

The Epistle to the Colossians

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by Given O. Blakely

The Epistle To The Colossians

PAUL AND TIMOTHY TO THE FAITHFUL BRETHREN

Lesson #1

AN EXPOSITION OF THE GOSPEL

The Epistles are an exposition of the Gospel of Christ, which is the exclusive “power of God unto salvation.” That exposition opens up the implications of the Gospel – the logical relationships that are inherent in the Gospel itself, and how they are brought to bear upon life in this world.

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

The Gospel is more than appears to the casual mind. It is not like a flat map, with no depth or varied perspectives. It is rather like a series of profoundly deep “wells,” out of which refreshing water is drawn. Thus Isaiah prophesied, “Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation” (Isa 12:3).

The Love of God

The love of God and Christ, proclaimed by the Gospel and delineated by the Apostles, is noted for its extensiveness. That is why we read of the desire that we “May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge , that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:18-19). The marvelous copiousness of Divine love cannot be contained in a statement, or fully comprehended in a word. It must be opened to us through Divinely appointed means. Thus we are strengthened with might by God’s Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ can, in fact, dwell in our hearts by faith. Then, and only then, will we be able to be “rooted and grounded in love,” and thus enabled to begin to grasp the scope of Divine beneficence (Eph 5:16-17).

The Grace of God

The grace of God, wonderfully proclaimed in the Gospel, is noted for being exceedingly rich: “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace ” (Eph 1:7). “That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:7). The grace of God and of Christ is noted for its rich and essential resources. There are no liabilities in grace, no deficiencies, or weaknesses. For this reason, it is not possible to place too much stress upon the grace of God. Only things and personalities that are not of themselves sufficient can be over-emphasized. Like other Divine qualities, grace can be misrepresented, misunderstood, or misapplied – but it is not possible to speak about it correctly, and yet say too much about grace itself.

The Glory of God

The glory of God, most fully declared in the Gospel, is also noted for its richness: “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory , to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man” (Eph 3:16). This is an aspect of the Lord that He is on the initiative to make known. As it is written, “And that he might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory” (Rom 9:23). God’s glory is the outworking and revelation of His Person, and it is central to Apostolic proclamation.

Christ Himself

When speaking of the benefits flowing from the Person of Christ, riches are again the appropriate description. “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ ” (Eph 3:8). Christ Himself is adequate for all things. There is no need to combine Him with something or someone else to obtain Divine benefits. He who has Christ has everything, for all riches are resident in, and obtainable

through, Him alone.

The Holy Spirit

In regeneration, men receive the Holy Spirit of God. That reception is spoken of in remarkable words: “according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:5-6). As is characteristic of every aspect of salvation, what men need is given in rich and copious supply!

Riches of His Goodness

The goodness of the Lord is also loaded with staggering benefits. How appropriately the Spirit speaks of them. “Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Rom 2:4). There is an abundance to be realized when the “goodness” of the Lord is comprehended and received by faith.

Wisdom and Knowledge of God

The wisdom and knowledge of God, particularly as they are made known in His great salvation, are also noted for their plentitude and abundant provision. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom 11:33).

Full Assurance and Understanding

Even the assurance and understanding that proceed from the belief of the Gospel, are characterized by richness. “That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding , to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ” (Col 2:2).

The Reproaches of Christ

There is such a fulness in Christ Jesus, that even bearing His reproach is laden with benefits and advantages. It is therefore said of Moses, “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt : for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward” (Heb 11:24-26).

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE GOSPEL

Nowhere is such magnificent abundance used to describe human experience or accomplishments. The church, which is the body of Christ, is never spoken of as, of itself, having such magnificent

abundance. The perceived mission of the church has no such copiousness. The family, home, or government is never spoken of as having such abundant provision.

With unwavering consistency, the Epistles hold forth the Gospel itself as the central message, and Jesus Christ as the fundamental and pivotal Person. In Apostolic doctrine, nothing is ever allowed to upstage the substance of the Gospel or the centrality of the Son of God. There is no Apostolic writing that leaves the hearers or readers looking at something or someone other than the Lord Jesus.

Much, if not all, of the deficiencies of the church are owing to a misplaced emphasis. Most of the Epistles were written to re-establish the preeminence of the Person of Christ and the message of the Gospel. The following is a sampling of this fact, and is by no means exhaustive.

- ROMANS. The centrality of Christ (1:1,3,6,7,8,16; 2:16; 3:22,24; 5:1,6, 8,11,,15,17,21; 6:3,4,8,,8,11,23; 7:4, 25; 8:1,2,9,10,11, 17,34,35,39; 9:1, 3, 5; 10:4,6,7; 12:5; 13:14; 14:9,10,15, 18; 15:3,5,6,7,8,16-20; 16:20,24,25). The priority of the Gospel. (1:19,15,16; 2:16; 10:14-17; 11:28; 15:16,19,20,29; 16:25).
- FIRST CORINTHIANS. The centrality of Christ. (1:1-13,17; 2:2,16; 3:11,23; 4:1,10,15; 5:4,7; 6:15; 8:6,11-12; 9:1; 10:4,9,16; 11:1,3; 12:12,27; 15:3,12-23; 15:57; 16:22-24). The priority of the Gospel (1:17; 4:15; 9:12,14,16,18; 15:1) .
- SECOND CORINTHIANS. The centrality of Christ. (1:1-5,19-21; 2:10,12,14, 15-17; 3:3,4,14; 4:4-6; 5:10,14,16-20; 6:15; 8:9,20; 9:13; 10:1,5,14; 11:2,3, 10,31; 12:9,19; 13:5,14). The priority of the Gospel (2:12; 4:3,4; 8:18; 9:3; 10:14,16; 11:4,7).
- GALATIANS. The centrality of Christ (1:1,3,6-7,10,12,22; 2:4,16-17,20-21; 3:11,13-14,16-17,22,24,26-28; 4:7,14,19; 5:1-2,4,6; 6:2,12,14-15,18). The priority of the Gospel (Gal 1:6-11; 2:2,5,7,14; 3:8; 4:13).
- EPHESIANS. The centrality of Christ (1:1-5,10,12,17,20; 2:5-7,10,12-13,20; 3:1, 4,6,8-9,11,14,17, 19,21; 4:12-13,15,20, 32; 5:2,5,14,20, 23-25,32; 6:5-6,23-24). The priority of the Gospel (1:13; 3:6; 6:15, 19).
- PHILIPPIANS. The centrality of Christ (1:1,2,6,8,10,11,13,15-16,18-21,23,26-27,29; 2:5-8,11,16,21,30; 3:3,7-9,12, 14,18,20; 4:7,13,19,21,23). The priority of the Gospel (1:5,7,12, 17,27; 2:22; 4:3, 15).
- FIRST AND SECOND THESSALONIANS. The centrality of Christ (1 Thess 1:1,3,6; 2:6,14,19; 3:2,11,13,16; 5:9,18,23,28; 2 Thess 1:1,2,8,12,14,16; 3:5,6,12,18). The priority of the Gospel (1 Thess 1:5; 2:2, 4,8,9; 3:2; 2 Thess 1:8; 2:14).

- **FIRST AND SECOND TIMOTHY.** The centrality of Christ (1 Tim 1:1,2,12, 14-16; 2:5,7; 3:13; 4:6; 5:11,21; 6:3, 13; 2 Tim 1:1,2,9,10,13; 2:1,3,8,10,19; 3:12,15; 4:1,22). The priority of the Gospel (1 Tim 1:11; 2 Tim 1:8,10; 2:8).
- **TITUS.** The centrality of Christ (1:1,4; 2:13; 3:6). The priority of the Gospel (1:3).
- **HEBREWS.** The centrality of Christ (1:2,5,8; 2:6; 3:1,6,14; 4:14; 5:5,8; 6:1,6; 7:3,28; 9:11,14,24,26,28; 10:10, 29; 11:26; 13:8,21). The priority of the Gospel (4:2).
- **JAMES.** The centrality of Christ (1:1; 2:1). The priority of the Gospel (1:18,21).
- **FIRST AND SECOND PETER.** The centrality of Christ (1 Pet 1:1-3,7,11,13,19; 2:5,21; 3:16,18,21; 4:1, 11,14; 5:1,10,14; 2 Pet 1:1,2,8,11,14, 16; 2:20; 3:18). The priority of the Gospel (1:12,23,25; 2:2,8; 3:1; 4:6,17; 2 Pet 1:19; 3:5,7).
- **FIRST, SECOND, THIRD JOHN.** The centrality of Christ (1 John 1:3,7; 2:22-24; 3:8,23; 4:9-10,14,15; 5:5,9-13,20; 2 John 1:3,9). The priority of the Gospel (1 John 1:10; 2:5,7,14; 3:18; 5:7, 10,11).
- **JUDE.** The centrality of Christ (1:1,4,17,21). The priority of the Gospel (1:4,17).
- **REVELATION.** The centrality of Christ (1:8-18; 2:23; 3:17; 5:6,8, 12, 13,6:1,16; 7:9,10,14,17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1,4,10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7,9,10; 21:6,7,14,22, 23; 22:1,3,9,13,16). The priority of the Gospel (1:2,9; 3:8,10; 6:9; 11:7; 12:11,17; 14:6; 15:5; 19:10; 20:4).

WHAT WE WILL SEE IN COLOSSIANS

The book of Colossians is rich with Apostolic emphasis. It shines the light of heavenly riches upon areas of human difficulty and challenge, showing they are not as significant as they appear. In doing this, the Spirit elevates our vision to behold the richness of Divine provision. Here are some of the central points that will be made.

- Grace and peace are conferred upon the saints(1:2).
- The affirmation of the hope laid up in heaven for the saints (1:5).
- The Gospel is said to be bringing forth fruit in the saints (1:6).
- A prayer for the saints to be filled all knowledge and spiritual understanding (1:9-11).
- Deliverance from the power or darkness and translation into Christ's kingdom proclaimed (1:13).

- Redemption and forgiveness are affirmed(1:14).
- An extended declaration of Christ superiority is given (1:15-19).
- The accomplishments of Christ’s atoning death are affirmed (1:20-22).
- The mystery hidden from the ages and generations is said to now be made known to the saints (1:26-28).
- Things hidden in Christ are declared to belong to the saints, and to be apprehended by them (2:1-3).
- It is powerfully affirmed that we are complete in Christ (2:10-15).
- The implications of being risen with Christ are delineated, and the saints urged to enter into them (3:1-4).
- In Christ the “new man,” or new creation has been put on (3:10-11).
- The Word of Christ can dwell richly and productively in saints (3:16-17).
- The saints will receive the reward of the inheritance, and are to live in view of that reality (3:24).

In some form, these affirmations are found in all of the Epistles. The perception of these things draws the saints into productive involvement in the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. If they are not ascertained to some extent, living by faith and walking in the Spirit are rendered virtually impossible.

These affirmations are pillars of sound reasoning. They represent a foundational way of thinking that reflects God’s “eternal purpose.” Everything that is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy (Phil 4:8) , intersect with these realities .

When these are clear in our hearts and minds duty makes sense and refreshment is realized. When they are not perceived, a diversion to lesser and unprofitable things is inevitable.

SATAN’S INITIATIVE

These are also the realities that are most vigorously attacked by the prince of the power of the air. His diabolical aim is not simply to disrupt churches, families, and governments. That is not at the heart of his dark agenda. All of his efforts are focused on two things. First, to obscure the Lord Jesus and the Gospel. Second, to oppose those who show forth the life of Christ and proclaim His Gospel. Thus the Spirit encapsulates Satan's initiative in these words: "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 12:17).

Throughout history, the church has been tempted with distraction and diversion. Satan has offered it another Savior, another Christ, another answer to the human dilemma. In this effort, he transforms himself into an angel of light, and his ministers come disguised as ministers of righteousness (2 Cor 11:14). Some of the results of this initiative are addressed in the book of Colossians. They include men imposing Old Covenant distinctions upon men (meats, drinks, holy days, new moons, and Sabbaths. These efforts also included the imposition of certain human disciplines upon believers (self abasement and the worship of angels) – 2:16-17.

The Seriousness of Such Things

The serious of these activities is seen in what is said of those perpetrating them. Such teachers are not said to be honest, simply ignorant, or fundamentally good. Rather, it is affirmed that they are "not holding the Head," from whom spiritual nourishment is ministered. The sustenance that is realized by holding to the Head results in believers being "knit together," and increasing "with the increase of God" (2:19). However, the teachers of reference aborted that process, introduced division, and nullified the increase of God.

Although the devil seeks to get the church to change its emphasis, he himself has never changed his thrust.

APOSTOLIC WRITINGS

The Apostolic writings carefully address these two matters: (1) The glorious realities, accomplishments, and benefits of Christ and, (2) The Gospel, its nature and content, and its impact upon Satan's initiative. Much of this will be confirmed in teaching of this brief but pungent book.

This Epistle is written to "the saints and faithful brethren which are at Colossae" (1:2). This city

was located in Phrygia, but was politically in the province of Asia. It was around 500 miles from Jerusalem, across the Mediterranean Sea (called “the Great Sea” in Scripture, Num 34:6). By way of land, it was around 800-900 miles from the holy city. Located on Lycus river, Colossae was about twelve miles above Laodicea, and near the great road from Ephesus to the Euphrates. EASTON BIBLE DICTIONARY It was considered a significant city.

TIME OF WRITING

The Epistle was probably written around A.D. 57, during Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:16). Although this is incidental, we conclude it from several facts.

- Timothy was with Paul at the time of writing (1:1 w/Philippians 2:19).
- Epaphroditus had recently come from Asia Minor, and was now with Paul in prison (1:7; 4:12 w/Phil 2:25; Phile 1:23).
- Paul was in prison, and had been preaching during his detention (4:3,18 w/Acts 28:30-31).
- Tychichus and Onesimus were with him, and carried the letter to Colossae, and another letter to Philemon as well (4:7 and Philemon 1:12 w/Ephesians 6:21).

It appears this Epistle was written later in Paul’s imprisonment, as indicated in his letter to Philemon, written about the same time. In that letter, Paul seemed to suggest he expected to be released very soon. For this reason, he told Philemon to prepare a place for him (1:22).

THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH

It appears as though the church was founded by Epaphras (1:7). Because Paul affirms the brethren there, and in Laodicea, had never seen his face (2:1), it is assumed it was founded after Paul had gone throughout that particular area, “strengthening all the disciples” (Acts 18:23).

The Spreading of the Word

If this assumption is correct, here is another church, like Rome, that was not founded by the Apostles. This confirms the zeal that characterized the spread of the Gospel in those early years.

The energetic promulgation of the Gospel following the scattering of the disciples (Acts 8:4) is a remarkable circumstance to consider, particularly in view of our present circumstances. Because of the persecution that provoked the dispersion of the disciples, their activities were not directed by the kind of organization and systemization that characterizes modern day efforts. Yet, those early advances were significantly more successful than most of the ones succeeding generations have been able to achieve.

THE OCCASION OF THE WRITING

Although Paul had not been to Colossae, he had learned of their state through Epaphras, their faithful servant (1:6-7; 4:12).

Both the tone and content of the Epistle suggest that among the Colossian brethren, there had been a shift of emphasis away from Christ. The influence of Judaistic teachers was found among them (2:16-17). There was also a philosophical accentuation that tended to upstage the Son of God (2:8). Additionally, some among them were pressing the idea of achieving spirituality through various disciplines and regimens of life (2:20-23).

The result of these diversions was that the Lord Jesus Christ was thrust into the background of theological thought. Although God Almighty had given Him “preeminence” in “all things” (1:18), the Colossians were being subjected to teaching that did not bring them to this perception. In fulfillment of his Apostleship to the Gentiles, Paul writes to correct this condition. He did not found the church in Colossae, and he had not seen them face to face. Another person, Epaphras, was a faithful servant among them (4:12). Yet, upon hearing of the condition of the church, the faithful Apostle at once steps into the circumstance.

Summation

In summary, this Epistle will expound the worthiness and dignity of the Lord Jesus together with His sole sufficiency and thorough adequacy. In matters pertaining to life and godliness, nothing more is needed than Jesus! We are “complete in Him” (Col 2:10).

The Nature of Kingdom Work

The Apostle did not recognize sectarian boundaries. To dignify such boundaries is not the manner of the Kingdom. Truth is to be freely declared wherever it is needed. Although there are good reasons to support the idea of congregational autonomy, where groups of believers are not under the dictatorial authority of an absent leader, that idea must not be taken too far. No body of believers is free to disregard the truth of God, or venture into theological deserts that lead people away from Jesus. Such departures are sinful and bring great reproach upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

In our very area, there are a significant number of Christian congregations who are conducting their affairs just as though Jesus Christ had not been “highly exalted” (Phil 2:9). All manner of teachings are being perpetrated among believers that are nothing more than tributaries of human wisdom. Yet, certain denominational walls and sectarian authorities not only allow such practices, but protect their continuance. Thus no small number of believers are being starved to death, while made to wander in spiritually arid wastelands.

Paul did not allow this to happen at Colossae. Note, he did not ask the elders for permission to send a letter to the church. He did not recognize any earthly head of the congregation through which all teaching was to be directed. The condition of the church demanded that a word be delivered from the Lord, and Paul was faithful to do it. Truth needs no earthly permission to be proclaimed!

SIMILARITIES WITH EPHESIANS

There are a number of similarities between Colossians and Ephesians. They were in general proximity to one another, and were both written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome.

- Ephesians 1:15-19 with Colossians 1:9-11
- Ephesians 1:20-23 with Colossians 1:15-19
- Ephesians 1:10 with Colossians 1:20
- Ephesians 2:1-10 with Colossians 1:21-23
- Ephesians 3:7 with Colossians 1:25
- Ephesians 3:9,10 with Colossians 1:26,27
- Ephesians 3:17 with Colossians 2:7
- Ephesians 2:11-22 with Colossians 2:11-15
- Ephesians 4:14 with Colossians 2:8
- Ephesians 4:15,16 with Colossians 2:19
- Ephesians 4:25 with Colossians 3:9
- Ephesians 4:22-24 with Colossians 3:9,10
- Ephesians 4:32 with Colossians 3:12
- Ephesians 5:19,20 with Colossians 3:16,17
- Ephesians 5:21 with Colossians 3:18-22
- Ephesians 6:6-9 with Colossians 4:1
- Ephesians 6:19 with Colossians 4:3
- Ephesians 5:16 with Colossians 4:5
- Ephesians 6:21 with Colossians 4:7

Apparently both of these churches had been subjected to similar assaults of philosophy and corrupted Judaism. We will find that our own times are characterized by remarkable similarities.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE BOOK

The fact that Colossians is truth makes it relevant, for truth, because of its very nature, cannot be irrelevant.

- If knowing the truth makes “free” (John 8:32), then a failure to proclaim it contributes to bondage.
- If Satan was noted for abiding not “in the truth” (John 8:44), then a failure to declare the truth is only possible while one is under his influence.

- If we are “sanctified through the truth” (John 17:19), then Divine rejection is inevitable where truth is not being affirmed.
- If “every one who is of the truth” hears the voice of Christ, then there is no way of determining who is of God, and who is not, where the truth is not being made known.
- If “speaking the truth in love” is the means of facilitating growth in Christ (Eph 4:15), then spiritual growth is not possible where truth is not heard.

Spiritual growth, recovery, and stability depend upon the proclamation of “the truth of the Gospel” (Gal 2:5). For that reason alone, the book of Colossians is important to us.

Yet Another Reason

There is yet another reason for the importance of this book. We are living in times when, within the professed church, Jesus has been upstaged. Other things have become the central proclamation. Such things as the church, the family, the mission of the church, the name of the church, youth ministry, the relief of the poor, and even the Holy Spirit, are given a place of prominence and honor that God has given to Jesus alone. The day of promoting various disciplines of life did not end during the time of this Epistle. The church is still plagued with such teachings. It is not that these things are wrong or sinful of themselves. However, when they become the main thing, they become wrong.

The essentiality of knowing we are “complete in Him,” is as necessary today as when this Epistle was written. There is nothing required to prepare us for the day of judgment that is not realized in Jesus Christ. We are complete in Him! There is no result of sin that is not fully and effectively addressed by Jesus Christ. We are complete in Him! There is no Divine benefit that does not come to us through Him. We are complete in Him! There is no spiritual or true advantage that is not accomplished in Him. We are complete in Him! Everything that is required for fulfillment, joy, peace, and satisfaction is found in Christ alone. We are complete in Him !

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We therefore come to this Epistle for nourishment, enlightenment, and encouragement. Here we will find food for the soul and strength for the heart. We will “live” by this word (Luke 4:4), and become “thoroughly furnished” by it (2 Tim 3:17). Our faith will be impacted by this word (Rom 10:17), and we will be “sanctified and cleansed” through it (Eph 5:26). When this message is comprehended, it will become the Spirit’s sword in our hand to wage war against the devil’s devices (Eph 6:17).

Let us receive the word to the Colossians in the same manner as the Thessalonians received the Words of Paul to them. “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received

the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess 2:13). We will find these words, their tone, their meaning, and their implication profitable for eternity. This is undoubtedly a word from God, and, like all of His words, it is for us today!

“ 1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ . . . ”

PAUL

“Paul” means “small or little.” However, the man with whom this name is most commonly linked is by no means associated with smallness. He may have been small in bodily stature, but he was a giant in the faith. He was humble, or “little” in his own eyes, like king Saul was in his beginning (1 Sam 15:17). He considered himself “less than the least of all saints” (Eph 3:8), and “the least of the Apostles,” and “not meet to be called an Apostle” (1 Cor 15:9). Because he “humbled” himself “under the mighty hand of God,” the Lord has exalted his name and his work (1 Pet 5:6). That is why the words “the Apostle Paul” evoke such respect among believers. God has exalted this faithful servant in this world, and will do so to even a greater degree in “the world to come.”

Saul of Tarsus

Prior to being an Apostle, Paul was known as “Saul of Tarsus.” Our first exposure to him is in the book of Acts. The time during which this exposure takes place was approximately A.D. 35, or about five years after Christ’s ascension to the right hand of God.

The Stoning of Stephen

The occasion was the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr for Jesus. When a mob of angry Jews stoned Stephen, “the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul” (Acts 7:58). These were the “witnesses” who were “set up” to speak against Stephen before the Jewish council (Acts 6:13). The eighth chapter of Acts begins by referring to this incident – when witnesses laid down their garments at Saul’s feet: “And Saul was consenting unto his death” (Acts 8:1). Twenty-two years later, Paul stood before a group of angry Jews and told them how he had confronted the Lord after his conversion, while he was praying in the Temple. Jesus told him to leave Jerusalem at that time, “for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me.” Saul then referred to the incident of Stephen’s stoning. “And when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him” (Acts 22:20).

The Persecution of the Church

Our next exposure to Saul of Tarsus came during the period following the stoning of Stephen. He led an unparalleled assault against the church. It is written, “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison” (Acts 8:3). At least twenty-three years later, Paul stood before Agrippa and confessed, “And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women” (Acts 22:4).

The aggressiveness with which he persecuted the church is also duly noted. “Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities” (Acts 26:11).

Paul spoke to the saved of his aggression against the church. “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God ” (1 Cor 15:9). “For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it ” (Gal 1:13). “Concerning zeal, persecuting the church ” (Phil 3:6). “Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious : but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim 1:13).

Advanced in the Jew's Religion

Prior to his conversion, as Saul of Tarsus, Paul was advanced in the Jew's religion, excelling his peers in both knowledge and zeal. Of this time Paul wrote to the Galatians, “And [I] profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers” (Gal 1:14).

Under the Tutelage of Gamaliel

Saul of Tarsus was a protege of Gamaliel, who was a “doctor of the Law, had in reputation among the people” (Acts 5:34). Paul was “thoroughly trained in the Law of our fathers,” and was “zealous for God” (Acts 22:3). His education was not secular, but was in “the Jews religion.” He was an expert in Moses and the Prophets.

Among the Hebrews

Among the chosen people, Saul excelled. He referred to himself as “a Hebrew of the Hebrews ” (Phil 3:5).

A Pharisee

In his relationship to the Law, Saul was a Pharisee: “as touching the Law, a Pharisee” (Phil 3:5). Pharisees led separated lives – that is, their entire life was given to Judaism. In this regard, he followed Gamaliel, who was also a Pharisee (Acts 5:34). Years after his conversion, when speaking to a group of angry Jews, Paul still referred to himself as a Pharisee, whose father also was a Pharisee. “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee” (Acts 23:6). This manner of life, he confessed, was after the strictest and most rigid manner: “. . . after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee” (Acts 26:5).

He Lived An Impeccable Life

Prior to being called into the Apostleship, Paul lived an impeccably holy life. Of this he confessed, “touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Phil 3:6). Again, when standing before a group of Jews that was seeking his life, he said, “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1).

In his persecution of the church, Paul was not motivated by a mere prejudicial hatred of Christians. He persecuted them, conscientiously thinking he was doing God service. Of this he said, “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9). Paul confessed that he was forgiven these monstrous sins because he was ignorant of what he was doing, and did not believe. “Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim 1:13).

His Commitment to Christ

Paul’s commitment to Christ was unequaled. Although he did not speak of this commitment often, he was able to share it with the brethren at Philippi. Their solid consistency in the faith (Phil 1:5) enabled them to receive his testimony without being unduly distracted by it. In his only elaboration on this subject Paul provided the following details of his commitment to the Lord.

- The religious profitability he had attained in the Jews religion was willingly forfeited – “counted loss for Christ” (Phil 3:7).
- He counted all competing interests “but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus” his Lord, considering them “but dung,” in order that he might “win Christ” (2:8).
- He determined to be found in Christ “not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phil 3:9).
- Concerning Christ Jesus, Paul’s unwavering determination was to “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (Phil 3:11).

- Realizing he had not yet reached the goal appointed for him, he followed hard after Jesus, that he might “apprehend that for which also” he was “apprehended of (by) Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:12).
- His awareness that he had not yet taken hold of the fulness of the inheritance moved him to confess, “this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:13-14).

Paul confessed these attitudes to be the kingdom norm , urging fellow believers, “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded : and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you” (Phil 3:15).

Just as Paul had been a “Hebrew of the Hebrews,” so he excelled among those who are in Christ Jesus.

Paul’s Labors

When comparing his labors with the other Apostles he humbly confessed, “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor 15:10).

Wherever the name of Jesus is embraced, Paul the Apostle is known. In him, we find a notable example of what God can do in a submitted person. Paul himself makes a point of this when he writes, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting” (1 Tim 1:15-16).

We are not speaking, therefore, of any ordinary person. Paul’s words are adorned by his own consistent and unwavering life.

APOSTLE

The word “apostle” means a delegate, an ambassador of the Gospel, one who is commissioned, or sent forth, with orders. An “apostle” is one who is sent out to deliver the message of another.

In all of Scripture, only Paul and Peter refer to themselves as “an Apostle” (Col 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1; 2 Pet 1:1). This is most fitting, for these two men headed up the Gospel initiative to the entire world – Peter to the Jews, and Paul to the Gentiles. As it is written, “But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me , as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter ;

(For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles)” (Gal 2:8).

Called to the Apostleship

As with all Divinely appointed offices, those who fill them must be called into them by God. Therefore Paul twice wrote he was “called to be an Apostle” (Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1). That call involved being “separated unto the Gospel of God” (Rom 1:1) – that is, his commission was to preach the Gospel.

Out of Due Time

The uniqueness of Paul’s Apostleship is seen in the fact that he was “born out of due time” (1 Cor 15:8). In this expression, Paul is comparing himself with the other Apostles. The birth to which he refers is his spiritual birth, not his birth in the flesh. When Stephen was stoned, which was roughly five years after Pentecost, Saul of Tarsus was a “young man” (Acts 7:58). Therefore, according to the flesh, he had been born in time to be called to the Apostleship in the same manner as the original twelve.

The change in Paul’s character took place more suddenly than that of the other Apostles. His call was not at all like that of the others. He was suddenly wrested from his aggression against the saints on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6). It was at that time that Jesus told him, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:18).

Immediately Paul “showed” what he had seen to “them in Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea” (Acts 26:20).

The ordinary qualifications of an Apostle were stated in the first chapter of Acts, when, under the direction of the Lord, one was chosen to take fill the “bishopric” vacated by Judas. Of the candidate, Peter affirmed, “Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.” NIV (Acts 1:21-22). Paul did not meet those qualifications: he was “born out of due time.”

For this reason, special tutelage was given to Paul by Jesus Himself. Paul did not confer with the Apostles to obtain his understanding, as the rest of the world would have to do. Speaking of his activity following Christ’s appearance to him, Paul wrote that it pleased God “To reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood : neither went I

up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days” (Gal 1:16-18).

The teaching he received directly from the risen Christ was so thorough, that after meeting with the James, Peter, and John, he confessed, “those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me” NASB (Gal 2:6).

The Lord’s Table

There was one particularly important event that involved only Jesus and the Apostles, following the exit of Judas. It was the institution of the Lord’s table. No one was there except Jesus and the “the eleven.” Anyone who learned of this event, and of its place in the church, would have to learn about it from the Apostles. Yet, this is not how Paul learned of it. In a telling testimony, he told the Corinthians of the personal instruction he received from Jesus on this matter. “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:25).

Paul is the only one who wrote of this table, and he did so with an understanding that is not declared by anyone else.

- As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we show forth, or declare the Lord’s death until He comes (11:26).
- Whoever eats this bread and drinks this cup unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord (11:27).
- A person is to examine himself before eating this bread and drinking this cup (11:28).
- The person who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself (11:29).
- Those who conduct themselves inappropriately at this table can be judged with sickness, and even death (11:30).

Not A Mere Formality

Paul’s Apostleship, therefore, was not a mere formality. He was “chosen” and “set apart” for this Apostleship from his “mother’s womb.” Although he was unaware of this prior to his calling, he became

aware of it later and confessed, “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood” (Gal 1:16). This kind of separation was also vouchsafed to Jeremiah. God said to him, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jer 1:5). John the Baptist was also characterized by this kind of calling. “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb” NKJV (Luke 1:15).

If great grace and an unusual calling mandates an unusual ministry (and this is the case), we will surely find it fulfilled in Paul. And, indeed, we do. He was a prodigious laborer, thus confirming his perception that God's grace had made him what he was. Let Paul's critics see if they can measure up to him in calling, insight, or labors. And, if they cannot, let them place their hands over their mouths. As for me, I give honor to the Apostle Paul who saw more and declared more among the Gentiles than any other man.

OF JESUS CHRIST

Like “the twelve,” (Matt 10:8; Acts 6:2; 1 Cor 15:5; Rev 21:14), Paul was an “apostle of Jesus Christ.” That is, he was commissioned and sent directly by the Lord Jesus. Peter referred to “the Apostles of the Lord and Savior” (2 Pet 3:2). Jude called them “the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:17). John the revelator was told of “the Apostles of the Lamb” (Rev 21:14).

In this case, the emphasis is not on “apostle,” but on the One who sent the Apostle. Although an Apostle of Christ has authority (2 Cor 10:8), it is not political authority, or the right to take control over other people. The authority lies in the One who sent the Apostles, and not in the Apostles themselves.

Paul is careful to make this point in all of his writings.

- “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God ” (Rom 1:1).
- “Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God ” (1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 2:1).
- “Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father , who raised him from the dead” (Gal 1:1).
- “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God ” (Eph 1:1; Col 1:1).
- “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Savior, and Lord Jesus Christ , which is our hope” (1 Tim 1:1).

- “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 1:1).
- “Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles” (2 Tim 1:11).
- “Paul, a servant of God , and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect , and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness” (Titus 1:1).

The Apostles are first in rank within the household of faith. As it is written, “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles” (1 Cor 12:28). If those of first rank were humble, not imposing themselves upon the members of Christ’s body, what must those of lesser rank do? If they came in the name of Jesus, only binding upon men what He had bound, what must be said of those who occupy lower and less authoritative positions?

As an Apostle, Paul did not come as one who had academic expertise about Jesus and His words – although He displayed such knowledge. His separation and appointment were confirmed in his insight and faithfulness to proclaim it. He was acutely aware of the fact that he as a steward, and it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful (1 Cor 4:2). That is, in the end, when the books are opened, the faithful custodian of the goods given to him will be the only one who is accepted and honored.

Paul could not speak of his Apostleship without bringing Jesus into the limelight. When he spoke of the church, he shined the light upon Jesus. When he spoke of proper living, the emphasis was upon Jesus. If he spoke about last things, Jesus was prominent. He was an “Apostle of Jesus Christ.” Whatever he said or whatever he wrote constrained him to lift up the Lord Jesus, speaking primarily of Him.

“ . . . by the will of God . . . ”

Paul affirms he is an Apostle “by the will of God,” or according to God’s purpose and determination. He did not seek the Apostolic office, or volunteer to be used in that capacity. God separated him to the Apostolic office before he was born, as affirmed in Galatians 1:15: “But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased . . . ” NASB (Gal 1:15).

THE DECIDING ISSUE

When it comes to things pertaining to life and godliness, the deciding issue is not the will of man, but the will of God . The new birth itself is “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13). The words spoken by holy men “never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21).

THE FACTS

Speaking academically, the words “the will ” are mentioned thirty-six times in the New Covenant Scriptures. The emphasis reflected in these references is unquestionably clear.

- “ The will of My Father” (Matt 7:21; 12:50).
- “ The will of your Father which is in heaven” (Matt 18:14).
- “ The will of his father” (parable of two sons, Matt 21:31).
- “ The will of God” (Mk 3:35; Acts 13:36; Rom 1:10; 8:27; 15:32; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; 8:5; Gal 1:4; Eph 1:1; 6:6; Col 1:1; 4:12; 1 Thess 4:3; 5:18; 2 Tim 1:1; Heb 10:36; 1 Pet 2:15; 3:17; 4:2,19; 1 John 2:17).
- “ The will of the flesh” (the new birth is not by this means, John 1:13).
- “ The will of Him that sent Me” (John 4:34; 6:38,40).
- “ The will of the Father” (John 5:30).
- “ The will of the Lord” (Acts 21:14; Eph 5:17).
- “ The will of the Gentiles” (something now repudiated, 1 Pet 4:3).
- “ The will of man” (Prophecy did not come by this means, 2 Pet 1:21).

The following expressions are not found in the New Covenant Scriptures: “man’s will,” “our will” “your will,” and “free will.” The words “Thy will,” referring to God, occur five times (Matt 6:10; 26:42; Luke 11:2; Heb 10:7,9).

The word “will,” as used in our text, is a noun, coming from the Greek word **qelh,matoj** (thel-ama-tos). It means design, purpose, or what is determined to be done . In this precise form, it is used fourteen times in Scripture.

- The new birth is not accomplished through “the will of the flesh” or the “ will of man” (John 1:13).
- Paul’s desire to come to the Romans by “the will of God” (Rom 15:32).
- Paul was an Apostle by “the will of God” (1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:11; 2 Tim 1:1).
- A person having “power over their own will ,” determining his daughter to remain a virgin during the time of crisis (1 Cor 7:37).
- Believers giving themselves to the work of God “by the will of God” (2 Cor 8:5).

- God predestined believers to the adoption of children “according to the good pleasure of His will ” (Eph 1:5).
- God has made known “the mystery of His will ” (Eph 1:9).
- God works all things “after the counsel of His own will ” (Eph 1:11).
- A prayer for believers to be “filled with the knowledge of His will ” (Col 1:9).

Care must be taken to avoid using these texts to formulate a rigid theology, or move beyond the Spirit’s use of them.

PURPOSE AND DETERMINATION

The word “will” is often equated with mere desire – something that may or may not take place. In such a view, a thing that is “willed” is actually determined by circumstances other than the will itself. From a human point of view, Paul expressed this when he said, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Rom 7:18).

The word used in the above passage, however, is not the one used in our text. This word comes from **qe,lein** (thel-ein), which means to desire, consent to, or be ready to. This is a “will” that actually reflects the purpose of someone else. Specifically, it has to do with consenting to the will of God, and being desirous to do it.

The “will” of our text, however, does not reflect a mere wish on the part of God. Rather, it is a Divine determination, or decision – made in strict accord with His character and His eternal purpose . God does not have the difficulty expressed by Paul: i.e., “how to perform that which is good I find not.”

The Lord DOES what He wills – what He purposes. As it is written, “He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4:35). What He purposes, He brings to pass (Isa 46:11). A God who cannot implement His own purpose is no god at all! This is a point made concerning idols, who “cannot profit or deliver,” and “cannot save” (1 Sam 12:21; Isa 45:20).

