

**THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS**  
**WITH THE COMMENTS ON THE**  
**COMPANION LETTER TO**  
**PHILEMON**

A Bible Student's Commentary  
by  
Bob Stewart

In concert with dedicated Bible students  
choosing to be a part of this work and  
to whom it is dedicated.

This study, as in all my work, is subject to revision as more is learned.  
(Revised April, 2018)

## **INTRODUCTION**

My goal as well as Paul's in Colossians, is to thwart the false teaching and at the same time clarify the real meaning and truth of the Word of God so we will be motivated to search out some truths for ourselves in time of need.

Paul faced these same challenges at the church at Colossae, and for that matter, in all the churches he was in contact with or founded over the years. His goal was to confute the "Colossian heresy"<sup>1</sup> and establish why we stand firm in the truth we believe.

Colossae was a city founded 400 years before Christ and became an important stopping place for trade merchants and military traveling from the west to the east. Alexander the Great made sure it was Greek to the core and stationed a garrison there. The name of the city means "place of punishment" suggesting it was a judicial center as well. Colossae's main industries, aside from trade accommodations, were wool, textiles, especially purple fabric, agriculture and retail goods.

Its importance waned when Laodicea was built in 260 B.C. eleven miles to the west and Hierapolis was built around 180 B.C. This was to accommodate a shift in the trade route.

But located in the well-watered Lycus Valley, it continued as a stable city until the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century when a series of earthquakes damaged it severely. The ancient city fell into ruin but the surrounding area was rebuilt and continued to be a viable center of commerce and a Catholic center until the 9<sup>th</sup> century when it was destroyed by the Turks. Much of the marble was confiscated by surrounding towns for construction and all we have left is a tel or mound. The nearest city is now ten miles away.

Let's begin. It is the year c. 59 A.D., Nero is emperor and it is late autumn. An older man leaves the small city of Colossae. The fledgling Christian church there, which has been meeting in the house of Philemon, is sending him. The church is a small body of mostly Gentile believers. It also has some Jewish constituents who

---

<sup>1</sup> This term stems from 2:8, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." In the context of the book, the influence of the Judaizers and probably the growing Gnostic movement are addressed. Gnosticism began as a "Jewish mysticism" before the time of Christ.

have come to the church with new doctrines and teachings causing controversy and confusion in the body.<sup>2</sup> It is time to get some help. This man leaves Philemon and Archippus to lead the people in his absence.

The man hopes to arrive at Rome before winter, and hopes more to have an audience there with Paul who is under house arrest, awaiting trial for two years now, yet free enough to roam about tied to a guard with a chain holding him in custody. He needs Paul's help in dealing with these teachings and strange doctrines. But he is motivated by another mission as well. He also hopes to catch up on the way with a man named Onesimus, a runaway slave from one of his friends in the fellowship, Philemon, a wealthy merchant who has done good things for the people of the church and community, a man of compassion and a with a servant's heart who well may have financed the man's journey. Onesimus<sup>3</sup> had escaped taking something of value from Philemon.

Carrying enough provisions and coinage supplied by the church to buy transport and necessities, he walks to the main road connecting Colossae with Laodicea about 12 miles to the west. This central trade route (still existing today as a railroad line) connects Ephesus with the Euphrates River. He looks to hire a cart ride to get him to the seaport of Ephesus, over one hundred miles away.

So, he catches his ride and travels to Laodicea. From there he can look across the Lycus Valley and see Hierapolis clearly. Most ancient cities have things in common. Built of stone in the Greco-Roman style, they all have temples to some god or goddess on a hill called an acropolis, an "agoura" or "market place" - the hub of the city, a forum for public meetings or trials, a theatre or two, a gymnasium, a field or stadium for contests, public baths and restrooms, aqueducts to get water to everything, rock paved roads in and out of the city, homes, fields, livestock, and so forth, everything built of rock.

But who is this man who journeys to Ephesus and what heavy burden does he carry in his heart to lay at the feet of the great apostle. He is willing to risk imprisonment to talk to Paul. It is a journey of two months and a thousand miles. His visit will prompt Paul to write four books, three of which we have in our Bibles today.

From Laodicea, the man continues his trip to Ephesus. He has been to Ephesus

---

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 1. Also see my review of "The Judaizers" and "Basic Gnosticism" found online at [www.bibleclassroom.org](http://www.bibleclassroom.org).

<sup>3</sup> "Onesimus" means "profitable" or "useful."

many times before. After a week he arrives, rests and takes nourishment as he seeks a booking on a sailing vessel to Rome, a freighter. The man's name is Epaphras. It is likely that somewhere along the way he does run into Onesimus, probably in Ephesus, but finds that Onesimus is reluctant to return to Philemon because Onesimus has stolen something of value from his master, sold it, spent the money, and fears retribution. Epaphras urges the frightened slave to accompany him to Rome and promises not to turn him in to Roman authorities if he will do so. Onesimus consents. Onesimus finds in Epaphras all he had heard about him in Colossae. Epaphras is a man of integrity and he is trustworthy. Plus, he is both compassionate and steadfast when it comes to things of the faith. A hard worker who does what he says he will do, Onesimus has no fear that Epaphras would do anything else but what he promised.

Who is this Epaphras and where did he come from? Well some ten or twelve years ago Epaphras, a resident of Colossae, had cause to be in Ephesus, perhaps with Philemon, and heard the gospel from Paul's proclamation in the school of Tyrannus and was converted along with Philemon. Acts 19:10 tells us that Paul taught there for two years "so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." Colossae was in Asia (Modern Western Turkey) and Epaphras was a Greek, that is, a Gentile, as were most of the Colossians. We are told that Epaphras took the word back to Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis and began to lead many to Christ. There were enough in Colossae to begin an assembly and Philemon, possibly a new convert, welcomed them to use his house as a meeting place. Soon many others joined the new way Epaphras and Philemon brought to Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis.

When Ephaphras arrives at Rome some two months later, he locates Paul and in doing so, he is arrested and placed in chains like Paul. But he brings Paul the news about the challenges the church is facing. Paul had heard it all before. Two movements, one by teachers we call Judaisers and another by Jewish adherents of a mysticism we have come to call Gnosticism had been busy for twenty-five years trying to seduce Christian believers to their position.

We know what Epaphras told Paul by the letter itself. In 60 A.D. Paul sent back his answers to the Church at Colossae by the hand of Tychicus. He also sends epistles to the church at Ephesus, Laodicea and to his friend Philemon.

So, who is this Tychicus? In mentioning him along with "Trophimus" in Acts 20:4 and noting they were both from "Asia", we also see in Acts 21:29 that Trophimus is called "The Ephesian." It is likely then, the Tychicus is also from the same

region. Both of them, along with several others left Ephesus together after the riot there (Acts 19) and traveled together for much of the rest of Paul's third missionary journey. Trophimus is mentioned in Acts 21:9. Exactly when Trophimus was seen with Paul on the temple grounds or when he was left sick at Miletus (II Timothy 4:20) is difficult to determine. Paul returned to Jerusalem and was subsequently arrested. After over a year and a half being imprisoned in Caesarea, Paul was granted transport to Rome as he had appealed his case to Caesar.

There we find with Paul in Rome: Luke, Timothy, Silas, Tychicus, Aristarchus, Onesimus, Epaphras (also a prisoner now) Demas, John Mark, Priscilla, Aquila, and other brothers and sisters whose names are not mentioned included members of Caesar's household.

Tychicus has become one of Paul's closest and most trusted companions among those mentioned above. He was likely a younger man and could be trusted to have the strength to do all the things Paul asked of him.

So, Tychicus, with Onesimus, sails back to Ephesus from Rome. He carries with him the four letters from Paul. After they dock at Ephesus, they deliver Paul's epistle we call Ephesians to the congregation there and spend time, as is common, sharing news about each other's ministry, as well as the political and social news, and also how things are for Paul who is in prison in Rome along with several others. Those in Ephesus tell Tychicus and Onesimus about what is going on there and in Asia Minor.

Asia Minor is a very difficult place to evangelize let alone maintain a strong church. Very difficult, indeed. Not only do you have the pagan community to deal with and their accusations and persecution, but persecution from orthodox Jews as well. Now, false teachers are infiltrating the church and confusing the believers, there is infighting, and many believers are suffering economic and family troubles as well as Jews who turn to Jesus being disinherited and shunned by their families.

After the news is shared, Tychicus and Onesimus, refreshed and rested, get transport up to Colossae, but before they arrive there, they stop at Laodicea and deliver another epistle to the church there and visit with them. We have lost Paul's letter to Laodicea, but it is mentioned in the letter to Colossae which we do have.

Now when Tychicus and Onesimus finally arrive at Colossae, it has been months since their departure, perhaps even as long as a year. They go directly to Philemon's house and present Paul's personal letter to him. Paul implores

Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a new brother in the Lord for Paul led Onesimus to Christ in Rome after Epaphras brought Onesimus to him.

Onesimus, as you remember was a slave of Philemon who stole something valuable from his master and fled which possibly could result in a capital sentence. Now, Onesimus has returned with Tychicus and a letter from Paul has thrown himself upon Philemon's mercy knowing Philemon to be a good Christian man, full of love and forgiveness. In the letter, Paul implores Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a brother in the Lord rather than as a renegade slave and a thief. We are confident that Philemon did this very thing, and reconciliation was attained as a new brother was added to the fellowship there.

Let's look at this letter.

1: "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker, 2: and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: 3: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4: I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, 5: because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints; 6: and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. 7: For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother."

8: "Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, 9: yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you--since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus-- 10: I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, 11: who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. 12: I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, 13: whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; 14: but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will."

15: "For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, 16: no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. 17: If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me.

18: But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; 19: I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well). 20: Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. 21: Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say. 22: At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.

23: "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24: as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. 25: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."

Well, what do you think Philemon did? We have a good idea that he did as Paul requested. Why? Because we have the letter. Further, the whole church knew about this and what was he to do? Philemon was a Christian with a Christian heart. His example in dealing with Onesimus would be important to the community both to believers and unbelievers.

Now it is time to prepare to read Paul's letter to the church of Colossae at the next assembly. Perhaps they called a special assembly, we don't know. But all have awaited the message. They, months ago, sent their own dear pastor, Epaphras, to Paul with their concerns and now he was imprisoned in Rome. So they look to Tychicus and Philemon to address the congregation. The main letter to the church is now read before all of them, including the false teachers.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

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

1-2: The typical Pauline greeting. Paul, always in defense of his true apostleship notes that it is by the will of God, not due to his being one of the twelve. Both he and Timothy together send this epistle to the people meeting in the home of Philemon at Colossae. Timothy is well known to the churches there because he was with Paul when Paul first came to Ephesus and became acquainted with some of the folks from Colossae, Hierapolis and Laodicea.

Paul commonly begins with the benediction, "grace to you and peace from God our Father" and often adds, "and our Lord Jesus Christ." Let me suggest something in light of these words. "Grace and peace" are not always the common companion of the believer. But they need to be. Too often we are stressed and frustrated over so much in our lives. This is normal, but we need to trust in God's grace and receive the peace only He can give at times like this.

Even when we are at our worst yet still have peace about our security in Christ, our theology is sound even if our state of mind is not. If you fear for your salvation when you are at your worst, you need not do so as His grace is greater than our fears.

3: "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4: since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; 5: because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, ..."

3-4: His phrase, "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" is a bit unusual and may be deliberate as this relationship is denied by the Gnostic teachers. For them, God is spirit and goodness and anything physical or corporeal is corrupt or evil. Therefore, Jesus was just a shell in which the true spirit of Messiah arrived at Jesus' baptism and departed at the crucifixion. Jesus in the flesh was little more than a puppet used to teach the "secret knowledge" (Gnostic doctrine) and then discarded.

Paul's thanksgiving for their "faith and love" is a common thread in many of his epistles. These two together are the most important attributes of the Christian. In I Corinthians we remember he wrote, "But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love."

5a: He points out the hope that they have laid up in heaven. The word "laid up" means that which is set aside, reserved or appointed for you. This does not mean that you have to "go to heaven" to receive it. It is like a treasure kept in a bank vault awaiting to be distributed. Also, hope isn't something we generate, such as being "hopeful" or employing "wishful thinking." The word "hope" in the New Testament is neither a verb nor an adjective, but a noun as it is in English. It is one of the three noun treasures Paul refers to in I Corinthians 13, Faith, Hope and Love. They indicate something indestructible upon which we can rest our faith.

5b: "...of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel 6: which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; 7: just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, 8: and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit."

5b-8: He reassures them here that what they heard from Epaphras was the truth and that the grace of God is at the core of the gospel. In fact he affirms twice in just one sentence that what they heard from Epaphras, a faithful servant of Christ is the truth upon which their faith and the fruit thereof is based. They can trust Epaphras as a good and truthful teacher. The source then, of hope, love and faith is the truth of the gospel they heard at the beginning. Nothing else.

9: For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10: so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11: strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously 12: giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

9-12: One long sentence, often typical of Paul. "...the day we heard of it..." of their "love in the Spirit." Paul's prayer for them is not just for wisdom, but for "all spiritual wisdom and (spiritual) understanding." The purpose he prays this for

them is so that they will conduct themselves, "in a manner worthy of the Lord" - that is - emulating Jesus and pleasing God by the way they bear fruit through their good work, increase in their knowledge of God and so on.

Notice how he ends this last sentence, verse 12, an unusual comment... "giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light". "Light", a Gnostic keyword but not to be understood in the manner they use it.

The last verse of his prayer turns the corner and begins a direct attack on the Gnostic doctrine when he closes the prayer with the words: "...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light." The word light represents the holy, pure, spiritual realm where God dwells in truth. "Qualified us to share in this inheritance, but not through a redemption based in knowledge of secret mysteries, but because;

13: "He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14: in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

We cannot conclude that Paul is not talking about Jesus at this point just because he doesn't use his name. He uses the terms "Lord Jesus Christ" and "Christ Jesus" in verse three and the context has not shifted to a conversation about a different "Christ." This clearly states that it is in Jesus alone that we are taken from darkness to God's kingdom of light and it is Jesus alone who provides redemption and forgiveness. Why? Because...