What About Not Willing That Any Should Perish?

The sophist may remonstrate, saying that God is not willing that any should perish, as stated in Second Peter 3:9. Does this mean something God willed was actually frustrated, or that what He did not will actually came to pass?

The word used in this text is not the same as the one used in Colossians 1:1. Here the word used comes from **boulo,meno,j** (boo-lom-enos), which means wishing, or preferring – not determining. The idea is that God finds no delight in people perishing, nor do they do so because God has determined they will perish. This is not something toward which He works, but is the consequence of opposing what He has determined.

That being said, it is not wise to base teaching upon original words. The Scriptures confirm in their doctrine that there is a Divine will, or purpose, that cannot be contradicted or successfully resisted. This is expressed in the phrase, “worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph 1:11), and “According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:11), and “Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself” (Eph 1:9).

PAUL’S APOSTLESHIP

Paul’s Apostleship, therefore, was an outworking of God’s “eternal purpose.” In his travels, preaching, and writing, he was not simply doing what God wanted men to do. Rather, he was doing what God had determined he himself should do.

God chose Paul to unfold His eternal purpose to men – to open to their understanding something of the involvements of His great salvation. The commission given to Paul confirms this, and is most remarkable. “. . . for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee . . . I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:16-18).

Paul also reflected this in several expressions.

- “If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery ; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph 3:2-5).
- “Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery , which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ” (Eph 3:7-9).

Paul was “THE Apostle of the Gentiles” (Rom 11:13), and exercised his office faithfully. In fact, Paul confessed Christ Jesus “considered me faithful, appointing me to His service ” NIV (1 Tim 1:12).

Elsewhere he also said he had “obtained mercy to be faithful” (1 Tim 1:12). Later, he will say in this Epistle, “I have become its (Christ’s body, the church) servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness” NIV (Col 1:25).

WHEN PAUL WRITES

When Paul writes, therefore, he is not doing so as a talented counselor, or one whose opinions excel those of his peers. He writes as one through whom God is speaking. He writes as one who is faithful to communicate what the Lord wants His people to know. He communicates things relating to God’s eternal purpose in Christ Jesus.

Paul was not raised up to comment on the customs of the times, or to deal with Roman and Grecian manners. He is not applying well trained human wisdom to life situations, and teaching people how to live successful lives in this world. Every word he delivers intersects with the Gospel of Christ. All of his teaching has directly to do with God’s “great salvation.” The words and teaching to which we will be exposed in this Epistle are immediately associated with God’s “eternal purpose.”

Because of this circumstance, the doctrine will help us understand what the Lord is doing through Christ Jesus. When it is believed and embraced, it will tend to orient us for “the world to come,” and prepare us to stand before “the judgment seat of Christ.” Hearing or reading the words of an Apostle of Jesus Christ is nothing less than being exposed to the mind of Christ and the purpose of God.

THE AUTHENTICITY OF SCRIPTURE

Because we are living in a time when academia and human reasoning have been assigned unwarranted value, there is considerable dialog concerning the authenticity of the Scriptures. Some teach that it has, over the years, been corrupted. Others say it contains human opinion. Such postulates are extremely dangerous, and are not to be heeded. If the words given to Paul came from Jesus, and if they reflect the nature of God’s eternal purpose, ponder the consequences of their perversion.

If these words have, in fact, not been protected and preserved by God:

- Salvation has been pushed away from us.
- Fellowship with God may no longer be possible, and walking in the light may very well be impossible.

- Our perception of God, His Son, His Spirit, His salvation, and His purpose can be distorted, and even totally erroneous.
- Critical matters like the atonement, justification, grace, and faith may be completely misapprehended.
- Matters such as our approach to God, our posture in the world, and our role in the body of Christ may very well be out of reach.

It is not possible to live with such conditions. Confidence and assurance, indispensable to the good fight of faith, cannot survive in a climate of doubt, where the integrity of the Word of God is questioned.

All believers must determine in their hearts that they are unwilling to live with such doubts – if, indeed, such a life is even possible. Until that decision is made, the Word of God will exercise little power in the individual. It will not dwell within a person “richly” until it is perceived as it is “in truth, the Word of God” (1 Thess 2:13).

The lack of this decision is confirmed by the general disinterest in the Word that exists in the modern American church. It simply is not being given the priority God has given to it, and thus God has sent a famine of hearing it.

“ . . . and Timotheus our brother.”

TIMOTHEUS

The name “Timotheus” is a transliteration of the Greek **Timo,qeoj** (Ti -moth-e-us) – a letter for letter transposition of the word into English. The translation of the word is “Timothy,” and is so rendered in most versions of Scripture. The name means “honoring God,” STRONG’S and the Scriptural record of him confirms this is precisely what he did – honor God.

Identified with Paul

Timotheus, or Timothy, is included in the opening of several Epistles.

- “ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother , unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia” (2 Cor 1:1)
- “Paul and Timotheus , the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Phil 1:1)
- “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother ” (Col 1:1)
- “Paul . . . Timotheus , unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 1:1)
- “ Paul . . . Timotheus , unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 1:1)
- “Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlaborer” (Philemon 1:1).

It is assumed from the reference in Philemon, written around the same time as Colossians, that Timothy was in prison with Paul at the time of writing. We know from the book of Hebrews that Timothy was once in prison: “Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released . . .” NASB (Heb 13:23).

Our Introduction to Timothy

We are introduced to Timothy in the book of Acts. This occurred immediately after the separation of Paul and Barnabas. Paul had chosen Silas, and they departed “being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God” (Acts 13:40).

As they were going throughout Syria and Cilicia confirming the churches, they came into contact with Timothy. This is the record.

“Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.” (Acts 16:1-3).

From this we learn several preliminary facts.

- Timothy was already in Christ when Paul met him (“a certain disciple.”)
- He came from a divided home. His mother “believed,” but his father was “a Greek.”
- He had a good reputation among the brethren at Lystra and Iconium.
- Paul selected him to go with them as they continued on their tour to strengthen the churches.
- Timothy was circumcised because of the Jews, so there would be no question about his loyalty to the Lord.
- He was from the same general area as Colossae, Lystra being to the East of Colossae, and Iconium to the Northeast.

Although flesh might have found good reason for Timothy not to serve the Lord, he determined to do so anyway. He was held in reputation among mature believers – something that is not at all common for young believers in our time.

His Early Life

We know from the Scriptural record that Timothy had a noble beginning in the Lord. Paul alludes to this in his second letter to Timothy.

- He was taught by his mother and grandmother, in whom the faith first dwelt. “When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also” (2 Tim 1:5).
- From the time he was a child, he knew the Holy Scriptures. “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15).
- He made a profession of faith before many witnesses. “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses” (1 Tim 6:12).

Timothy confirms the value of faithful tutoring in the ways of the Lord. Further, this was done by his own mother and grandmother, without any apparent assistance from a godly father.

Timothy had Special Gifts

- Timothy was admonished to stir up the gift that was in him by the putting on of hands. “Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands” (2 Tim 1:6).
- Paul admonished Timothy to live in strict accord with the prophecies that were made concerning him. “This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare” (1 Tim 1:18).
- He was granted a spiritual gift, which was given to him through prophecy and the laying on of hands. “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery” (1 Tim 4:14).

There was a sense in which Timothy did not choose his own vocation. There were prophecies concerning him which appeared to announce his role in the body of Christ. Someone was alert to the spiritual endowments of Timothy, and in the Spirit declared what he would be. A special gift accompanied those prophecies, and Paul exhorted Timothy to stir it up and live in accord with what had been prophesied about him. It is difficult to conceive of such a thing taking place in our time and nation. But it is still possible, and we should be alert for such occasions.

He Some Health Disorders

Paul alludes to Timothy’s health in his first letter to him. “No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments” NASB (1 Tim 5:23). In keeping with the tenor of the New Covenant, Paul does not make a big issue of Timothy’s “frequent illnesses,” NIV but simply admonishes him to take wise precautionary measures. It is at once apparent that Timothy did let his health interfere with his labors for the Lord.

In Ephesus with Paul

During Paul’s productive ministry in Ephesus, Timothy is said to have been among those who ministered to him.

After the Word of God grew “mightily” and “prevailed” in Ephesus (Acts 19:20), Paul purposed in his spirit to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achai (19:21). In preparation for that journey, he sent Timothy and Erastus “into Macedonia.” They are described as “two of them that ministered unto him ” (Acts 19:22).

His Labors

- He traveled extensively with Silas (Acts 17:14,15; 18:5).

- He accompanied Paul to Asia (Acts 20:4)
- Paul describes him as his “yokefellow” (Rom 16:21).
- He is described as Paul’s “beloved son” (1 Cor 4:17).
- Paul said of him, “he worketh the work of the Lord” (1 Cor 16:10).
- Paul wrote to the Philippians of Timothy saying, “For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state” (Phil 2:20).
- He is referred to as “our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlaborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith” (1 Thess 3:2).
- He was spiritually competent to detect faith and love, and accurately report them (1 Thess 3:6).
- He was young, or youthful, at the time of Paul’s prison Epistles. “Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe” (1 Tim 4:12)
- He was sensitive, known for being moved to tears. “Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy” (2 Tim 1:4).

The Scriptures provide us with details of Timothy’s life that extend over a period of approximately 14-15 years. The first mention of him is dated around A.D. 50 (Acts 16:1), and the last around A.D. 65 (Heb 13:23). In all of that time, there is not a single account of him defecting, wavering, being disobedient, or being unresponsive. He is the Joseph and Samuel of the New Covenant. We read of young Mark balking (Acts 15:38), and Demas forsaking Paul (2 Tim 4:10). But nothing of this sort is ever said of Timothy.

Church History Speaks of Him

Church history also has considerable to say about Timothy. This does not carry the weight of revelation, but does provide some index as to the character of this man, and the longevity and faithfulness of his ministry.

- Eusibus (A.D. 310) writes, that according to the old traditions, Timothy continued as the bishop of Ephesus. Hist. Eccles. 3, 4, 2; *Const.Apost.* 7:46
- He is to have been martyred during the reign of Domitian. The following is said of that occasion. “The great festival of Artemis (a goddess) led him to protest against the license and frenzy which accompanied it.

The mob were roused to fury, and put him to death with clubs.” Niceph. Hist. Eccles. 3,11; Photius, Cod. 254

- Some are of the opinion that, if he continued as the bishop of Ephesus, he was the “angel” of Ephesus to whom Jesus delivered a personal message in Revelation 2:1-7.

OUR BROTHER

How does the Spirit move Paul to refer to such an illustrious young man? He simply refers to him as “Timotheus our brother.” Of course, that is by no means a lowly or condescending reference.

Paul refers to Timothy as “our brother.” That was how Timothy was viewed among their fellow laborers, and among the saints in general. He was their brother, because he was classed among Christ’s “brethren” (Heb 12:11-12). That is the loftiest of all human associations.

Terms like “brother” (Rom 16:23), “brethren” (Rom 8:29), “sister” (Rom 16:1), and “sisters” (1 Tim 5:2) reflect identity with Christ Jesus and with one another. This is how Ananas referred to Saul of Tarsus when sent to him by Jesus: “Brother Saul” (Acts 9:17; 22:13). Now Paul also uses the word to describe those who have been reconciled to God, and are laboring in the Gospel. He also speaks in a manner that promotes unity.

“ 2 To the saints . . . ”

Here is a common way of addressing God’s people – “the saints.” Forty-three times it is used in the Epistles (Rom 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25,26,31; 16:2,15; 1 Cor 1:2; 6:1,2; 14:33; 16:1,15; 2 Cor 1:1; 8:4; 9:1,12; 13:13; Eph 1:1,15,18; 2:19; 3:8,18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18; Phil 1:1; 4:22; Col 1:2,4,12,26; 2 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 1:10; 1 Tim 5:10; Phile 1:5,7; Heb 6:10; 13:24; Jude 1:3,14). Four times it is used in the book of Acts (Acts 9:13,32,41; 26:10). Once it is used in the Gospels (Matt 27:52).

The very use of this word accentuates the greatness of “the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10). The word “saints” refers to the quality of those being brought near to God. It means set apart for God’s purpose, dedicated, sacred, holy, and very pure. ROBERTSONS

THEIR RELATION TO GOD

First and foremost, the word “saints” denotes those who have been made suitable to come to God through Jesus Christ . These are the ones who have access to God (Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; 3:12), and for whom, Jesus intercedes (Heb 7:25). They are the ones to whom the Holy Spirit has been given (1 Thess 4:8), and for whom He intercedes (Rom 8:27).

This is not a mere formal identity, but reflects the change that has taken place in them through the grace of God. They hear God (Heb 12:25), and God hears them (1 John 4:6). They draw nigh to God (Heb 10:22), and He draws nigh to them (James 4:8). They are His “children” or “sons” (Gal 3:26; 1 John 3:1), and He is their “Father” (Gal 1:4).

These are people who are suitable for Divine use , and “prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21). They are “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:2), and therefore are special “vessels” prepared to contain “mercy” (Rom 9:23). God is “among” them (1 Cor 14:25), works “in” them (Phil 1:13), and they have become “one spirit” with the Lord (1 Cor 6:17). They are “stewards” of God (1 Pet 4:10), “call upon Him” (Rom 10:12), and God is in them “all” (Eph 4:6).

These are very real associations. A person is not as “saint” simply because they have made some religious profession. This is the result of being “reconciled to God” (Rom 5:10), being made “alive unto God” (Rom, 6:11), and bringing forth “fruit unto God.” In fact, this is why we were freed from the Law, that we might bring forth fruit unto God (Rom 7:4).

THEIR CHARACTER

The “saints” have a holy and righteous character. “Holiness” is a quality that confirms separation from the world. It is a condition in which the individual does not touch “the unclean thing” (2 Cor 6:17). Those who are “holy” have given heed to the admonition, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor 6:17). They know that “the friendship of the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4).

Those in Christ Jesus are “new” creatures. “Old things” have passed away, and “new things have come” NASB (2 Cor 5:17). These are the people who “resist the devil” (1 Pet 5:8), seek the things that are “above” (Col 3:1-2), and “live by faith” (Heb 10:38). They are “strangers and pilgrims” in the earth (1 Pet 2:11), and are “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:13). The saints “have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24).

These are the people to whom God speaks through His servant Paul. They are the ones to whom words of consolation, enlightenment, and strength are sent. They are to the holy ones, the separated ones, and the believing ones. They have been raised above the ordinary and mundane.

“ . . . and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colossae. . . ”

The “faithful” are those who are full of faith, and therefore constant, reliable, and steadfast. These do not vacillate too and fro, moving back and forth between hot and cold. Just as surely as there are “false brethren” (2 Cor 11:26; Gal 2:4), there are also “faithful” brethren (Eph 1:1).

Prior to Christ Jesus, “faithful” people were exceedingly rare. God said of Moses, “My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all Mine house” (Num 12:7; Heb 3:5). Nehemiah’s brother Hanani is said to have been “faithful” (Neh 7:2). Abraham was “faithful” (Gal 3:9), and is described as one who had a “heart faithful before” the Lord (Neh 9:8). Daniel was also said to be “faithful” (Dan 6:4). By inference we know that Enoch was faithful (Gen 5:22), as well as Noah (Gen 6:9), together with the “holy Prophets” (Lk 1:70; Acts 3:21).

However, Israel as a whole was never described as “faithful.” Rather, they are said to have been a “disobedient and gainsaying people” (Rom 10:21; Isa 65:2). There were “stiffnecked,” and unwilling to turn to the Lord (Deut 9:13). Under that economy Solomon shouted out, “a faithful man, who can find” (Prov 20:6).

FAITHFUL BRETHERN

“ . . . faithful brethren. . . ” Faithfulness involves human effort and discipline, but that is not the secret to its possession. Paul stated it succinctly when he confessed himself to be one “hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful ” (1 Cor 7:25).

Unfaithful

The phrase “faithful brethren” does not suggest there are unfaithful brethren. That would be tantamount to saying “unholy saints,” “worldly believers,” “godly sinners” or “holy demons.”

The truth of the matter is that in Christ there is no room for unfaithfulness. Wherever it is

found, it must be confessed and abandoned with great haste.

It is interesting to note that the word “unfaithful” is not found in most standard versions of the New Testament Scriptures. The NRSV translates “the unbelievers” as “unfaithful” (Lk 12:46), and “did not have faith,” as “unfaithful” (Rom 3:3).

Jesus spoke of “good and faithful” servants, declaring that any other kind of servant would be rejected (Matt 24:45,51; 25:21,23,20). He clearly taught that the person who was unfaithful in what was given in this world would not receive anything else from Him (Luke 16:10-12).

Faithful

“Faithful brethren” are trustworthy brethren. They are ones who can be trusted to carry out the will of the Lord, fighting the good fight of faith. These are good stewards, for “it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor 4:2).

So, is this Epistle written to unfaithful brethren? Indeed, it is not. There will be words addressed to those who are less than faithful, but they will not be the thrust of this book. Words to those who are slumbering are always apart from the main message. Such are issued warnings, rebukes, and corrections. Unless those who are living at a distance from the Lord correct their wayward course, they will be rejected, being castaways – something to be avoided at all cost (1 Cor 9:27).

Some object to this, but their objections are not worthy of note. There is no example in Scripture of an unfaithful person being looked upon with favor from God. There are no promises of good to the unfaithful, and never any commendation of them.

In Christ

“ . . . in Christ . . . ” The word “faithful” cannot be considered independently of Jesus Christ. Being “in Him” is what generates faithfulness, and being apart from Him is what causes unfaithfulness. Those who walk in the Spirit will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh, and thus will be found faithful (Gal 5:16). All others are shut up to being unfaithful, for faithfulness is the fruit of being “in Christ” – actually, of being “married” to Him (Rom 7:4).

God Himself puts us “in Christ.” As it is written, “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” NASB (1 Cor 1:30). In that state there is “no condemnation” (Rom 8:1). That is the only place where “the love of God” can be realized (Rom 8:39). Redemption is “in Christ” (Rom 3:24). There is where we are “sanctified” (1 Cor 1:2). This is where we are “established” (2 Cor 1:21). “In Christ” we have been raised to sit together with Him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6). This is where “all spiritual blessings” are found (Eph 1:3).

The “promise of life” is “in Christ” alone (2 Tim 1:1). The grace that is so essential is only found “in Christ” (2 Tim 2:1). Salvation in its entirety, whether initially or in its consummation, is “in Christ” (2 Tim 3:15).

At this point the church world is seriously divided. Some declare that once you are in Christ Jesus you can never be disassociated from Him. That would be like saying once God put Adam and Eve in the Garden, it was not possible for them ever to be expelled from it (Gen 3:24). It is like saying once Israel came into Canaan, they could never be thrust from it (Deut 29:28; Lev 20:22). You just as well affirm that once Judas, by Jesus’ own choice, was an Apostle, he could never lose his bishopric (Acts 1:20-25). If one wanted to be foolish in the extreme, you might as well say, Once Satan and his angels were in heaven, they would always be in heaven (Rev 12:9).

Abide in Him

The requirement is to remain in Christ, where God has placed believers – to abide in Him. That is why Jesus said, “Abide in Me” (John 15:4,7). To Gentiles like those at Colossae Paul wrote “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness : otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (Rom 11:22). John also admonished believers to “abide in Him” (1 John 2:28).

Abiding in Christ is linked with the ministry of the Holy Spirit – the “anointing” which we receive in Christ. “But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him ” (1 John 2:27).

Abiding, then, is not something that takes place automatically. It is a result of walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:25), living by faith (Heb 10:38), and continuing in fellowship with Christ, into which we have been called (1 Cor 1:9). The “faithful in Christ” are those abiding in Him.

At Colossae

“ . . . which are at Colossae” Even though the Gospel and its exposition is for all, yet the presentation of it is tailored for specific congregations and individuals. The Gospel itself is not tailored. None of its facts are in the slightest altered. It is not rearranged, with differing priorities for different recipients. It is the application of the Gospel that is adjusted to the circumstance , thereby “handling the Word of God aright” (2 Tim 2:15).

Thus the faithful in Christ who are “at Colossae” are addressed. Jesus knows them “by name,” as He does all of His sheep (John 10:3). There are special circumstances at Colossae that must be addressed, and Paul will do it by correctly applying the Gospel and its implications to those circumstances . Special comforts will be required, particular encouragements, and unique perspectives.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCRIPTURE

There is a certain philosophy that pervades Scripture. It is not the philosophy of men, but a certain way of thinking – a Divine way. Those who do not perceive this will find it easy to ignore Scripture, or even to wrest it.

Particularly in the Apostolic writings, the message is basically to the new creation – whatever is “born of God” (1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18). The flesh, or fallen part of man, is never addressed. Nor, indeed, is there any effort to make flesh wise in the ways of the Lord.

There is a reason for this situation. “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). For this reason, neither Christ nor the Apostles sought to reason “in the flesh.” There is a hostility in flesh that will not allow it to hold dialog with Deity, or receive what the Lord says. This circumstance is also presented to the Corinthians. There Paul affirms that he carefully crafted his words so that spiritual people could understand them. “Which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words . But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” NASB (1 Cor 2:14).

When, therefore, a congregation is referred to as “the church of God,” and “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:1), this does not mean everyone in the congregation is accepted. Some teach that those who were called “carnal” in the third chapter of First Corinthians (3:3-4) were really “carnal Christians.” They had the privileges of all of the saints, maintaining their status in Christ, even though they were living in contradiction of His will.

This kind of rationale cannot be supported. Later in First Corinthians, Paul referred to someone who was “called” a brother, yet was immoral. Such a person was to be excluded from their assembly, and was referred to as a “wicked person” (1 Cor 5:10-11). The intent was not to condemn the man, but to put him in a position where God could work with him through “the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (5:5). In such a case the “new man” could be awakened and brought into prominence, thereby enabling the person to again receive the Word of the Lord and, when granted repentance, recover himself from the snare of the devil (2 Tim 2:24-26).

Speaking to the New Man

The salutation of this book is, in fact, speaking to the “new man” – the part of us that is born of God. That will become more apparent as we proceed through the book. In fact, the very next expression confirms that is the case.

“Grace be unto you and peace . . . ”

Here is the most common Apostolic greeting – “grace” and “peace” to the people (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 2:11 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; Phile 1:3; 1 Pet 1:2; 2 Pet 1:2; 2 John 1:3; Rev 1:4).

This greeting is never directed to the flesh. It is exclusively for those who are “born of God” and “in Christ Jesus.” These are Kingdom commodities that are found in “heavenly places.”

Grace and peace mingle well with the mercy God. Thus we read, “Grace, mercy, and peace, from . . . ” (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; 2 John 1:3). These can also be possessed in large measures without generating any deficiency or weakness. Therefore we read, “Grace unto you, and peace, ne multiplied” (1 Pet 1:2; 2 Pet 1:2).

Both of these are essential to the successful navigation from earth to glory, from the cradle to the grave, and from time to eternity.

GRACE

The grace of God has to do with His favor, and is always associated with accomplishment, or doing something.

- When Paul and Barnabas launched out on a missionary tour, they were “recommended to the grace of God for the work” (Acts 14:26).
- Disciples are said to have “believed through grace” (Acts 18:27).
- The “Word of His grace” is “able to build you up and give you an inheritance among them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).
- We are “justified freely by His grace” (Rom 3:24).

- The righteousness of God is referred to as “the gift of grace” (Rom 5:15).
- Grace has “abounded to many” (Rom 5:15).
- An “abundance of grace” promotes a “reign in life” by Jesus Christ (Rom 5:17,21).
- Spiritual gifts are “according to the grace that is given to us” (Rom 12:6).
- The grace of God made Paul a “wise masterbuilder” (1 Cor 3:10).
- The grace of God made Paul a prodigious laborer in the vineyard of the Lord (1 Cor 15:10).
- Abounding grace brings to the saints all sufficiency for all things (2 Cor 9:8).
- Grace is sufficient, making us adequate for both trials and blessings (2 Cor 12:9).
- God’s call is facilitated by His grace (Gal 1:15).
- We are saved by grace (Eph 2:5,8).
- Grace was given to Paul to preach “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8).
- Grace enables us to teach and admonish one another (Col 3:16).
- Everlasting consolation and good hope come to us through the grace of God (2 Thess 2:16).
- Faith and love are brought to us in abundance through the grace of our Lord (1 Tim 1:14).
- The grace of God teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world (Tit 2:11-12).
- It was by the grace of God that Jesus “tasted death for every man” (Heb 2:9).
- Grace brings us “help in the time of need” (Heb 4:16).

Grace enables us to serve God acceptably (Heb 12:28).

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- The grace of God establishes the heart, making it spiritually stable (Heb 13:9).
- God’s grace equips us to minister to one another (1 Pet 4:10).
- Grace is the heavenly soil in which we are caused to grow (2 Pet 3:18).

You see how remarkable is the work of the grace of God. When, therefore, “grace” is conferred upon the saints, all of the abundance of salvation is being brought to them. Everything that grace does comes with it!

PEACE

Peace is that spiritual commodity which grants the soul equilibrium in a troublesome world. It hoists a sail that causes the winds to move the boat instead of destroying it.

Peace is within, where no eye can see, and no hand can touch. It cannot be conferred by the world. Thus Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

We are urged, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil 4:6). This does not necessarily mean the Lord will remove conflicting people and circumstances – although He is fully able to do this. The promise that is held out to us relates to peace. When we make our requests known to God with supplication and thanksgiving, we have this promise. “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7).

Stephen had this peace when he prayed for those were stoning him (Acts 7:60). Paul had this peace when he faced great suffering (Acts 20:24). Peter had it when it was revealed to him that he was going to die shortly (2 Pet 1:14).

The peace of God cannot be explained to the carnal mind. It defies explanation because it “passeth all understanding.” Yet it will surely “guard your hearts and your minds through Christ Jesus” NKJV (Phil 4:7), protecting us from distraction. Elsewhere it is written that “the peace of God will rule in your hearts” (Col 3:15).

Peace is the spiritual soil in which the “fruit of righteousness is sown” (James 3:18). Where there

is turmoil and agitation, there will be no spiritual advancement. But where the peace of God is found, there will growth be found also! Troubled souls cannot advance far in the faith. But for those with the peace of God, advance is sure.

Who is able to estimate the value of peace, or quantify how much of it is required? The smallest measure of it can yield immense benefits that ripple into eternity. As with grace, when peace is brought to us, it brings all of the benefits that are associated with it. It contributes to spiritual stability and effectiveness. It helps to clear our eyes, unstop our ears, and put strength in our hands. Thank God for His peace!

“ . . . from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Spirit speaks expressly on this matter. Grace and peace are not the products of mere human endeavor. They do not come through some form of discipline or routine. Taking deep breaths and trying to clear the mind with a procedure will not bring grace and peace to your heart.

These come to us from both the Father and the Son: “God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Our relationship to God as sons brings these benefits to us. Our relationship to Jesus as brethren also brings them to us.

This kind of language is common in Scripture, and it is glorious to consider. These gifts cannot be overstated.

- “To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 1:7; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; Phile 1:3).
- “Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2).
- “Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 6:23).
- “Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2).

- “Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 1:4).
- “Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love” (2 John 1:3).

It should also be remembered that both grace and peace are associated with the work of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22; Heb 10:29).

The reconciliation accomplished by the Lord Jesus is thorough and pleasing to the Lord. God has seen the travail of Christ’s soul, and is “satisfied” (Isa 53:11). Now, the entire Godhead joins in bringing grace and peace to us. Such plentitude cannot be measured by the human mind – but it can be experienced by every person who is in Christ Jesus.

Wherever there is a “saint,” an abundance of grace and peace is coming down from heaven, making the child of God adequate, and joyful as spiritually well! Grace and peace, precious twins of Divine will.

Thus we have been introduced to an Epistle that is filled with rich morsels for the soul. It is written by a spiritual prince who is noted for abundant labor and unexcelled faithfulness. It was written within the framework of profound fellowship, while Paul, was with a faithful servant who naturally cared for the condition of God’s people.

This Epistle is for the “saints and faithful brethren.” It is a needful message, and will strengthen their hands for battle, comfort their hearts in tribulation, and equip them for effectual ministry. It will sharpen their focus to see through erroneous reasoning, and lay hold of the rich promises of God.

Do you very best to take in these words of life, to perceive them and enjoy them. You will not regret it! Let them confirm that you are complete in Christ.

GIVING THANKS FOR THE BRETHREN

Lesson # 2

There are certain priorities in the Kingdom of God. These are matters that are close to the heart of God, and are thus given more emphasis in His revelation. For example, what God has done in this day of salvation is greater than all that was done previously.

- What the Lord Jesus Christ has done is of greater significance than what God did through Moses (Heb 3:3).
- The deliverance experienced in Christ (Col 1:13) is greater than what was realized when Israel came out of Egypt (1 Sam 10:18).
- Baptism into Christ (Gal 3:27) is more significant than baptism into Moses (1 Cor 10:2), or John's baptism (Acts 19:3-4).
- The New Covenant is a better covenant, established upon better promises (Heb 8:6).
- Jesus is greater than Solomon (Matt 12:42).
- Jesus is greater than Jonah (Matt 12:41).
- He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist (Matt 11:11).
- The new creation (1 Cor 5:17) is greater and more extensive than the natural creation (2 Cor 4:6).
- There is a "greater and more perfect tabernacle" (Heb 9:11).
- There is a "better country," which is in heaven, and is associated with an "enduring substance" (Heb 10:34).

- There are “greater riches” that are to be sought and preferred above earthly riches (Heb 11:26).

The accentuation of the Gospel in particular, and the Scriptures in general, is placed upon the Son of God – His Person, accomplishments, ministry, and soon coming. All other matters, regardless of their seeming importance, come after Christ, and can only be properly perceived within the light that comes from His Person.

There are also greater matters – things that carry more weight in the Divine economy. This does not nullify lesser things. The emphasis, however, is placed upon the greater things.

- There are “weightier matters,” and they are to be emphasized (Matt 23:23).
- The person who prophesies is “greater” than the person who speaks in tongues – unless he interprets (1 Cor 14:5) .
- Of the abiding qualities of faith, hope, and charity, charity is “the greatest” (1 Cor 13:13).
- Glory has a greater weight than suffering (2 Cor 4:17).
- The witness of God is “greater” than the witness of men (1 John 5:9).

Acceptable preaching and teaching majors on the greater and better things. That is where the stress is placed. Appropriate kingdom specialists are preoccupied with these matters. All other purported specialists are only for a season, and will have no relevance in the world to come. Their ministry will be obsolete when the world ends.

If what we emphasize does not transfer into eternity, we have missed the mark. While on earth, treasures are to be accumulated in heaven. This is highly disruptive of a good deal of supposed Christian teaching, but it needs to be stated. When preachers and teachers spend the burden of their time gathering an understanding about temporal things and situations, they have wandered away from the Foundation. What is more, the Christian academic community has not done well in encouraging the development of such knowledge, even though they operate under the banner of Christ.

A CHANGE IN TONE

In this Epistle you will note a change in tone when temporal things are mentioned.

- Beware lest any man soil you through philosophy and vain deceit – 2:9.
- Mortify your members that are upon the earth–v 3:5.
- Forbearing one another in love – 3:13
- Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands – 3:18
- Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them– 3:19
- Children , obey your parents in all things – Col 3:20
- Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged – 3:21.

- Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh – 3:22
- Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal – 4:1
- Walk in wisdom toward them that are without – 4:5.
- Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt – 4:6.
- Salute the brethren – 4:15.
- Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received, and fulfill it – 4:17.

These are not the heart of the Epistle , nor are they the mere conclusions of the pivotal matters that are declared. These are a consequence of our salvation, but they are not the primary consequence, nor are they the emphasis of Paul's letter.

POINTS AT WHICH WE INTERSECT WITH THE WORLD

These are points at which our lives intersect with the world – the lower domain in which our adversary exercises his influence. They are the areas in which we become vulnerable because of their proximity to “this present evil world.” If we are not vigilant and watchful in these areas, the devil and principalities and powers will pull us into the powerless and jeopardous zone of sense and time.

All of these areas occupy the sphere of testing. These are fields in which Satan aggressively attempts to alter our priorities, move our affection away from the things that “are above,” and upstage faith with a preoccupation with temporal things.

The Holy Spirit never approaches these matters as though they were fundamental. They are, when compared with heavenly realities, rather elementary. No one obtains kingdom superiority when they excel in any of these social realms. Further, they are not common to all men.

However, this by no means suggests these areas of responsibility may be neglected or approached as though there were no consequences to be realized when they are neglected. Rather, we are to see to it that they do not become a place where Divine fellowship is interrupted, and our affection for things above is cooled. All of them will be eliminated when we leave the body – whether in death, or the intrusive appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Without minimizing any of these areas, the giving of thanks never revolves around them. To be sure, moral or spiritual failure in any of these areas is inexcusable. However, they are unsuitable to become a Kingdom emphasis, for all of them will pass away. They are successfully and satisfactorily addressed through one's faith and love. While faith primarily has to do with God, it is not ineffectual in the area of domestic and social involvements. Once, therefore, faith and love are received and cultured in the heart, an exhortation to fulfill responsibilities among men becomes effective , for they are always addressed to the new creation, and ordained to be fulfilled in faith and love.

I say these things because of the current trend to major in these lower, but necessary, areas of human responsibility. They are never the Divine focus, and we must not allow them to become ours. Wherever that emphasis is found, it tends to upstage the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Procedure and fleshly practicality thus become main points. This will become abundantly apparent as we proceed through this Epistle. All of these things are all under the canopy of Divine emphasis, but they themselves are never the emphasis.

“ 1:3a We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . ”

To “give thanks” is to express thanksgiving – to articulate it – to say it with words. This is involved in offering up the “calves” of our lips (Hos 13:2). In this Hosea text, other versions substitute the word “sacrifices,” NKJV or “fruit.” NASB However, the Hebrew word (egel) is properly rendered “calf or bull.” STRONG’S This is a form of offering prefigured by the “sacrifice of thanksgiving” associated with the “peace offerings” under the Law (Lev 7:13). Then they were largely confined to formality. However, God desired a more personal thanksgiving – one that proceeded from the perception of what the Lord had done. This is the kind of thanksgiving that is depicted in our text. It is not a rigid formality, but a tender and perceptive expression.

GIVING THANKS TO GOD

Settle it in your heart, you do not give thanks to God for something in which He Himself was not active. Thanks to God is always for something in which His activity and influence is apparent. The more the working of God is perceived the more thanksgiving is expressed to Him. Where there is not much thanksgiving, there is not much perception – not much recognition of the gracious hand of the Lord.

Some examples that confirm the role of perception in thanksgiving will suffice to buttress this point.

- **FOR THE EPHESIANS.** “Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints , Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (Eph 1:15-16).
- **FOR ALL THINGS.** “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:19-20).
- **WHAT GOD HAS MADE US.** “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12).
- **IN THE NAME OF JESUS.** “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus , giving thanks to God and the Father by him ” (Col 3:17).
- **THE THESSALONIANS.** “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father” (1 Thess 1:2-3).
- **GOD’S CHOICE.** “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thess 2:13).

What has prompted Paul to give thanks is nothing less than the recognition of the working of the Lord among the Colossians. He is not thanking God for their effort, but for what has been accomplished in them by a Divine working. They have been involved in that work, but it is God who has worked in them “both to will and to do” (Phil 2:13).

The Necessity of God- Consciousnes

Properly seen, thanksgiving is the result of God-consciousness – the awareness of the Lord that is produced by faith. A phrase that includes the idea of God-consciousness is “the knowledge of God” (1 Cor 15:34; 1 Cor 10:5; Col 1:10; 2 Pet 1:2).

Wherever God is known, there is an acute awareness of His Person, will, and work . That is part and parcel of knowing the Lord. Where this sentience is not present, there is an inevitable gravitation to sin, and consequent departure from the Lord.

It is not possible to sin while experiencing a lively cognizance of the Living God. When Israel was at Mount Sinai, they did not indulge their lusts while the Law was being thundered from heaven, and the presence of the Lord was very obvious to them. But when the visible evidences of the Lord subsided, and Moses was away from them for a long time, they gratified their sinful lusts worshiped a golden calf, ate and drank, and indulged in pagan revelry and fornication (Ex 32:6; 1 Cor 10:7-8).