15:

15: He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

15: Immediately Paul sets out the truth. Jesus is not an inferior, corrupt, fleshly being in whom the Spirit of the true God resided for a while teaching through Him to enlighten the Gnostic masters before departing, but the exact image of the true God, and in fact the firstborn, corporeal, fleshly exact image of God without flaw. Later, the Apostle John, battling this same Gnostic doctrine says in his first epistle,

I John 1:1-7, "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- and the life was manifested, and we have seen

and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete. This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

Now the Jehovah’s Witnesses use verse 15 to claim that Jesus is a created being, much like God created angels, but with a special nature and purpose. The Gnostics deny the physical humanity of the "Christ"( who resided in the human shell we call Jesus), and the Jehovah’s witnesses deny His deity. Paul condemns both these views in this letter and it is interesting that the Jehovah’s Witness use verses establishing Christ’s deity to deny it. So, outside of a Biblical and historical context, verses like this can be wrested to say most anything one wants.

Paul continues and identifies Jesus with God as the supreme Creator.

16-20:

16: For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17: He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18: He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19: For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20: and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

16: “For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him.”

This denies that Christ is a mere man and also denies that creation was brought about by some lesser god, as well as denying that it is therefore evil because it is

material. Further, Paul mentions “all creation”, “all things”, and “everything” seven times in verses 15-20 stressing that Christ is supreme over all.

17: “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”

The “Christ” was not made out of a man in whom God sent His Spirit of enlightenment for a while, but Christ existed before all things were made, and He still holds it all together.

18: “He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

Jesus is the "head" of the church (those who by faith in Him are in a bonded relationship with Christ and are His people and household - also called His body). This entity does not come about through some higher special knowledge Gnostic masters insist is the way of salvation.

Christ proved His authenticity by rising from the dead in order to have first place in everything.

19: “For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,...”

Jesus wasn't just imbued with a divine spirit for a time, but He was the fullness of the true God revealed to us in human form, the word “fullness” being another Gnostic term. The word is "pleroma" and is the word used by gnostic doctrine to describe the ultimate spiritual realm of pureness, goodness, light, truth and glory.

20: “...and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven.”

Redemption came in the blood of Christ, (a physical product) not in knowing some higher secret mystery, and to make it clear, Paul notes that all existence is involved and that Platonic dualism and the separation of spirit and matter as good and evil is a bogus Deduction.

21-23:

21: And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22: yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach-- 23: if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

(Comment) In one paragraph, Paul denies all the key doctrines of these Gnostic teachers. Here is something to think about. If all the heresies, false gospels, false prophets and false teachers had not risen up to fight against the Christian faith early in the church, there would few, if any, writings to guide us along since then. As angry as Paul and John, Peter and James and others got sometimes with all these challenges, I am glad they occurred.

21: The condition of all peoples, open to all sorts for things for self-centered and evil purposes, hostile in mind to any other interference with those purposes. Yet...

22: Paul is crystal clear in employing unusual language ("...He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death) to set aside all thought that the "Christ" was not physical. Not only that, but it is faith in this truth and in Him that allows us to be presented before God holy and blameless.

23: He is not saying that one is in danger of losing salvation, but that one must continue in the faith - *firmly established and steadfast* - and not be derailed from the truth and hope of the Gospel they already heard. Otherwise one will not be presented to God "holy and blameless and beyond reproach" but having given adherence to false and corrupt teaching.<sup>4</sup>

Perseverance in one's faith is the evidence of one's true conversion. This gospel preceded any other doctrine or teaching the entire "creation under heaven" heard. So if one desires to really stand before God – "holy, blameless and above reproach" the true gospel must not be tarnished or diminished. Verse 22 is important in setting the context for this verse because of the "fleshly body" comment, a deliberate statement to repel the Gnostic persuasion. If one uses this verse to propose one's loss of salvation he must disregard the entire corpus of

---

<sup>4</sup> See;1:5; 3:1-3; Ephesians 1:3-14; Romans 8:34-39; I Peter1:3-5 etc.

Paul's teaching to the contrary. The issue is, is one trusting fully in Christ for their salvation or not?

Note: Evil and deception are still with us and we might have well been swept away if we did not have the writings of those who were there. There would be little light. That is why it is so important to understand not just what is written by these apostles, as well as all Biblical texts, but WHY they were written.

24:

24: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions."

24: The first part of this verse is clear. Paul's suffering is a cause for his rejoicing because it is a result of his ministry to them and their positive growth in their faith as a result. So his suffering is well worth it to him.

The second phrase is also clear in that Paul's suffering in the flesh on behalf of the church, Christ's body, corresponds to the first phrase.

The odd phrase is the last phrase ..."in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." What this doesn't mean is that the apostle is somehow completing Christ's work on the cross himself, that is, Jesus' death did not complete or finish the work for which it was intended. This would not be the proper understanding because Paul goes to great lengths in his writings to proclaim the finished work of Christ.

The word "afflictions" (*thlipis*) is variously translated "tribulation", "anguish", "distress", "persecution", or "trouble." Peter T. O'Brien, writing the commentary on the book of Colossians<sup>5</sup> extensively covers the viewpoints on this verse and makes the observation that, "...though presently exalted in heaven Christ continues to suffer in his members, and not least in Paul himself. This was driven home to him on the Damascus road when Christ said to him: "Why do you continue to persecute *me*?"<sup>6</sup>

One member of our study group made the observation that the church, the body of Christ continues to suffer and will suffer until the end of time. Therefore, it still

---

<sup>5</sup> Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 44, Word Books, 1982, pg.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 9:4

lacks the fulfillment of the suffering that it is destined for. Thus the suffering of Christ, who's body we are in this world, still continues.<sup>7</sup>

So, as the church, Christ's body in this world, continues to suffer and in one sense, so Christ continues to suffer also. In other words, He is continually being persecuted when his body, the church, is persecuted. So as Paul suffers, so does Christ. This could be compared to a parent suffering when seeing his own child in pain. Both Christ's body and the church are one with Him and at the heart of the context. Paul's suffering validates the truth of his gospel and he does not suffer for any other reason. Therefore he urges them to pay strict heed to his teachings because they don't come cheap. Jesus paid the ultimate price for the gospel and Paul is paying a price as well, and in just four or five years he too will be executed. Further, the preaching of the word contains a mystery, but not in accordance with Gnostic mysticism or the teaching of Judaism. This theme continues in verses 25-27.

25-29:

25: Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26: that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27: to whom God willed 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. 28: We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29: For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me."

25-27: It is the body of Christ, the true church, for whom Paul was made a minister (servant) in concert with the stewardship (management) God committed to him to preach the full word of God. This meant that the Gentiles, once rejected by the Jews as having any part of the Kingdom of God in their prejudiced tradition, were to be reinstated according to God's Word. This was actually a part of the commission God gave to Abraham and his descendants.<sup>8</sup> It is an age long promise now re-proclaimed through Paul and his companions.

---

<sup>7</sup> Greg Schmidt

<sup>8</sup> See Genesis 12:2-3; 17:4-6; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4 etc.

The mystery is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." This is for both Jew and Gentile and rejects any other means of achieving the "glory" (or pleroma) of God.

So this mystery is twofold. First, It is Christ in us the hope of glory, nothing in us or by us. Second, as in other writings, the mystery is that God's redemptive plan has always included the Gentiles. This is not hidden in the Scriptures, but the scriptures were hidden from the heart and mind and purpose of the Jews. Early in Genesis God made it clear to Abraham,

Gen. 12:1-3, "Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

Gen. 18:17-18, "The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?"

Gen 22:18 "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

Isa. 9:1, "But there will be no *more* gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make *it* glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them."

Isa. 42:5-7, "Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it And spirit to those who walk in it, "I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison."

So Paul's role is special and his word reflects not the strange, new teaching of the Gnostics, or the blind narrow view of the Judaisers, but the truth God revealed long

ago and now reiterated to both the house of Israel and the gentile nations. All are included in Christ's redemption and by faith, all are one in Christ. Not only that, but Christ dwells in every believer whether Jew or Gentile and therein lies their hope of glory, not in the teachings of either group or any group regardless of how persuasive, but in that which is totally apart from them or their doctrines, in Christ alone. And it is only in union with Christ that completeness can be accomplished. It is not in the workings of the mind or the flesh, but in Him.

For so many churches and Christians, it is Jesus plus something that puts a person in good stead with God or qualifies him for some blessing or other. We are told by so many it is due to our failures as a Christian that puts us out of fellowship with God or places us on the brink of losing our salvation. This is unacceptable . First, it is not our salvation, but His offered to us and nothing can touch it because it is of God. Imagine the arrogance of someone who feels he alone, by his petty sins, can negate what Christ did on the cross for him. Christ's suffering and death become of no effect. That's a pretty weak sacrifice, and a pretty low view of Jesus.

Remember, please, that the salvation we enter into is neither created nor sustained by our commitment to Him. It is His commitment to us that makes our salvation sure and our lives meaningful and worth living.

28: Only Jesus is to be the source of completion for the believer and any who are thinking differently are hereby admonished.

29: Paul has labored and is laboring to assure his audience that only through faith in Christ can a person be presented before God as complete. He continues to present his own pain and struggle on their behalf and on behalf of all the churches he has concern for.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

2:1-5,

1: "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, 2: that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, 3: in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4: I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument. 5: For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ."

1: A continuation of chapter one in that Paul shares his own personal pain on their behalf. Most had never been in the presence of the apostle.

2a: His heart and work is for their encouragement and the "knitting of their hearts together in love. "Their" looks to be directed to the assembly at Laodicea.

2b-3: Paul now begins to address, once again, the Gnostic heresy. Using their jargon, he reveals that the "secret" or "mysterious knowledge" is not some mental ascent of the mind, but Christ Himself. In Him alone are all the "hidden" treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The term "true knowledge" is actually "full knowledge"(epi-gnosis) and "knowledge" at the end of verse three is "gnosis", the very terms used by the "Gnostics" themselves. These terms are commonly used by Paul, but in this context they reflect the heresy.

4: Self-explanatory.

5: In other words, he wants them to imagine he is there rejoicing in their stability in Christ. "Stability" means: "a solid body, a support, strength, firmness."<sup>9</sup>

2:6-10,

6: "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,

---

<sup>9</sup> E-Sword - NASB concordance.

7: having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. 8: See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. 9: For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10: and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;"

Comment: Paul appears to transition from the focus on the Gnostic heresy to that of the Judaizers. His following comments apply to both and as we move into verse eleven and following we see the false doctrine of the Judaizers make an appearance.

6-7: Again, Paul repeats his point that they are to walk (conduct their lives) in Christ according to what they were told in the beginning of their faith.<sup>10</sup> Jesus is the Christ, the Lord and they are rooted and built up in Him.

This opposes the Gnostic concept that Jesus was just a shell in which the spirit of the "Christ" dwelt. In using the term "Christ", it is seldom connected with Jesus in Gnostic teaching due to flesh being evil and corrupt.

8-9: A warning not to give attention to or be swayed by any teaching contrary to the truth that in Christ, "...all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." This is a clear rejection of the Gnostic doctrine. It also addresses the skepticism of many Jews. Paul has said this twice now, first in 1:19; "For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him..."

10: In addition, Paul states clearly that Jesus is the head over all rule and authority. He is not a human shell through which the Messiah taught, nor some lesser being. Thus, in Him we are all made "complete" (pler-ah-oh) that is achieved the fullness the Gnostics claim can only be achieved through their mental transcendence.

11-15,

11: "...and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12: having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him

---

<sup>10</sup> As noted in 1:5; 1:7; 1:23.

from the dead. 13: When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14: having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15: When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him."

11-12: Now Paul shifts to include spiritual and eternal truths for the church, first speaking to the Gentiles but including Jewish believers as well as he proceeds. Spiritual and eternal realities are more significant than temporal, earthly and fleshly ones, and there we can agree with the Gnostics and others. But the Judaizers were hung up on the works of the Law and tradition as a means of salvation and were attempting to persuade the Gentile believers that they must keep the Law of Moses and be circumcised to be right with God.

So Paul sets up a series of contrasts and uses the earthly as a metaphor for the spiritual. One is death and the other is life. His intent is to proclaim that by faith in Christ the fleshy and temporal act of circumcision has been superseded spiritually and eternally. This is signified by the baptism of faith. In such an act, the control and destiny of the flesh is put to death and the control and destiny of the spirit is transferred to Christ where life resides. God's raising Jesus from the dead both confirms and assures the truth of this transformation.

13-14: The Gentiles were "dead" in their uncircumcised state as are all outside of Christ. So Paul repeats the theme and adds that Christ's death also includes the entire body of "transgressions." Paul does not use the word "sin" here. In the mind of the Jew "sin" was different than "transgressions." They are two different Hebrew words. For example, in Psalm 25:7 we read, "Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; According to Your lovingkindness remember me, For Your goodness' sake, O LORD." And in Psalm 32:5 we read, "I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'; And You forgave the guilt of my sin."

What is the difference? "Sin" is the specific breaking of the Law. "Transgressions" are the general attitude of rebellion and the actions stemming thereby. The root word describes someone who steps off the path.<sup>11</sup> It would also encompass sin if the Law itself were violated. But the Gentiles did not come out from under the law

---

<sup>11</sup> Often translated, "trespasses." "Iniquities" is yet another word and in both testaments it refers to moral evil.

or strict Jewish tradition. Paul's comments however, include both Gentile and Jew in the context of this passage. All of these violations have been eradicated forever having been put to death on the cross.

15: A difficult verse to understand. The word "disarmed" is ἀπεκδύομαι (aph-ek-duo-mai) meaning to divest oneself of something, removing or stripping it away. First, who "stripped away" these away from Himself and second, how did the cross make a public display of them and triumph over them? Then, the verse tells us that it was "rulers" and "authorities" that were "stripped away." What rulers and authorities?