Religious men have often wondered why seemingly godly people drop off into deep sin. The reason for such departure from purity is evident. It is because “God is not in all his thoughts” (Psa 10:4). They lost their sensitivity to, and awareness of, the living God. As a result, the protection of the “knowledge of God” was lost, and Satan gained access to them, bringing them down.

The Role of the Assembly

One of the indispensable roles of the assembly of the saints is to culture an acute awareness of the Lord – to nurture the “knowledge of God.” The power of such an awareness is confirmed in Paul’s word to the Corinthians. “But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest: and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth ” (1 Cor 14:24-25).

Much purported Christian activity does not produce this kind of perception. It leaves the people too close to the world, and thus too far from God. In this regard, we are to pursue the example of our blessed Lord, who always left people keenly aware of His Father in heaven, His will, and His good pleasure.

Concluding Thoughts

The thanksgiving of Paul, therefore, reveals these two marvelous realities.

- He was keenly aware of the presence and activity of the Living God.
- He recognized what God had done in and among the Colossian brethren.

The people of God are themselves the product of Divine working. They are “ His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). They may confess with the Psalmist, “Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is He that hath made us , and not we ourselves; we are His people , and the sheep of His pasture ” (Psa 100:3).

If this were not the case, thanks could not properly be given to God for His people.

THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Paul does not refer to God in vague generalities. He does not speak of a “higher power,” or a basically “unknown God ” (Acts 17:23). There is only “one God ” (Mal 2:10; Rom 3:20; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6; 1 Tim 2:5). Now Paul identifies who He is – the One to whom He gives thanks.

God is frequently referred to as “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; Eph 1:3; 3:14; Col 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3). This particularly refers to God in a redemptive sense – the “God of salvation” (Psa 68:20). God is also known in relation to the creation (Mk 13:19), the kings of the earth (Psa 76:12), and the whole of human activity (Jer 32:27). There are aspects of His nature that are “understood by the things that are made” (Rom 1:20). There are also facets of His Person that are seen in His dealings with kings and princes, like Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, and Belshazzar (Ex 9:16; Dan 4:30-32; 5:22-23). Something of God’s nature is perceived in His dealings with groups of people, like Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 1:7), the Amalekites (Deut 25:19), and Jerusalem (Matt 23:37-38).

But never is God seen more clearly and extensively revealed than in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Jesus Himself is the “express image of His Person” (Heb 1:3), and “the fulness of the Godhead” dwells in Him “bodily” (Col 2:9). The loftiest and most complete revelation of God is found in the Person of Christ – including His accomplishments, words, and activities.

The Father

God is exclusively referred to as “Father” in relation to the Lord Jesus. He is rarely referred to as “Father” in Moses and the Prophets. In the Old Covenant Scriptures, of the fifteen references to God as “Father,” most of them refer to Him being the Father of, or One who begat, the nation of Israel (Deut 32:6; 1 Chron 29:10; Isa 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:19; 31:9; Mal 1:6; 2:10). The Lord referred to Himself as the father of Solomon, who would build His house (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chron 17:13; 1 Chron 22:10; 28:6). He is also called “Father” in relation to the coming Messiah (Psa 89:26; Isa 9:6).

By way of comparison, God is referred to as “Father” two hundred and fifty-nine times in the New Covenant Scriptures. One hundred and eighty times, Jesus speaks of the “Father.” Forty-eight times He referred to “My Father.” Seventy-three times He referred to “the Father,” associating Him with the redemption He would accomplish in and through the Son. Jesus inducted an era in which men would realize a closer and more intimate relationship with the God of heaven.

He Begat the Son

The Lord Jesus Christ is referred to as “the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:14). He is also called “the only begotten Son, which was in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18), “His only begotten Son” (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9), and “the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

In the book of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit makes much of this point – namely, that the Son was begotten of the Father. “For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee? And again, I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son (2 Sam 7:14)? And again, when He bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him” (Heb 1:5-6).

Because of His unique begetting, the Lord Jesus is uniquely the Son of God. Mary, the mother of our Lord, was informed of this fact. “And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Although those in Christ are “the sons of God” (1 John 3:1-2), and have the same Father (Heb 2:11), yet Jesus is the Son of God in a unique way. In fact, our sonship is wholly dependent upon His, so that if He was not THE Son of God, it would not be possible for us to be God’s sons.

Prophetically, the Psalmist spoke of the coming Messiah as one who would be begotten of God: “I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee” (Psa 2:7). In his review of God’s dealings with the Jews, Paul confirmed this was speaking of Christ Jesus. He applied the statement particularly to the resurrection of Christ Jesus. “God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee” (Acts 13:33). In this sense, He was “the Firstbegotten from the dead” (Rev 1:5).

The begetting of Christ Jesus by the Father is also related to His high priesthood, in which He makes continual intercession for His people. “So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an high priest; but He that said unto Him, Thou art My Son, to day have I begotten Thee” (Heb 5:5).

God is the Father of the Lord Jesus in a sense that can be said of no one else. This circumstance has wholly to do with redemption. Apart from the salvation of God, there was no need for the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us (John 1:14).

He Sent the Son

In regards to the Lord Jesus, the Fatherhood of God is related to Jesus being “sent” into the world. It was the Father’s mission that brought Him, not the need of humanity. As it is written, “And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the

Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14). Jesus repeatedly referred to the Father sending Him into the world: “the Father which hath sent Me” (John 5:23,30,37; 6:44), “the Father hath sent Me” (John 5:36; 20:21), “the living Father hath sent Me” (John 6:57), “the Father that sent Me” (John 8:16,18), “He sent Me” (John 8:42), “the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world” (John 10:36), “the Father which sent Me” (John 12:49), “Thou hast sent Me” (John 17:21,25).

The sole mission of Jesus was to fulfill the Father’s agenda – to do His will (Heb 10:5-9). Further, the Father sent the Son into the world because there was no other alternative if men were to be saved. The Law was “weak through the flesh,” and thus was thoroughly incapable of saving men. Men could not be saved by a code, or moral law, for sin had completely debilitated them, rendering them incapable of saving themselves – even if the living God outlined detailed procedures concerning human conduct and behavior.

He Sustained the Son

While the Son was in the world, the Father sustained Him. He was in the enemy’s camp, so to speak, and, as a Man, was vulnerable. Therefore, when yet an infant, the angel of the Lord directed Joseph to protect the “holy Child,” taking precautionary measures to ensure His safety (Matt 2:13-19).

While Jesus grew into manhood, “the grace of God was upon Him” (Luke 2:40), ensuring that He would come into manhood, and “give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Jesus said He did nothing of Himself, or on His own initiative, but acted in strict accord as He was “taught” by His Father (John 8:28). He declared that He was “loved” by His Father, referring to His sustaining and empowering love (John 10:17). This is what carried Him through His ministry.

The prophet Isaiah foretold of the Father sustaining the Son, and did so in a most unique manner. “For I the LORD Thy God will hold Thy right hand , saying unto Thee, Fear not; I will help Thee ” (Isa 41:13). “Behold My Servant, whom I uphold ; Mine Elect, in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles” (Isa 42:1). And again, “I the LORD have called Thee in righteousness, and will hold Thine hand, and will keep Thee , and give Thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles” (Isa 42:6).

Jesus summarized these promises during the evening in which He was betrayed, confirming He was being sustained by the Father: “Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me ” (John 16:32).

He Exalted the Son

As “the Father,” God exalted the Son in order that, through His intercession and mediatorship, He might bring the sons home to glory. Thus, on the day of Pentecost, Peter declared “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit , He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Acts 2:33). God has “highly exalted Him,” giving Him a name that is above every name, and making all things subject to Him (Phil 2:9; Eph 1:20-22; 1 Cor 15:27).

Summation

It may appear that all of these things are obvious – but they are not. While the human intellect can take these facts in, and process them in a cursory manner, they are not easily apprehended by the heart. At some point, men must be brought to think of “the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” in relation to their salvation. They must thrust from themselves any notion that God entertains a productive relationship with them independently of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is yet another aspect to this matter that must be considered. If salvation is of works, men are required to accomplish all of the things relating to Christ, and do so independently of God. That is, they must bring Jesus down, sustain Him in His ministry, raise Him from the dead, and exalt Him to the Father’s right hand. All of these are essential to our salvation. If men really do save themselves from sin, then they must personally do these things. This is the meaning of the Spirit’s words in Romans 10:6-7. “But the

righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead)” (Rom 10:7).

Let it be clear, if men cannot do this, then they cannot save themselves, or bring salvation by their works. Jesus must, in such a case, assume a primary relationship to them rather than the Father. Such a thought is obviously preposterous. It is imperative to see that it is just as absurd to affirm that men can take hammer and chisel in hand and fashion their own salvation.

“ 3b . . . praying always for you . . . ”

Paul prayed for those for whom He gave thanks. He knew their need of Divine care, protection, and intervention. He was aware that “Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Psa 127:1). He knew the meaning of our Lord’s words, “without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

DIVINE INVOLVEMENT REQUIRED

If it is true that salvation is “not of yourselves” (Eph 2:8), then we are unquestionably dependent upon the Lord, who “hath begun a good work,” to “perform it until the day of Christ” (Phil 1:6). Holy men were acutely aware of the need of Divine involvement in the lives of the saved. This is reflected in the intercession of both the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

- Jesus prayed for His disciples (John 17:9,15,20-21).
- The Holy Spirit intercedes for us (Rom 8:26).
- Jesus ever lives to intercede for us (Heb 7:25).

THE CONTENT OF PRAYER

The critical need of the saints for Divine involvement ought to be apparent from the present activity of both the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Salvation does not make people self-sufficient. Neither, indeed, does it place people in some kind of automatic cycle that obviates the need for further work. This is seen in the nature of Apostolic prayers for those who are in Christ Jesus, and are living by faith.

- That the Father would give the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Himself (Eph 1:17).
- That the eyes of the understanding might be opened to perceive the hope of God’s calling – the intent for which we have been called (Eph 1:18a).
- That the eyes of the understanding might be opened to see the riches of God’s glorious inheritance in the saints (Eph 1:18b).
- That the eyes of the understanding might be opened to see the exceeding greatness of the power that is toward those who believe (Eph 1:19).
- That God would grant believers to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man (Eph 3:16).

- That Christ would dwell in their hearts by faith (Eph 3:17).
- That, being rooted and grounded in love, the saints might be able to comprehend “what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:18-19).
- That the love of the saints might “abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment” (Phil 1:9).
- That saints might “approve things that are excellent” (Phil 1:10a).
- That saints might “be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ” (Phil 1:10b).
- That they might be “filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:11).
- That believers might be “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9).
- That saints would “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing” (Col 1:10a).
- That they would be “fruitful in every good work” (Col 1:10b).
- That those in Christ would be found “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10c).
- That they would be “strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power” (Col 1:11a).
- That Divine power in them would result in “all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Col 1:11b).
- That believers would “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Col 4:12).
- That God would “sanctify you wholly . . . your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23).
- That saints would be counted “worthy of this calling” (2 Thess 1:11).
- That God would “fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power” in the saints (2 Thess 1:11).
- That the “name of our Lord Jesus Christ” would be “glorified” in believers (2 Thess 1:12).
- That God would cause the “communication of thy faith” to “become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus” (Phile 1:6).
- That God would make the saints “perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever” (Heb 13:21).

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Such prayers are rarely heard in our time. The very sound of them conflicts with many religious emphases. But this reflects the very manner of the Kingdom of Christ. It provides an inspired commentary on what is involved in the salvation of God. A religion that makes it difficult to see these necessities, or removes the inclination to pray for them, is not simply wrong, it is dangerous beyond all description. Where God is not working, people are not, in fact, being saved. Furthermore, a significant amount of this work is being accomplished through the involvement of His people.

PERCEPTIVE PRAYER

The prayers of Paul were not prompted by His Apostleship, but by His perception of the nature of salvation. After he had preached to the people, and they had believed, he commenced to pray for them. He did so because he knew they were being hounded by a fierce and cunning adversary (1 Pet 5:8-9; Rev 12:17). They were in hostile surroundings (John 15:19), and were running a race that led them through treacherous territory (Heb 12:2). They carried about in themselves a contrary and competitive law (Rom 7:23), and were housed in frail tabernacles of clay (2 Cor 4:7). The saints have within themselves an “old man” as well as a “new man” (Eph 4:22-24), the “flesh” as well as the Spirit (Gal 5:16-17), and a conflicting and contrary law as well as the new “inward man” (Rom 7:22-23).

The “saved of the Lord” presently have the remnants of Adam as well as the nature of Christ. That circumstance creates a serious liability. It requires sobriety (1 Thess 5:6), vigilance (1 Pet 5:8), and perseverance (Heb 10:36). If life in Christ is not properly addressed, it is possible to run “in vain” (Gal 2:2; Phil 2:16). This is a climate in which one can “draw back to perdition” (Heb 10:39). If one does not live by faith and walk in the Spirit, a departure from the faith will occur, and damning attention will be given to “seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Tim 4:1).

It is the awareness of these things that compelled Paul to pray “always” for the saints at Colossae. Such a perception will work no differently in believers today. It will move them to pray insightfully.

“ 4a Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus . . . ” Other versions read, “ having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus,” ASV “ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus,” NIV and “ for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus,” NRSV and “ after hearing of your faith in Christ Jesus.” BBE

The hearing of reference is what prompted Paul’s prayers for the Colossians. Remember, he had not been there, and they had not seen his face (2:1).

SINCE WE HEARD

The phrase “since we heard” is translated from a single Greek word: **avkou,santej** . It means to have received news, or to have heard a report. In this case, the immediate report was made by Epaphras. Paul made this clear when he wrote, “As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit” (Col 1:7-8).

THE FAITH OF THE EPHESIANS

Paul had also “heard” of the faith of the Ephesians. “Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus” (Eph 1:15). The faith of the Roman brethren had been heard of throughout the whole world. “your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (Rom 1:8). The same was true of the faith of the Thessalonian brethren: “in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad ,” or “become known everywhere” NIV (1 Thess 1:8).

THE FAITH OF THE THESSALONIANS

The faith of the Thessalonians was reported in this manner: “ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:9-10).

HEARING ABOUT FAITH

It is important to underscore what was heard about the Colossians. Paul did not receive word about their attendance, the building in which they met, or their various positions on the issues of the day. The thing that aroused his interest was not their youth program, the way they reached out to the local community, or their worship service. Rather, it was their faith in Jesus Christ.

Since faith is “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1), a report of faith is one that speaks of persuasion, conviction, confidence, and assurance. It is a report of a people who have forsaken competing interests and are focused on the Lord Jesus Christ. They are rejoicing in the Lord, and waiting for His Son to return and take them unto Himself. A report of faith is one that tells of a people walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16), living by faith (Gal 3:11), confessing they are strangers and pilgrims in the earth (Heb 11:13).

How is it that we can “hear” of someone’s faith? The very sound of the words is strange in the church culture of our land. Reports are given of size of certain churches, well known preachers among them, and other such matters. But when was the last time you heard of the faith of a congregation? And if their faith is not known, how could they possibly be of any great significance before God?

The truth of the matter is that we are surrounded by a religious culture that differs vastly from that of the Colossian brethren. Particularly for this reason, it is essential that we consider the words of this text. It speaks of a certain Kingdom manner. Here is how God looks upon churches. This is what He looks for, and represents a condition that brings proper glory to Him through Christ Jesus. This is evidence of Jesus building His church, as He said He would (Matt 16:18). Where faith is not found, the Lord is not working, for He alone is said to “fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power” (2 Thess 1:11)!

Before Jesus returned to heaven, He asked a probing question: “Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). You may rest assured that where faith is not found, Jesus will not be welcomed, nor will it go well with those in whom faith is lacking.

Those who have faith in Christ have fallen upon the Stone, abandoning all other hopes of obtaining favor with God. Jesus put it this way, “The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that Stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder” (Luke 20:17-18).

The Word of God contains examples of faith being reported. Perhaps the most notable example is the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. The following is the manner of the report.

- By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain – 11:4.
- Enoch pleased God – 11:5-6.
- Noah, being warned of the impending flood, built an ark as he was told to do – 11:7.
- Abraham left his home, obeying the word of the Lord, and “went out, not knowing whether he went” – 11:8.
- Abraham “sojourned” in the land of promise, looking for a city that has foundations, “whose Builder and Maker is God” – 11:10.
- Sarah “judged Him faithful that promised,” and therefore conceived strength in her old age – 11:11.
- Believers prior to Christ were persuaded of the promises of God, embraced them, and confessed they were “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” – 11:13.
- When he was tried, Abraham set out to offer up Isaac, just as he was told to do, reasoning that God was able to raise him from the dead – 11:17-19.

- Believing God’s promises, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come – 11:20.
- Believing God’s promise, Jacob blessed both the sons of Joseph while he was dying – 11:21.
- Believing Israel would enter the promised land as God promised, Joseph gave the commandment to carry his bones there – 11:22.
- Perceiving that Moses “was a proper child,” his parents hid him three months, refusing to be afraid of the king’s commandment to kill all male babies – 11:23.
- Moses chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy Egyptian pleasures for a season – 11:24-27.
- Moses kept the Passover, moving all Israel to do so also, “lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them” – 11:28.
- By faith Israel “passed through the Red Sea as by dry ground” –11:29.
- By faith Israel walked around the walls of Jericho as they were commanded, and they “fell down” – 11:30.
- Rahab the harlot did not perish with the citizens of Jericho because she believed God was with the Israelites – 11:31.

In all of these instances, the people relied implicitly upon the word of the Lord. They shaped their lives by what the Lord had said and done. That is what faith does. We hear about someone’s faith when they alter their conduct to be in harmony with what God has declared or promised. We hear of their faith when they conform their lives to the revealed will of God.

The Thessalonian’s faith moved them to quit worshiping and serving idols. It moved them to engage in serving the Lord. It constrained them to wait for His Son from heaven, anticipating His return (1 Thess 1:9-10). They became followers of the Lord, receiving the Word in much affliction, and refusing to be deterred by that affliction (1 Thess 1:6). The Hebrew believers were noted for their initial faith because they “took joyfully the spoiling” of their goods, “knowing” in themselves that they had “in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb 10:34). The faith of the Ephesian brethren was made known when “many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men” (Acts 19:19).

Faith moves those who possess it to respond joyfully to the word and will of the Lord. The fear of man, which brings a snare (Prov 29:25), no longer intimidates. The world no longer has an attraction to those with faith. Heaven becomes the preeminent place, the Lord Jesus becomes the preeminent Person, and the will of God becomes the preeminent will.

We are living in a time and place when such traits are exceedingly rare. Of course, throughout the history of the world, such qualities have always been the exception. That is precisely why a report was made of them wherever they were found. Having heard of the faith of the Colossians, therefore, Paul gives thanks, and is moved to minister to them.

“ 4b . . . and of the love which ye have to all the saints . . . ”

Other versions read, “love for all saints.” The word “for” accents the ones receiving the love. The word “to” stresses the intent of the ones exhibiting the love. Both views are technically correct. However, I personally prefer the word “to,” for it has, in my judgment,

a fuller meaning. The idea is that the love is being directed toward all the saints – that is, it is an active love, one that does something. There is a personal interest in the saints – even a preference for them. This includes an interest in their welfare.

This is the manner of spiritual love. It does not say to needy brethren, “Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled,” but gives the things “which are needful for the body” (James 2:16). Just as we “perceive” the love of God by what He did (1 John 3:16), so love directed toward the saints is ascertained by what it does.

“THE LOVE”

The love of reference is not a natural love. It springs from one’s love of the Lord Himself. It is an extension of loving God with all of the heart, soul, mind, and strength. It is the love that fulfills this word: “And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (1 John 4:21). The fulfillment comes from the heart, and is the very real expression of the people themselves.

This is “the love of the brethren,” in which the Holy Spirit Himself is active. As it is written, “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren ” (1 Pet 1:22). This love, therefore, is a spring of purity that is the result of “obeying the truth.” That purity expresses itself in a sincere and unpretentious love of the people of God. Where such a love is not found, purity of soul is not found either.

Jesus’ Attitude Toward His Disciples

Jesus placed a great emphasis on the love of the brethren. “By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). The Lord Jesus had a high regard for His disciples, preferring their company above all others. There were times when He withdrew from the multitudes to be with His disciples (Mk 3:7; 8:10; John 6:3). When He went to pray, He took His disciples with Him (John 18:1-2). When He sought to communicate the precious things of God, He did so to His disciples (Mk 4:10-11). On the night of His betrayal, He “desired” to eat the Passover with His disciples (Lk 22:15). When He prayed in Gethsemane, He did not pray for the world, but for His disciples (John 17:9). His love for the disciples is said to have been “unto the end” (John 13:1). While it is true that Jesus died “for the ungodly” (Rom 5:6), it is more specifically stated, “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it ” (Eph 5:25).

It is inconceivable that any individual could be in fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), and not love His brethren! Christ does not dwell within the individual who does not love those who are called God’s “sons” and “daughters” (2 Cor 6:18).

The glory of hearing that a congregation has love toward the saints is substantiated by what the Spirit affirms concerning such love. These particular affirmations are found in the Epistle of First John. The potency of these statements will be very apparent.

- The one who loves the brethren abides in the light, and there is no occasion for offense in him. “He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him” (1 John 2:10).
- The one who lacks this love abides in darkness, walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going. “But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes” (1 John 2:11).
- The person who loves the brethren is a child of God. The one who does not is a child of the devil. “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother” (1 John 3:10).
- The love of the brethren proves one has passed from death to life. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14a).
- The one who does not love the brethren is dead. “He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” (1 John 3:14b).
- The one who does not love the brethren is a murderer, and does not have eternal life. “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:15).

- The love of the brethren is a God-kind of love. “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).
- The one who does not love the brethren is disobedient. “And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment” (1 John 3:23).
- The one who loves the brethren is born of God and knows God. “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God” (1 John 4:7).
- The one who does not love the brethren does not know God. “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:8).
- If we love the brethren, God dwells in us and His love is brought to maturity in us. “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:11-12).
- He that dwells in love dwells in God, and God dwells in him. “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16).
- The person who says he loves God, yet does not love His brother, is a liar. “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1 John 4:20).
- The love of the brethren is inextricably linked to loving God. “And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (1 John 4:21).
- The one who really loves God, who begets the brethren, also loves the brethren He has begotten. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him” (1 John 5:1).
- The love of the brethren is linked to loving God and keeping His commandments. That is the personal evidence that we love the brethren. “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:2-3).

It is difficult to conceive of anything having any more implications than the love of the brethren. This is an area where deficiency is simply not allowed. You will note from the above references that there are only two attitudes toward the people of God – love or hate. There is nothing between these expressions. Either the saints of God are loved, or they are hated – and the true condition of an individual or congregation is made known by either one.

“TO ALL THE SAINTS”

The love of the Colossian brethren was not discriminatory. It was toward “all the saints.” They did not simply love those of their own assembly, but found a preference and care for all the saints in their hearts. We do not know precisely how this love was displayed. They did, however, appear to have a remarkable love for all who had believed on the Son of God. Considering how ardently the Lord Jesus “loved the church,” giving Himself for it, it is evident that a similar love found in His people is most noteworthy.

Philemon was also noted for this kind of love. Paul said of him, “Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints” (Phile 1:5). The Ephesian brethren were also noted for this. “Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints” (Eph 1:15).

This kind of love was exhibited by the Jewish believers to whom the book of Hebrews was written. It was said of them, “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Heb 6:10).

The love of the brethren is seen in the Malachi's holy cluster, who feared the Lord and continued to speak frequently to one another during spiritually sterile times. It is said of them, "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (Mal 3:16).

Those who have a high regard for the children of God are themselves held in high regard by the Lord. Jesus declared that acts of mercy directed toward His "brethren" were actually bestowed upon Him. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt 25:40). The response of Jesus to their thoughtfulness of His "brethren" was, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mat 25:34). There is a sense, therefore, in which our eternal destiny hinges upon our conduct and attitude toward the people of God.

It is no wonder, therefore, that Paul gives thanks to God for the report of the love the Colossians had toward "all the saints."

A SUMMARY THOUGHT

When the love of God fills the heart of a believer, the love of the brethren immediately evidences itself. The love of God permeates our hearts through the work of the Holy Spirit. As it is written, "Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom 5:5).

The phrase "love of God" has at least two perspectives. It is God's own love that is poured into our hearts, so that we love in the same way that He loves, though not to the same degree. It is also God's love for us. When that is poured into our hearts we are filled with an awareness of His great love, and convinced we are precious in His sight. The result of this work is our deep and abiding love for God Himself (1 John 4:19), and a consistent and productive love for His children (1 John 5:1).

" . . . faith in Christ Jesus" and "love . . . to all the saints."

New life in Christ Jesus can be summarized in this expressive couplet: "faith in Jesus Christ, and love toward all saints." How frequently this summation is given. ". . . your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all saints" (Eph 1:15). "Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints" (Phile 1:5). Timotheus brought tidings to Paul of the Thessalonian's "faith and charity" (1 Thess 3:6). Their faith was "growing exceedingly," and their love toward each other was "abounding" (2 Thess 1:3).

Ponder how these two virtues are found together. They are two-thirds of the abiding triad, "faith, hope, and charity" (1 Cor 13:13).

- The objective of the commandment is "charity out of a pure heart . . . and of faith unfeigned" (1 Tim 1:5).
- Christ dwells in our hearts "by faith," and we are "rooted and grounded in love" (Eph 3:17).
- It is written that "love with faith" come to us "from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 6:23).
- Two of the things Paul held in constant remembrance were the "work of faith" and "labor of love" (1 Thess 1:3).
- A protective piece of the armor of God is "the breastplate of faith and love" (1 Thess 5:8).

- The grace of God comes to us “exceeding abundant with faith and love ” (1 Tim 1:14).
- The “form of sound words” is possessed “in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 1:13).

Here are two glorious qualities that have their origin in both the Father and the Son. They are fueled by grace, bring spiritual stability, and erupt in ministry to the sons and daughters of the Most High God. It should not surprise us, therefore, that Paul gives thanks for the report of faith and love among the brethren in Colossae.

These were not virtues that were merely reported among the Colossians themselves. There are no doubt many congregations who say this of themselves, or whose members have seen these qualities in one another. Rather, these were qualities reported to Paul by faithful Epaphras. It is evident that he saw these as primary traits among the Colossian brethren, and things for which they ought to be known. This also reveals that He had the mind of Christ.

THE ESSENCE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The presence of faith and love are like the encapsulation of spiritual life. Heavenward, that life is summarized in “faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.” In the world, it is epitomized in “love toward all the saints.” Where these are found, a claim to affiliation with God is justified. Where they are absent all such claims are pretentious, and there is no truth in them.

Our text does not assign these qualities to an individual, but to a congregation. That is what makes the commendation so remarkable. In a highly professional and institutional religious world, faith and love rank very low – if, in fact, they rank at all. They are conveniently upstaged by numbers, programs, and institutional fervor. Proportionately speaking, there appear to be very few congregations that are noted for these virtues.

This is largely owing to the sectarian thrust that presently dominates the Western Christian world. People have been brought to associate the love of the brethren with denominational camaraderie. Believers have grown accustomed to living with divisions – it is just a way of religious life. The professed body of Christ is divided over everything from names to humanly devised theological systems. However, Christ is not divided, and divisions are an evidence of the carnal mind, which is enmity against God (1 Cor 1:13; 3:1-4; Rom 8:7). Make no mistake about this, “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8).

The seriousness of the condition is seen in the fact that God Himself is not present where faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and love to all the saints are missing. In view of these, and other, considerations, it is good for a congregation to determine to be known for its faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and love toward all saints. Such reports bring glory to God.

“ 5a For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven . . . ” Other versions read, “ because of the hope,” NKJV/NASB “the faith and hope that spring from the hope,” NIV “ Through the hope,” BBE “ on account of the hope,” DARBY and “You do this because you are looking forward to the joys of heaven.” NLT

A STATEMENT OF THE CASE

The faith and love credited to the Colossians were not the result fulfilling the obligations of law. They were not the fulfillment of certain requirements passed along to them by more knowledgeable brethren. The faith and love of the Colossians sprang out of their hope – their confidence of an “eternal inheritance” that was laid up for them “in heaven.”

THE PRODUCTIVITY OF HOPE

The “hope” that is spawned by the Gospel is spiritually productive. It accomplishes things that cannot come from keeping the Law. Even if an individual exerts every aspect of their person to keep the Law, hope will not come from such efforts. Rather, a sense of guilt will pervade the heart and mind, and all hope of being saved by the Law will vanish. Therefore it is written, “the law entered, that the offence might abound” (Rom 5:20). The Law itself was not calculated to produce hope, and contained no promises of good things to come. For this reason it is written, “the strength of sin is the law” (1 Cor 15:56). That is, the Law pointed out the condition created by sin, as well as the guilt of sin itself. When its message was received, all confidence in self was destroyed, and the need of a Savior was brought home to the heart.

In Christ a new and refreshing circumstance has appeared. Now men can possess hope, owning it for themselves. Hope is like an aggressive workman than sets out to produce all manner of fruit in the one possessing it. This is owing to at least two circumstances.

Hope Is Brought through the Gospel

Here is an aspect of the Gospel being “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16). Hope is referred to as “the hope of the Gospel” (Col 1:23); i.e., the hope “held out” in the Gospel, NIV and realized when it is believed. I will develop this aspect of hope in the next section.

Hope is the Result of the Spirit’s Work

Hope is caused to abound in the heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. As it is written, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:13). An abounding hope is an overflowing one that goes beyond humanly devised theological borders. It convinces its possessor of the reality of an “eternal inheritance,” even when the circumstances of life appear to contradict that fact.

Those who are abounding in hope are willing to give up this world’s goods in the prospect of good things to come. The writer of Hebrews, whom I believe to be Paul, commended the Hebrew believers for their unselfish spirit. Two circumstances revealed this condition. “For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb 10:34). During hardship, these brethren did something for an imprisoned brother. In addition, they experienced the plundering of their goods, or confiscation of their property, doing so with joy. The reason for this remarkable attitude is given: “knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.” NKJV That is the power of hope! It can move people to do good to their brethren during their own duress, and experience the loss of earthly goods with sustaining joy.

Hope is not flimsy or uncertain. It is appropriately described as “an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil” (Heb 6:19). It exercises a stabilizing influence upon the soul, issuing forth in confidence and assurance that liberates the soul to be forward to trust God and love His children.

WHEN HOPE IS ABSENT

Prior to being in Christ, we were characterized as “having no hope” (Eph 2:12). Those who are presently outside of Christ are described as “others which have no hope” (1 Thess 4:13). That condition is tragic, yet understandable.

But what of the absence of hope within the professed church? What kind of condition leads professed believers to NOT know in themselves they have “in heaven a better and an enduring substance?” What of individuals who cannot confidently say, “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor 5:1)?

First, such a condition may exist among professed Christians, but it is contrary to the manner of the Kingdom. It is opposed to

the new birth and newness of life. It is a deficiency that is not necessary. It is a spiritual abnormality, a kind of disease of the soul that will be lethal if not corrected. If we are “saved by hope,” it is certain we cannot linger long without it.

Second, where hope is not found, faith and love will, at the very best, be very meager, if, indeed, they are found at all – for they spring from hope. I can tell you that if you engaged in a quest to find people who were assured of an “eternal inheritance,” knowing in themselves that they had in heaven “a better and an enduring substance,” you would be shocked at the fewness of the number. You would likely hear expressions like, “I am doing the best I can,” or “I hope I will be in heaven,” or “I hope I make it.” Rarely will you hear an expression of faith that would be described as an “anchor for the soul, both steadfast and sure.”

It is for this precise reason that such people are not noted for faith in Christ and love for all saints. The feebleness of their hope will simply not allow for strong faith and robust love. Such poor souls are actually spiritually restricted because of their lack of hope. Neither faith in Christ nor the love of the brethren can flourish when hope is absent, or remains feeble.

This circumstance accounts for the condemning spirit that tends to exist among those with a harsh and lifeless legalistic propensity. Their religion is the product of their anaemic hope, and is consequently worthless.

“ 5b . . . whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel . . . ” Other versions read, “of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel,” NASB “you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel,” NIV “because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel,” NRSV “knowledge of which was given to you before in the true word of the good news,” BBE and “ News of this hope reached you not long ago through the word of truth, the gospel.” NJB

“Good hope” does not spring from good works, however notable they may appear. It is not the result of hearty effort, or even of disciplined and faithful obedience. Hope grows out of believing the Gospel, which reveals it. The Gospel of Christ speaks of the Object of hope, which is “Christ in you” (Col 1:27). It also reveals the reality of the hope, which is the “things God has prepared for them that love Him” (1 Cor 2:9). The Gospel contains words that speak of the “the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15), which is one of the “better promises” upon which the New Covenant is “established” (Heb 8:6).

The salvation of God is an “eternal salvation” (Heb 5:9), and one that is “with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10). An “eternal inheritance,” “eternal salvation,” and “eternal glory” postulate continuance beyond this time and this world. Salvation does not reach its maturity or culmination in this world. Consequently, at least two perceptions are required.

- First, our religion must not anchor us to this world, leaving us to imagine that it is the primary world, and that the present time is the most important time.
- Second, there must be a productive and conscious connection with “the world to come.” This is where our Lord and our inheritance reside. Our consciousness of that “world to come” will yield a confidence that enables us to resist the devil and cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart.

Hope satisfactorily answers both of these requirements. It anchors our souls “within the veil,” where Christ is presently mediating the New Covenant and interceding for those who are coming to God through Him (Heb 6:19; Heb 7:25; 9:15).

HEARING

When the Colossians “heard” the Gospel, they were, through that Gospel, apprised of the hope from which their faith and love sprang. That means this “hope” is actually integral to the Gospel. It is an effect of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. However, it is a declared effect, not one that is derived by the reasoning of the hearer.

Some preach a Gospel that only announces the remission of sins. In such cases, salvation is exclusively associated with a retrieval from the guilt and power of sin. Others relate salvation wholly with matters pertaining to this world. Such do not limit it to the matter of forgiveness, but declare it is related to health and prosperity in the body. In both of these cases, the hearers are left thinking God's "great salvation" (Heb 2:3) majors on the consequence of sin. However, that is only half of the equation of salvation.

The fulness of the Gospel can be seen in the commission given to Paul. This came from the words of the Lord Jesus Himself. "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:18). Here the multi-dimensional nature of salvation is seen. It includes:

- Illumination: "to open their eyes."
- A change of environment: "to turn them from darkness to light."
- Deliverance from Satan's dominion: "to turn them . . . from the power of Satan."
- Deliverance to the beneficent care of God: "turn them . . . unto God."
- The purpose of this illumination, change, and deliverance is carefully delineated: "that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance."
- The society in which these things will take place is identified, together with the means of preparation: "among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."

Notice, the purpose for opening our eyes, moving us from darkness to light, and turning us toward God is twofold: (1) That we may receive forgiveness of sins. (2) That we may receive the appointed inheritance.

The "inheritance" is not of this world. It is not something that can be seen or touched with natural senses. It is an "eternal inheritance" (Heb 9:15), and, while we are in this world, can only be grasped by hope. This is frequently declared in the Apostolic exposition of the Gospel.

- "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:13-14).
- "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col 1:12-13).
- "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men: knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Col 3:23-24).
- "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet 1:3-4).

This is why we read of inheriting "the earth" (Matt 5:5), "everlasting life" (Matt 19:29), "the promises" (Heb 6:12), "the kingdom" (Matt 25:34; 1 Cor 6:9; Gal 5:21), and "all things" (Rev 21:7). It is because the bulk of our salvation is ahead of us, and will be fully revealed only after the passing of the temporal order. Thus it is written, "And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain" (Heb 12:27).

The things that “cannot be shaken” include our inheritance. They include a “better and an enduring substance” (Heb 10:34), and a “house not made with hands” (2 Cor 5:1). A “better country” is involved, and the “city” God has prepared for those who desire that country (Heb 11:16).

All of these things, and more, are involved in hearing about the hope – the hope by which faith in Christ and the love of all saints are fueled.

THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL

The phrase “the word of the truth of the Gospel” is most significant. Other versions read, “the word of truth, the Gospel,” NASB/NIV That is, truth is not an aspect of the Gospel, but the Gospel is itself the truth of God. It is as though Paul declares the Gospel is “the word of truth.” This is precisely what he wrote to the Ephesians: “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13). In referring to believers being begotten by the Gospel, James also refers to “the word of truth” (James 1:18).

THE WORD

By using the expression “word,” the Spirit emphasizes that the Gospel is an articulation , not a human conclusion. It is an affirmation , not a statement of sundry facts from which men construct a theological view. It is God’s manner to proclaim work through assertion. Both the Gospel of Christ and the promises of God are assertions, declarations, or announcements. They declare existing provisions.

The Gospel of Christ is the announcement of amnesty, the report of reconciliation, the proclamation of propitiation, and the news of nearness. It is the annunciation of atonement, the tidings of triumph, and the promulgation of peace. The Gospel is essentially a message – a good message of things that have been accomplished, and realities that are now accessible to those who will “believe the report” (Rom 10:16).

The Gospel is not a system. It is not the outline of a procedure, or the delineation of a routine or discipline. It is not the declaration of a way of life. The Gospel is, in fact, a report of “the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11). When Jesus declared His manifesto in that Nazarene synagogue, He basically gave some good news. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19). This was not a word of what men ought to do, but of what men could now obtain.

This is the word that begat hope in the Colossians, as well as everyone else who believes it. May the Lord free us from the purveyors of religious systems, and bring to us those who will declare what the Lord has done. If you have heard such proclamations, I trust you will keep them in constant remembrance. As you recall them, “hope” will grow stronger, and faith in Christ and love for the brethren will become more prominent in your life. Here are some of those marvelous announcements.

- “And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ . . . God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them ; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18-19).
- “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3).
- “And, having made peace through the blood of His cross , by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself ; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Col 1:20).
- “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil ; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their

lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb 2:14-15).

- “And having spoiled principalities and powers , He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col 2:15).
- “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ ” (Acts 2:36).
- “For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself ” (Heb 9:26).
- “For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father ” (Eph 2:18).
- “For He hath made Him to be sin for us , who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him ” (2 Cor 5:21).

This small sampling of relevant texts shows the marvelous nature of the Gospel. It is a word of affirmation – a message of realities that only faith can grasp.

THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL

The word “truth” means “in reality, or in fact.” It is something that is certain. It cannot possibly be false, understated, or exaggerated, because it is supported by unquestionable realities.

The Gospel is not the announcement of something that will be, but something that IS. It is not a suggestion of possibilities but a declaration of accomplishments. This is why hope comes to us by means of the Gospel. The hope that saves (Rom 8:24) must be based on realities, not mere human aspirations. Thus we read of “the TRUTH of the Gospel” no less than four times (Gal 2:5,14; Eph 1:13; Col 1:5).

- It is what the Spirit wants to continue with us. “To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (Gal 2:5).
- When Paul rebuked Peter, it was because he was not walking according to the truth of the Gospel. “But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel , I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?” (Gal 2:14).
- The Ephesians “trusted” in Christ when they heard this Gospel. “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13).

Hearing the Gospel of Christ is the point at which salvation is brought within our reach. Where the Gospel is not preached, calling upon the name of the Lord is not possible. The Gospel is not something that can be learned by study – even the study of things that seem very apparent to one who is in Christ.

Remember, our text does not merely refer to a point in time when the Colossians heard the Gospel, repented of their sins, and were baptized into Christ. Indeed, those responses are associated with the Gospel of Christ. In our text, however, Paul is speaking of the sanctified lives of the brethren in Colossae. In particular, he is accounting for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and love for all of the saints. He affirms these traits were produced by the hope that was made known when they heard the Gospel.

It is not necessary to spend more time on this matter. However, it does explain why hope is so rare in our day. It is because the Gospel is not being preached. A variety of other messages and emphases have supplanted the Gospel. Hope cannot flourish under such conditions. For hope to be strong, the Gospel must be declared and expounded. If this does not happen, hope withers, and will eventually die.

“ 6a Which is come unto you. ”

The “truth of the Gospel” came to the Colossians. They did not discover the good news, it was brought to them. This is the manner in which the Lord works. Every man who believes does so by means of one who ministers the Gospel. The messenger of the Gospel is not the point, but the message that he brings. This is the means through which men are brought to faith. This is why it is written, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man ?” (1 Cor 3:5).

These messengers are “sent” by God. Only He can coordinate the meeting of a seeker and a proclaimer. For some, this is too difficult to receive. They imagine that men themselves do the sending. While men are certainly involved, the actual sending is done by the Lord Himself.

Thus it is written, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent ? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom 10:14-15).

Barnabas and Saul

On one occasion, while the brethren in Antioch were fasting and ministering to the Lord, the Holy Spirit said to them, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.” After the brethren had “fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.” Although the brethren are said to have sent them away, they were secondary participants. The text continues, “So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit , they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus” (Acts 13:4). Ultimately, they were not sent by men, but by God.

Sent to Macedonia

While the Word was spreading and the disciples were increasing, Paul and company came to Mysia. At that time they were forbidden to preach the Word in Asia. We are not told precisely how they were forbidden. I assume the brethren were sensitive enough to Divine direction to draw proper conclusions about the matter. Following that prohibition, the same brethren tried to go into Bithynia, “but the Spirit did not permit them” to do so. Having passed by Mysia, and come down to Troas, a vision appeared to Paul during the night. In that vision there “stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us” (Acts 16:9). “ Immediately ,” they “endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them” (Acts 16:10). They were sent by God!

The Ethiopian Eunuch

Take, for example, the Ethiopian eunuch. He came to Jerusalem to “worship” (Acts 8:27). What is more, he came from Ethiopia, which tells us he was a committed man – no doubt a proselyte. We know from Luke’s narrative that as he returned to his homeland, he was reading from the prophet Isaiah. That provides some indication of the things to which he had been submitted in Jerusalem. The text he was reading is described: “The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth:

In His humiliation His judgment was taken away: and who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth” (Acts 8:32-33, ref: Isa 53:7-8). To those who are in Christ – who have heard the Gospel – the meaning of the text may seem quite apparent. But it was not so with the eunuch. When asked by Philip if he understood what he was reading, the eunuch answered, “How can I, except some man should guide me? . . . I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?” (Acts 8:31,34).

The eunuch needed to hear the Gospel – to hear it from someone who himself perceived it. That is why Philip was “sent,” being directed by an angel to cease his productive ministry in the villages of the Samaritans, and go into Gaza, which is desert. Upon

arriving, his path immediately intersected with the Ethiopian eunuch, and the angel said, “join thyself to this chariot” (Acts 8:26-29). The intersection of the eunuch and Philip was not coincidental. He was sent by God!

In much the same way, the Gospel had come to the Colossians. It did not come by the hand of Paul, but he knew the messenger was sent by God, for no man can effectively preach unless he is “sent.” No child of God should balk at this. It should be very apparent that if it is not in man that walks to direct his own steps (Jer 10:23), it is certainly not in him to direct the affairs of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is the Head of the body, and He orchestrates its affairs.

“ 6b . . . as it is in all the world . . . ” Other versions read, “as it also has in all the world,” NKJV and “just as in all the world.” NASB

Jesus had declared that “repentance and remission of sins” were to be preached “beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk 24:47). However, it was not to be confined to Jerusalem. The Gospel was also to be preached “in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Jesus also commanded, “preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15), and “teach (or ‘make disciples of’ NKJV) all nations” (Matt 28:19).

Academically, our Lord’s words are not difficult to understand. However, within the context of contemporary Christianity they sound too challenging. Few people really take them seriously. The brethren of the first century did take them seriously, and the brethren in Colossae are proof of their conviction.

Those who brought the Gospel to the Colossians, whoever they were, had tasted of the hope of the Gospel themselves. That is why such marvelous fruitage could be found in Colossae. The principle of effective preaching is encapsulated in this statement: “The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits” (2 Tim 2:6).

Wherever “the truth of the Gospel” is brought, hope is awakened and begins to flourish. One God sends forth one Gospel. One Gospel proclaims one Lord Jesus Christ. One Lord Jesus Christ sends forth one Holy Spirit. One Holy Spirit produces one array of spiritual fruit to the glory of God. In the end, that fruit will be found in “every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Rev 5:9). This is what happened at Colossae.

“ 6c . . . and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you . . . ” Other versions read, “is bringing forth fruit,” NKJV “is constantly bearing fruit and increasing,” NASB “is bearing fruit and growing,” NIV “has been bearing fruit among you,” NRSV “in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing as it also does among you,” ESV and “It is changing lives everywhere, just as it changed yours.” NLT

Harvesting is an important aspect of the work of the Lord – bringing forth fruit. One of the reasons for our deliverance from the condemning Law is that we might be “married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom 7:4).

MUCH FRUIT

Our heavenly Father is “glorified” when “much fruit” is produced by the disciples of Jesus. This is confirmed by two salient statements of the Savior.

- “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit : for without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).
- “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit ; so shall ye be My disciples” (John 15:8).

First , Jesus does not refer to some “fruit,” but to “ much fruit.” He affirms that this is result from abiding in Him, and He in the individual. Second , the Father is glorified when those abiding in Christ bear “much fruit.” Third , our discipleship is confirmed by the bearing of “much fruit.”

It is no wonder, therefore, that Paul gives thanks for the fruit found among the Colossians. It confirmed that they were abiding in Christ, and Christ was abiding in them. Through their fruit the Father was being glorified. Additionally, it substantiated that they were, in fact, disciples, or learners, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It should be obvious that not bearing fruit – “much fruit” – has some startling implications.

THE BLIGHT OF DIVISION

This circumstance makes division and schism sins of the greatest magnitude. There is nothing about the Gospel of Christ, or the great salvation of God, that promotes controversy or division among those who believe and embrace it – nothing! Wherever contention and variance are found, “another GOSPEL” has been introduced (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6) . Ultimately, it is not interpretations and opinions that divide professed believers, but “another Gospel.” Somehow God and Jesus are being seen and understood incorrectly. An erroneous message was heard. For schism to occur, a carnal shroud must be thrown over the Gospel of Christ. Man himself must become preeminent, Jesus must become secondary, and heaven must be thrown into the background of human thought. Human institutions must upstage the kingdom that God has set up (Dan 2:44), and the theologies of men must be preferred to the Gospel affirmations of the Almighty God.

FRUIT WILL COME

Wherever the Gospel of Christ is set forth with power and insight, and believed, it will bear fruit. Ranking high in that fruit will be faith in Christ Jesus, and the love of all saints. Where these qualities are missing, profession is empty and spurious.

“ 6d . . . since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.” Other versions read, “since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth,” NKJV “since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth,” NASB “from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God,” NRSV and “ever since you heard about the grace of God and recognized it for what it truly is .” NJB

There are four notable things to see in this portion of the verse. First , their fruit-bearing response was from the very first. It was not the result of a lengthy process. Second , their fruit commenced when they heard about the grace of God. Third , it was the result of knowing, or comprehending the grace of God. Fourth , their comprehension was in strict accord with the truth, or reality, of God’s grace.

These confirm the insight of the Apostle, and the genuineness of the fruit that was seen in the Colossians.

SINCE THEY HEARD OF IT

“ . . . since the day ye heard of it.” Through the power and grace of God, the Gospel can produce immediate results. It did in the Colossians from the day they heard of God’s grace. There are other examples of this in Scripture.

- On the day of Pentecost, Peter’s first enlightened Gospel proclamation produced fruit immediately (Acts 2:37-41).
- The city of Samaria immediately responded to the preaching of the Gospel (Acts 8:5-6).
- Upon hearing Jesus speak to Him, and hearing the words of Ananias, Saul of Tarsus responded straightway (Acts 9:5-9, 17-20).
- The Ethiopian eunuch responded the first time He heard the Gospel insightfully presented (Acts 8:36-39).
- Cornelius and his household immediately responded to the proclamation of the Gospel (Acts 10:43-48).
- Lydia responded to first Gospel proclamation she heard (Acts 16:14-15).
- The Philippian jailor gave an immediate response to the Gospel (Acts 16:29-34).
- Certain disciples of John in Ephesus were obedient to the Gospel as soon as they heard it (Acts 19:4-5).

There were also certain congregations that were noted for their consistent response to the Gospel from the very first.

- The Philippians. “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now” (Phil 1:3-5).
- The Ephesians. “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13).
- The Thessalonians. “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: so that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia” (1 Thess 1:5-7). “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Th 2:13).
- The Colossians. “Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth” (Col 1:6).

Such a marvelous response is not at all common – even though it is quite possible. The grace of God is effective enough to work such a reaction. The Gospel of Christ is conducive to such a response. The Holy Spirit is capable of producing such fruit. Why, then, is it not always found?

Without engaging in all manner of fruitless speculations, a lack of appropriate response is owing to at least one of two conditions. Either the Gospel was not really preached, or it was preached but not believed. I am persuaded there is more of the former condition than we dare to imagine. Valid fruit will not come from a powerless or perverted Gospel.

SINCE THEY COMPREHENDED IT

“ . . . since the day . . . ye knew the grace of God.” Just as the day one hears the Gospel of the grace of God is an epoch, so the time when it is comprehended, or perceived, is a spiritual milestone. For some, this is a considerable time after their first profession of faith. However, it is glad day when it is realized.

Note, it is the grace of God that is known, or apprehended. It is possible to understand the wrath of God and be motivated to do what is right. It is also possible to realize the meaning of the commandments of God and determine to do them heartily. But when the grace of God is understood, the individual passes into a fruit-bearing mode. That fruit shows itself in an increasing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and a fervent love of the brethren – just as it did in Colossae. But where men remain ignorant of the grace of God, neither faith nor love will flourish. It seems to me that this is a principle that cannot be contradicted. Those who make little of the grace of God, or even speak against it, guarantee their own spiritual sterility. They will not be able to grow until they recognize the soil in which growth is realized – the grace of God.

ACCORDING TO THE TRUTH

“ . . . since the day ye knew the grace of God in truth.” The idea here is that they “understood the truth” about God’s grace. NLT They not only saw its reality, but they perceived what it had accomplished. You might say it “appeared” to them personally (Tit 2:11).

Corruptions

Men have attached other words to grace, thereby modifying its meaning to fit their own theological systems. Considering the extremities of theological persuasion, it is not unusual to hear of “sovereign grace,” “cheap grace,” and “irresistible grace.”

By “sovereign grace,” men mean it overrides all conditions by Sovereign decree. The expression “cheap grace” refers to a grace that allows for the individual to continue in sin. “Irresistible grace” means that once God’s grace is toward a person, that grace cannot be resisted, spurned, frustrated, or rendered ineffectual. None of these are “the grace of God in truth.” They are a misrepresentation of God’s grace, and therefore will not allow for the fruit that comes from the “true grace of God” (1 Pet 5:12).

Although the Scriptural word “grace” is employed in each of these expressions, the expressions themselves denote an interpretation of grace, and not the grace of God itself. Those interpretations are also substituted for the truth itself. I am persuaded this is a more serious abuse of God’s word than is ordinarily perceived.

Grace Is Not Inferior

Men also wrestle with the notion that somehow the grace of God encourages sin, or that it is not a safe and God-blessed approach to life. Thus it is spoken of with tongue-in-cheek, as though it was actually a liability to men – a sort of inferior approach to living. To this day, there remains a rather large contingency of Christians who think grace suggests fleshly license, opening the door for all manner of infractions of the Law of God. For this reason, certain religious persuasions speak more about what grace is NOT, than what it is. Such men imagine they are protecting the abuse of the grace of God. This too is not “the grace of God in truth.” Those who entertain such notions cannot realize the fruit that comes from knowing “the true grace of God.” Their misunderstanding of the grace of God stunts their growth.

Wherever the true grace of God is comprehended, faith in Christ and love for all saints will be found in some measure. Those expressions will begin to occur as soon as the grace of God is known in truth – perceived and embraced as it really is. Examine your own walk with the Lord, and see if this is not precisely what happened in you.

Consider the circumstances of this text. Paul is in prison. From the lower view, he is suffering at the hands of wicked men. From the higher view, he is the “prisoner of the Lord” (Eph 4:1). He comes in contact with one named Epaphras, who is imprisoned with him, as confirmed by Philemon 1:23. Epaphras, who was a faithful servant of the church at Colossae gives a report of the brethren there, testifying of their faith in Jesus Christ, and love for all saints. Those are the facts in the case.

Those with no heart for the Kingdom of God would not be impacted by such a report. Such things might be considered “nice.” However, unless they were more immediately associated with one’s personal congregation or some institutional agenda, they could be easily forgotten. Some might inquire whether or not they were “one of us,” or belong to “our movement.”

Can you conceive of the Lord Jesus asking such questions, or inquiring about the name of their congregation, or what their official stand on the millennium was? And what of the holy angels? Can you imagine Michael or Gabriel inquiring about their stand on spiritual gifts, or what they thought about the number of cups to be used at the Lord’s table? Would some Cherub or Seraph inquire about whether they preferred traditional or contemporary worship services, or favored singing with or without an instrument?

There is joy in the “presence of the angels” over one sinner that repents (Lk 15:10). Jesus will manifest Himself to the person who has His commandments and retains them in his heart and mind (John 14:21). The Father is glorified by “much fruit” (John 15:8), and men will know we are Christ’s disciples if we have love one for another (John 13:35).

It is apparent that all of the above things are of a heavenly order. They do not have the stench of flesh upon them. They all reflect a heavenly agenda. In fact, it is not possible to capitalize on spiritual fruit, or to use the grace of God for ignoble purposes.

I exhort you to make it your aim to know the grace of God in truth – to see it in the Gospel of Christ, and to embrace it with your whole heart. It will produce good and abundant fruit in you just as it did in the Colossians. You will be a cause for thanksgiving and a source of refreshment to other saints. You will also bring joy and rejoicing to both the Father and the Son. It may very well be said of you, “The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in his love, He will joy over thee with singing” (Zeph 3:17). That has a most pleasant sound, doesn’t it?

A FAITHFUL REPORT OF LOVE IN THE SPIRIT

Lesson # 3

WHAT HAS BEEN SEEN

The opening verses of this Epistle set the stage for sound spiritual thought. They assist us in getting our bearings. They break up the fallow ground of the mind, and clear the way for the reception of the truth. Several key considerations are being made known.

1. The Experience of Saints

While this is a special letter written to a special church, it contains words that pertain to a “common salvation” (Jude 1:3). The Spirit speaks in such a manner as to profit all saints. A brief reminder of these things will assist us in obtaining the maximum benefit from the text. The experiences of reference are common to all believers.

Faith. Faith is at the foundational level of spiritual life. It is more of a root than a branch. It is the coinage of the Kingdom with which Divine provisions are appropriated. The very first thing Paul heard about the Colossians pertained to their faith: “we heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:4). This is what provoked them to receive the Gospel, and be faithful to the Lord. With religious men, the adoption of a human creed or theological position identifies them. With those in Christ, faith is the true mark of godly identity.

Love. The love of the brethren is an accomplishment that can only be realized by those who are in Christ Jesus. This was also one of the first things Paul heard about the Colossians: “the love which ye have to all the saints.” Not only are believers knit together in Christ Jesus, the Colossians knew it. They saw the people of God as Jesus Himself saw them, and expressed affection for them, and ministry toward them. This is the common experience of all who live by faith and walk in the Spirit.

Hope. When the Colossians heard the Gospel of Christ, they understood it be personal. It was not a sectarian creed, or a lifeless dogma. It enabled them to have an “anchor” in heaven, and thus brought stability to them. Therefore Paul reminds them that their faith and love sprang from “the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel” (1:5).

After all is said and done, the ultimate spiritual experiences are faith, love, and hope. Without these, no other experience is of any lasting value. You can cross the Red Sea, but fail to enter the promised land because of a lack of faith. You can profess that you know God, but if you do not love the brethren, you remain in darkness, and do not know God. You can be part of a seemingly thriving church, but if you do not have hope, you will not be able to be saved.

2. The Fellowship of Believers

The love of the brethren is both personal and expressive. It results in a productive fellowship. It is seen in the closeness of Paul and Timothy (1:1). It is confirmed in the forwardness of Paul to bless the Colossian brethren (1:2). The thanksgiving of Paul was an expression of that fellowship (1:3). The Colossians love for all of the saints was such an expression as well.

We live in a time of lifeless religion. Much of “church life” centers in the flesh rather than the Spirit. However, true fellowship is the result of walking in the light, not in fleshly attraction. As it is written, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). This is an indispensable and evidentiary spiritual experience.

3. Divine Provision

Life in Christ Jesus does not consist of lifeless teachings and vain philosophizing. Ours is not a religion of speculation and theorizing. In Christ there is the conscious and satisfying experience of Divine provision. This includes the Gospel itself, which identifies the hope that is laid up for us in heaven (1:5). Men like Paul, Timothy, and Epaphras are included in these provisions (1:1,7), as well as grace and peace (1:2), and faith and love (1 Tim 1:14).

4. Spiritual Fruit

The life of God is productive, bearing fruit. In Christ, this is a common experience, not an unusual one – even though it is not common in institutionalism. Paul reminded the Colossians that the Gospel was bringing “forth fruit” in them, as it was doing “in all the world” (1:6). There is no such thing as a disciple that does not bear fruit. Fruit is one of the characteristics through which disciples are identified. Jesus said, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (John 15:8). Speaking as a man, the lowest percentage of fruit is “thirty-fold” (Matt 13:8).

5. Godly Expectation

Spiritual life is the mother of expectancy – of “good hope.” Jeremiah spoke of the marvelous outcome of Divine working as “an expected end” (Jer 29:11). For those in Christ, this is “the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel” (1:5).

As you can see, there is a spirit that pervades the whole of the heavenly kingdom. This spirit, or tone, is found in individual believers themselves and their communication with one another. It is acknowledged in the emphasis of their lives, their words, and their deeds. At no point do believers conduct themselves apart from the Lord Jesus, whether Paul, Timothy, Epaphras, or the Colossian brethren. I acknowledge this is not common in the American churches. However, that is because the churches are substandard.

NOT TO OURSELVES

No individual believer or congregation of believers live unto themselves. As is it written, “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself” (Rom 14:7), or “For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone” NIV (Rom 14:7). The sense of the text is captured very well in the Basic Bible English Version: “For every man's life and every man's death has a relation to others as well as to himself.” The New Living Translation also presents an interesting perspective: “For we are not our own masters when we live or when we die.”

Two perspectives are included in this text. First, we are answerable to the Lord Jesus Christ for both our living and our dying. It is our business to live well and die well – to the honor and glory of

Christ. Second, we are on display in both living and dying. Men behold us, and can either “glorify our Father in heaven” for what they behold (Matt 5:16), or “blaspheme that worthy Name” by which we are called (James 2:7). Those in Christ are particularly said to be “a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men” (1 Cor 4:9). There are reactions in the heavenly realms to what is seen among men. Angels, for example, are noted for their joy “over one sinner that repenteth” (Lk 15:10). An angel also “smote” Herod to death when “he gave not God the glory” (Acts 12:23). No man lives or dies to himself!

In the text before us, the lives of the Colossian saints had been reported to, and duly noted by, Paul. The faithful report had an impact upon his spirit, and he was moved to give thanks for those in whom Divine workings were evident.

His introductory words are not expressions of mere human politeness. They are not a literary formality, or courteous dialog. His words are insightful communication, designed to give God glory and promote spiritual life. They are an expression of spiritual perception.

“ 7a As ye also learned . . . ” The subject under consideration is the message that had produced notable spiritual qualities in the Colossian brethren: “the word of the truth of the Gospel” (1:4). It is “the word of the truth of the Gospel,” because that is the only means of becoming aware of the fact, nature, and intent of the Gospel. There is not one particle of tangible evidence that can lead to the conclusions proclaimed in the Gospel. There is no form of reasoning, logic, or philosophy, that can cause a person to conclude the realities affirmed in the Gospel. From the beginning to the ending, these things are “learned” from a message – an inspired message revealed from heaven.

Even though I have mentioned some of these things before, it is needful to again rehearse a few of the accomplishments that are made known through “the truth of the Gospel.” These are pillars in sound thought.

- Jesus “put away sin” (Heb 9:26).
- We “were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Rom 5:10).
- Jesus “made peace” through the blood of His cross (Col 1:20).
- God “saw the travail” of Christ’s soul, and was “satisfied” (Isa 53:11).

- Through death, Jesus “destroyed” the devil (Heb 2:14).
- In the cross, Jesus “spoiled principalities and powers” (Col 2:15).
- Jesus was declared to be “the Son of God with power... by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom 1:4).
- Jesus has been exalted “to give repentance to Israel and the remission of sins” (Acts 5:31).
- The church has been purchased with Christ’s blood (Acts 20:28).
- We are “justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24).
- Jesus was “raised for our justification” (Rom 4:25).
- God “condemned sin” in the flesh of Christ (Rom 8:3).
- Christ is “at the right hand of God,” and “also maketh intercession for us” (Rom 8:34).
- Christ is Lord of the living and the dead (Rom 14:9).
- We have been “bought with a price” (1 Cor 6:20).
- God made Jesus “to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21).
- Jesus “gave Himself for our sins” to “deliver us from this present evil world” (Gal 1:4).
- Christ has “redeemed us from the curse of the Law,” being “made a curse for us” (Gal 13:13).
- We have been “made accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6).
- We have been “made nigh” to God “by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13).
- Christ has “broken down the middle wall of partition” between Jew and the Gentile (Eph 2:14).
- Jesus has “abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances” (Eph 2:14).
- When Christ offered Himself to God, it was a “sweet smelling savor” to Him (Eph 5:2).

- Jesus has “delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:10).
- Jesus died for us, that whether we live or die, “we should live together with Him” (1 Thess 5:10).
- Christ “gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity” (Tit 2:14a).
- Christ “gave Himself” to “purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit 2:14b).
- Jesus is presently upholding all things by the word of His power (Heb 1:3).
- Jesus “tasted death for every man” (Heb 2:9).
- Jesus is “able to succor them that are tempted” (Heb 2:18).
- Jesus ever lives “to make intercession for us” (Heb 7:25).
- Christ has “obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb 9:12).
- The blood of Christ can “purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb 9:14).
- We have been called to “receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15).
- “By one offering,” Jesus has “perfected forever them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:14).
- In Christ we “have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus” (Heb 10:19).
- Through His flesh, Christ has “consecrated” a “new and a living way” for us (Heb 10:20).
- Jesus is “the Mediator of the New Covenant” (Heb 12:24).
- The “precious blood of Christ” has redeemed us from the “vain conversation received by tradition from our fathers” (1 Pet 1:18).
- Jesus “bore our sins in His body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:24).
- Jesus “is the propitiation for our sins,” and for “the whole world” as well (1 John 2:2).

- Jesus has “washed us from our sins,” and made us “kings and priests unto God” (Rev 1:5-6; 5:10).

SOME OBSERVATIONS

There are forty-two Gospel realities – and they are only a sampling. Which one of them (to say nothing of all of them) would any mortal ever have known if it was not declared? Where can such glorious realities be learned apart from the Gospel of Christ? What astute thinker or logician has ever concluded them?

Allow me to press this point, for it is a foundational one. Can a single one of these verities be drawn from the well of human wisdom – in any of its varied forms? Will science testify to these things? If we linger at the pool of psychiatry, will we be able to learn of them? What verb tense or etymological mood can yield such conclusions? Can the financial world shed any light on them? How about human history? Dip into the shallow well of motivation and organization and see if you can cause a single one of these declarations to be more clear!

What man or woman is there who has learned these things independently of the “glorious Gospel of the blessed God” (1 Tim 1:11? If the Gospel had not been preached “with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven” (1 Pet 1:12), would such lofty truths ever have found their way into any creed, doctrinal statement, or writings of men?

You may even consider the three foundations of the Gospel: the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15:3-4). If they had not been declared, how would you have known of them? Could you have studied the writings of Moses and surmised them? Could you have derived such facts from the Psalms, or Proverbs, or the writings of the Prophets? If the light of the Gospel did not shed its rays upon Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, we would have remained as abysmally ignorant of facts and implications concerning the Messiah as the generations before us! That is involved in the Spirit’s word, “Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations , but now is made manifest to His saints” (Col 1:26). And how is it “made manifest?” It is by declaration – by the heralding of a message!

THE COLOSSIANS LEARNED

To “learn” is to come to an understanding of something. It is not like “learning” mathematical tables, or a mere routine. Such things can be learned by rote, with no real comprehension of what is involved in them.

The way “learn” is used in the Scriptures confirms it is not speaking of an academic learning.

- “It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath

heard, and hath learned of the Father , cometh unto me” (John 6:45).

- “But go ye and learn what that meaneth , I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mat 9:13)
- “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of [from] Me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Mat 11:29).
- “Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus” (Eph 4:19-21).
- “Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned , in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Phil 4:11).
- “And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful” (Titus 3:14)
- “Though he were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which he suffered” (Heb 5:8).

In particular, these brethren had learned “of the hope” that was “laid up in heaven” for them. That is what motivated them to have faith in Christ and a love for all the saints (1:4). They had understood the Gospel, and therefore it bore fruit in them.

The Gospel Must Be Understood

The Gospel bears no fruit where it is not understood. Jesus confirmed this in His explanation of the parable of the sower who cast his seed on various soils. One area that received that seed is described as “the way side,” or “the path” NIV “beside the road.” NASB It is said of that seed, “it was trodden down,” or “trampled down.” NKJV Men walked upon it as though it was nothing. Consequently “the fowls of the air devoured it” (Lk 8:5). Jesus did not tell the multitudes the meaning of this parable. So far as they were concerned, it was an agricultural lesson.

The disciples of Jesus were not content to remain in the dark. They asked, “What might this parable be?” Confirming that understanding is not the result of mere human reasoning, Jesus responded, “Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:10). Others, however, only received the parable, and thus could not see and could not understand. He then made the meaning known to them, and they “learned” it.

The seed, Jesus affirmed, “is the word of God.” This is essentially the Gospel, for Jesus announced the Spirit was upon Him to “preach the Gospel” (Lk 4:18). The “word of the kingdom” is the

message of the “day of salvation.” It is the means through which Divine purposes are realized in the hearts and lives of people. Only the Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” – not salvation initially, but salvation in its entirety (Rom 1:16). As soon as the Gospel ceases to be proclaimed and expounded, the power of God ceases to work “unto salvation.”

This circumstance explains many of the religious conditions that characterize our time. The “word of the kingdom” is not the law of Moses. It is not the Ten Commandments. It is not the book of Proverbs, or the various Divine statements concerning human behavior and interpersonal relationships. It is not the word concerning the church, its pattern, and its activities. There are certainly Divine utterances on all of these matters, and they are to be believed and embraced without hesitation. But they are not the “word of the kingdom.” They are not the essential message. They contain implications of the Gospel, but they are not the Gospel itself. Radical changes in human behavior do not come from sociological tips, but from the belief of, and obedience to, the Gospel of Christ.

The “way side” depicted a certain class of people – those who were exposed to the word of the kingdom, the Gospel. Matthew adds they were people who heard “the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not” (Matt 13:19). They walked about on the seed, totally oblivious of its nature and power. However, that was not the end of the matter. Jesus said, “then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts , lest they should believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12). Matthew said, “then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart” (Mat 13:19). Mark says, “but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately , and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts” (Mark 4:15). They did not learn, for learning is understanding!

Should A Lack of Understanding Be Tolerated?

In this day of religious accommodation, should an ignorance of the Gospel be tolerated within the church? Whatever your answer, this is a condition that does exist, and in most alarming measures. However, God will not long endure such a circumstance. He will not stop Satan from snatching the powerful word of the Gospel out of disinterested and casual hearts – for they are the only ones who do not understand.

It ought to be noted that the Word must first be proclaimed before such a judgment will be put upon way-side-hearers – whose name is “Legion.” I fear this marvelous Word has been supplanted by a sort of social Gospel that sways too and fro to the rhythm and cadence of the world. These days people are not hearing much about the Lord Jesus, and the “wonderful works of God.” The result is an unparalleled level of ignorance concerning what the Lord has done. In many circles, the death of Christ is the sole fact that is known, with little or no understanding of its implications.

Such knowledge cannot produce the fruit found in the Colossians, which is the staple fruit of the kingdom (Gal 5:22-23). Shallow understanding cannot develop spiritually productive lives.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

All of this may appear to be a meaningless excursion. Our religious environment, however, demands that these things be affirmed, for they are not generally known. It was a message that brought such favorable results among the Colossians. They heard a word that had power. Therefore, when they embraced it, powerful results were found in their lives.

When what is preached is embraced, yet change is not apparent, a kingdom abnormality has occurred. Languid lives are the unavoidable result of powerless preaching. I will wax bold and suggest that the level of division, disinterest, and lack of stability that are found in the average church may very well be the result of a deficient spiritual diet.

When men spend an inordinate amount of time solving problems, they are actually encroaching on Divine prerogatives. When problems tend to increase, and resolutions are more to be desired than the blessings of God, unbelief is lurking in the corners of life. That is simply not what the Gospel produces.

It was not so among the Colossians. Their faith in Jesus and love toward all saints grew out of their embrace of “the word of the truth of the Gospel.” Once known, the truth made them free (John 8:32). It will do no less in day! The unquestionable challenge of our time is the dearth of truth, and a love for it, in the land.

“7b . . . of Epaphras . . .” The name “Epaphras” means “lovely.” STRONG’S It was a most suitable name for this dear saint, for he had a beautiful spirit and demeanor. Some consider this name to be a contraction of Epaphroditus, and therefore the person of reference to be the same man mentioned in Philippians 2:25 and 4:18. However, there is no etymological or doctrinal evidence that this is the case. I will consider this to be a unique person. Epaphroditus was associated with the church at Philippi (Phil 4:18), and Epaphras with the church at Colossae (Col 4:12). That is evidence enough that they are not the same person.

Epaphras is also mentioned in the book of Philemon, where he is called Paul’s “fellow prisoner” (Phile 1:23). We know from Colossians and Philemon of others who were associated with the church at Colossae. Onesimus was one of the Colossians (4:9), and a former slave of Philemon (Phil 1:10-12). Archippus was one of the Colossian brethren, and is also mentioned in Philemon (Col 4:17; Phile 1:2). Philemon himself was apparently among the Colossians. In fact, there is strong evidence that these brethren met in Philemon’s own house (Phile 1:2). The Colossians were no doubt the saints that were often “refreshed” by Philemon (Phile 1:7). All of this strongly suggests that the Colossians were not a “large” group of brethren, but were a smaller number of saints who gathered regularly in the house of Philemon – a “house” church (Phile 1:2).

Epaphras was the one through whom the Colossians had heard the truth of the Gospel: “the word of truth, the Gospel . . . and knew the grace of God in truth which has come to you . . . just as you learned it from Epaphras” NASB (1:5-7). This suggests Epaphras founded the church at Colossae – although he appears to have been a relatively unknown child of the King. Nevertheless, God does not look upon appearance, but on the heart.

Because Onesimus was sent to both the Colossians and Philemon (Col 4:9; Phile 1:10), we conclude that the letters addressed to them were written about the same time. From that supposition we may draw at least two conclusions.

- Onesimus had been in prison with Paul, and was converted through Paul at that time (Phile 1:10).
- Epaphras suffered “for righteousness sake,” being in prison with Paul at the time of the writing of both letters (Col 4:12; Phile 1:23).

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT EPAPHRAS

The facts we know concerning Epaphras are few, but powerful. They reveal that he was a man of faith.

- He served with Paul (1:7a).
- He was a minister of Christ to the Colossians (1:7b).
- He preached the Gospel in such a way as to accentuate the grace of God and the hope of believers (1:5-7).
- He gave a faithful report of the condition of brethren (1:4,8).
- He labored fervently in prayer for the Colossians, that they might stand “perfect and complete in all the will of God” (4:12).
- He had a great zeal for the Colossians, and those who were in Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:13).
- He was imprisoned for Christ (Phile 1:23).

HIS MANNER OF COMMUNICATION

Consider the manner of Epaphras’ communication – what he talked about. When imprisoned

with Paul, he related the good spiritual status of the Colossian brethren – their “faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love” they had “toward all saints” (1:4). Our text declares he also reported the “love in the Spirit” that was prevalent among the Colossians. While in prison, he prayed for the spiritual stability of his brethren, and those in Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:12-13).

There is no record of him speaking with Paul about the deplorable conditions in the prison. Nor, indeed, did he major on the injustice they had experienced when imprisoned. The political climate was not the theme of his conversation, nor were the moral conditions or social customs that existed at that time.

While I do not doubt that other matters filtered into conversations between Paul and Philemon, the things of the Kingdom dominated their conversation. The fact that Paul begat Onesimus when he was in bonds also confirms this to be the case.