Okay, to begin with, one of the answers might be that the subject is not Jesus, but God. The verse is awkward in that there are three pronouns *in the verse*. Let's look again, "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him." Going back to verse 12, we pick up the context and the subject, There we read, "...having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." So here we clearly have God stated as raising Jesus from the dead. And in verse 13, "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,.." we have God making "you alive together with Him (Jesus) and the verse continues where, "...having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." Not "His" cross but to "the cross." So this must be God as well doing this. Thus, verse 15 ought to read, "When God had disarmed the rulers and authorities, God made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Jesus."<sup>12</sup>

So Jesus becomes the means whereby God triumphed over the rulers and authorities. Now the question remains, "Who or what are these rulers and authorities?" Opinions vary greatly but the context gives us some help. Verse 14, (just prior to our verse under discussion) says, "...having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." This would indicate the mandate of the law and its power to impose death as the "wages of sin." In verse 16 we have the conjunction "therefore" continuing the thought of 15 saying, "...no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a

---

<sup>12</sup> Jamison, Fausset, and Brown hold this view and refer to others who do also.

new moon or a Sabbath day--"

The verses before and following verse 15 refer to the mandates of the Law. Further, verses 11-13 speak of "circumcision." So what then are the "rulers" and "authorities" relating to this? There are several valid possibilities. The most prominent are those "rulers" of the synagogue and "authorities" (scribes, lawyers, Pharisees and Sadducees) who have considerable power over the people and used the Law, distorting its purpose and intent in order to use it as a means to control the people and glorify themselves. In 16, Paul says, "Let no one act as your judge..." So he is referring to people here.

Second, the thought is that Paul could be referring to the power of evil and demonic spiritual forces at work through both the religious and political establishments.

Third, some speculate that Paul might be referring to the mediation of the angels who transmitted the Law to Moses. For example, this is the argument of Martin Vincent<sup>13</sup> who refers to (among other verses) Galatians 3:19, "Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made."

16-23:

16: "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- 17: things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. 18: Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19: and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. 20: If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21: "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" 22: (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)--in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23: These are matters which have, to be sure, the

---

<sup>13</sup> Vincent's Word Studies, e-Sword online.

appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence."

Comment: in this paragraph, Paul once again contrasts the uselessness of worldly, physical, fleshly, temporal conduct, even religious, with the spiritual, eternal, heavenly real substance that comes from a bonded faith in the risen Christ. All the worldly, physical and temporal matters have no value and are ineffective in living our lives in Christ or finding favor with God in the matter of salvation. This is also a contrast to all religions including some expressions of "Christianity."

16: ""Therefore" ... connecting this passage with what has just preceded it, Each of these items relate to a specific matter of Jewish law or tradition. In Christ the believer has been released from any activity of the flesh that would be required for righteousness under the law.

17: All of these are but, a "shadow of what is to come" and not the reality of spiritual or heavenly matters yet to come. The writer of Hebrews also makes a note of this in 8:4-5 saying, "Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things..." And in 10:1, "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near."

"The substance belongs to Christ" is actually, "the body is Christ's" in the original. This means that the shadow is not the object of our faith, but the one who casts the shadow. He is the reality.

18: Repeating his warning from verse 16, Paul tells them not to allow anyone to defraud them of their "prize." This translation is awkward. It refers to the judge of a contest who decides that one is unworthy to receive a prize and condemns them. The prize would be their victor's wreath at the end of the race. Those who present themselves as superior because of their religious practices are those who would do this to others who trust in Christ by faith alone.

Paul uses derogatory terms to describe these false teachers, "inflated without cause by his fleshly mind' or "puffed up in vanity and pride." "Fleshly mind" is the mind set on the physical attributes of the flesh, in this case self-righteousness and superiority of conduct and experience one looks down his nose at others over. One time I had a deacon, an older man, in the church who, pointing to his mouth during

a meeting said, "Not one drop of alcohol has ever crossed these lips." Even Jesus couldn't say that. His motive was along the lines of these Paul speaks of.

Their bragging includes how they deny themselves many things and abstain from certain foods and drink (verse 20) and now are "holier than thou" or feel they deserve the "prize" due to their abstinence, their worship of angels and visions they claim to have had. So very heavenly minded are they. These would be Jews who are caught up in a legalistic and mystical aspect of their religion. However, many religions and followers of religious philosophy both ancient and contemporary engage in asceticism.<sup>14</sup> They would be included in this warning as well.

19: But these things are just shadows and those who adhere to them for their salvation are misguided and not adhering to the head that supplies the entire body with growth (or increase) from God.

20-23: The point of verses 20 and 21 is to reiterate that there is nothing we can do physically to achieve spiritual status. That is already taken care of through faith in Christ. Dying with Christ is to move to an existence separate from this physical universe where all the things of this world are insignificant and meaningless to the spiritual existence we are now assured on in Him. All these things plus the laws and traditions of men have no place in the reality of the spiritual realm, and do not, and cannot exist there. These things will all perish but those in Him will not.

As we look upon all the religious practices of every religion in the world, they have the appearance of "wisdom" and present something and someone as special. But none of it has any power or effect against "fleshly indulgence." By this Paul means that the power against fleshly indulgence does not come from the flesh. In fact, it can make it more demanding especially if this is one's supposed means to righteousness.

---

<sup>14</sup> Monks of various religions including: Catholicism , Buddhists, Hinduism, Jainism, Islam , Baha'i, etc. many of which predate Christ.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

3:1-4,

1: "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2: Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3: For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4: When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

1-4: Continuing his thought from the previous passage ("therefore") Paul stresses that they are not to set their minds on things of this earth as if they had some importance, but to seek "things above." He says this twice. Christ, seated at the right hand of God - the place of ultimate power and authority - is where they need to keep their focus. Those who have been raised up with Christ are "hidden with Christ in God." The glory will come at the revealing of Christ who is our life.

3:5-11,

5: Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6: For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, 7: and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. 8: But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9: Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10: and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him-- 11: a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all."

5: Though Paul has said that asceticism has no value against fleshly indulgences, (2:23) this does not mean that permission is given to engage in this behavior. In verse 3 he notes that "you have died..."

Here, in verse 5, the translation is askew. It should read and means, "Put to death, therefore, the earthly things of your body ; sexual immorality, hateful attitudes and emotions, moral filth, and greed which is idolatry."

6-7: Specifically because of "idolatry" - meaning that one's life is engaged in the desire for worldly things rather than the One who provides them and engaged in ungodly indulgences mentioned in verse 5. A person outside of Christ and hope finds the entire meaning of their life in these indulgences and are ruled by them as if they are worshipped, Thus, "idolatry." We once conducted our lives under these influences.

8-9: Paul makes it clear that we are living a new life, "newness of life" he calls it in Romans 6:4. We have laid aside the old life and now it is time to lay aside all the ungodly things we were engulfed in the old life and put them to death as well.

10: Having laid aside the "old self" and having put on the "new self" we are being renewed "to a true knowledge...". Again, Gnostic jargon terms used to refute their position. The "true knowledge" then, is according to God who created the image of the "new self" which is being renewed and which we are to "put on." The description of this renewing new self looks to be in verses 12-17.

11: This renewal is without discrimination of any kind because we are all in Christ as one. Paul says this in Galatians 3:26-28,

26: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27: For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

3:12-14,

12: "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13: bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14: Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity."