FAITH EFFECTS SPEECH

Faith does effect what people talk about. This is confirmed in the conversations reported between Paul and Epaphras. Those whose conversation rarely centers in things pertaining to life and godliness are revealing very much about themselves – whether they want to or not. When God gives people “one heart and one way,” as He promised (Jer 32:39), it will erupt in a “pure language,” as He also promised (Zech 3:9).

Just as the Prophets foretold the manner of the Messiah, and the glory of His salvation, so they also revealed the manner of those who would embrace that Messiah and His salvation. One of the prominent things among the saved would be this: “They shall speak of the glory of Thy kingdom, and talk of Thy power” (Psa 145:11).

The above prophecy is as precise as those concerning the Messiah Himself. What would we think of a Savior who did not fulfill the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah? What would be our response to a Savior who was not born in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2), or whose mother was not a virgin (Isa 7:14)? Yet, throughout Christendom people are accepted as “Christians” who bear no resemblance to the kind of people foretold by the Prophets.

- “They shall all know Me, from the least to the greatest” (Jer 31:34).
- “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them” (Ezek 36:26-27).

- “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert” (Isa 35:5-6).
- “Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon His name, declare His doings among the people, make mention that His name is exalted” (Isa 12:3-4).
- “One generation shall praise Thy works to another, and shall declare Thy mighty acts. I will speak of the glorious honor of Thy majesty, and of Thy wondrous works. And men shall speak of the might of Thy terrible acts: and I will declare Thy greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of Thy great goodness, and shall sing of Thy righteousness” (Psa 145:5-7).

This is the kind of dialog that was going on between Paul and Epaphras. They were speaking of the Lord’s doing, praising Him for His works, and speaking of His glory and majesty. They were declaring His doings and making mention of His name.

Where such things do not take place, in the very best view, a serious deficiency exists. It may very well be that the Lord is not in such a place at all. How can He reside in an environment that contradicts what He Himself said would result from His salvation?

It may appear as though this has nothing whatsoever to do with our text. However, there is a spirit in this text – the very life of God is revealed in it. The circumstances that surround this Epistle evince the very nature of spiritual life. If we are to realize any profit from what is said, we must be able to see this.

COMPARED WITH OUR DAY

None of the things for which Epaphras was commended rank high in the institutional church! They would be totally unacceptable in the average ministerial resume, and viewed as though they were irrelevant. Contemporary Christianity does not provide such assessments, or place a high value upon them. We are living in a time when a report of “large numbers” tend to place the stamp of approval on church leaders. I cannot conceive of Epaphras being asked to speak at a national Christian convention, or asked to write in the brotherhood oracle.

Modern “churchdom” has dignified mediocre preachers, and religious leaders with only a modicum of spiritual understanding. Spiritual midgets have been vaunted to places of prominence and fame within the Christian entertainment industry (if, indeed, there is such a thing). Those with a minuscule perception of the “mysteries of God” (1 Cor 4:1) are sanctioned and applauded because of the numbers who follow and approve of them.

These are “perilous times,” when the church allows identity with Christ without the fruit of the Spirit, or any evidence of spiritual life. The modern church caters to the flesh, courts the world, and leaves the people without an acute awareness of the Lord Himself, His works, and His purpose. The whole condition has lulled many souls to sleep.

FLAWED PREACHING PRODUCES FLAWED DISCIPLES

Just as surely as “sound doctrine” produced good fruit among the Colossians, flawed preaching produces flawed disciples. This is a circumstance that cannot be avoided. God will not empower messages that did not come from Him! A social Gospel cannot be “the power of God unto salvation.” That is an absolute impossibility.

This circumstance is one of the reasons Paul admonished young preachers, “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 1:13). “But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1).

The strength with which Paul addresses this subject is to be duly noted. “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;

he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself” (1 Tim 6:3-5).

Only the truth liberates the soul (John 8:32). Only the Gospel of Christ is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16). Only when the grace of God is known “in truth” will it produce the spiritual fruitage found in the brethren at Colossae. This is fruit that cannot be emulated.

Our senses must be exercised to recognize these things (Heb 5:14), and to respond to them immediately and appropriately. The salvation of God is not to be taken lightly, nor are the fruits of its presence to be ignored. When God works, it is our business to recognize it.

“ 7c . . . our dear fellowservant . . . ” Other versions read, “our beloved fellow bond-servant .” NASB “our well-loved helper,” BBE “our beloved fellow-bondman,” DARBY “our beloved fellow slave ,” NAB and “our very dear fellow-worker .” NJB

“OUR”

“OUR dear fellowservant.” By saying “our,” Paul confirms he is relating the personal evaluation of himself and all who truly know Epaphras. The qualities that he will mention are not mere professional credentials. They have not been lifted from a resume, or a brotherhood journal. This perception has been forged in the crucible of Kingdom experience, as men were involved in the work of the Lord. He has “heard” of the faith and love of the Colossians, but he has seen the faith and love of Epaphras. That is why Paul took his report concerning the Colossians to be the truth. He did not seek the verification of Epaphras’ testimony, but proceeded to address the Colossians, knowing it was the truth.

DEAR

“Our DEAR fellowservant.” The word “dear” is an especially affectionate one, meaning “well-beloved, esteemed, favorite, and worthy of love.” STRONG’S It also carries the idea of “dearest,” BARCLAY-NEWMAN This describes a person who is particularly close and precious.

While those who are born of God love all of the brethren, they do not love them in the same measure. I understand that some in their simplicity object to such a statement, affirming that this reveals a respect of persons. However, this is a foolish postulate, for it would make God a respecter of persons. God does not love all of His children in the same measure or with the same intensiveness. Ponder some of the distinguishing things that are said of those who were loved by God and Christ.

- DAVID. “And when He had removed him, He raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also He gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after Mine own heart, which shall fulfil all My will” (Acts 13:22).
- ABRAHAM. “And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God ” (James 2:23).
- DANIEL. “And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision” (Dan 9:22-23).
- JOHN THE APOSTLE. “Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved ” (John 13:23).
- ASPIRE TO BE DEAR TO GOD. “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children ” (Eph 5:1).

Those who walk closest to the Lord get the most from Him. Those who choose to linger in the peripheral areas will not receive an abundance from the Lord. That is because the further you are from

God, the closer you are to the world. The less aware you are aware of the world to come, the more you are aware of “this present evil world” (Gal 1:4).

There were people who were NOT dear to Paul – those of whom he did not speak favorably. These were people connected with the work of the Lord. For example:

- DEMAS. “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Tim 4:10).
- HYMENAEUS AND PHILETUS. “And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus ; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some” (2 Tim 2:17-18).
- PHYGELLUS AND HERMOGENES. “This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes ” (2 Tim 1:15).
- HYENAEUS AND ALEXANDER. “Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander ; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim 1:19-20).
- ALEXANDER. “ Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words” (2 Tim 4:15).
- THE GALATIANS. “I am afraid of you , lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain” (Gal 4:11).
Those who walk at a distance from the Lord should not expect those who walk in the light to lavish affection upon them. God does not do such things, and does not ask His children to do so.

The Reason for this Condition

There is a reason for the differing levels of brother love. These are not levels that reflect fleshly discrimination, for those who are living by faith “know no man after the flesh” (2 Cor 5:16). This is not an institutional love, where denominational camaraderie prevails.

As we draw closer to the Lord, we also become closer to those who themselves are especially near to the Lord. By “near,” I mean they are more aware of the Lord – more conscious of His presence and power. Such individuals are walking “in the light as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7). They are not stumbling about in life, falling into all manner of moral and spiritual pits, for “If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world” (John 11:9). These are people who are walking “in the Spirit,” and therefore do “not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16). They “live by faith,” and thus confess they are strangers and pilgrims in this world (Heb 10:38; 11:13). These are the people who are looking “for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God” (Heb 11:10).

Such brethren are obviously “laborers together with God” (1 Cor 3:9), and give forth evidence that they are enjoying the fellowship of God’s Son, into which they have been called (1 Cor 1:9). These people have their hand on the plow, and are not looking back (Luke 9:62). Like true disciples, they have “forsaken all” to follow Jesus (Luke 14:33). Their “affection” is set “on things above, and not on things on the earth” (Col 3:2). They are mortifying their members “that are upon the earth” (Col 3:5), and “have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24).

What This Does NOT Mean

These are the kind of people that are “dear,” “dearly beloved,” “well-loved,” and “precious.” Your own experience will testify to you of the fewness of such people among professed believers. This by no means justifies a condemning attitude, or setting ourselves up to be the judges of all who wear the name of Jesus. Jesus did not do this, the Apostles did not do it, and neither are we to appoint ourselves as the official evaluators of the profession of others.

What It Does Mean

This does mean that the closest and most endearing brethren are those who are the most serious about, and devoted to, our Lord. If people choose to walk at a distance from the Lord, they will also experience a distance from His people. If they walk in the light as He is in the light, they will enjoy a close and productive fellowship with others who are walking in the light (1 John 1:7).

Those who have “left all” to follow Jesus invariably experience a certain loneliness among men – even religious men. Faith does distance us from even the smallest amount of unbelief. However, the sharpening countenance of a faithful brother, and a comforting word from a fellow-laborer compensates for the rejection and coolness of all other religious peers. One Epaphras makes up for a multitude of Demas’, Hymanaeus’, Philetus’, Hermogenes, Pylollugus’, and the likes!

A mere glance from a fellow pilgrim and stranger brings more refreshment to the child of God than a lengthy theological discourse by someone who is half-hearted. That is because such a person is “dear.” The heart of these people has been knit to our own, and we are more experientially “members one of another” (Eph 4:25).

Thus Paul speaks of Epaphras as one who has been knit to his heart. He is special because of his special ministry, and his special ministry is owing to his special relationship to God and to Christ.

I urge you to make it your aim to be a blessing to the saints of God – to be a source of encouragement to them. This will invariably be the result of walking close to the Lord, ridding yourself of all distracting and debilitating influences.

FELLOWSERVANT

“Our dear FELLOWSERVANT .” A fellow servant is who is sharing in a common work – working side by side with others. A fellow servant is one devoted to the accomplishment of someone else’s agenda – in this case, the Lord’s agendum, or purpose.

It does not appear that Paul knew Epaphras for a lengthy time, but that their acquaintance was forged while Paul was in prison. Yet, it became apparent to Paul that they were both laboring for the same Lord and the same cause.

The term “fellowservant” reveals the level at which “fellowship” takes place. It is not at the point of profession, but in the crucible of involvement. I do not know that spiritual fellowship can exist independently of godly activity.

This word is not used frequently in Scripture. It comes from the Greek word **sundou,lou** (sundoulos), which means “a fellowservant, one who serves the same master with another.” THAYER The word “servant” implies carrying out the will of a master, to which the servant is subject. The word “fellow” denotes partnership, or fellowship, that is of a closer nature.

In this text, a “fellow servant,” therefore, is one who is active in doing the will of the Lord, working together with God . It is also one who is closely aligned with other servants of the one Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. A “dear fellowservant” is one who excels in these qualities, and is faithful in doing so.

AN OBSERVATION

Particularly in the Western world, I am impressed with how very few of this kind of laborers are prominent. With all of the religious activity going on, very little is focused on the revealed Divine agenda. We have specialists in youth, music, worship, and motivation. There are ministers of education, interpersonal relationships, seniors, singles, and counseling.

I do not deny that some speck of goodness may be found in many of these things, but it is certainly marginal. It is much like a jewel in a swine’s snout (Prov 11:22). The reason is that they are largely driven by humanly-conceived agendas. They do not blend well with the intercession of Jesus, the administration of the Holy Spirit, or the “whole counsel of God.” Many of them do not require Divine empowerment, spiritual understanding, or fellowship with Jesus Christ. Further, when the “eternal purpose” of God is chosen as the heart of thought, such things lose their preeminence. That is precisely why those who major on such things speak rarely of Divine objectives and provisions.

Of course, these things are not unique to the twentieth century. There have always been those

who preferred their own agenda to that of the Lord.

The point to be seen in this text is that Epaphras excelled in the area, where God expects men to excel. He was a strong encouragement to those who were laboring for, and pleasing, the Lord. It is no wonder that Paul spoke so well of him. He had become proficient in an arena that absolutely required the presence and blessing of the Lord.

“ 7d . . . who is for you a faithful minister of Christ . . . ” Other versions read, “who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf,” ASV “who is a true servant of Christ for us,” BBE “who is a faithful minister of Christ for you ,” DARBY “he is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf ,” ESV “a trustworthy deputy for us as Christ's servant,” NJB “He is Christ's faithful servant, and he is helping us in your place ,” NLT and “who is for you a faithful ministrant of the Christ.” YLT

FOR YOU

“ . . . who is for you . . . ” On the surface, the different versions appear somewhat confusing. Some represent Epaphras as a faithful minister for the Colossians: “for you,” “on your behalf” and “in your place.” Others represent him as being a faithful minister for Paul and those with him: “on our behalf,” and “for us.” Thus he is seen as either a minister of Paul to the Colossians, or as a minister of the Colossians to Paul. Either he was helping the Colossians, or he was helping Paul. For whatever it is worth the textual evidence is divided, with older Greek copies adopting the “on our” view, while the ancient versions adopted the “your behalf” view. The critical editors of the text are also divided on the meaning, as well as the commentators. From this, it is clear that the meaning cannot be derived from the language itself. We must look at the context of the passage, and the intent of the book to obtain a satisfactory understanding of the text.

Consideration #1

Paul is writing in response to the report given to him by Epaphras. It was a good report, declaring a faith and love that sprang from the hope generated by the Gospel they had heard (1:4-5). That Gospel had been delivered to them by Epaphras (1:7). Therefore, the ministry of this brother had been “for,” of to, them, and they had realized the ultimate benefit from it.

Consideration #2

It is possible that Epaphras had ministered to Paul himself in the behalf of the Colossian brethren. This would be the kind of ministry Epaphroditus had to Paul on the behalf of the Philippian (Phil 2:25; 4:18). There is no evidence of such a ministry in Scripture. Paul's does not speak of Epaphras ministering to him as he did of Epaphroditus.

Consideration #3

It is possible that Epaphras was Paul's own convert and disciple, and that he had ministered to the Colossians in the behalf of Paul. Thus, the Gospel he preached to the Colossians would have been learned from Paul himself. There is also no evidence of this in Scripture. Paul makes no reference to Epaphras being his convert, or that he had sent him initially to Colossae to preach the Gospel.

Conclusion

In view of the above considerations, I take it that Paul is commending Epaphras for the unvarnished Gospel that he had faithfully ministered among the Colossians.

In the second chapter, Paul will address some doctrinal encroachments that were taking place in Colossae. The people were being challenged concerning the following dangers. He will rely on the truth of the Gospel to address these, and provoke a resistance of the wicked one.

- Philosophy and vain deceit (2:8a).
- The tradition of men (2:8b).
- The rudiments of the world (2:8c).
- Meats and drinks (2:16a).
- Holy days, new moons, and Sabbaths (2:16b).
- Voluntary humility (2:18a).
- The worshiping of angels (2:18b).

It was therefore imperative that the Colossians be assured of the validity of the Gospel that had produced spiritual fruit within them. The accent of Paul's commendation is not what Epaphras had ministered to himself, but that he had faithfully ministered to the Colossians. Any ministrations to Paul is secondary to that. The remainder of this Epistle will confirm this is the thrust of the comment.

I feel compelled to note that the proper emphasis of a minister is noted in this text. It is not an institutional thrust – building an organization, stuffing a structure with people, and obtaining a name in the community and brotherhood. A valid ministry has a spiritual focus that produces spiritual fruit.

FAITHFUL MINISTER

A “faithful” minister is one who is trustworthy and true in his stewardship of the truth. This is

the preeminent requirement of a steward. As it is written, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful ” (1 Cor 4:2).

The word “faithful” means trustworthy, reliable, believing, true, unfailing, and sure.

All the Counsel of God

This is a person who delivers the full counsel of God. It is the one who can say with Paul, “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Here, the word “counsel” refers to the will of the Lord in particular: “the counsel of His will” (Eph 1:11). Thus the NASB reads, “I did not shrink from declaring unto you the whole purpose of God .”

Strictly speaking, the phrase “all the counsel of God” does not mean all of the Bible – although such teaching will be found where all of God’s counsel is declared. This deals more with Divine perspective than with detailed instructions. It is not the proclamation of a system, but of revealed Divine intent. Our text is speaking of the faithful ministration of Divine purpose – what God is doing through Christ Jesus. This is a vital point that is lost in much of today’s trendy preaching. A few examples of such declarations is in order. These are summations of “all the counsel of God.”

- “Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:26).
- “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me” (Acts 26:18).
- “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Pet 3:18).
- “For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb 2:10).
- “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified” (Rom 8:29-30).
- “And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:9-11).

- “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet 1:3-5).
- “Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14).

In each of these texts, the panorama of Divine purpose is placed before us. The objective of salvation is declared, as well as the benefits that “accompany salvation” (Heb 6:9).

A “faithful minister” teaches with such things in mind. He refuses to get caught up in temporal things – matters that will eventually pass away. When addressing things pertaining to life in this world, it is always for the purpose of getting the people into the posture of blessing – within the circumference of spiritual hearing and seeing.

If men and women are not prepared for the coming of the Lord, it really makes no difference what else they may have accomplished. If they are not ready to make the transition from time to eternity, and from earth to glory, their whole life has been spent in vain. If, when Jesus comes, He does not find them with faith, He will look for nothing else, and they themselves will be rejected. If people are not being “changed from glory unto glory” (2 Cor 3:18), and being conformed to the image of God’s Son (Rom 8:29), all of their religious activity is fruitless and pointless.

A “faithful minister” prepares people for the end of the world, the coming of Christ, the day of judgment, and the reception of rewards. This is a minister who clarifies the nature and content of the Gospel, and opens up the purpose of God to the minds of the people. He brings the people into “fellowship” with the Son of God, into which God has called them (1 Cor 1:9). He prepares people for the Divine appointments of death and judgment (Heb 9:27).

The “faithful minister” has not been called to solve people’s problems, but to declare and expound God’s resolution to the sin problem. When he addresses distracting issues, and words and deeds that jeopardize the state of the people, he does so with God’s objective in mind. “All the counsel of God” sets before the people what God has done, what He is doing, and what He has determined will be done. All

practical teaching and application are set within that framework.0

A “faithful minister” presents God’s will as superior to man’s will. He teaches in such a way as to make heaven more dominant than earth. He sets forth eternal life as preeminent over life in this world, and pleasing God more to be

preferred than pleasing men. While his teaching will enable men to live godly

lives in this world, it will also, prepare them to separate from this world now, and prepare to leave it at God's appointed time. A faithful minister will shine the jewel of hope, and promote a longing for "a better country, that is, an heavenly" (Heb 11:16).

A "faithful minister" is not a super-minister. He is the only kind God will accept. Consequently, he is to be the only kind men accept. A minister who is not "faithful" is really no minister at all. He is an imposter of the worst sort, for God is not working through him.

OF CHRIST

Paul says Epaphras is a "faithful minister of Christ ." The word "of" is a literary expression that provides focus. It is like an arrow that points to the primary Object. A minister is a "servant" – one who carries out the agenda of another. The master sets the agenda, and the servant carries it out.

In this case, Epaphras was a "minister of Christ" – that is, he was carrying out Christ's agenda. He was doing for the people what Christ wanted done. He was bringing them where Christ wanted them brought. He was teaching that what Christ wanted them to be taught.

A "minister of Christ" clarifies the Person, accomplishments, and ministry of the Lord Jesus. He is not hawking a system, but proclaiming a Person. He is a slave of Jesus – a willing slave. He has chosen to replace his own will with Christ's will. His affection is set above, where Jesus is enthroned at God's right hand (Col 3:3). His quest is to "know" Christ, and be "found in Him" (Phil 3:9-10), and he has counted "all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:8). This is not an option, but a necessity.

A "faithful minister of Christ" brings Christ closer to the people, and the people closer to Christ. He declares a gospel that accentuates Christ, who He is, what He has accomplished, what He is doing, and that He is coming again. He himself is close to Christ, and preoccupied with His revealed agenda. Christ works through such a "minister," or servant, bring benefit to His people.

" 8a Who also declared unto us . . ." Other versions read, "he also informed us," NASB "who also told us," NIV "he has made known to us," NRSV "made clear to us," BBE and "manifested to us."
DARBY

The word “declared” means to “make manifest,” or “make clear and plain.” THAYER The idea is that Epaphras made known the real circumstance among the Colossians. He did not give his personal assessment of their condition, but, through spiritual perception, unveiled their real condition. Therefore, Paul did not write to find out if the appraisal of the Colossians reported by Epaphras was correct. He knew it was correct, and therefore gave God thanks, and wrote to the brethren with words of commendation and praise.

A SPIRITUAL ENVIRONMENT

There is a spiritual environment in which acceptable communication takes place. It should be obvious that this surrounding should be closer to heaven than to earth, and dominated by faith rather than feeling. The wisdom of men is not allowed in such an environment, and it contributes to edification. The Gospel of Christ plays a key role in these environs, and the will of the Lord is fundamental. The Scriptures provide the nomenclature that is employed, and the priorities that are embraced.

Now, all of this is easy enough to say. However, to find such an environment can prove to be quite challenging. Nevertheless, this is the spiritual surrounding in which Epaphras and Paul had their communications. We know this is the case because they did not speak of the political or social culture in the city of Colossae. Nor, indeed, were they occupied with the status of the Colossian church in the community, or with the ratios of the old and young, male and female, and the likes. They did not rate their families, analyze their young people, or assess their academic achievements.

Because of the spiritual environment they were occupying, these men spoke of “saints and faithful brethren in Christ” (1:1). When desiring something for the brethren there, “grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” came to mind (1:2). What had been reported concerning the Colossians was their “faith in Christ Jesus,” and the love they had “toward all saints ” (1:4). The “hope” generated by the Gospel came to their minds, together with “fruit” to God, and “the grace of God in truth” (1:5-6). This was the framework within which Paul had learned of the brethren at Colossae.

Since the church has been captured by the psychologists and opportunists of the land, this kind of environment is unusually rare. These days churches are assessed according to their youth program, ministry to singles and seniors, recovery programs, public education, and praise and worship. In order for such assessments to take place, one has to be unusually close to the world. That, of course, means that such a person is correspondingly far from God, for close to the world equals far from God.

What believers talk about when they are together reveals where they are living. Those who inhabit the higher realms find it difficult to speak of things occurring in the lower realms. Such things contradict⁶ their manner of life. Conversely, those who are dwelling in low places cannot speak of things in “heavenly places.”

It is not by coincidence that we are admonished, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things

above, not on things on the earth” (Col 3:1-2). And again, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil 4:8).

Faithfulness in these matters impact the way we speak to one another, and what we speak about. It will also promote proper appraisals of the brethren, and thanksgiving for the godly virtues that are found in them. That will yield a crop of comfort and strength. It is good for individuals and churches to ponder what kind of report might be given by godly people concerning them. Would be as favorable as that of Epaphras?

“ 8b . . . your love in the Spirit.” Every major translation reads exactly the same way: “your love in the Spirit.” The paraphrased New Living Translation reads, “the great love for others that the Holy Spirit has given you.” I prefer the standard translation.

YOUR

The virtue for which the Colossians were commended was the expression of their own persons: “your.” It was not a routine or perfunctory expression. Nor, indeed, was it the outgrowth of group comardarie. This was a love provoked by heavenly influences. The heart of these people had been opened (Acts 16:14), purified (Acts 15:9), and established (1 Thess 3:13). God had sealed them, and given them “the earnest of the Spirit in” their “hearts” (2 Cor 1:22). God had shined “into their hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). He had also “sent forth the Spirit of His Son into their hearts crying ‘Abba, Father’” (Gal 4:6). Christ was dwelling in their hearts “by faith” (Eph 3:17), and they were being “kept by the power of God through faith” (1 Pet 1:5).

These circumstances, and more, made the godly expressions of the Colossians their own— in this case, “YOUR love.” Their hearts were in the matter. They were not fulfilling a requirement, but what they really desired to do.

LOVE

Note what Paul says: Epaphras “declared unto us your love.” He did not declare their religious affiliation, but their love. This love is revealed in at least three ways.

Toward Paul and Timothy

Although the Colossians had not seen Paul face to face (2:1), yet they had a love for him, as made known through Epaphras. Paul frequently expressed thanksgiving for brethren who exhibited love toward him. Some of those expressions are as follows.

- “But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us , as we also to see you” (1 Thess 3:6).
- “Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us , see that ye abound in this grace also” (2 Cor 8:7).
- “For I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me ” (Gal 4:15).
- “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again ; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity” (Phil 4:10).
- “And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me ; so that I rejoiced the more” (2 Cor 7:7).

This love was provoked by the rich resources that were realized through the doctrine and personal ministry of the Apostle.

Toward Epaphras

Their love was no doubt extended to Epaphras also, who had declared the Gospel to them. Because that Gospel unveiled the sanctifying hope of glory, it also became the fountain from which their love proceeded. Such love particularly embraces ministers by whom we have believed, “whom God gave to every man” (1 Cor 3:5).

Those in Christ are reminded, “to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake . And be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thess 5:13). There is every reason to believe the Colossians had such a response to Epaphras.

Toward all saints

The love “for all saints” includes those who have particular and refreshing insights into the purpose of God. It also includes those who have personally brought the truth within our reach. That marvelous love also extends to “all saints” everywhere, producing thankfulness for every trophy of Divine grace.

IN THE SPIRIT

“ . . . your love in the Spirit.” The Apostle is careful to identify the kind of love of which he speaks. It is a spiritual love that has its origin in the working of the Holy Spirit.

If you have been subjected to much preaching, you have heard of the different Greek words for “love” found in Scripture. They represent the scope of love, as well as its nature. A brief review of these words will be profitable.

“Agapa” LOVE

ajga>ph (a-ga-pa). The lexical meaning is “affection, good will, love, and benevolence.” THAYER This word emphasizes judgment and deliberate choice.

Many have affirmed that this is the “God-kind of love.” Indeed, God is said to love with this kind of love – a discretionary love that seeks to do good to the object of the love. This is the love mentioned in John 3:16, where God “so loved the world.” But it is also used in John 3:19, where “men loved darkness rather than light.” It is used in John 3:35, where it is affirmed “the Father loveth the Son.” It is also used in John 12:43, where it is written, “They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” This is the word used in Second Timothy 4:8, where the faithful are said to “love His appearing.” It is also used in Second Timothy 4:10, where it is written, “Demas hath forsaken me. Having loved this present world.” Peter used this word when he wrote, “Love the brotherhood” (1 Pet 2:17). He also used it when he wrote of those who “loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Pet 2:15).

“Phileo” LOVE

file,w (phil-e-o). The lexical meaning is, “to love; to be friendly to one, delight in, or long for.” THAYER This word emphasizes affection and attachment. This word is used in John 5:20, where Jesus said, “The Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things that Himself doeth.”

Perhaps you have heard that this is the human kind of love, as distinguished from Divine love. It is true that men love with this kind of love, but it is not limited to men. Jesus applied this word to those who “loved father or mother more than” Him (Matt 10:37), therefore signifying such love could embrace Him as well as relatives. Jesus used this word when He said the scribes “love greetings in the market” (Luke 20:46). He also used it in John 5:20, where He said, “the Father loveth the Son.” Jesus used this word in John 12:25: “He that loveth his life shall lose it.” He also used it in John 16:27, where He said, “the Father Himself loveth you.” When Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, he used “agapao” twice, and “phileo” once (John 21:15-17). This is the word Paul used in First Corinthians 16:22. “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha” (1 Cor 16:22). Jesus used it when He said, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten” (Rev 3:19).

It is not comely for the people of God to promote simplistic academic views of spiritual realities. The truth of the matter is that “love” is too large to be contained in a single Greek word.

Commentary

Love involves the attachment of the affection, or heart, to an object. It is accompanied by a fervent desire to please and benefit that object – to promote its welfare, comfort, and interests. It includes desire, an eagerness to serve, and a thorough delight in the company of the object of affection.

There is also a willingness and forwardness to forgive, which pushes away all obstacles to fellowship. There is determination, friendship, and a powerful attraction to the one who is loved. There is a selflessness in love that transcends definition. Consider how the Spirit speaks of love in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. The Authorized Version uses the word “charity,” which I prefer. It is used in that version twenty-eight times, and consistently refers to the kind of love that is received from God.

- Charity suffers long (13:4a). Some versions read “is patient.” NASB/NIV The idea is that love is forbearing, and able to endure things that are difficult to bear. This is the kind of attitude admonished in Ephesians 4:2: “With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.” **This is not what love should do, but what it does.**
- Charity is kind (13:4b). To be kind is to show oneself useful, or to act benevolently. This manner is urged upon the saints. “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you” (Eph 4:32). **This is not what love should do, but what it does.**
- Charity does not envy (13:4c). To be envious is to covet to possess what others have. It includes the idea of sinful jealousy, and to have feelings against someone. David spoke of being envious of the well being of the workers of iniquity (Psa 37:1). Stephen reminded his audience that Joseph's brothers sold him because they were “moved with envy” (Acts 7:9). **This is not what love should not do, but what it does not do.**
- Charity does not vaunt itself (13:4d). To vaunt one's self is to boast, or put one's self forward, before others. It is to display oneself and extol one's self excessively. God spoke of Israel vaunting themselves against Him – preferring themselves and their will to His (Judges 7:2). **This is not what love should not do, but what it does not do.**
- Charity is not puffed up (13:4e). To be puffed up is to be proud – blowing one's self up to be something. It is to be inflated, swelled up, and be lofty in both looks, words, and deeds. Paul admonished the Corinthians not to be “puffed up one against another” (1 Cor 4:6). He said that those who did not mourn when serious transgression had occurred failed to do so because they were “puffed up” (1 Cor 5:2). **This is not what love should not do, but what it does not do.**

- Charity does not behave itself in an unseemly manner (13:5a). To behave unseemly is to conduct one's self in an unbecoming and reproachful manner. It is to act inconsiderately, and disgracefully, being ill-mannered, rude, and defying social standards. It involves acting indecently. Because they were given up by God, the Gentile world degenerated into sodomy, "men with men working that which is unseemly" (Rom 1:27). **This is not what love should not do, but what it does not do.**
- Charity does not seek its own (13:5b). To seek one's own is to pursue purely self-interests, with no regard for others. Those who so conduct themselves live in a little world all by themselves. Peter spoke of those who walked "after their own lusts" (2 Pet 3:3). Paul wrote of those who "after their own lusts" accumulated teachers for themselves (2 Tim 4:3). **This is not what love should not do, but what it does not do.**
- Charity is not easily provoked (13:5c). To be "easily provoked" is to become angry with very little stimuli – to be made angry quickly, or fly off the handle. This is the opposite of Moses, who was "very meek, above all men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num 12:3). Solomon spoke of a person who was "soon angry," and stated that it provoked foolish actions (Prov 14:17). **This is not what love should not do, but what it does not do.**
- Charity thinks no evil (13:5d). To "think evil" includes the idea of keeping a record of wrongs, being unwilling to forgive. NASB It is to be "resentful." NRSV Love does not "impute evil," DARBY or take the worst possible view of a person or matter. **This is not what love should not do, but what it does not do.**
- Charity does not rejoice in iniquity (13:6a). To rejoice in iniquity is to find pleasure in things that oppose the Law of God. It is to be entertained by things that made it necessary for Jesus to die. Love cannot take delight in evil, or find pleasure in people and things that provoke the Lord of glory. It is said of Balaam that he "loved the wages of iniquity" (2 Pet 2:15). **This is not what love should not do, but what it does not do.**
- Charity rejoices in the truth (13:6b). Rejoicing in the truth is the result of receiving "the love of the truth" (2 Thess 2:10). Rejoicing in the truth involves an appetite for it. The Word, in such a case, is "esteemed more" than "necessary food" (Job 23:12). When the Word is found, or properly discerned, it proves to be "the joy and rejoicing" of one's heart (Jer 15:16). **This is not what love should do, but what it does.**
- Charity bears all things (13:7a). Other versions read, "has the power to undergo all things," BBE "is always ready to make allowances," NJB and "never gives up." NLT To "bear" something is to cover it with silence, enduring patiently. STRONG'S It carries the idea of covering a matter up with silence. It is what Peter referred to when he said, "charity shall cover a multitude of sins" (1 Pet 4:8). **This is not what love should do, but what it does.**
- Charity believes all things (13:7b). Other versions read, "always trusts," NIV "having faith in all things," BBE "is always ready to trust," NJB and "never loses faith." NLT This does not refer to believing everything God has said – although that is imperative. It rather refers to attitudes toward men, in particular, fellow believers. Love expects and is confident of the best things from the people of God. This attitude is expressed several places in Scripture. "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak"

(Heb 6:9). “I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things” (2 Cor 7:16). “I have confidence in you through the Lord” (Gal 5:10). “And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you” (2 Thess 3:4). **This is not what love should do, but what it does.**

- Charity hopes all things (13:7c). Other versions read, “always hopes,” NIV “is always ready to hope,” NJB and “is always hopeful.” NLT Because love delights in the blessing of others, it hopes for the best for them. It will hold on to the slightest shred of hope, trusting in the Lord to bring it to pass. John expressed this kind of hope when he wrote to Gaius, “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth” (3 John 1:2). **This is not what love should do, but what it does.**
- Charity endures all things (13:7d). Other versions read, “always perseveres,” NIV “is ready to endure whatever comes,” NJB and “endures through every circumstance.” NLT The idea is that love bears up under all manner of persecution, opposition, and trial. It does so without complaining or inflicting injury upon others. This is the kind of love Stephen expressed when he prayed, “lay not this sin to their charge” (Acts 7:60). It is what moved Paul to say of those who refused to stand with him, “I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge” (2 Tim 4:16). **This is not what love should do, but what it does.**
- Charity never fails (13:8a). Other versions read, “love never ends,” NRSV “love has no end,” BBE and “it shall not be done away.” DARBY Love is adapted to all circumstances in this world, and in the world to come as well. There is no line of demarcation beyond which love cannot go. It has no inherent weakness, and thus cannot deteriorate. It is more closely akin to God Himself, who is love, and therefore cannot pass away. The tender soul cannot take his faith into the world to come, nor his hope. Faith will give way to sight, and hope to fruition. But love will go on. It cannot come to an end, for “God is love,” and He is eternal. It never fails. **This is not what love should do, but what it does.**

HOW CAN THESE BE ACHIEVED?

There are sixteen characteristics of love. They are not goals that love can attain, but affirm what love IS. Is there a person of sound mind who feels these can be accomplished in the flesh, or by natural abilities?

The Spirit’s Ministry

These are too aggressive and too consistent to be accomplished through natural ability! That is why Paul spoke of “love in the Spirit” – not in the human spirit, but in the Holy Spirit. This kind of love is only possible when the love God has for us fills our hearts and permeates our being. This cannot happen through human discipline and regimentation. It can only happen through the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus it is written, “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us” (Rom 5:5). Other versions say this love has been “poured out in our hearts,” NKJV “poured out within our hearts,” NASB and “poured into our hearts.” NRSV

Our “hearts” are the most inmost part of our being, even as our bodies are the most external part. This is where “newness of life” is implanted (Rom 6:4). It is the place where God and His great salvation

are comprehended (Eph 3:16-18), and the eyes of the understanding reside (Eph 1:18). This is where we “lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim 6:12). It is where “fellowship” with God’s is experienced (1 Cor 1:9). It is where God has “sent forth the Spirit of His Son” (Gal 4:6).

The Holy Spirit is able to pour the love of God into our hearts, filling them with the refreshing and stabilizing influence of Divine affection. When that takes place – and only when it takes place – we are able to “love in the Spirit.” Until that time, all effort to be loving is vain, and is only pretense.

Mark it well, there is not a single aspect of God’s great salvation that can be accomplished independently of Him! Were such a thing possible, salvation could not be ascribed wholly to Him (Rev 7:10).

Fruit of the Spirit

Love is in every way included in “the fruit [not ‘fruits’] of the Spirit.” In a description of this marvelous fruit, or outworking of the Spirit, “love” is listed first: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love” (Gal 5:22). “Love in the Spirit” is the evidence of this holy fruitage, and is largely toward the brethren. It is true that we are to “love our enemies” (Matt 5:44). However, the mark of true discipleship is not the love of our enemies, but the love of one another (John 13:35). We do not know we have passed from death unto life because we love our enemies, but because we love the brethren (1 John 3:14). The love of the brethren is the preeminent man-to-man love.