Comment: It looks like the description of the "new self" to be "put on" is found in verses 12-14.

12: "Chosen of God." Paul's perspective is that God chose those who would believe in Him and His word to be His people. This was done based on His

foreknowledge before creation was spoken into existence.<sup>15</sup> The understanding of Jews in Paul's day had a very simple understanding of the "predestination" issue. They simply believed that God had "predestined" that those who would believe in Him and His word would be His "chosen" people. In modern times, Paul is interpreted by Calvin and other proponents of his theology. It would be more appropriate to interpret Paul by what he and his contemporaries understood about this subject.

"Put on" is to "clothe yourself", (same word as in Galatians 3:27 quoted above). How this is done is by decision to adapt these virtues and truths into one's own life. In other words, take them to heart. Make them a core motive for living.

"Compassion" here is to take pity on someone and be merciful. This is different than the word used to describe Jesus' "compassion" in Matthew 9:36, 14:14, 15:32, 20:34; Mark 1:41, Luke 7:13, 10:33, 15:20; and so on. That word indicates a deep empathy in one's very internal organs while the word Paul uses is the outward expression of caring.

"Kindness: here indicates doing what is good and right with excellence. Putting forth your best effort on behalf of another, not half heartedly.

"Humility" is not thinking of yourself as superior to another but casting any thought of that aside and treating others with respect.

"Gentleness" is exactly what it means to us, not being harsh, abrupt, or impatient with another who has need of your help.

"Patience" is a part of gentleness and describes a person who is willing to see something through to the end for another in need regardless of how long it takes.

13: "Bearing with one another" is holding them up, supporting them in time of need, sharing their burdens.

"Forgiving the one you have a complaint about." "Forgiving" here is showing favor, pardoning, letting the offense go, not the technical remitting of their sins. An important theological and biblical point is made here. We are to forgive as the

---

<sup>15</sup> See my work on: "Predetermination and Predestination of One's Life" in the controversial section of [www.bibleclassroom.org](http://www.bibleclassroom.org)

Lord forgave us. This is a reflection of the New Covenant ratified at the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. In Matthew 6:14-15 we read Jesus words,

"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

A good question here is, "Do Jesus words apply to those under grace in the New Covenant?" The reason this is so important is: 1. If they do then Paul's words here and in Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" are in error. 2. If they do not apply to the believer under the New Covenant then one must ask why not?

The answer is the difference in the provisions of the Old Covenant and the New. Not recognized by far too many teachers and preachers, Jesus taught under the Old covenant<sup>16</sup> and applied the Law not just to the external works but to the attitudes and motives of the heart. Under this microscope, all stand condemned.<sup>17</sup> The New covenant did not come into existence until the death of Christ and subsequent events. Prior to that, the Old Covenant, the Law was in force. It was abolished once the New Covenant was ratified.<sup>18</sup>

14: "Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity." "Beyond" is "above" or "over." Though "*put on*" is supplied, it is the antecedent in verse 12 and so proper here. One is to clothe oneself with "love" (agape). It is the perfect bond of unity because it includes all without judgment just as God has done in Christ for those who are His. Jesus said this as recorded in John 5:24, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

And John also notes this comment in 3:17-18, "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

---

<sup>16</sup> Galatians 4:4-5.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 5:27-28, 18:35; Mark 7:6, 14-15 and so on.

<sup>18</sup> Romans 6:14; 7:4-6; 8:1-5; Colossians 2:14; Ephesians 2:14-16; Hebrews 7:18, 8:13, 10:8-9, etc.

The "bond of unity" is a love that excludes and sets aside anything one would find for a cause for disunity among the saints.

3:15-17.

15: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16: Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17: Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

15: The previous verses are meant for the sake of others. These verses are for the entire assembly and each person as a part of the body. The intent here is for them to get along in unity with each other, Christ's peace being the resource.

16-17: The His word, richly dwelling within them, and they, teaching and admonishing each other in all wisdom with the singing and thanksgiving is another expression of unity and joy in what they have in Christ.

3:18-24,

18: "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19: husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. 20: Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21: Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. 22: Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23: Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, 24: knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

Comment: These verses are still Paul's teaching on achieving unity and harmony among the people of the church. They should not be taken out of context and hammered into a strict doctrine of compliance, subservience or becoming a doormat to someone to avoid all confrontation in relationships. Paul must deal with the difficulty in the early Gentile church where, the different roles people had in their private and social lives before coming together as a unified group, was cause for concern. For example, many Gentile women were often looked upon as religious

and social leaders due to the Greco-Roman pantheon of gods and goddesses whom they worshipped. In Asia, the goddess Artemis (Diana to the Romans) was the primary goddess given homage and her priestesses often looked to for divine guidance. (After all she was the daughter of Zeus, the sister of Apollo who was the patron of Delphi.)<sup>19</sup> They also often held sway in the political arena in many cities. In Acts 13:50, after Paul had been preaching the gospel in Antioch of Pisidia, we read, "But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district." And in Acts 17:4 while at Thessalonica we read, "And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women." 17:12 reads, "Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men."

These women were Gentiles of course. So blending their religious and cultural customs into the teachings of Christ was an abrupt wake up and challenge for many of them. Add to that the influx of false teachings and these folks would be rightly confused and disturbed. Paul had to mandate strict controls over some of the women who had become disruptive in the churches. This is seen in I Timothy 2:9-12 for example and in Ephesus again;

"Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness. A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet."

This instruction reveals the disruption some of the Gentile women are bringing into the assembly. The same happened in Corinth. Yet many women are commended for their teaching, leadership and service in other places, albeit infrequently.<sup>20</sup>

Further, the oft noted "chain of command" in these relationships was not the end goal for these relationships. The goal was oneness as in the day man and woman were created. This was an equal partnership in value, authority and purpose. In

---

<sup>19</sup> One might look up the power and influence of the Oracles in Greece and their enduring impact. For one example, Acts 16:16-24 tells one story about the heritage the oracles left.

<sup>20</sup> Acts 9:36 ff.; 18:26; 21:8-9; Matthew 12:42-43; Titus 2:3.

Genesis 1:26-28 we see this, "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Jesus refers to this in Matthew 19:1-8 (and Mark 10:1-12). Paul as well in Ephesians 5:22-33 where he has a more extensive detail about this relationship.

Those who are in Christ regardless of being male or female are all equal heirs of the kingdom of God. (Galatians 3:28-29)

18: The word "subject" is "hupo-stash-oh" meaning to "stand under." The hopeful goal is for the wife to "stand-beside" and the ultimate goal is to recognize all are one in Christ. Interestingly, Paul only brings this matter up in writing to the churches in this region. His basis for this instruction is revealed in I Timothy 2:13-14 where he says, "For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression." Thus the order of the relationship changed from equal partners to a chain of command, the man now responsible for the restoration of the partnership. He may so do at his will. Women are seen as Eve's children and so are placed in this system. But Jesus was clear that at the beginning it was not meant to be.

"...as is fitting in the Lord" is a key verse in that it means "appropriate" or "proper." How this plays out is not mentioned. But in the traditional Jewish home, the wife is no wallflower, but often is the instrument God uses to accomplish key elements of His will. For her, the Lord's will and word are primary and she will willingly stand under her husband's authority as long as he evidences the leading of the Lord in his life. If not, then Paul has other counsel, such as in I Corinthians 7.