Such marvelous things could not be said of a love that was wholly generated by human effort.

Grace Brings Love

The love of which we speak – “love in the Spirit” – is brought to us by the grace of God, as well as through the Spirit. Thus it is written, “And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 1:14). What the Spirit sheds abroad in our hearts comes wrapped in the grace of God. The love we have for the brethren is the overflow of the grace of God, as produced by the Holy Spirit of God.

This is a most wonderful commendation – to have the report of loving “in the Spirit” – loving the brethren of Jesus. This is an evidence of Divine working, and a prelude to glory. It is a source of great joy to the beholder, and confidence to the possessor.

Thus have we seen something of the manner of the Kingdom – the way the Lord works among His people. There is an environment in which the purpose of God is being fulfilled. It is one of faith and love, founded upon hope, and expressed by “love in the Spirit.” There is a love of the truth, an intense interest in the things of God, and a burning desire for the betterment of the saints of God. The people of God speak of the God and the things of God. They talk of His power, and speak of His saints. They work together for the Lord, and are precious to each other.

Where these characteristics are found, God the Father is present. The Lord Jesus is alive in the people. The Holy Spirit is also producing His precious fruit within them . Let us be diligent to thank the Lord for such workings, and to encourage their furtherance by both word and deed.

A PRAYER FOR THE SAINTS

Lesson #4

How does the Holy Spirit lead someone to pray for the people of God – for the churches? Here is an aspect of “praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 1:20) that is particularly significant. In some circles, “praying in the Holy Spirit” refers to strictly personal prayers. Others see it as praying in a language that is unknown to one who is praying.

There is no need for a lot of idle speculation in this area. The Spirit has provided us with prayers that reflect the mind of the Lord – and no prayer that does not reflect His mind can possibly be one that is “in the Holy Spirit.”

THE LORD’S PRAYER

I am particularly referring to the prayer of our Lord just prior to His betrayal in the garden. A cursory overview of that prayer will suffice to us a feel for the content of effective prayers. This prayer is the seventh chapter of John.

1. Jesus asked the Father to glorify Him so He could glorify the Father (17:1).
2. He acknowledged the purpose for which the Father gave Him power over all flesh (17:2).
3. He stated the meaning of “eternal life” (17:3).
4. He confessed He had glorified the Father on the earth and completed the work He was given to do (17:4).
5. He asked for the Father to glorify Him with the glory He had with the Father before the world was (17:5).
6. He confessed He had made the Father known to the men He had given Him out of the world (17:6a).
7. He declares His followers had kept His word, and knew that what Jesus gave them was from God (17:6b-7).
8. He affirms He had given the disciples the words the Father gave Him, and that they had believed He came out from God, and that God sent Him (17:8).
9. He states He is not praying for the world, but for those God had given to Him, for they belonged to God (17:9).
10. He confesses that all who were His were also God’s, and that all who belonged to God also belonged to Him, and that He was glorified in them (17:10).
11. He asks the Father to keep His disciples through His own name, that they might be one, even as the Father and the Son are one (17:11).
12. He confesses that none of His disciples had been lost, except Judas, that the Scripture might be fulfilled (17:12).

13. He expresses His desire for His joy to be fulfilled in His followers (17:14).
14. He asks the Father to keep His followers while they were in the world (17:15).
15. He asks the Father to sanctify His disciples through the truth, and defined what He meant by “truth” (17:17-19).
16. He prays for those who will believe on Him through His disciples words, that they all may be one as He and the Father are one.
17. He asks that He, the Father, and His followers may all be made one, that the world may believe God has sent Him (17:21-23).
18. He states that He wants His followers to be with Him, and behold the glory God had given to Him (17:24).
19. He summarizes the relationship of the world, Himself, and His disciples to the Father (17:25-26).

To give you a little flavor as to the emphasis of this prayer, there are 49 references to the Father, 52 to the Son, and 41 to Christ’s disciples.

APOSTOLIC PRAYERS

The thrust of Apostolic prayers is also very apparent. A brief review of some of these prayers will serve to prepare us for this lesson. In all of these examples there is a certain direction in the prayers. This world is consistently made subordinate to the world to come. There is also an obvious concern for the maturity, stability, and productivity of the people of God. This will be very apparent.

- **WISDOM AND REVELATION.** “That the Father would give the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Himself” (Eph 1:17). If God is not known, no other knowledge is of any consequence.
- **KNOWING WHY GOD CALLS.** “That the eyes of the understanding might be opened to perceive the hope of God’s calling – the intent for which we have been called” (Eph 1:18a). If we do not know why God has called us, our lives will be off-center.

- **KNOWING THAT WE ARE GOD'S INHERITANCE.** "That the eyes of the understanding might be opened to see the riches of God's glorious inheritance in the saints" (Eph 1:18b). The knowledge of what God intends for His people to be to Himself, is critical to living acceptably.
- **COMPREHENDING THE POWER TOWARD US.** "That the eyes of the understanding might be opened to see the exceeding greatness of the power that is toward those who believe" (Eph 1:19). If we do not know the nature and greatness of the Divine power that is directed toward us, our ambitions will be too small.
- **STRENGTH IN THE INNER MAN.** "That God would grant believers to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph 3:16). Christ will not remain in a weak and frail inner man.
- **CHRIST DWELLING WITHIN.** "That Christ would dwell in their hearts by faith" (Eph 3:17). Christ will dwell within us in direct proportion to our faith. A person with "little faith," at the best, will have only a little of Jesus.
- **COMPREHENDING THE MAGNITUDE OF SALVATION.** That, being rooted and grounded in love, the saints might be able to comprehend "what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph 3:18-19). Rooting and grounding speaks of spiritual stability and dependability. This brings the ability to perceive and appreciate the remarkable scope of salvation. A deficiency in this area is far more serious than ordinarily perceived.
- **ABOUNDING LOVE.** That the love of the saints might "abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phil 1:9). An abounding love toward one another requires perception, understanding, and sound judgment.
- **APPROVING THINGS THAT ARE EXCELLENT.** That saints might "approve things that are excellent" (Phil 1:10a). The postulate is that God's people are regularly exposed to spiritually "excellent things." However, it is not the exposure that brings the blessing. Rather it is the hearty approval and embrace of them.
- **READY FOR THE DAY OF CHRIST.** That saints might "be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ" (Phil 1:10b). Sincerity is purity, and being "without offence" is a condition before God Himself. These are needful qualities.
- **FILLED WITH THE FRUITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.** That they might be "filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:11). Having some "fruits of righteousness" is one thing. Being "filled" with them is quite another matter. This equates with "much fruit," wherein God is glorified and discipleship is confirmed (John 15:8).
- **FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WILL.** That believers might be "filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col 1:9). There is such a thing

as a keen and thorough awareness of Divine purpose and intentions. This is not a mere intellectual matter, but results in practical wisdom and an understanding of the things of the Spirit.

- **WALKING WORTHY OF THE LORD.** That saints would “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing” (Col 1:10a). There is a spiritual condition in which the individual is especially pleasing to God – like a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22).
- **FRUITFUL IN EVERY GOOD WORK.** That they would be “fruitful in every good work” (Col 1:10b). Godly works are not an end of themselves. It is the harvest, or result, of them that is especially honoring to God. To be “fruitful in every good work” is to enjoy the increase that God alone can give.
- **INCREASING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.** That those in Christ would be found “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10c). This involves a personal acquaintance and familiarity with the Lord Himself – being knowledgeable of His ways, manners, and intentions.
- **STRENGTHENED WITH ALL MIGHT.** That they would be “strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power” (Col 1:11a). It should be obvious that such strengthening has no limitations. It provides for thorough equipping, protection, and enablement. It brings sufficiency and adequacy to us.
- **PATIENCE AND LONGSUFFERING WITH JOYFULNESS.** That Divine power in them would result in “all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Col 1:11b). Being able to continue making progress to glory and endure all things is challenging enough. To do so “with all joyfulness” emphasizes the need for Divine involvements.
- **PERFECT AND COMPLETE IN GOD’S WILL.** That believers would “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Col 4:12). Perfection and completeness speak of spiritual maturity – growing up into Christ “in all things” (Eph 4:15). Attaining to that condition “in all the will of God” is a most arresting consideration.
- **COMPLETE SANCTIFICATION.** That God would “sanctify you wholly . . . your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23). Salvation provides for the thorough dedication of every part of our being. Only God is capable of fulfilling this provision.
- **WORTHY OF GOD’S CALLING.** That saints would be counted “worthy of this calling” (2 Thess 1:11). The calling of God not only involves extrication from the dilemma of sin, but participation in the purpose of God. There is a certain worthiness that accompanies such involvement, and only God can bring it to pass.
- **FULFILLING GOD’S PLEASURE AND THE WORK OF FAITH.** That God would “fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power” in the saints (2 Thess 1:11). This

request stretches the mind and the heart. It involves the fulfillment of every Divine intention for the individual, and the powerful effects of faith.

- **THE NAME OF JESUS GLORIFIED.** That the “name of our Lord Jesus Christ” would be “glorified” in believers (2 Thess 1:12). Christ receives glory in believers when they complement His purposes, and do not distract from them.
- **THE COMMUNICATION OF YOUR FAITH.** That God would cause the “communication of thy faith” to “become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus” (Philemon 1:6). The communication of one’s faith occurs within the framework of doing the will of the Lord. The effects of faith are thus communicated to others, accruing to the glory of God and the benefit of saints.
- **GOD WORKING IN YOU.** That God would make the saints “perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever” (Heb 13:21). The thoroughness of this work is refreshing to consider. Here is God working freely in individuals and congregations in such a manner as to fulfill His purposes and bring great satisfaction and pleasure to Himself.

AREAS OF DIVINE FOCUS

It should be apparent that these are all areas of Divine focus. While we are encouraged to make our requests known to God, there are certain stipulations concerning their fulfillment. They must be asked in faith, without wavering (James 1:6-7). They must be according to the will of God (1 John 5:14-15).

God responds to our requests by granting a peace that will keep our “hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6-7). However, there are no such limitations placed on matters included in Apostolic prayers. They are more directly related to the purpose of God, and thus are the more guaranteed of fulfillment. These have more to do with God’s “eternal purpose,” and thus must be given greater emphasis in our prayers.

WHERE GRACE IS ESPECIALLY EFFECTIVE

What child of God has not experienced disappointment in the matter of prayer. Something was fervently sought, yet it appeared as though, at the best, the answer was much delayed. Of course, Jesus affirmed that there are times when the Lord will “bear long” with us, delaying an answer to our prayers (Lk 18:7).

However, in the matters covered by Apostolic prayers, there is no hint of delays. They are areas in which the grace of God is especially effective, and thus it is to be expected that prayers concerning them will be answered. God’s grace is tailored, so to speak, for such things.

AREAS OF FRUITFULNESS

These are all areas in which fruit can be realized. They deal with things for which Divine power is intentionally adapted. Those who bear fruit in these areas will be more apt to be effective in all that they do.

AREAS OF PROPER PREPARATION

The areas covered by these prayers also tend to prepare for the world to come. Growth in these matters will enable us to stand confidently before the Lord in the day of judgment. They will produce a hearty anticipation of dwelling forever in the house of the Lord. It is sad, yet true, that many prayers that are offered to God, were they answered, would not yield such results.

RARELY ARE APOSTOLIC PRAYERS CORRECTIVE

If you will study the prayers of the Apostles for the churches, you will find they are rarely, if ever, corrective. I have provided twenty-four examples of such prayers. The nature of them is very apparent. Generally speaking, the Apostles would deal with needed correction through doctrine, not through prayer.

GENERALLY PROMPTED BY GOOD REPORTS

A good report concerning those who were in Christ Jesus often prompted Apostolic prayers (Eph 1:15-16; Col 1:9; Phile 1:5).

REVEAL THE OBJECTIVE OF PROPER PREACHING

The focus of inspired prayer should also be the focus of sound preaching. There is a sense in which prayer and preaching should be harmonious. One can only imagine what marvelous effects would come from preaching that was in full accord with the subjects of Apostolic prayers.

- A spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God.
- Knowing why God has called us.
- Knowing we are God's inheritance.
- Comprehending the Divine power that is toward us.
- Strength in the inner man.
- Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith.
- Comprehending the magnitude of salvation.
- Abounding in love.
- Approving things that are excellent.
- Being ready for the day of Christ.
- Being filled with the fruits of righteousness.

- Being filled with the knowledge of God’s will.
- Walking worthy of the Lord.
- Being fruitful in every good work.
- Increasing in the knowledge of God.
- Strengthened with all might.
- All patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.
- Perfect and complete in all the will of God.
- Being sanctified wholly, spirit, soul, and body.
- Being worthy of God’s calling.
- God fulfilling all the good pleasure of His will in us, and the work of faith with power.
- The name of Jesus being glorified through us.
- The communication of our faith being effective.
- God working us to do His will.

It should be apparent that such noble objectives are not perceived in the common preaching of our day. I suggest that there can be no truly good or sound preaching independently of these objectives. Whatever good may appear to result from other doctrinal emphases is only imagined. It is not valid in the eyes of God, and will bring Him no glory.

A person cannot be out of synch with the objectives of the Lord and have a proper and profitable ministry. Appropriate and effective ministries are the result of laboring together with God (1 Cor 3:9), and being yoked to the Lord Jesus (Matt 11:29-30). Where there is no fellowship with Jesus in intention, there can be no fellowship with Him in labor. Godly works require God’s presence. This should be apparent to us, and will be confirmed in the prayer before us.

“ 1:9a For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you . . . ”

Here is a prayer that rises out of thanksgiving, like a fragrant odor to the Lord. It is stimulated by understanding, and driven along by a fervent love for the people of God. The nature of the kingdom of God will be revealed in this prayer. Regarding those who have been reconciled to God, the focus is not on mere doing, but upon participation with God Himself. The purpose of godly intentions is not to have God identify with what men are doing, but to have men identified with what God is doing. This is fundamental to all valid working.

FOR THIS CAUSE

“For this cause . . .” The “cause” to which Paul refers is the report of the Colossians “love in the Spirit.” Their “love in the Spirit” was not an end of itself, but was the means to an end. It qualified them, so to speak, for real involvement with God and His purpose.

Divine Objectives

It must always be remembered that the blessing of man is not the ultimate purpose of God. Listening to the various religious emphases of men, however, one would think this was the case. Various religious thrusts ranging from soul winning and congregational expansion to acceptable interpersonal relationships and trouble-free living are regularly bartered in the religious marketplace. Every honest soul is suspicious that such things are not true, for they do not match well with human experience. When a person begins to walk in the Spirit and live by faith, it is not unusual to find one’s foes being “those of his own house” (Matt 10:36). It may even be possible for such a soul to experience “often infirmities” like Timothy (1 Tim 5:23), or even be a “beggar full of sores,” like Lazarus (Lk 16:20).

In instances like those just mentioned, the person who has embraced a subjective, or self-centered, religion, is prone to think the Lord has abandoned them, or that they are surely wretched above all people. Such poor souls are the victims of a distorted theology. They are candidates for prayers such as the one in our text. Thanksgiving is to made for all who are living by faith and possess “love in the Spirit,” regardless of the circumstances in which they find themselves.

Note carefully, Paul is not being motivated to pray for the Colossians because of their adverse circumstances, but because of their “love in the Spirit.” That is the condition that prompted this particular prayer.

However, let there be no doubt concerning the propriety and necessity of praying for those who are experiencing adversity! We are, for example, to “remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body” (Heb 13:3). When our brethren are subjected to the abuse of the ungodly, we are to pray God will deliver them “from unreasonable and wicked men” (2 Thess 3:2).

A Higher Level

This prayer is at a higher level, calling for the personal perfection of the saints in order that they might see more of, and participate more with, the God who bought them through Jesus’ blood.

SINCE THE DAY WE HEARD IT

“: . . . we also, since the day we heard it . . .” The condition and progress of the Colossian brethren was so significant that it had induced a godly response in Paul and Timothy from the very first : “since the day we heard it.”

The awareness of their condition was not the result of, what I will call, “church reasoning.” That is, because they had “accepted the Lord,” their faith and love of the brethren was assumed. The faithful report of Epaphras confirmed fruit, not mere human decision. It revealed the working of God, not only in turning to God, but going on to perfection.

Focused Prayer

It was so apparent these people had been singularly blessed, that Paul immediately sought the Lord concerning them. The focus of his prayers was not their correction, but their continuance and advance in the Spirit – i.e., their “perfection” (Heb 6:1). There is a vast repository of Divine goodness that becomes available to all who are in Christ Jesus. All saints have access to this rich treasury, but all are not as aware of it as they could be. Between the child of God and the wealth grace brings there are battles, enemies, trials, and all manner of distractions. Our “adversary the devil” stalks about “as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour,” and no saint is exempt from his attacks. That condition requires spiritual maturity, and growth in “grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18).

Institutionalized Christianity has hidden these things to casual disciples (if, indeed, there be such a thing). That is why this prayer is not heard in most churches, or included in most of the religious writing that is popular these days. This is all the more reason why we must give heed to this prayer. It will reveal to us the real nature of spiritual life, together with its involvements.

DO NOT CEASE TO PRAY

“ . . . do not cease to pray for you.”

The continuance of Paul’s prayers was not owing to a declining condition among the Colossian brethren. Rather, it was because their singular devotion to Christ and unfeigned love of the brethren had been duly noted by “the prince of the power of the air.” They were in the midst of a battle of gargantuan proportions. A few words on this matter will confirm this was the case.

Satan’s activity

Satan is solidly aligned against all who are in Christ Jesus. He is depicted as a fierce and determined adversary. Having been expelled from the courts of heaven, he has come down to earth “having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (Rev 12:12). The anger of the devil is focused on the people of God. With cunning wit and intention he “makes war” with those “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 12:17). Those are the only people who pose any threat to his burgeoning empire. Satan’s aggression requires prayer for the saints.

Although the ultimate outcome of this war has been determined, those who will actually

participate in the victory are being determined in the heat of the battle. Their victory is not automatic. It requires both their own activity, and the help of the other members of the body. This is the manner of spiritual life. It is how God has arranged the “good fight of faith” (1 Tim 6:12), in order that He might receive proper glory and honor.

Principalities and powers

The life of faith also involves grappling with a high order of spiritual foes. Whether the saints are aware of it or not, they are striving against forces that are vastly superior to the most advanced form of human intellect and power. They are described in the sixth chapter of Ephesians. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:12).

The only way to survive this conflict is to put on “the whole armor of God.” Protection of every part of our being, from head to foot, is necessary. We must be versatile in handling both sword and shield, else we will be overcome (Eph 6:10-18). This circumstance requires our prayers for one another. In fact, that is part of our armor: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Eph 6:18).

All that is in the world

We are being saved in the very midst of the enemy’s camp – in a hostile realm populated with all manner of adversaries. It is true that we also occupy the “heavenly places,” where we have been placed by God Himself (Eph 2:6). That holy domain, however, is for our spirits. Our bodies are not there. They are in the world. We not only live with a consciousness of, and certain involvements with, the heavenly places, but we do so in the world as well. This constitutes a certain liability.

It is written, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:15-17).

The Spirit tells us of the present condition of things, their liabilities, and the sure outcome of it all. If the world did not have a strong drawing power, we would not be told to refrain from loving it. It pulls at our souls with desires for fleshly gratification (lust of the flesh), covetousness (lust of the eye), and the vanity of worldly recognition (pride of life). For this reason, prayer must be made the saints of God, and it must be made fervently.

“ 9b and to desire . . . ” Other versions read, “and to ask,” NKJV/NASB “asking God,” NIV “asking,” NRSV “make request for you,” ASV and “to beg.” DOUAY

WHAT IS DESIRE

The word “desire” comes from the Greek word **aivtou,menoi** (ai-tou-men-oi), which means “to ask, beg, call for, crave, desire, and require.” STRONG’S It is an especially strong word, carrying the idea of “demanding.” This precise form of the word is used three other places.

- When the Jews demanded that Jesus be crucified (Luke 23:23). In this text the word is translated “requiring.”
- When the Jews sought to have Paul made accessible to them so that they might kill him (Acts 25:3 and Acts 25:15). In these cases, the word is translated “desired” and “desiring.”

Other forms of the word include giving “to him that asketh of thee” (Matt 5:42), and being ready “always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15). The word is also used when describing the narrative between the mother of James and John and the Lord Jesus. It is said that she worshiped Jesus “desiring a certain thing of Him” (Matt 20:20).

As you can see, the word “desire” does not speak of a mere wish – something Paul would like to see happen among the Colossians. This speaks of strong desire that is articulated to God Himself. It is something that is requested with zeal, and fervently expected from the Lord of glory.

What is more, this is not something that is prayed with uncertainty about how it will be honored by God – like making your request known to Him (Phil 4:6). This petition is based upon an awareness of both the circumstances and the purposes of God. It is driven by faith, fueled by hope, and sanctified by an unfeigned love for the brethren.

I fear that many professing believers have never come to a point where such desires can be expressed through them. They live too close to the world, and are blissfully unaware of the real circumstances that face the saints of the most high God. This shrinks both the size and content of their prayers, and makes their answer highly unlikely. A nonchalant professing Christian simply cannot pray like this.

The prayer that follows is the “desire” Paul mentions. It is how he phrased his request to God,

and is therefore very instructive. The man who prayed this had “obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful”, or who had been “made trustworthy” NKJV by God’s mercy (1 Cor 7:25).

THE ROLE OF DESIRE

This kind of desire – an expectation expressed to the Lord – is a key ingredient of spiritual life. It includes both personal desires and sanctified wants for our brothers and sisters. This is a strong and compelling quest for God’s blessing – blessing that is integral to His great salvation. John said it this way: “And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him” (1 John 5:15).

From the personal perspective, David spoke of his focused desire in this way. “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple” (Psa 27:4). Let me once again emphasize that this is not a silent desire, kept within the heart. Rather, it is a desire that erupts from the mouth in supplication and prayer.

THE DESIRES OF YOUR HEART

Through the Psalmist the Lord said, “Delight thyself also in the LORD; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (Psa 37:4). These desires are not limited to personal wants. They also include desires for the people of God – like the ones expressed in this prayer.

The Magnitude of This Prayer

A brief word concerning the magnitude of this prayer is in order. This is a not a “help-them-to-be-good-neighbors” prayer. It rises higher than mere earthly relationships. In fact, God-honoring interpersonal relationships can only take place when this kind of prayer is answered. Notice the language: “ filled with . . . all wisdom and spiritual understanding . . . walk worthy of the Lord . . . all pleasing . . . fruitful in every good work . . . strengthened with all might . . . His glorious power . . . all patience and longsuffering.”

In this prayer, we are standing on holy ground, and aspiring to lofty heights. Such a prayer cannot even be uttered in the flesh. It is too majestic to be contained in a carnal mind. This is the expression of the “new man,” not the “old man.” It comes from a heart that has been ravished with the love of God. This is the prayer of a spiritually informed and understanding child of God. That makes it of the highest relevance.

“ 9c . . . that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will . . . ”

YE

Here is a prayer for the corporate assembly – male and female, bond and free, old and young, etc. This is not a prayer for the leaders alone. It is not a particular prayer for the elders and deacons, or those serving in some kind of official capacity. It is for the entire church – all of the saints in Colossae.

The prayer that follows is the standard for all who are in Christ Jesus. There are some “desires” that are appropriate for certain groups believers. For example:

- Elders are to “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Pet 5:2-3).
- “Young men” are to be “an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12), and “be sober minded. In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you” (Titus 2:6-8).
- Young married women are to “be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (Titus 2:4-5).
- A widow is “at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord” (1 Cor 7:39)
- Servants , or slaves are to “be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men” (Eph 6:5-7).
- Masters are to “give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven” (Col 4:1).

These various roles, however, are not at the heart of the kingdom of God. They all represent temporary relationships that are confined to this world. For that reason, they cannot become the core of sound doctrine. Rather, they are relations and duties that properly adorn the doctrine.

Further, no special Apostles or Prophets were assigned to these groups. There are not special spiritual gifts that are being administered for these groups. The trend of specialists for these and other divisions of humanity are all of man's making.

There is no question that these lower relationships are to be addressed by the church as required. However, after all is said and done, these were not the subject of Paul's prayer. They were not at the heart of the Gospel he preached. Having said that, you may be sure that the prayer before us indirectly addresses every lower relationship of believers.

Those who do not seek the matters addressed in this prayer will be forced to resort to methods and humanly devised techniques to address interpersonal relationships. It is most unfortunate that this is the general approach of the contemporary church. The results of such efforts speak for themselves. The larger congregations of our land have more assistant staff members than Jesus had Apostles!

Here is a word that is addressed to everyone in the congregation: men and women, old and young, teachers and learners, bond and free. It is for the troubled and distressed, and the happy and knowledgeably blessed. All are included, and none are excluded.

Why Make this Point?

There is a reason for making this point. We are living in a religious culture that has established a new set of objectives for the church. They call for a professional clergy and specially trained religious experts, neither of which are identified in the Word of God. The work of these professionals is close to the world, and can hardly be distinguished from crafts that are driven by the wisdom of this world. This new religious culture has contributed to even further divisions in the body of Christ.

This text recognizes no walls between believers. Paul will pray for things that all believers need. Those who are proficient in these areas will not be deficient in any needful facet of life.

BEING FILLED

“ . . . that ye might be filled . . . ” The word “filled” means to make replete, to cram full, and level up: to fill to the full and cause to abound. **STRONG'S**

First, this indicates that we have remarkable capacities – capacities that need to be filled from heaven. This particularly has to do with the capabilities created when we are born again. Apart from Christ, men become “ filled with all unrighteousness” (Rom 1:29a). The mouth can become “ full of cursing” (Rom 3:14), and the heart “ full of envy, debate, deceit, and malignity” (Rom 1:29b). The

unsanctified tongue is “ full of poison” (James 3:8). Peter spoke of some religious leaders whose eyes were “ full of adultery” (2 Pet 2:14). The extent of man’s capacity for evil cannot be measured. It is like a bottomless pit.

However, in Christ, men are made new, and given the capacity to be filled with good things from God. That is why there are frequent references to large measures of Divine benefits. In Christ, we are “enlarged” (Psa 119:32; 2 Cor 6:11,13) – enabled to receive much from God. This is part of becoming “a new creature” (2 Cor 5:17).

God is glorified when the capacities He has given are filled to the brim with His blessings. This is the aim of all valid ministries – to bring the people to the point where they are “filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19). I have long lamented the minuscule spiritual appetite that is promoted by Western Christianity. Not only is it wrong, it contradicts the whole nature and intent of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. In my opinion, it is highly unlikely that God will even work in such an environment. I understand this cannot be received by many people. However, the fruits that stunted spiritual appetites have yielded appear to justify such a conclusion.

Here are some of the things with which believers can be filled .

- Goodness (Rom 15:14a).
- Knowledge (Rom 15:14b).
- Comfort (2 Cor 7:4).
- All the fulness of God (Eph 3:19).
- With the Spirit (Eph 5:19).
- The fruits of righteousness (Phil 1:11).
- The knowledge God’s will (Col 1:9).
- Joy (2 Tim 1:4).

There is also such a thing as the “ full assurance of understanding” (Col 2:2), “the full assurance of hope” (Heb 6:11), and “the full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22). Jesus spoke of being “ full of light” (Matt 6:22).

There is a remarkable satisfaction in our day with elementary introductions to spiritual things. One could hardly associate the average church fare with any form of filling. At best, people are growing accustomed to a smattering of Divine provision.

We must rid ourselves of any tendency to associate the things of God with sparse measures. There should be a growing discontent with a “little” from God, and a growing appetite for an abundance. In my judgment, spiritual growth cannot be realized without this “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matt 5:6). Only those with a “hunger and thirst for righteousness” will be “filled.”

THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WILL

“ . . . with the knowledge of His will . . . ” Most versions read the same: “the knowledge of His will.” The few exceptions are, “the knowledge of His purpose,” BBE “a complete understanding of what He wants to do in your lives,” NLT and “learn more and more how God works.” THE MESSAGE

What does Paul mean by the words “His will?” Is this will centered in the individual believers – i.e., “the will of God for your life?” Is he speaking of a special and tailored plan the Lord has for your life – including your marriage, family, vocation, place of employment, and place of residence? Is this will subjective – having to do primarily with you? Or is it objective, having to do primarily with God Himself? Are you personally the aim of God’s will? Or is the intention for you to become involved in the Divine will that is larger than yourself?

The Knowledge

This is not intellectual knowledge – like knowing mathematical tables, or the facts of history. Technically, this is “precise or correct knowledge.” STRONG’S This is speaking of discernment, perception, and understanding. It is a knowledge that brings a fellowship with God. That fellowship is realized in the apprehension of God’s will. This is a perception that enables the proper USE of what is known as well as the facts involved in it. This is a knowledge that is precise and accurate. It makes no allowance for opinion or private views.

There is a phenomenal amount of inaccurate knowledge in the professed church. There are major denominational divisions over HOW people understand the Word of God. Subjects like the church, the coming of Christ, the death of Christ, and the new birth have actually become the causes of division. Someone does not have the knowledge mentioned in this text. They have an imperfect knowledge. They do not have discernment or perception. However acceptable this may seem, it is altogether at variance with the very nature of the kingdom of God. The blessings of the Lord cannot be realized through imperfect knowledge!

At some point, those with a clear view of the things of God must pray for the saints to be “filled” with the kind of “knowledge” that glorifies God and transforms saints. This is involved in the renewing of the mind (Rom 12:2).

This is the kind of knowledge that includes perception, discernment, and understanding. It enables the one possessing it to handle the truth of God “aright” (2 Tim 2:15), and realize its benefits – i.e., “ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

His Will

Here is the matter to be known: “His will.” God’s “will” is His purpose, determination, choice, and good pleasure. It is anchored in eternity, and is therefore called God’s “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11).

This is a “will” that centers in redemption, as wrought out by the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me” (John 4:34). Again He affirmed, “For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me” (John 6:38). Once more Jesus said, “I can of Mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and My judgment is just; because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me” (John 5:30).

Paul spoke of this will in the following way.

- “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will ” (Eph 1:5).
- Again, showing the scope of this magnificent will, Paul wrote: “Having made known unto us the mystery of His will , according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself : that 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; even in Him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will ” (Eph 1:9-11).
- “Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father : to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Gal 1:4-5).

This is “the will of God” concerning which Paul is praying. It includes what God is doing in the individual saints – but that is not its focus . The will of God is transcendent to men, even though they realize their ultimate benefit within that will. “His will” has primarily to do with what God is doing through Christ Jesus, who is the One who came to “DO” His will (Heb 10:9). It involves humanity, but is much larger than that. It touches upon every individual believer, but extends far beyond them.

God did not call us to participate in a salvation that centers in ourselves, our needs, our

pleasures, and our welfare. In Christ we become beneficiaries, but we are not at the heart of things.

There is a core “will of the Lord” that must be understood. It moves one away from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. This is precisely why Jesus said, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mat 6:33). He did NOT say, “Seek ye first your personal well being, the resolution of your difficulties, and security and happiness in this world!” Yet, much professed Christian activity actually holds these matters out as being preeminent.

The “knowledge” of which Paul speaks is the key to all other understanding. It deals with a lofty purpose that brings glory to God from among angelic hosts as well as humanity. Its most precise expression is found in Christ Jesus, and its most thorough declaration is found in the Gospel of Christ. This “will” has more to do with eternity than time, and the world to come than “this present evil world.” This “will” was settled before the world began, and will continue after the heavens and earth that now are have passed away. This is fundamentally God’s own will, not the will of man.

It is imperative that men be freed from all self-centeredness. Jesus died “for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). Any other kind of life is simply not acceptable.

“ 1:9d . . . in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” Other versions read “ through all spiritual wisdom and understanding,” NIV and “ with all wisdom and experience of the Spirit.” BBE

IN

“ . . . in . . . ” The word “in” speaks of a “fixed position,” or the area in which something is realized. For example, “redemption” is said to be “IN Christ” (Rom 3:24). That is, it cannot be realized anywhere else. “In Christ” is the fixed, or determined, position where redemption can be experienced.

The Spirit will now establish a kingdom technicality. It is critical that we grasp what He is saying. He will lift the “knowledge” of reference out of the academic realm. It will be placed in the context of fellowship with God and Christ – a fellowship into which salvation calls us (1 Cor 1:9; 1 John 1:3).

The spiritual qualities that follow are like containers in which “the knowledge of His will” is carried and made useful. That is, the genuine possession of “the knowledge of His will” is made known, or confirmed, in “all wisdom and spiritual understanding.”

This knowledge cannot be possessed or maintained independently of actual involvement in the will of the Lord. No one can possess, or become an able user of, the knowledge of God’s will whose heart is not in the matter. In Christ, there is no such thing as operating, or living by, by rote.

ALL WISDOM

“ . . . all wisdom . . . ” Notice the use of the superlative “ALL.” Our text is not speaking of some wisdom, a sampling of wisdom, or introductory wisdom.

The word “all” means of every kind, all manner of, whole, and thorough. STRONG’S It deals more with the scope of wisdom than its individual components. Paul is not praying that the Colossians will become omniscient, but that they will be blessed with the vast panorama of wisdom.

“Wisdom” has to do with knowing how to navigate in a certain realm, and handle the things of that realm . For example, a wise wood craftsman knows the advantages of certain kinds of wood, how to produce articles from it, and how to use tools that have been made for woodworking. The kind of “wisdom” intended in this text relates immediately to eternal things.

Different Spheres of Wisdom

There are different spheres of wisdom. Each of them depends upon a certain body of knowledge. The following represent areas that cannot yield a single Kingdom benefit. They are all impotent in things pertaining to life and godliness, and have no role whatsoever in the wisdom declared in this text.

- “Wisdom of words” (1 Cor 1:17). This has to do with cleverness of speech, whereby men are manipulated by clever, but powerless, words.
- “Wisdom of the wise” (1 Cor 1:19). These are those who are “wise” by the world’s standards. They are the “wise” the world recognizes, and on whom it depends.
- “Wisdom of this world” (1 Cor 1:20). This “wisdom” is confined to the temporal order. It is based upon the supposition that this world is primary, and that the only realities are those attested to by the senses.
- “Wisdom of men” (1 Cor 2:5). This is wisdom that originates with man, and accrues to the glory of

man.

- “Wisdom” that is “earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3:15). This is a wisdom that is actually perpetrated by the evil one, and promotes his own diabolical agenda.

None of the above use, or depend upon, the Word of God. None are related to the will or purpose of God. The life of God is not found in any of them, and they will all perish when the earth passes away. The base of knowledge that is employed in such wisdom is not eternal, and is frequently in obvious opposition to the wisdom of God.

What is more, these forms of wisdom cannot mix or blend with the “wisdom that is from above” (James 3:17). Having said that, a considerable amount of effort is being expended within the professed Christian community to merge these areas of wisdom with the wisdom of our text. All such efforts are vain, and actually militate against the purpose of God.

The Wisdom of Our Text

The wisdom of our text is related to holy prudence and godly discretion. Elsewhere this is called “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (Eph 1:17). It involves knowing how to bring the truth of God to bear upon living – living that is directed toward the Lord.

A Word from a Departed Brother

I want to share a word from a departed brother that touches on this matter. This was written during the late 1800's.

Our educational system is radically defective at this point. As a rule, our colleges, under the auspices of the different religious denominations, are minus the school of the Holy Ghost. They educate the mind, but not the heart, sending out semi-infidels to occupy the pulpits. We have a few holiness colleges, and need a thousand more. These schools, like holiness revivals, recognize the Bible as the only authority, and the great Textbook to which all others are subordinated. We cannot depend on the dualistic system of theology to educate our young people, if we do not want them to graduate like Samson, shorn of his locks, to go out and grind in the mills of Dagon all of their lives. We must have teachers filled with the Holy Ghost. The holiness movement must take our schools into hand, if we would supply the world with able ministers of the New Testament. Instead of spending four years studying heathen authors as I did, and many others are now doing, we should make out our Latin course in the Latin Bible, and our Greek course in the Greek Bible, and likewise with the Hebrew. It is a shame on the escutcheon of Christianity to educate our young people in the heathen classics. I would rather than a million of dollars today I had spent my four years in the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew Bible, instead of the pagan authors. It is high time we would throw off this semi-paganism which we carried out of the Dark Ages. If we are going to save the world, we must have Spirit-filled teachers as well as preachers. We must wake to the fact that the Bible is the only Book, and let all others be merely subsidiary. The secret of the awful apostasy now so fearfully prevailing in the Churches is, that the pulpits are filled with intellectual giants and spiritual babies (in the same person). **W.B. GODBEY on Colossians 1:9**

“All Wisdom”

“All wisdom” involves knowing how to “walk and to please God” (1 Thess 4:1). It is founded upon the Word of God, and operates within the framework of the revealed will of God. It relates immediately with eternal things – things that will remain after everything that “can be shaken” has been shaken out of existence (Heb 12:27). This is a wisdom that has more to do with man’s “spirit” than his “soul” or his “body” (1 Thess 5:23). It is a wisdom that enables those possessing it to bring all things into subordination to the Lord Jesus Christ.

This wisdom makes sin unreasonable and righteousness reasonable. It moves one to prefer eternal things to temporal things. The person possessing such wisdom not only knows the truth, but is able to use it like a wise spiritual craftsman. It sensitizes the ear to hear Him who is speaking from heaven (Heb 12:25, and the heart to the inner witness of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:16).

ALL SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

The word “spiritual” means “pertaining to the spirit.” BARCLAY-NEWMAN The word applies to both the wisdom and understanding mentioned in this text. It is the opposite of “worldly” or “carnal.” More particularly “spiritual” refers to things relating to, and coming from, the Holy Spirit. These are realities that exhibit Divine qualities, and bear the mark of Divine character. THAYER

“Spiritual understanding,” therefore, is understanding that is acquired through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. John referred to this kind of understanding when he wrote, “But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as It hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him” (1 John 2:27).

The purpose of such an understanding is not to produce dignity among men, but to enable one to “abide” in Christ. To be “filled” with such an understanding results in a close and productive affinity with the Son of God.

There is a certain intelligence related to this understanding. It is a higher form of intelligence – a perception of, and acquaintance with, the things of God that erupts in godly usefulness. This is what produces spiritual maturity: “but in understanding, be men” (1 Cor 14:20). It is when the understanding is “enlightened,” and the things of God are more clearly seen or discerned (Eph 1:18). Elsewhere, Paul spoke of “ understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:17), and “the full assurance of understanding ” (Col 2:2).

Where there is “spiritual understanding,” there is maturity and stability. The Lord Himself is known, and there is an acquaintance with both His purpose and His ways. The Word of God is more fully comprehended, and a delight is found in Him.

If these two qualities – “wisdom and spiritual understanding” – were possessed by all professing believers, religious counselors would be put out of business. Most of them, together with sundry specialized ministries, thrive on the spiritual ignorance and juvenility of church people. The answer to this prayer brings the resolution to many difficulties.

“ 10a That ye might walk worthy of the Lord . . . ” Other versions read, “that you MAY walk worthy of the Lord,” NKJV “that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord,” NASB and “that you may live a life worthy of the Lord.” NIV

There is a reason why Paul prayed the Colossians would be “filled with all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” The filling itself was not the point, but what would result from it. There was a holy objective that was targeted, and the Divinely appointed means to its realization was being “filled with all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” What follows cannot be achieved without the filling. Conversely, it cannot fail of fulfillment if the filling is present.

THAT THEY MIGHT

“That ye might . . . ” Paul prayed the Colossians – all of them – would be “filled with all wisdom and spiritual understanding” in order THAT THEY MIGHT . . . Other versions read “SO THAT you may,” NASB “we pray this in order that you may,” NIV and “and so be able.” NJB Mark it well, the intended benefit cannot be realized without the appointed means! You cannot have kingdom effects without kingdom causes!

WALKING WORTHY

“ . . . walk worthy of the Lord . . . ” Here is a line of heavenly reasoning that can hardly be found within the professed church – particularly the American church. In fact, it stands in stark contrast to much that flies under the banner of Christendom.

The word “worthy” comes from a word meaning “appropriately, as becomes one, in a manner proper to, after a godly sort, and suitably.” STRONG’S There is such a thing as living in a manner that contradicts one’s profession of faith. Such lives cause the Word of God to be “blasphemed” (Tit 2:5), and “give occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully” (Tit 2:5). The Spirit also declares such off-

centered living causes the name and doctrine of God to be blasphemed (Tit 2:5).

There is certainly a sense in which we are not worthy of what we have in Christ Jesus. We can confess with Jacob, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant" (Gen 32:10). This, however, is not the usual manner in which the Holy Spirit deals with this subject.

God Has Spoken On Worthiness

Whatever may be said about being "not worthy" or "unworthy," considerable is said about true worthiness. The following are most sobering words, and are to be taken seriously by every professed believer.

- "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not WORTHY of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not WORTHY of me" (Mat 10:37-38).
- "But they which shall be accounted WORTHY to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage" (Luke 20:35).
- "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted WORTHY to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36).
- "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted WORTHY to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:41).
- "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk WORTHY of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Eph 4:1).
- "That ye would walk WORTHY of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess 2:12).
- "Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted WORTHY of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer" (2 Thess 1:5).
- "Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you WORTHY of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power" (2 Thess 1:11).
- "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are WORTHY" (Rev 3:4).

There should be no question about the validity and necessity of walking worthily. Our theology must be purged of any views that do not allow us to speak in this way.

There is an objective that is realized by obtaining “all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” That purpose is not to make us theological experts, or to qualify us as scholars in Biblical matters. Rather, it is to the end that we may “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.” Actually, to be filled with such marvelous perception and comprehension has no other utility. It cannot be used to make an individual famous, or to increase their monetary worth. The aim is to enable us to live in a worthy manner before the Lord.

Walking

Much is said in the Scriptures about walking. When referring to His daily activities Jesus said, “I must walk today, and tomorrow, and the day following” (Lk 13:33). He said those who followed Him would not “walk in darkness” (John 8:12). He affirmed those who “walk in the day” would not stumble, while those who “walk in the night” would (John 11:9).

Life is like walking – there is progress toward a preferred destination. It is like walking because there is effort and activity, and it takes place in measures, like a step at a time. Life is also like a walk because it is deliberate and marked by intention. Only the living walk. Walking is not for dead men.

Walking “worthy of the Lord” is walking “IN newness of life” (Rom 6:4). It is taking advantage of the salvation of God in your life – living in an awareness of the Lord and His blessing. To walk “worthy of the Lord” is to walk “after the Spirit,” and not “after the flesh” (Rom 8:1,4). It is to “walk honestly,” and not in sinful indulgence (Rom 13:13).

Walking “worthy of the Lord” is living “by faith, and not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7). It is to be governed by the perception of the Lord and not the vision of this world. This is walking, or living “in the Spirit,” and thus not fulfilling “the lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16).

The Practicality of this Word

There is an unusual degree of practicality in this word. If it is true that being filled with all wisdom and spiritual understanding is to the intent of enabling us to walk worthy of the Lord, then we must conclude the following. Where a life worthy of the Lord is not eagerly sought, this wisdom and understanding will not be granted. There is no way to avoid this circumstance.

To put it another way, if a professing Christian is not seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, such a one is confined to the realm of spiritual ignorance. Such will not be able to discern the purpose of God, nor truly profit from His Word. This is the manner of the Kingdom, and it helps us to understand the deplorable condition of many people who wear the name of Jesus.

“ 10b unto all pleasing . . . ” Other versions read “ fully pleasing,” NKJV “to please Him in all respects ,” NASB “please Him in every way ,” NIV “unto all well-pleasing ,” DARBY and “ always honor and please the Lord.” NLT

UNTO

“ . . . unto . . . ” This is the objective of the walk – of the godly life. It is the direction toward which worthiness is pointed.

ALL PLEASING

“ . . . all pleasing . . . ” No one is “worthy of the Lord” who is not pleasing to Him! Nor, indeed, does God ever represent Himself as bestowing benefits upon, or reserving eternal rewards for, those who are not pleasing to Him. Further, our text does not say “unto pleasing,” leaving the matter open to human interpretations. The Spirit says “ ALL pleasing,” or pleasing in all things, and in every way.

This is a life that abandons all opinions of men as a foundation, and rejects the “carnal mind,” refusing to allow it to dominate the affection and will.

If I read this text with the nominal church in mind, it will appear to be speaking of an advanced stage of spirituality – one that is attained by very few. However, keep in mind the ones for whom this prayer is made. It is not for the leaders of the Colossian assembly. It is for all of them – male and female, young and old, servants and masters! This is, in fact, the standard of conduct for the child of God. Those who live in any other way are in imminent danger!

The state of “all pleasing” is described in these words: “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col 3:17). And again, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Col 3:23). And again, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31).

This is not speaking of a desire alone, but of a life that is being lived out for the glory of God – a life that is a thank offering to the Lord. Such a life cannot be lived independently of Divine involvement. The Lord is the One who “fills” us with “all wisdom and spiritual understanding,” which are essential to living a life that pleases Him.

AN OBSERVATION

We are living in spiritually superficial times. In the present religious climate, the expression of a desire to please the Lord is equated with actually pleasing Him. Even though such a desire is noble, if the pleasing life is not lived, the desire counts for nothing. It is far easier to say one wants to please the Lord, than to actually set out to do so.

Not In Talk

The kingdom of God is not in talk, but in power. As it is written, “For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power” (1 Cor 4:20). Other versions read, “For the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power,” NASB and “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.” NIV

This prayer is a plea for the power to be given to God’s people. It is intended to bring the people of God into a life with which the Lord is well pleased. Each believer must be serious enough about their relationship to God to examine their life with a critical eye. If they are honest, they will find a need for the power revealed in this prayer.

In the meantime, let us have done with imagining that people who lack the wisdom and spiritual understanding of this text can “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.” If such a thing was possible, there would be no need for a prayer like this one.

“ 10c . . . being fruitful in every good work . . . ” Other versions read, “bearing fruit in every good work,” NASB and “AS you bear fruit in every good work,” NRSV

The “good work” itself is not the point, but what comes from it – its “fruit.” Ordinarily, one might suppose “good works” themselves to be fruit. Here, however, they are a means to fruitage – something God uses to produce a glorifying yield.

BEING FRUITFUL

The work itself is not what is fruitful, but the one engaging in the work. The Kingdom of God is a network of various fruits. For example, the Gospel produced fruit in the Colossians, as it did “In all the world” (1:6). Now, the Colossians are called into the matter of bearing fruit, being themselves productive.

Because of a proneness to forget this, I must again remind you that this is a prayer for all the saints – not a select few. Fruit bearing is a family matter, with every member of Christ’s household being involved. Jesus affirmed that the one abiding, or remaining, in Him would “bring forth much fruit” (John 15:5). That is the manner of the kingdom. It is the nature of true spiritual life.

Wherever the Holy Spirit is not quenched or grieved, He produces a rich bounty for the glory of God – “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-23). This not what the Spirit might do, or is capable of doing, but what He actually does. Our text is showing the appointed means through which this fruitage is produced. It comes by being “filled with the knowledge of” God’s will – something that results in “all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” In turn, that marvelous comprehension produces a life that is “worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.” The result of that pleasing life is fruitfulness “in every good work.”

Being “fruitful” is multi-dimensional. There is an inner fruit that enhances human character: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Gal 5:22-23). There is “fruit” brought forth to God Himself (Rom 7:4), which includes thanksgiving (Heb 13:15), a holy life (Rom 6:22) or righteousness (Heb 12:11), and converts (Rom 1:13).

IN EVERY GOOD WORK

This is a statement of the greatest magnitude, challenging both heart and mind: “fruitful in EVERY GOOD WORK .”

The Opposite of Laboring in Vain

This is the opposite of labor being “in vain,” something Paul zealously sought to avoid. He stated his concern for the Galatians in these words: “I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain ” (Gal 4:11). Again, he wrote to the Philippians, “Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain ” (Phil 2:16). He also wrote to the Thessalonians, “For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain ” (1 Thess 2:1). Again he wrote, “For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain ” (1 Thess 3:5).

The Result of Christ’s Indwelling

Being “fruitful in every good work” is the result of Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith (Eph 3:17). It is actually Jesus that lives in us, producing rich fruitage in all that is done in His name. That is

why Paul confessed, “I am crucified with Christ: 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, and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

The Result of God’s Working

Being “fruitful in every good work” is also the result of God’s own working, “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). Those who are filled with all wisdom and spiritual understanding are brought to a point where they are made “perfect in every good work to do His will, [God] working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Heb 13:21).

A Comparison with Israel

Being “fruitful in every good work” is the result of a life that corresponds to the labor God has expended upon us – for we are “His workmanship” (Eph 2:10). By way of comparison, ponder Israel. Their lives did not yield an appropriate harvest to the Lord. When they corrupted themselves, Moses chided them: “ Do ye thus requite the LORD , O foolish people and unwise? is not He thy Father that hath bought thee? hath He not made thee, and established thee?” (Deu 32:6). They were not “fruitful in every good work.” God Himself said of them: “Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto Me?” (Jer 2:21). They were not “fruitful in every good work.”

Through Isaiah, the Lord lamented: “What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes ?” (Isa 5:4). They were not “fruitful in every good work.”

THIS IS NOT A COMMANDMENT

Being “fruitful in every good work” is not a commandment. It must not be approached as though it was spoken from Mount Sinai. Fruit bearing is necessary, but necessities are not always fulfilled by means of a commandment. Notice how the Holy Spirit approaches the matter of bearing fruit – good fruit. It is not from the standpoint of Divine demand.

- Good fruit invariably comes from a good tree (Matt 7:17).
- The quality of a “tree” is known by the fruit it produces (Matt 12:33).
- When the “good seed” of the kingdom is heard and understood, it does bring forth fruit (Matt 13:23).
- When the Word of God is kept in an honest and good heart, the individual will “bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15).

- The one who abides in Christ, and in whom Christ Himself abides, “bringeth forth much fruit” (John 15:5).
- Being made “free from sin,” we have our “fruit unto holiness” (Rom 6:22).
- We are “married” to Christ in order to “bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom 7:4).
- Fruit is the result of the Spirit’s own work (Gal 5:22; Eph 5:9).
- When the chastening of God is received, it produces the “peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Heb 12:11).

THE HARMONY OF OUR TEXT

Our text is in complete harmony with these representations of the production of fruit. Being “fruitful in every good work” is traced to walking worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing. Walking “worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing” is the result of being “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” Being “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” is a condition resulting from prayer to God – it is the result of God’s own working!

This working, however, does not exclude our own involvement in the process. That is, in fact, why this prayer is being raised to the God of heaven. There will, in reality, be no progress in spiritual life until the people themselves are involved. There is no such thing as an impersonal salvation, where God uses people like a puppet master uses a puppet. The people of God are not like dummies sitting upon the lap of a Divine ventriloquist. They have been “joined to the Lord,” and are “one spirit” with Him (1 Cor 6:17). Knowing this, and upon hearing of the faith and “love in the Spirit” of the Colossians, the Apostle is praying for the deeper and more productive involvement of the saints. He knows the objective of salvation, and the nature of living by faith, and therefore he prays in this manner.

THE TIME FOR EXAMINATION

It is time for every child of God to examine themselves. How do they stand in regard to being “filled with the knowledge of” God’s will? To what degree do they possess “all wisdom and spiritual understanding?” Is their life “worthy of the Lord,” and does it fall into the category or “all pleasing?” Are they being “fruitful in every good work?”

An honest appraisal of these things will confirm to your heart that there is still a lot of room for growth. There are heights still to be reached, and levels of participation still to be realized. In fact, as long as we are in the body, this condition will remain. We are not in heaven yet, and until we are, there is room for significant advancement in the Lord. While we are traveling the highway raised in the desert, we need much grace.

“ 10d . . . and increasing in the knowledge of God.” Other versions read, “growing in the knowledge of God,” NIV and “learn to know God better and better.” NLT Let me again emphasize that this is the manner of the Kingdom.

AND

“ . . . and . . . ” This is, what is called, a coordinating conjunction. That is, the word “and” links together two things that occur simultaneously. Not only, therefore, does Paul pray the Colossians will be “fruitful in every good work,” but that their fruitfulness will be accompanied by another condition.

INCREASING

“ . . . increasing . . . ” The word “increase” appropriately describes the nature of the Kingdom of God. Increase, or growth, is not only a sign of life in this world, it is also a quality of spiritual life. It is the nature of life from God to increase, and to do so in exponential measures.

God Himself “gives increase” (1 Cor 3:6-7). It is not something that occurs occasionally, but is itself an evidence of His hand at work. In matters relating to the body of Christ, the “increase of the body” in spiritual qualities is the aim of every spiritual gift (Eph 4:16; Col 2:19). The Lord causes His people to “increase and abound in love one toward another” (1 Thess 3:12).

This is a different way of thinking, yet it is the standard way of thought in Christ Jesus. I do not know of “church growth” plan or organization in existence that does not emphasize numerical growth. In fact, the words “church growth” have come to be synonymous with an increase in attendance or church membership. The modern American church is driven more by a financial budget than the Spirit of God, and is therefore keenly interested in numbers. But such mundane objectives cannot be found in the prayer to which we are now submitted.

Properly seen, “increase” has to do with obtaining more of what salvation brings. It is realizing a greater harvest of what God Himself has planted. Thus believers are urged to “grow in grace” (1 Pet 3:18). Behold now the area in which Paul prays for kingdom increase.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

“ . . . in the knowledge of God.” This is a parallel to Peter’s exhortation, “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ” (2 Pet 3:18). It is also what Paul prayed for the Ephesians. “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him ” (Eph 1:17).

Right here we soar beyond the limited confines of institutionalized religion. As of 2003, I have been personally and intimately involved with the work of the Lord for over fifty years. I have been exposed to all manner of local congregations, ranging from small to very large. I can easily count the number of congregations that were increasing in the knowledge of God. In fact, the very terminology is strange, and does not fit well with the emphasis of the average church. You will be hard pressed to find a single person who even will know what you are talking about if you refer to “increasing in the knowledge of God.”

Of all of the Christians I have known, a very small percentage of them give any evidence of increasing in the knowledge of God. Many of them have been speaking about the same things for decades, without a single enlargement of their view, or any new or fresh perspective. Their understanding of God, Christ, and salvation appear to be static and motionless. They know absolutely nothing about the day dawning and the “Day Star” rising in their heart (2 Pet 1:19). Expressions like “abound yet more and more” (Phil 1:9; 1 Thess 4:1) and “increase more and more” (1 Thess 4:10) are not even in their vocabulary. This is an abnormal condition, and is in sharp variance with the revealed purpose of God. It cannot be justified, and there is no satisfactory explanation for it.

What Is the Knowledge of God?

This is not knowledge about God, although the one possessing such knowledge will know much about the Lord. This is an acquaintance with God Himself – an acquaintance that is cultured within the framework of fellowship and faith.

Recognizing When He Speaks

When Samuel was young, God spoke to him, but he did not know it was the Lord. The Spirit’s explanation for this lack of understanding is this: “Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord” (1 Sam 3:7). Eli, on the other hand, was familiar with the Lord. As he thought upon Samuel’s experience, “he perceived that the Lord had called the child” (1 Sam 3:8). After Samuel had received a word from the Lord and delivered it to Eli, the aged priest responded “It is the Lord” (1 Sam 3:18). Knowing the Lord, therefore, involves being able to recognize when He is speaking (Heb 12:25).

A New Covenant example of this kind of recognition is found in the Thessalonian’s response to the Gospel. “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess 2:13).

Knowing His Ways

Prior to Christ, few people knew the ways of the Lord – the manner in which He conducted His kingdom. One of the few men who did know His ways was Moses. It is said of him, “He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel” (Psa 103:7). The Israelites only saw with their eyes what God did. Moses saw WHY He did it. His knowledge of the ways of the Lord is what enabled him to effectively intercede for Israel when God was about to destroy them (Num 14:13-20).

The knowledge of God is a particularly fertile area of human involvement. It is one of the primary pillars of the New Covenant. It is stated in the covenant itself, “they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest” (Jer 31:34; Heb 8:11).

This is not a static or unchanging knowledge. It is one that is characterized by growth, advancement, and increase. Divine fellowship is realized to the degree that we know the Lord, are familiar with His ways, and think His thoughts.

It must be remembered that eternal life is knowing the Lord. As Jesus prayed, “As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him. And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom \Thou hast sent ” (John 17:2-3). John referred to this relationship in the following words: “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ ” (1 John 1:3).

Increasing in the Knowledge of God Is Not Simplistic

Increasing in the knowledge of God is not a simplistic matter. It requires more than taking a Bible course, or becoming more familiar with Scriptural texts that speak of God and Christ Themselves. There is difficulty associated with this kind of increase – the kind of difficulty that requires the involvement of God. That is why Paul is praying as he does. In order to increase in the knowledge of God, the following must take place.

- God must fill us with the knowledge of His will.
- That knowledge must result in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.
- Wisdom and spiritual understanding must result in a walk that is worthy of the Lord.
- The walk that is worthy of the Lord must be pleasing to Him.

- Fruitfulness in every good work will accompany an increase in the knowledge of God.

It is evident that such things cannot be achieved in by natural means, or in the energy of the flesh. That is why Paul labored in pray concerning the matter, and told the Colossians he was doing so.

It is time the professing church to make their unwavering aim to enjoy such an increase. War must be made on the ignorance of God and His ways. A certain discontent with a failure to know what God is doing in Christ must be found among all professed believers. In the New Covenant God IS known!

“ 11a Strengthened with all might . . .” Other versions read, “strengthened with all power,” NASB “made strong with all the strength” NRSV and “in all might being made mighty.” YLT

STRENGTHENED

To be “strengthened” is to be made strong, or enabled . Because we have the treasure of God in “earthen vessels” (2 Cor 4:7), dwelling in “houses of clay” (Job 4:19), we must be fortified with a strength that is not our own. There is no hope of being filled “with the knowledge of His will,” having “all wisdom and spiritual understanding,” walking “worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing,” being “ fruitful in every good work,” and “increasing in the knowledge of God” if we are not strong! Such requirements supercede all natural abilities. No amount of education can produce such effects, or make one able to receive them from God. No amount of personal discipline, regardless how rigorous it may be, can put such noble objectives within our reach.

Yet, these things are essential. They must be found in the people of God. There is no promise of good to those who have no knowledge of God’s will. An eternal inheritance is not held out to a people who lack wisdom and spiritual understanding. Glory is not promised to those who are not pleasing to God in their walk of life. Jesus makes no commitment to bless those who are not fruitful, nor does He promise to abide with those who are not increasing in the knowledge of God. Search and see if these things are not true!

I do not believe the average American Christian has the faintest notion of the necessity of these things. That is why we hear so few prayers concerning them, and perceive so little effort to obtain them. People are being taught to rely on fleshly strength. They trust in scholarship, the studies and

accomplishments of others, church identity, and even theological positions. Some rely on their training, their education, their natural ability, or their imagined mental capacity. Professed Christians are seeking “strength” from psychiatrists, counselors, educators, motivators, and the likes. They are going down to Egypt for help, and it is as vain a pursuit for them as it was for Israel (Isa 31:1). Formerly, the children of Israel tended to trust in horses and chariots “because they are many,” and “horsemen because they are strong” (Isa 31:1b). They refused to look “unto the Holy One of Israel,” and thus they failed miserably (Isa 31:1c).

In our text, Paul is looking to the Lord to strengthen His people. It is the kind of strength that is required to safely navigate from earth to glory, and through time to the portal of eternity. He knew the people needed to be “strengthened.”

God is not glorified by a weak and vacillating church that lacks the strength He alone can give. He has commanded His people, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong ” (1 Cor 16:13). And again, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Eph 6:10). And again, “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 2:1).

Again, permit me to emphasize that this is a prayer for the whole church. It is uncomely for any member or group of members of an assembly to be weak, ineffective, and without strength! If you are a man, be strong ! If you are a woman, be strong ! If you are a young person, be strong ! If you are an aged person, be strong ! If you are a servant, be strong ! If you are a leader, be strong ! You do not have a right to be weak. Jesus died for you when you were “without strength” (Rom 5:6), but He did not do so in order that you might remain in that condition!

ALL MIGHT

Paul does not pray for ordinary strength – or strength as men define it. He prays the saints will be strengthened with “all might.” This is real, not feigned, power. It is sufficient to accomplish what is expected of us in Christ Jesus.

“ALL” is a favorite word of the Holy Spirit. It speaks of the plentitude of Divine provisions, with nothing lacking.

- “ALL joy and peace” (Rom 15:13).
- “ALL knowledge” (Rom 15:14; 1 Cor 1:5a).
- “ALL utterance” (1 Cor 1:5b).

- “ALL comfort” (2 Cor 1:3).

- “ALL the promises” (2 Cor 1:20).

- “ALL diligence” (2 Cor 8:7).
- “ALL grace” (2 Cor 9:8; 1 Pet 5:10).

- “ALL bountifulness” (1 Cor 9:11).

- “ALL patience” (2 Cor 12:12).

- “ALL spiritual blessings” (Eph 1:3).

- “ALL wisdom/prudence” (Eph 1:8).

- “ALL the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19).

- “ALL lowliness/meekness” (Eph 4:2).

- “ALL goodness” (Eph 5:9).

- “ALL prayer/supplication” (Eph 6:17)

- “ALL boldness” (Phil 1:20).

- “ALL gladness” (Phil 2:29).

- “ALL your need” (Phil 4:19).

- “ALL wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9).
- “ALL pleasing” (Col 1:10).

- “ALL might” (Col 1:11).

- “ALL riches of the full assurance of understanding” (Col 2:2).

- “ALL the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3).

- “ALL the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9).
- “ALL the will of God (Col 4:12).
- “ALL the good pleasure of His goodness” (2 Thess 1:11).
- “ALL longsuffering” (1 Tim 1:16).
- “ALL godliness and honesty” (1 Tim 2:2).
- “ALL purity” (1 Tim 5:2).
- “ALL Scripture” (2 Tim 3:16).
- “ALL good works” (2 Tim 3:17).
- “ALL good fidelity” (Tit 2:10).
- “ALL meekness” (Tit 3:2).
- “ALL joy” (James 1:2).
- “ALL grace” (1 Pet 5:10).
- “ALL diligence” (2 Pet 1:5).

In Christ we are separated from all forms of mediocrity! We are brought into the realm “allness” – Divine plentitude. Nothing that is required to please God is withheld from those who live by faith and walk in the Spirit.

This is more than Divine kindness. It is nothing less than the provision of what God Himself requires from us.

“All Might”

The agent used to strengthen us is called “all might,” or “all power.” NASB, NIV Some might will not be sufficient for the task. The saints need “all might.”

The word translated “might” or “power” applies particularly to the Lord. It speaks inherent power, or a power that is resident in, and originates with, the Lord. With men, such power is given to them. With God, it naturally resides in Him.

The meaning of this text is that we are “strengthened” with God’s own powerful nature. It is the same as saying, “strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Eph 6:10). There is no limitation in this power. By it, the Lord is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us ” (Eph 3:20). There is no Divine requirement that cannot be met through this power. More emphatically, Divine requirements can ONLY be met through His power. “All might” means God has no reservation about conferring this great power upon us. It is “toward us,” or intended to be employed by us.

“ 11b . . . according to His glorious power . . . ” Other versions read, “the might of His glory,” ASV and “the great power of His glory.” BBE

ACCORDING TO

Being “strengthened with all might” will be achieved through God’s “glorious power.” The New Revised Standard Version captures this perspective: “May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from His glorious power ” (Col 1:11). Other versions read, “ through His glorious power.” GENEVA “ in accord with His glorious might.” NAB

This is not a special power, but a particular working of God’s power – a particular way in which it is made known. There are a number of things that are said to be accomplished by God’s power.

- “He draweth also the mighty with His power ” (Job 24:22).
- “He divideth the sea with His power ” (Job 26:12).
- “Man did eat angels' food: He sent them meat to the full. He caused an east wind to blow in the heaven: and by His power He brought in the south wind. He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea: and He let it fall in the midst of their camp, round

about their habitations” NRSV (Psa 78:25-28).

- “He hath made the earth by His power ” (Jer 10:12).
- “Behold, God exalteth by His power : who teacheth like him?” (Job 36:22).
- “He ruleth by His power for ever” (Psa 66:7).

Something that is “according to” is something pertaining to, or joined with. In this case, the agent that is employed (glorious power) is tailored to produce the stated objective. It is particularly adapted for that work.

The objective that will be revealed will not be accomplished through the kind of power that draws the mighty into His purpose. This is not the kind of power that divides the sea, or causes a south wind to bring in an abundance of quail. It is not the kind of power through which the world was made, or through which the Lord rules over all.

Those things can only be accomplished by the power of God, to be sure. But they are not the “glorious power” of our text. What is prayed for the saints can only be accomplished through a certain kind of Divine working.

HIS GLORIOUS POWER

When the Lord revealed Himself to Moses, He declared He was “glorious in power” (Ex 15:6). Frequently the Spirit wraps “power” and “glory” in the same sentence (1 Chron 19:22; Psa 63:2; 145:11; Matt 6:13; 24:30; Mark 13:26; Lk 21:27; 2 Thess 1:9; Rev 5:13).

“Glorious power” is particularly revealed through the Lord Jesus Christ. God has always been “glorious in power,” but it was never before seen to the extent to which it has now been revealed. Regarding its nature, this power is expounded more fully in the book of Ephesians. In Colossians the way in which that power is utilized is the emphasis.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul prays that the eyes of the understanding might be opened to see “what is the greatness of His power to usward who believe,” or “what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.” NASB This power is now at work within believers, and through it God “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph 3:20). But this power has been displayed, unveiling something of its nature.

After praying that the eyes of our understanding might be opened to see the “exceeding greatness” of this power, the Apostle unveils how it has been displayed. “according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:19-23). This is “His glorious power.” Behold what it has accomplished!

- It raised Jesus from the dead.
- It set Jesus at the Father’s right hand in the heavenly places.
- It placed Jesus far above all forms of rule and power.
- It put Jesus above every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in the world to come.
- It put everything and everyone under Christ, subordinating all to Him.
- In the capacity as Head over all things, God gave Jesus to the church, to supply, protect, and lead it to glory.

This “glorious power,” therefore, invaded the regions of the dead, and brought Jesus back. It invaded the area ruled by the prince of the power of the air, as Jesus returned to glory to be enthroned. It subordinated all delegated power, making it subservient to Jesus. It brought honor and dignity to Jesus that is not realized by any created being. It enabled Him to bring many sons to glory.

Is that not a magnificent power? How does it compare with the power made known in the creation? What kind of comparison can be made between this “glorious power” and the power revealed in the flood of Noah’s day? Is there any person who does not see its superiority to the power made known when Israel was delivered from Egypt? This is a transcendent power that has no parallel. Through it, God is more fully revealed. The extent of His might and influence are more thoroughly displayed in His “glorious power” – particularly as it has been revealed through Jesus Christ.

How will such power be employed by the saints of God. To what end or objective is this “glorious power” utilized by those who are in Christ Jesus? That is the point to which Paul now addresses himself. The same power required to raise and exalt Jesus is required for the accomplishment of these objectives. Therefore, there is difficulty associated with their attainment.

“ 11c . . . unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.” Other versions read, “for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously,” NASB “so that you may have great endurance and

patience, and joyfully,” NIV

“for all endurance and patience with joy,” RSV and “so that you may undergo all troubles with joy. BBE

The fact that God’s “glorious power” is devoted to the accomplishment of these things confirms their priority. You will nowhere find God’s “glorious power” associated with resolving interpersonal relationships, being highly successful in this world, or experiencing health and wealth. It is not connected with any fleshly experience, however noble it may appear.

When one young man attempted to have Christ resolve a domestic dispute, Jesus replied, “Man, who made Me a judge or a divider over you?” (Luke 12:14). Jesus was not saying He despised such resolutions. Rather, He was showing us that is not the purpose of His “glorious power.” The reason for His answer reveals more of the root of the matter, and is stated in the next verse. “And He said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15).

The words that follow will chaff against institutional agendas and mere human perceptions of valid and honorable kingdom accomplishments. However, every “honest and good heart” will perceive the priority of these matters. You can go to heaven and lack both health and wealth. You can also go to heaven with your foes being members of your own house. But you cannot dwell in the house of the Lord forever if you are lacking in the areas that follow. You had better make it your business not to fail in these things – especially since God’s “glorious power” has been given to ensure their realization.

FULL MEASURES

Divine objectives are for us to have full measures of blessing, not introductory ones or mere samplings. Our minds are to be stretched to think in terms of grandness and thoroughness. Thus far, we have read of “ALL the saints,” “ALL the world,” “ALL wisdom and spiritual understanding,” and “ALL might” (1:4,6, 9,10,11). Now we will read of “ALL patience and longsuffering.”

UNTO ALL PATIENCE

“. . . unto all patience . . . ” “Patience” is steadfastness, NASB and endurance. RSV It is constancy and continuance, or duration. STRONG’S The person who is “patient,” or endures, is not moved off course. Even the greatest trials and afflictions will not cause the “patient” one to leave the race that has been set before him (Heb 12:1-2).

The one who is “patient” keeps fighting (1 Tim 6:12), continues running (Heb 12:2), and does not stop wrestling (Eph 6:12). If he falls down “seven times,” he rises again to continue the trek to glory (Prov 24:16). He may be troubled, but he is not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but he is not destroyed (2 Cor 4:8-9). Like those noble warriors of Zebulun, those who are “patient” are able to “keep rank,” and are not of a “double heart” (1 Chron 12:33).

The “patient” person does not become weary in well doing, and does not faint or quit (Gal 6:9; 2 Cor 4:1,16).

“Patience” is perseverance and persistence. It is when a person, like Jacob, will not let go until he obtains the blessing (Gen 32:26).

Our text speaks of “ALL patience.” That is persistence in prayer – fainting not (Luke 18:1). It includes enduring “to the end” (Mk 13:13), and not being “weary in well doing” (Gal 6:9). This includes being a faithful steward (1 Cor 4:2), enduring all manner of persecution, and pressing relentlessly “toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:14). It involves not fainting when we are “rebuked” by the Lord (Heb 12:5).

“All patience” includes “enduring unto the end,” even when we are “hated of all men” for Jesus’ sake (Matt 10:22). It is standing firm when iniquity is abounding all about us, and “the love of many” is waxing “cold” (Matt 24:12-13). It is continuing in the faith, and entering the kingdom “through much tribulation” (Acts 14:22).

“All patience” is standing “fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free,” and not being “entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (Gal 5:4:1). It includes holding “fast the form of sound words,” and not being thrown off course by the theological fads of the day (2 Tim 1:13). There is also the matter of enduring “hardness as a good soldier” (2 Tim 2:3), and continuing in “the things which thou hast learned” (2 Tim 3:14). “All patience” involves giving “the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip” (Heb 2:1). It is maintaining “the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end” (Heb 3:14), and having the “full assurance of hope unto the end” (Heb 6:11).

It is through “faith and patience” that we “inherit the promises” (Heb 6:12). Unstable and unfaithful people do not obtain the promises of God! I do not believe the average American Christian has any understanding of this. There is too much vacillation, unfaithfulness, lukewarmness, and disinterest. All of this means the people are not experiencing God’s “glorious power.” The reason they lack this power is that they have really seen no need for it. They are not doing something that requires the power, so they have not received it. People are looking for this marvelous power – the power that raised Jesus from the dead – to accomplish things that are of little eternal consequence. They will not receive it!

UNTO ALL LONGSUFFERING

“ . . . and longsuffering . . . ” Longsuffering is a sister to patience. The meaning of this word is very close to that of patience. Both involve persistence and endurance. Patience has to do with

continuing in the race. Longsuffering has to do with enduring all of the afflictions, hindrances and trouble that assaults the person during the race. It is bearing up under a burden and entering “through much tribulation.”

This is patience under trial, when it is necessary to subdue inclinations to retaliate, avenge, and return evil for evil. This is when suffering does not move the individual to respond in an ungodly manner, or cease to run the race set before him: LONG - suffering!

This is a Divine trait, for God Himself is “longsuffering” (Ex 34:6). This particularly has regard to forgiveness. As it is written, “The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression” (Num 14:18). This is not an attitude of indifference, as though God had no hatred for sin. The above verse continues, “and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation” (Num 14:18). This, then, is not the indifferent toleration of iniquity.

Longsuffering involves genuine suffering. Pain has been inflicted upon the soul, and what was done to the longsuffering one was wrong – and is to be recognized. Yet, longsuffering endures the wrong, seeking the recovery of the wrongdoer, and being willing to forgive.