Paul's view of marriage develops as he continues to consider it and write about it. But here, his concern is bringing the church into a unified understanding of how best to work their relationships for the sake of peace, harmony and unity in Christ.

19: The responsibility for love, the care and growth of the wife and children is the husband. Paul tells the husbands not to be “embittered” against their wives. This word means to have an attitude of and behave in a way that is acrid, bitter, sharp and piercing toward their wives. This statement by Paul indicates that there were husbands in the households in the church at Colossae were unduly severe. As fathers, these men were not to “exasperate their children” (verse 21). This means to constantly pick on them, provoking them to anger. In other words, these men were always finding fault, pointing out the flaws in others and making life miserable in the household. It would be difficult for a wife to co-exist not to mention be submissive to a man who is like this.

20-21: In a similar contrast, children are to be obedient to their parents, but at the same time fathers are not to exasperate their children so they will not lose heart. Again, the responses of both wife and children to husband and dad are in his hands.

22-24: "Slaves" were of various levels. Here the word is sometimes translated "bond-slave." The word simply means a person purchased or owned by another individual. Paul uses this of himself in Romans 1:1 and Philippians 1:1. He considered all those who are Christ's "bought with a price" (I Corinthians 6:20, 7:23) Peter also recognizes this (II Peter 2:1). The word used is "dou-los" throughout whether the translation is "slave", bond-slave," "bond-servant"<sup>21</sup> or "servant" (common in the KJV).<sup>22</sup> It is used of Epaphras in 4:12 of this epistle.

From ancient times, slaves were treated differently depending upon the household. Some became like family, and indeed Abraham would have made his slave Eliezer his heir (Genesis 15:2-3). And, in Genesis 24:2 Abraham had placed a slave in charge of his entire estate. In other situations, slaves would be beaten, abused, overworked or worked to death.

Paul instructs all workers, whether slave or not to work "heartily" as unto the Lord. The word is "psu-keh", "from the soul." Whether they receive a reward here on this earth for their labor is unknown. But what is known is that they will receive the reward of the inheritance from the Lord.

---

<sup>21</sup> Acts 16:17; Romans 1:1; II Corinthians 4:5; Galatians 1:10; Philippians 1:1; II Timothy 2:24; etc.

<sup>22</sup> Indentured servitude describes one who has volunteered to serve until a debt is paid. How this worked is that a person would borrow money from someone and then work it off until it was deemed paid. This was done under a contract. For example, during the great immigrations to the colonies of this country, many poor people sold themselves into slavery in order to afford ship passage. There is no record of this being an ancient or Biblical practice.

Slavery had come a long way by Paul's day. It had developed from capturing a prisoner of war and either selling him or using him as a forced laborer to procuring people as household assistants either by purchase or by debt payment. The state of well being for slaves was often better than the poor freeman on the street. A slave had been accorded almost all the rights of a free Roman citizen and was protected by law from abuse and mistreatment. Slaves often dressed well, ate well and lived in a furnished room in the master's house. Not only that, but some slaves even prospered and grew wealthy. Slaves were actually given five denarii a month, 60 a year as spending money. The average freeman earned some 313 denarii a year, but from this he had to pay for all his housing, clothing, food and all necessities often leaving him with less than the slave. They could exchange their independence for security for themselves and their family. In fact, in time of economic hardship, it was the slave, not the freeman who was guaranteed the necessities for himself and his family. It was a status symbol for slave-owners to have strong, healthy, well dressed and fed slaves. They made his household look even better when guest came and were served by these impressive individuals.

There was an unwritten or even possibly a written contract between a slave owner and a slave. A slave could seek his freedom and was often encouraged to do so. As he gained in wealth, he could purchase it. If he was allowed to join the military, he could be awarded it for valiant or faithful service. Often a compassionate master would train his slaves in marketable skills and set him off on his own. For everyone in this Greco-Roman society, personal dignity, independence, and human autonomy were the signs of personal strength and value. The slave set all this aside and until he and the master agreed that it was time for him to be on his own as a productive member of society, he was owned and confined to his master's will.

3:25-4:1

25: "For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. 4:1: Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven."

25: The subject is the slave in relationship to his master. Paul may include this because Onesimus had returned to Philemon with a letter from Paul to Philemon asking him to receive Onesimus back as a brother, not just as a slave, forgiving him his offense and debt.<sup>23</sup> In 4:1(belonging here) he also admonishes slave

---

<sup>23</sup> See: The Book of Philemon as well as the introduction to this commentary, pages 4-7.

"masters" ("kyrioi" - also translated "lords") to treat their slaves justly and equally as their heavenly Lord treats them.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

4:2-4,

2: "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; 3: praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; 4: that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak."

2: What does he mean to, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it"? Well what it doesn't mean is to get into a routine of mindless activity. The word "devote" does not have some ritual in mind as we often think. It means to pray with earnestness, vigor and strength. Put yourself into it. Persevere with constancy. Don't let it slip into disuse. Don't let it be an add-on to a day's routine, not that there is anything wrong with daily prayer. Quite the contrary. The point is to make your prayers those you feel deeply about, you are earnest about and feel strongly about.

Keeping alert fits right in. Don't fall asleep while you are praying. This would reveal a lack of earnestness wouldn't it. In fact, the word Paul uses is the same word Jesus used in the Garden of Gethsemane when He asked the disciples to watch and keep alert while He prayed.

Further, it means to have you faculties about you when you pray rather than using insipid, repetitive, lethargic, empty phrases. In the context, Paul may well be suggesting that their alertness in prayer might prevent them from falling into the trap of the false teachers with their distorted doctrines again. He nowhere suggests a system or style of prayer, but in every case, he wants prayers to be fervent and on point. And he wants Christians to pray constantly in this manner and to do it with thankfulness, not as a mealtime routine only, but thanksgiving with fervency and gratitude toward God. The word thankful implies the sense of worship. The word is "Eucharist" the same word used for the communion supper.

3-4: Paul requests prayer for himself and those with him that though he is in prison he might have opportunity to speak the word and to do so effectively. There imprisoned in Rome this prayer may include his witness to the people nearby including guards and perhaps the "household of Caesar" he mentioned in his earlier letter to the church at Philippi. His requests for prayer appear in several epistles. "The mystery of Christ" is Christ in us the hope of glory and that the Gentiles are included in this.

4:5-6,

5: "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. 6: Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person."

5: Essentially he asked them to be like what he has prayed for himself. A common theme for Paul as he writes all the churches is admonishing them regarding their conduct toward outsiders. The word "conduct" means to walk about, live and manage yourself in the world. We are to do it with wisdom. "Wisdom" means that we are taking the raw material of our lives and producing something worthy of being placed in God's home.

Nevertheless, our witness toward outsiders is critical. And there are three critical parts to it. One is our prayers, two is our conduct, and the third is our words.

6: "Let your speech always be with grace, *as though* seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person."

An interesting statement. Is Paul implying that we can know how to respond to anyone if our speech is filled with grace? It seems so. How many people have you heard say, "I can't talk to people about the Lord, I wouldn't know what to say". But Paul is teaching us that anything we say is appropriate as long as it is filled with grace. Well, what does this mean? Well grace is having favor bestowed upon us when we deserve condemnation, forgiveness when we deserve judgment, mercy when we deserve wrath, love when we deserve destruction, hope when we deserve fear and life when we deserve death. If our speech is to be filled with grace this is how we are supposed to approach people.

I can't remember Jesus or the apostles ever teaching that we should approach people with the speech of hate, condemnation, judgment, criticism, belittlement,

punishment, wrath, fear and hopelessness. Quite the contrary. Our speech is to be seasoned with salt, a preservative with taste and essential minerals for the decaying souls of others. It should also be pungent and flavorful, not bland and tasteless. Keep it interesting and appealing to the palate. Regardless then of what we say, if it is filled with grace and seasoned with salt, God can use it to His glory.

4:7-9,

7: "As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information.<sup>24</sup> 8: For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; 9: and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here."

7: Paul is in prison and with him Epaphras who brought him the news from Colossae as well as bringing Onesimus with him to Rome, having found him somewhere along the way.<sup>25</sup> So Paul assigns Tychicus to return to Colossae taking the letter to Ephesus, Colossae, Laodicea and Philemon with him as well as returning Onesimus to Philemon. Tychicus also will report to the churches the latest news about Paul's situation in Rome.

4:10-13,

10: "Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him); 11: and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me. 12: Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondslave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. 13: For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

10-13: Aristarchus is a Macedonian from Thessalonica who is mentioned three times in the book of Acts. He was with Paul during the Ephesian ministry and the riot there, and therefore was known to the people at Colossae. Both he and Tychicus were with Paul in Greece after leaving Ephesus and were headed to clear

---

<sup>24</sup> See introduction pages 4-5 for more information about Tychicus.

<sup>25</sup> See the introduction pages 3-5.

up the mess in the Corinthian church. And Aristarchus is with Paul in Jerusalem and accompanied him to Rome. "Mark", is John Mark and a disciple of Jesus. He and Paul have a long history. Mark left them while in the middle of the first missionary journey and it caused Paul such great consternation he refused to allow Mark to accompany them on the next missionary trip.<sup>26</sup> John Mark's mother was one of the several "Mary's" mentioned in the Gospels, and Mark was also the author of the Gospel bearing his name. There was a harmonious reconciliation between Paul and Mark along the way, likely facilitated by Barnabas, his uncle (or cousin). Barnaba's sister was Mark's mother.

Justus may well have been Titius Justus, noted in Acts 18 when Paul was in Corinth, a Jewish man who had his house next to the synagogue there.

Notice Paul's comments about their very own Epaphras in verse 13, the one who helped bring the gospel to them and then was willing to travel to Paul to consult with him for direction in the church in their fight for truth.

Epaphras concern for the little assembly there causes him to worry and labor in prayer for them. His prayer is a model for us all, and the reason Paul wrote this epistle, "that they may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God." This suggests that Epaphras concern was because he feared their foundation was crumbling because of the persuasive false teachings of those who had infiltrated their midst. Paul writes this letter and sends it to them along with one to Ephesus, one to Laodicea and one to Philemon.

4:14-15,

14: "Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas.  
15: Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house."

14: Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and *also* Demas.

Luke, the physician, has accompanied Paul since he came to Troas on his second missionary and is still with him in Rome. He of course is the author of both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. Demas, from Thessalonica and a friend of Aristarchus, and once a faithful worker would soon depart and desert Paul. In

---

<sup>26</sup> Acts 12:25; 15:37-39

Paul's letter to Philemon, he says this about Demas, "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, *as do* Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers."

In his second letter to Timothy later on he writes, "...for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica". Paul is quite harsh here, not condemning Demas for his loss of faith but for returning to something back home he felt was more important than remaining with Paul. It could have been perfectly legitimate, family, business, or perhaps not. Yet from Paul's comment, Demas will be forever looked down upon as a deserter and untrustworthy.

But remember, Paul had said the same thing about John Mark at one time, but now, John Mark has become one of his most beloved supporters and friends due to the ministry of Barnabas who is known by the churches throughout the empire. Paul mentions John Mark twice in his greetings here.

15: Remember, in Colossae the church is meeting in the house of Philemon, and generally that meant that the owner of the house was the teacher or a key leader. "Nympha" is the best reading and has the most textual support. Some later manuscripts have "Nymphas" the masculine, but support is weak. So it is most probable a woman, Nympha, is mentioned in Laodicea. She might well be a key leader there or even a teacher. Don't forget that Priscilla was the key teacher in the churches at Ephesus, Corinth and Rome.

4:16,

16: "When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.

16: This letter to the church at Colossae is also to be read to the assembly at Laodicea and the letter he sent there to be read to the people at Colossae. Unfortunately, that letter has been lost.

4:17,

17: Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

17: Paul sends a special greeting to Archippus. This man is only mentioned one other time in the New Testament and that was in the second letter sent to Colossae for Philemon. There he writes, 1: Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker, 2: and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house."

"Apphia" may well be the wife of Philemon but we are not sure or the relationship of Archippus to this couple. Whatever this is, Paul encourages him to "take heed" or "look to" the service the Lord gave him to fulfill and keep at it. Whether this is a reminder or a compliment we don't know, but apparently Archippus had been given an important responsibility and perhaps the gifts and talents to accomplish it and Paul wants to make sure he continues to fulfill it.

4:18,

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

18: It seems that many letters had gone out purporting to be from the apostle Paul and false teachers had invaded the church with doctrines contrary to the truth of the gospel.<sup>27</sup> So Paul either wrote or signed his letters in his own hand, and his writing became recognizable by the churches. He makes note of this at the end of I Corinthians and II Thessalonians as well.

He covets their prayers for him in prison. He is elderly now, probably in his sixties and not in good physical condition. But despite this he is determined to serve the Lord with all he has until his death.

"Grace be with you" is Paul's most common benediction. Grace is God's gift of love in Christ, His kindness and favor.

---

<sup>27</sup> Note: II Thessalonians 2:1-3; I John 4:1-2; II Peter 2:1-3 etc.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY AND CREDITS**

Scripture passages reproduced in this study are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted. The NASB, Zondervan Corporation, 1999, The Lockman Foundation. (Note: The asterisk normally indicating the historical present tense has been eliminated to avoid confusion in terms of footnotes).

Word Biblical Commentary, volume 44 - Peter T. Obrien, Word Books

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible – Abingdon, 1962

The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible – Zondervan, 1978

The Interpreter's Bible – Volume 11, Abingdon Press, 1955

The Expositor's Greek Testament – Volume 3, Eerdman's, 1961

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament – Eerdman's, 1968

The Greek New Testament – Fourth Edition, United Bible Societies, 2007

Jerome, "On Philemon" 23 and "On Famous Men" 5.

E-sword.net: Smith's Bible Dictionary; Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary; "Albert Barnes notes on the Bible"; "Adam Clark's Commentary on the Bible"; "Vincent's Word Studies"; John gills Exposition on the Entire Bible";