One of the qualities that confirms a person is a “minister of God” is “longsuffering” (2 Cor 6:4-6). This is also a trait of genuine love: it “suffers long,” “enduring all things” (1 Cor 13:4,7). This includes “forbearing one another in love” (Eph 4:2).

“All longsuffering” is having a gentle and forbearing spirit when ill treatment is experienced. It involves holding back emotion, which is most difficult, if not impossible for us to control. That is precisely why we need God’s “glorious power” to do so.

WITH JOYFULNESS

“ . . . with joyfulness.” The Holy Spirit now moves us even higher. For some, it is challenging enough to endure to the end. But what of enduring all kinds of trial, and bearing up under all manner of abuse and ill treatment. However, our text does not even leave us thinking that is an appropriate use of “glorious power.” The Spirit adds these pungent words, “WITH JOYFULNESS.”

Weaker Translations

Some versions attach the words “with joyfulness” to the following verse: i.e., “joyously giving thanks,” NASB “and joyfully giving thanks,” NIV and “while joyfully giving thanks.” NRSV This reading is based on a view of the Latin translations.

The text itself makes more sense when the joyfulness is attached to “all patience and longsuffering.” That would involve being “strengthened with all might according to His glorious power.” There is a natural association of joy with thanksgiving, because true thanksgiving flows from insight. However, there is a supernatural affiliation of joyfulness with the patience and longsuffering.

The idea here is that endurance and longsuffering are made more productive when “joyfulness” is being experienced. This is also in keeping with the doctrine of Scripture.

- “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (James 1:2-3).
- “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad : for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Mat 5:12).
- “Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy : for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets” (Luke 6:22-23).
- “Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church” (Col 1:24).

Having seen this truth, when the Apostles were subjected to suffering, they continued to be patient and longsuffering, “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name” (Acts 5:41).

The Reason for Joyfulness

The reason for joyfulness is not found in the experience of trouble itself. The need for endurance is not the ultimate reason for joyfulness. Nor, indeed, does persecution and tribulation of itself produce joy. Joyfulness springs from hope, which is cause to shine more brightly when hardships and afflictions are endured. Thus Jesus told His disciples to rejoice “for great is your reward in heaven” (Matt 5:12).

Romans 12:12 refers to “rejoicing in hope,” and Romans 5:2 speaks of “rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.” When the heart is joyful, we can “abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:13). Joy is, therefore, more immediately related to hope – the anticipation of good things to come. Thus we read of “the rejoicing of the hope” (Heb 3:6).

Because of God’s “glorious power,” the impediments we encounter in the race to glory, and the sufferings we endure along the way, only serve to accent what is ahead. The “much tribulation”

through which we must enter into the kingdom (Acts 14:22), thus causes the star of hope to shine all the brighter.

Joyfulness Is Necessary

This kind of joy is not a spiritual luxury, it is a necessity. It is not a sign of advanced spirituality, but of spiritual normalcy. That is why joy is also associated with faith itself: “the joy of faith” (Phil 1:25).

The necessity of joy is affirmed in the book of Hebrews with unquestionable firmness. “But Christ as a son over His own house; whose house are we, IF we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (Heb 3:6). Those with a propensity to legalism often tell us what we need to do. Rarely, however, do they ever mention “the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.” There are also those who are disposed to continually emphasize what is required to be identified with Christ. You will not hear them mention holding fast “the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.”

This is of such critical importance that the Spirit identifies “the rejoicing of the hope” with being part of the “house” over which Jesus presides? Is there any person of sound thought who will affirm we can be saved without being part of that “house?” What can any person hope to receive from Christ who is not in this “house?” Jesus is a “Son over His own house.” That house is God’s house, for “He that built all things is God” (Heb 3:4). Some of the other versions read that Jesus is “over God’s house.” NIV/NRSV This should not surprise us, for the church is specifically called God’s house: “the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15).

Make no mistake about this! We are part of that house “if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.” That sheds a great deal of light on the prayer of Paul for the Colossians.

A Knowledgeable Joy

James also said to “count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (James 1:3). Trials, or tests, are the appointed way of producing patience, or perseverance. When they are approached in faith, they actually make the believers more determined to finish their “course” (2 Tim 4:7).

TOO DEMANDING FOR NATURE

But all of this is not a mere exercise of self-discipline. The perceptive heart knows these things are too demanding for natural abilities.

We must have power from outside ourselves in order to be “strengthened with all might.” If the objective is to have “ALL patience and longsuffering with joyfulness,” we need help “from above.” That help comes in the form of “His glorious power” – the kind of power that raised Jesus from the dead, and

enthroned Him at God's right hand, invested with all power in heaven and earth. That is the kind of power it takes to realize these required results, and that is the kind of power God will give us. It is right for us to seek such power, and expect to receive it.

We have been exposed to the heart of the kingdom of God – the appointed objective for the people of God. It is apparent that it differs vastly from the perceptions extant in the contemporary church. These are matters concerning which very little is being said from the pulpits of the land. You will rarely hear any pray request that is remotely associated with this prayer. As a general rule, these things are simply not seen as important, much less essential.

All of this indicates that, as in Isaiah's day, truth has "fallen in the street" (Isa 59:14). As in Jeremiah's day "truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth" (Jer 7:28). As hard as it may be to receive, "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so" (Jer 5:30-31).

A new gospel, which is really no gospel at all, is being foisted upon the church. It has largely to do with life in this world, and very little to do with eternity. It is the kind of Gospel that does not require "glorious power." It does not demand that those who embrace it be "filled with the knowledge of His will." In fact, one can remain abysmally ignorant of God's will and still be a member in good standing.

This neo-gospel does not move people to seek for a knowledge that erupts in "all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Throughout the land professed Christians wander about in the field of truth like groping blind men, unable to comprehend or apply the truth of God by which men are sanctified. The average churchman is not noted for being either wise or understanding in things pertaining to life and godliness.

This is a day when there is little insistence that people walk "worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." Pleasing the institution is actually of greater importance than pleasing God. Some mention is made of being fruitful, but hardly ever do you hear of being "fruitful in every good work," and "increasing in the knowledge of God." And what of possessing "all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness?" Is there anyone in all the world who does not know this is an uncommon thrust?

THIS IS NOT UNDULY HARSH

All of this may appear to be unduly harsh and negative. However, when one ponders the situation, such imaginations will instantly be cast down. Our text has revealed the prayer of a righteous man – one who received mercy “to be faithful.” He was counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, and Christ was living in him. He had an understanding of salvation, and of the things integral to it – an understanding that had been given to him (Eph 3:4-11).

His prayer focuses on matters relating to the Lord Himself: “the knowledge of His will . . . worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing . . . increasing in the knowledge of God . . . and “ His glorious power.” There is a plentitude that requires sober thought: “ all wisdom and spiritual understanding . . . all pleasing . . . every good work . . . increasing . . . all might . . . all patience and longsuffering.”

Such things require more than human strength. They call for “glorious power,” which comes from God alone!

How could any lack of emphasis on such things possibly be excused? In fact, the weakened condition of the modern church is largely owing to its failure to speak of such things. The religion of the day is not demanding. It does not require an aggressive quest for the Lord, His power, and His will. It is too accommodating to the flesh, and thus is powerless in every sense of the word.

Remember, this prayer was prayed for a people who had given evidence of the working of the Lord within them. It reflects the nature of the kingdom, the expectancies of the Lord, and the need of the hour. These are matters that cannot be ignored – either in preaching or in praying. They are not ancillary matters, but are at the very heart of God’s dealings with His children. They must be sought and obtained.

WHAT GOD HAS DONE

Lesson # 5

Having heard of the faith and love of the Colossians, Paul had entered into consistent prayer for them. His prayers were insightful, and in keeping with the objectives of salvation. They were not perfunctory, nor were they earth-centered. He sought for the Colossians filling. For some people, that means something entirely different than what is revealed in this prayer.

A SPECIFIC DIRECTION

The prayer is pointed in a specific direction, and aimed at producing certain results. Being filled with “the knowledge of” God’s will, or purpose, is the foundation upon which Paul asks the Lord to build (1:9a). Apart from such knowledge, spiritual growth is not possible. The “knowledge” Paul coveted for the Colossians would result in “all wisdom, and spiritual understanding” (1:9b). The saints would be able to navigate in the truth of God, bringing it to bear upon life in “this present evil world.”

HOLY INVOLVEMENT

In redemption, the aim is to involve men with God through their lives. This is described as walking worthy of the Lord “unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work” (1:10a). In this experience, believers would be “strengthened with all might” according to God’s “glorious power” (1:11a). This is the very power that raised Jesus from the dead, and enthroned Him at the Father’s right hand, invested with all power in heaven and earth.

The resulting manner of life is depicted in a glorious summation: “unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (1:11b).

THE FORWARD THRUST

The life of faith has a certain forward thrust. It refuses to settle down in this world, choosing to continue in quest of a “better country, that is an heavenly” (Heb 11:16). Faith constrains the one possessing it to “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14).

Faith has a forward posture. Its eyes are focused beyond this world, and it moves its possessor to place affection on things above, and not on things on the earth (Col 3:2). The objective of the believer is to “seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col 3:1). Faith creates a discontent with this world, and a longing for “the world to come.” It prepares us for an ultimate confrontation with God, and the things He has “prepared for them that love Him” (1 Cor 2:9).

A GENUINE PROFESSION

Where these inclinations are not found, faith is not present. That is precisely why Paul gave thanks for the Colossians. They had “faith in Christ Jesus” and love “to all saints.” This attested to the genuineness of their profession.

The absence of a heavenly mind-set reveals a heart that is at enmity with God. There is no such thing as a salvation that does not constrain a person to anticipate and prepare for glory. Where people profess faith, yet are firmly anchored to this world, their profession is worthless.

These are strong statements, yet they need to be heard. Like the Philippians and others before us, we are in the midst of a “perverse” generation. Our situation is compounded by the significant corruption of the religious environment. With seemingly few exceptions, the religious emphasis of this generation has left people thinking friendship with the world is really of no consequence. A hunger and thirst for righteousness is not at all common in the churches. Most observers know this is the case, but relatively few are willing to say it.

It is imperative that those longing to dwell forever with the Lord make progress toward that objective. This forward motion does not occur automatically, or without the effort of the believer. That is precisely why Paul prays as he does for the Colossians. His prayer is one that seeks the involvement of the people themselves. They are the ones being filled with the knowledge of God's will. They are the ones in whom "all wisdom and spiritual understanding" are to be found. The people of God are themselves the ones who will walk "worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." They are the ones who will increase "in the knowledge of God." It is the saints who are "strengthened with all might" by God's "glorious power." They are the ones who will come to own "all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness." I do not believe any person can establish that salvation is, in any sense, separate from these things.

THE MEANS TO THE APPOINTED END

Our text will confirm the forward attitude of faith. That is the means to the appointed end. Where the eyes of the individual are not focused upon the revealed goal, none of the above fruits will, or can, be experienced. If peoples' religion anchors them to this world, it separates them from participation in "the world to come." Friendship with this world IS enmity with God (James 4:4).

Paul will now touch upon the role of thanksgiving in our journey to glory. It will be very apparent that the focus is the future, not the present. Insightful thanksgiving looks at the present in view of the future. It sees Divine provisions as preparatory for our ultimate confrontation of God and the world to come. The blessings of the Lord are not intended to rivet us to this world, but to prepare us for leaving it. This will become very apparent as we consider giving thanks to the Father. The Spirit's approach will be a lofty one.

"1:12a Giving thanks unto the Father . . ." Only one major version does not say "giving thanks" – "always thanking." NLT This is a continuation of the prayer beginning in verse nine. This is also a continued exposition of walking "worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing. (1:1). That worthy and pleasing walk involves the following.

- Fruitful in every good work.
- Increasing in the knowledge of God.
- All patience or endurance.

- All long suffering.
- With joyfulness (1:10-11).

The religious climate of America does not even recognize the validity of these things. None of these virtues contribute to institutionalism, which has now been placed on the religious throne. Rather than Christians being recognized because of their identity with Christ, and fervent love for one another, their organizational affiliation is accented.

You will note the total absence of such an approach in our text – as well as the rest of the Apostolic writings. Paul did not commend the brethren for being members of the Colossian assembly. He did not site their commitment to a certain theological position, or to a written creed. He started by being thankful for their “faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love” they had “to all saints” (1:4). His prayer for them was designed to strengthen those qualities.

Now he continues to accent the type of life that is worthy of God.

GIVING

One of the distinctions of the New Covenant is the willingness and forwardness of the people. They have truly been made “willing in the day of His power” (Psa 110:3).

Under the Law, things were often given to God reluctantly, or even not at all. In Malachi’s day, the people offered animals that were “blind,” “lame,” and “sick” (Mal 1:8). Technically, some might have considered these things as being “given” to God. That is not, however, how heaven regarded them. They revealed a disdain for God, and not a love for Him, or a the fear of Him. Our text speaks in harmony with the nature of the New Covenant, not that of the Old.

“ Giving” involves loving the Lord, fearing Him, and knowing Him. It is associated with recognizing and understanding Him, and being determined to please Him.

THANKS

“Thanks” is not only being grateful, but expressing gratitude – putting it into insightful and acceptable words. The word itself involves “feeling grateful.” STRONG’S “Thanks” comes from the heart, is accompanied with insight and understanding, and is placed into words. “Giving thanks” cannot be

done perfunctorily, or through empty routine. It cannot be done casually, or without the involvement of spirit, soul, and body.

The giving of thanks was typified by the “thank offerings” presented under the Law. These were offered according to the will of the people. As it is written, “And when ye will offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving unto the LORD, offer it at your own will ” (Lev 22:29). These are generally understood to be the “freewill offerings” mentioned in the Levitical Law (Lev 22:18; 23:38; Num 29:39; Deut 12:6,17). Their frequency was governed by the heart of the people rather than the Law itself.

Such thanks offerings, for example, were offered during the revival of Hezekiah’s day. Then those who were of a “free heart” brought sacrifices for “thank offerings.” “Then Hezekiah answered and said, Now ye have consecrated yourselves unto the LORD, come near and bring sacrifices and thank offerings into the house of the LORD. And the congregation brought in sacrifices and thank offerings; and as many as were of a free heart burnt offerings” (2 Chr 29:31).

“Thank offerings” were properly called “sacrifices of praise,” given freely to the Lord. As it is written, “And they shall come from the cities of Judah, and from the places about Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the plain, and from the mountains, and from the south, bringing burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and meat offerings, and incense, and bringing sacrifices of praise , unto the house of the LORD” (Jer 17:26). This type of sacrifice is fulfilled in Christ Jesus, and is referred to in Hebrews 13:13. “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name” (Heb 13:15).

The broad nature of thanksgiving is seen in the various sacrifices that could be offered in the thank offerings under the Law. The offering could be made of an animal, fruit from trees, honey, oil, or new wine (Ex 13:12,13; Lev 23:10-13; Num 18:12; 1 Chron 9:29; Neh 10:37; 2 Chron 32:5; Deut 12:17,18; 14:23). Thus, not only was the frequency of the offering in the hands of the people, but WHAT they offered as well.

All of this is brought to spiritual fruition in this word to the church – “giving thanks.” The time and content of this thanksgiving will be determined by the will and insight of the people. That does not mean thanksgiving is slipshod, or that we are not to apply ourselves to it with zeal. This will be confirmed by the words that follow. They are a summons for believers to ponder the benefits of redemption. Once they enter into such contemplation, and their understanding is fruitful, thanksgiving will follow.

The verses that follow contain some of the most profound of all Apostolic doctrine. That doctrine will be best received when it is heard with insightful thanksgiving.

UNTO THE FATHER

Thanksgiving is to be offered “unto the Father,” who is the Architect of our salvation, and the One who “hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3).

The words “ the Father,” as applied to God Himself, do not occur in Genesis through Malachi. That is not how God was generally known prior to, and during, the administration of the Old Covenant. However, the New Covenant writings refer to “the Father” over one hundred and twenty-two times. Seventy-two of them are found in the Gospels. This circumstance reflects the marvelous accomplishments of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Those who are in Christ Jesus are brought into a new and productive relationship with the heavenly Father who begat them. It is a deeper relationship than that of “Friend,” which Abraham enjoyed (James 2:23). It is more extensive than the benefits realized by David, a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22). In all of the Psalms, the word “Father” occurs only once (Psa 89:26). Daniel was called “greatly beloved” (Dan 9:23; 10:11,19), but that does not approximate the status of those who are in Christ Jesus. The word “Father” does not occur a single time in the book of Daniel. None of Solomon’s writings contain the word “Father.”

The term “Father” emphasizes source, or origin. Thus we read, “God, the Father, of whom are all things , and we in Him” (1 Cor 8:6).

A Consciousness of the Father

It is imperative that our religion promote a lively consciousness of “the Father.” Much of the Christianity of our day has very little to say about “the Father.” It is not uncommon to hear people pray to Jesus, even though He taught us to pray, addressing our prayers to “Our Father” (Matt 6:9). In speaking of the time following His enthronement at the right hand of God, Jesus said: “And in that day ye shall ask Me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you” (John 16:23).

Paul spoke of his personal prayers in this manner: “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 3:14). In the book of Colossians, one of the first things Paul said was, “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you” (Col 1:3). He taught that we have “access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:18).

While this may seem to be a small point, rest assured that this is not the case. God the Father is central in the entire redemptive economy. Although this is known intuitively by those familiar with Scripture, it is good to reaffirm the centrality of the Father in the matter of our salvation.

- We were “reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Rom 5:10).
- We are “alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11).
- Through Christ we “bring forth fruit unto God ” (Rom 7:4).
- The one who “serveth Christ is acceptable to God ” (Rom 14:18).
- We “glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God ” (Rom 15:17).
- Giving glory is spoken of on this wise: “ To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen” (Rom 16:27).
- In the “end,” it is written that Jesus “shall have delivered up the kingdom to God , even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power” (1 Cor 15:24).
- God “giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:57).
- It is God who “always causeth us to triumph in Christ” (2 Cor 2:14).
- Our lives are “ unto God a sweet savor of Christ” (2 Cor 2:15).
- Our trust is “through Christ to God-ward ” (2 Cor 3:4).
- Christ has reconciled both Jew and Gentile “ unto God in one body by the cross” (Eph 2:16).
- Christ Jesus “hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savor” (Eph 5:2).
- We are to give “thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:20).
- “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him” (Col 3:17).
- Christ is a “merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God , to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17).

- Jesus is “able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25).
- Spiritual sacrifices are “acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5).
- Christ died and rose again “that He might bring us to God , being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Pet 3:18).
- It is by Jesus that we believe in God. “Who by him do believe in God , that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God ” (1 Pet 1:21).
- God the Father put us into Christ. “But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30).
- The Father sent the Spirit into our hearts. “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6).
- The “eternal purpose” was conceived by the Father. “According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:11).
- The Son came to do the will of the Father. “In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God ” (Heb 10:6-7).
- The Father sent the Son. “And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14).
- The Father sustained the Son. “Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me” (John 16:32).
- The Father raised the Son from the dead. “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Rom 10:9).
- The Scriptures declare the Father has glorified the Son. “ The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus” (Acts 3:13).
- The Father gave the Son a name that is above every name. “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name” (Phil 2:9).
- The Father is glorified by our good works. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Mat 5:16).

- Most precisely, Jesus is “the Son of the Father” (2 John 1:3).

These are only a small sampling of the type of doctrine delivered by Christ and His Apostles. They serve to confirm the centrality of the Father in redemption, and the necessity of proper focus upon Him. Christ is, after all, the Way to the Father. In fact, it is the Father who gives significance to Christ.

“ 12b . . . which hath made us meet . . . ” The things for which we give thanks to the Father have their ultimate origin in Him. Now, the Spirit will trace our acceptance to God, and our qualification for His blessing, to the Father Himself. If we are to “grow up into Christ in all things” (Eph 4:15), we must have a proper view of the Father.

Our theology must not be juvenile and naive. When it comes to the things of God, simplicity of understanding is an enemy, not a friend. We are solemnly admonished, “Brethren, be not children in understanding : howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men” (1 Cor 14:20).

Salvation Is Not Simplistic

Nothing about salvation is simplistic, and it must not be viewed as though that was the case.

- Anything that involves God being both just and the Justifier cannot be elemental Rom 3:26).
- Reconciling sinners to a holy God is not rudimentary (Rom 5:10).
- Making peace between the enemies of God and God Himself is not a matter to be expounded by children, even though children who are of thoughtful mind can possess that peace (Col 1:20).
- In salvation the devil has been “destroyed” (Heb 2:14), yet “walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour ” (1 Pet 5:8). That is not a simple matter.
- Principalities and powers have been spoiled, and yet we continue to wrestle against them (Col 2:15; Eph 6:12). That is not simplistic.

- The removal of a stony heart and the reception of a heart of flesh is not something to be expounded by the novice (Ezek 36:26).
- The fact that the “glorious Gospel of the blessed God” (1 Tim 1:11) can be believed by the young, and pondered by the most astute and disciplined thinkers among men, confirms it is not a juvenile message. This is a Gospel that has moved holy angels to inquire into it (1 Pet 1:12).

We should expect a salvation of this magnitude and depth to engage the mature mind as well as the undeveloped one. What Paul now expounds comes from a matured understanding – a keen perception of the nature and extent of salvation. This is not the outer court of spiritual thought, but brings us into the most holy place.

MADE US

“ . . . which hath made us . . . ” Other versions read, “who has qualified us,” NKJV/NASB/NIV “who has enabled you,” NRSV and “who did make us.” YLT

The word “made” refers to the result of God’s own work. The condition that follows is “the Lord’s doing,” and it is “marvelous in our eyes” (Psa 118:23).

It is true in redemption, just as it is in the natural creation: “it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves” (Psa 100:3). As Paul said, “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:10). We will now behold some of the involvements of that glorious “workmanship.”

MEET

“ . . . meet.” Other versions read, “qualified,” NKJV/NASB/NIV “enabled you to share,” NRSV “given us a part,” BBE “fit for,” DARBY “worthy,” DOUAY and “able to.” NJB

This is an aspect of salvation that is rarely considered by professing Christians . The truth of the matter is that much of the preaching of our day is not conducive to sound spiritual thought.

While, like Jacob, none of us are “worthy of the least of all the mercies” we have received (Gen 32:10), yet the things God has prepared for those who love Him of God demand worthiness on our part ! Thrust from your mind any notion that unworthy people will at last dwell forever with the Lord. This is not the case. Unworthiness excludes us from the Lord, His courts, and His blessings. That is precisely why we had to be delivered, saved, raised, and “made meet.” Salvation does not leave us in an unworthy condition, but rather delivers us from it.

God did not give us a procedure by which we could be “made meet,” but did the work Himself. He “made” us “meet,” qualified, or worthy. His nature would not allow Him to give an “eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15) to unworthy individuals – else the devil himself could receive it. Further, fallen man was unable to attain to a state of worthiness in his own strength – even if he was told precisely what to do. The Law provided such information, yet was “weak through the flesh” (Rom 8:3), leaving mankind in an unworthy state.

Therefore, the Lord did the work Himself. The prophet put it this way: “And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore Mine own arm brought salvation unto Me; and My fury, it upheld Me” (Isa 63:5). That marvelous salvation includes the work of making us qualified for the blessings to be realized in Christ Jesus. In redemption, God not only does something with our iniquity, He does something with us as well.

“ 12b . . . to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”

In this text, the Spirit provides a grand summation of the “salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10). It is essential for us to have a grasp of this overall view. Only God can give us the grand total first, then provide the details that sum up to that total. Whatever does not eventually lead to this conclusion has nothing whatsoever to do with our salvation. If the theology one embraces does not have a primary place for the consideration that follows, it ought to be abandoned with both zeal and haste. Such a theology is false to the core, for God promotes nothing that does not lead to this end: “the inheritance of the saints in light.”

I understand that this does have some alarming repercussions, for much of the religion to which we are exposed these days has precious little to do with an inheritance. However, nothing – absolutely nothing – about salvation is divorced from this consideration. This is the objective toward which Jesus is working. It is why Jesus died, and why the Holy Spirit works within us.

PARTAKERS

“ . . . to be partakers . . . ” Other versions read “to share,” NASB/NIV/NRSV “given us a part,” BBE “sharing the portion,” DARBY and “the participation.” YLT

The word “partakers” means a part, as distinct from the whole; an assigned part, portion, or share. STRONG’S Here we are introduced to a Kingdom manner – a way God has of dealing with mankind. Being made a “partaker” postulates obtaining a part of something much larger than ourselves. What the Lord provides is divided, or apportioned, with Divine discretion. The Holy Spirit makes a point of this throughout Scripture.

The Earth

While men have aspired to be world conquerors, the Lord divided the earth, giving certain sections to certain people. “By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations” (Gen 10:5). “These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood” (Gen 10:32). “When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel” (Deu 32:8).

When speaking to the Athenians, Paul referred to this division in most precise language. “From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live” NIV (Acts 17:26).

The Land of Canaan

When Israel came into the promised land, it was divided to them by lot – each tribe receiving a portion of the land appropriate to their size and function. “And ye shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families: and to the more ye shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer ye shall give the less inheritance: every man's inheritance shall be in the place where his lot falleth; according to the tribes of your fathers ye shall inherit” (Num 33:54).

The Spoils of Victory

In ancient times, the spoils of victory, or the goods plundered from the enemy, were divided by portion. David is particularly noted for his discretion in this matter. Following a thorough defeat of the Amalekites, it is written of him, “Then answered all the wicked men and men of Belial, of those that went with David, and said, Because they went not with us, we will not give them ought of the spoil that we have recovered, save to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away, and depart. Then said David, Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the LORD hath given us, who hath preserved us, and delivered the company that came against us into our hand. For who will hearken unto you in this matter? but as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike. And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day” (1 Sam 30:22-25).

Ministries Within Christ’s Body

The same dividing procedure is found within the body of Christ. The Lord Himself apportions certain functions within Christ's body. As it is written, "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him" (1 Cor 12:18). These are areas of responsibility that accrue to the building up of the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit administers these various functions. "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will" (1 Cor 12:4-11).

In admonishing the saints to engage in profitable ministry, Peter referred to this arrangement. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth" (1 Pet 4:11). Paul spoke similarly to the brethren in Rome. "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom 12:3-5).

Concluding Thought

A "partaker" is a participator, not a spectator. A partaker is someone with a function, or role, within something much larger than himself. This is something for which God has made us "meet," or worthy.

THE INHERITANCE

". . . of the inheritance . . ." The word "inheritance" emphasizes the future. It is something that is not currently seen or realized, yet of which powerful testimony has been delivered. The "inheritance" is at the heart and core of spiritual life. It is something for which there is both longing and labor. Ponder how much is said of it.

- **AN INHERITANCE AMONG THE SANCTIFIED.** "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). The Word of God's grace, contained in the Gospel, is able to give us a participation in the things God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor 2:9).
- **THE OBJECTIVE OF APOSTLESHIP.** "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:18). Forgiveness is in order to participating in the inheritance that has not yet been revealed. It is involved in making us worthy for that glorious inheritance.
- **IN A SENSE, IT IS ALREADY OBTAINED.** "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph 1:11). The inheritance is presently obtained by having our names affixed to it. It is reserved for us, to so speak, in Christ Jesus. The aim that must pervade the heart of every believer is to obtain it.

- **WE HAVE A DOWN PAYMENT OF THE INHERITANCE.** “. . . that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory” (Eph 1:13-14). The Holy Spirit is a pledge of the inheritance to come. He represents the nature and substance of that inheritance, and is a guarantee that it will be realized.
- **AN ETERNAL INHERITANCE.** “And for this cause He is the Mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance ” (Heb 9:15). Unlike the lands inherited by the nations, and the portions of Canaan inherited by the twelve tribes of Israel, the inheritance realized in Christ Jesus is an eternal one. Those, therefore, who emphasize worldly benefits, affirming that to be the meaning of “life more abundantly” have not told the truth. It is still true, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Cor 15:19).
- **BORN AGAIN TO OBTAIN.** “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet 1:3-4). From this point of view, the purpose for the new birth is in order to the realization of an incorruptible inheritance – not one that will perish, or cease to be when the world passes away. Even though we presently have the “earnest of the inheritance,” we do not have its fulness – nor can we have it while we remain in the body in this world. However, it is “reserved in heaven for you.”

After all is said and done, a person must be qualified for this inheritance. We give thanks to God that, although we had no power to qualify ourselves, He has made us “meet” to participate in this “eternal inheritance.” We will participate in that inheritance by lot, or portion. Jesus referred to this as our “reward in heaven” (Matt 5:12). Paul referred to it as “the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him” (1 Cor 2:9). Elsewhere we read of a “city” God has “prepared” for those who seek a “better country” (Heb 11:16). John spoke of the inheritance in the grandness of scope. “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son” (Rev 21:7).

Keep in mind that before we were in Jesus, we were appropriately described as “by nature children of wrath” (Eph 2:3), and “having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). We were “condemned already” (John 3:18), and the wrath of God was abiding upon us (John 3:36). Ponder Paul’s extensive description of our former state in his letter to Titus. “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Titus 3:3).

Our outward appearance might have been acceptable before men, but we ourselves were not acceptable to God. It is no wonder that we are called to give thanks to the Father for making us qualified for the inheritance! That is a great work, indeed!

Minuscule views of the “inheritance” will produce meager and beggarly thanksgiving. It is

possible for people to limit their thanksgiving to the experience of temporal benefits. To be sure, we must give thanks to the Lord for these things. However, we must see to it that our thanks are not limited to them. Our Father in heaven has qualified us for “the inheritance,” and for this an uninterrupted flow of praise must be raised to Him! Perhaps if preachers and teachers spoke more of the inheritance it would produce a greater measure of thanksgiving in the hearers.

THE SAINTS IN LIGHT

“ . . . of the saints in light.” Other versions read, “saints in the kingdom of light,” NIV/NIB “that belongs to God’s holy people, who live in the light,” NLT and “God’s holy people and with them to inherit the light.” NJB

“God is light” (1 John 1:5), and those who would fellowship with Him here, and dwell forever with Him there, must be in the light !

“Light” speaks of life and illumination. Jesus said those following Him would have “the light of life” (John 8:12). He also said, “If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world” (John 11:9). He further referred to the light being IN the person, not merely upon him: “But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him” (John 11:9).

Saints

There are all manner of qualifiers in this brief sentence. God is the One who has qualified us, and without that qualification we cannot participate in the inheritance. Now the Spirit adds that the enjoyment of that inheritance will be by “saints” – holy ones, for that is the meaning of the word.

Elsewhere we are taught that “without” holiness, “no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). This is a day when it is certainly not fashionable to speak of holiness. The modern church does not reflect this quality in its appearance, activity, or thought. But be sure of this, there will not be one unholy personality in glory – not a single one! If a person is not holy, then they must at once engage in activities that make for holiness. The Spirit puts it this way: “I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness ” (Rom 6:19). And again, “But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness , and the end everlasting life” (Rom 6:22).

We are admonished, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1). The “new man” was “created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24). No unholiness proceeds from the new creation – not even the smallest expression of it (2 Cor 5:17). Where unholiness, or unrighteousness is found, “the flesh” is dominating the person. We are solemnly told, “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall

die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:13). That is a big “IF.” There is not the slightest chance that a person living “after the flesh” will be saved. Conversely, there is not the slenderest chance that those mortifying the deeds of the body through the Spirit will not live!

Holy people are “saints.” Righteous people are “saints.” Godly people are “saints.” The inheritance is for “saints,” and no one but “saints.”

A lack of holiness reveals a lack of Christ. The modern church, particularly the American church, is too tolerant of a lack of holiness. It’s counselors are attempting to talk people out of sin instead of calling upon them to repent and bring forth “fruits meet for repentance” (Matt 3:8). The church has become a hospital where people stay sick instead of getting well. Among the people with whom I have been identified, the words “inheritance” and “saints” are like foreign language. The average church member does not have the faintest notion of what they mean, even though they are frequent themes of Apostolic exposition.

In Light

The Spirit seems to drive the truth even deeper into our conscience. He does not end by mentioning “saints,” or “holy ones,” He identifies them with the “light.” Some versions read “kingdom of light.” NIV/NIB That is, the “light” is the habitat in which the “saints” live. It is a domain of understanding, insight, and illumination. Saints “walk in the light,” and thus experience fellowship with one another and the continual cleansing of the blood of Christ. As it is written, “But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). With true “saints,” there is no “if” – they DO walk in the light, for that is how they maintain their godly character.

Saints are “children of the day,” and are “not of the night” (1 Thess 5:5). They “know God,” from the least of them to the greatest (Jer 31:34; Heb 8:11). They have acquainted themselves with Him, and therefore have peace (Job 22:24).

“Light” is the surrounding element of the saints: “the saints IN light.” This speaks of an environment of understanding, perception, and insight. Enlightenment and illumination from God are experienced (Eph 1:18; 3:18; Heb 6:4; 20:32). An ignorant person or church cannot be holy, for ignorance indicates one is in darkness (1 John 2:11)!

We must not be judgmental toward one another in this matter. However, we must see to it that those who insist on walking in darkness are not comfortable when they are among the saints. In the same way, our personal and congregational manners should not cause offense to those who are walking in the light. What offends God will not please those who know Him.

Once again, I want to emphasize how this manner of speaking conflicts with the Christianity of our day. This condition underscores the spiritual jeopardy of the times in which we are living. These are truly “perilous times” – times that encourage slumber. How the church needs the focus of the text before us! It needs to see how great a deliverance is wrought when the holy God qualifies a person for His inheritance – the things He has prepared for those who love Him!

“ 13a Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness . . . ”

WHO

“Who . . . ” We now embark on what God the Father has done in our salvation. These are matters for which insightful thanksgiving is given to Him. Such thanksgiving is integral to walking “worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.”

This is “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 11:31; Eph 1:3; 4:6; 1 Pet 1:13). It is the God that is manifested in Christ Jesus (1 Tim 3:16). This is the One to whom, Jesus is bringing us (1 Pet 3:18). He is most precisely seen in Jesus, who is “the express Image of His Person” (Heb 1:3).

This God is not fully defined in a creed. His “fulness” dwells in the Lord Jesus (Col 1:19; 2:9). Only the Lord Jesus can make this God known. Apart from Christ, He cannot be comprehended as He is. Thus Jesus affirmed, “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him ” (Mat 11:27).

God cannot be known by mere study or research. The heavens declare His glory, but in all the history of the world, no one has ever comprehended God by studying the heavens!

Apart from the Lord Jesus, all talk about God is mere speculation. No eternal benefit has ever, nor can it ever, come from an understanding of God that was not taught by Jesus. No man can come to God except by Christ (John 14:6), and no man even knows who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom Jesus wills to reveal Him. That is the God who is the Subject of this text.

DELIVERED US

“ . . . hath delivered us . . . ” Other versions read, “rescued us,” NIV/NRSV and “made us free.” BBE The word “deliver” means “ to draw to one’s self, to rescue, and to deliver.” STRONG’S Lexically, the word means “ To draw , hence, properly, to draft, to oneself , to rescue, to deliver.” THAYER

The picture is that of one Master drawing a captive to himself from another master. The utter helplessness of the one being delivered is also assumed.

This deliverance was as complex as our bondage. We should not expect a deliverance requiring the incarnation, death, resurrection, exaltation, and intercession of Christ to be simplistic. Sin introduced a complex situation that could only be resolved by an all-powerful and all-wise God.

- Concerning our condemned status, and the justness of it, we were delivered from the Law in its condemning capacity. “But now we are delivered from the law , that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom 7:6).
- Concerning our conflict with God, and the consequent indignation to which we were subjected, we were delivered from the wrath to come. “And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come ” (1 Thess 1:10).
- Concerning our present environment, with which we had been united by nature, we were delivered from this present evil world. “Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world , according to the will of God and our Father” (Gal 1:4).

Now the Spirit affirms our deliverance from an alienating power greater than ourselves. This was a power to which we had been enslaved, and from which we could not extricate ourselves. Furthermore, no created personality could liberate us from this bondage.

FROM THE POWER OF DARKNESS

“ . . . from the power of darkness.” Other versions read “the domain of darkness,” NASB “the dominion of darkness,” NIV “power of evil ,” BBE “ authority of darkness,” DARBY “the ruling force of darkness,” NJB and “the one who rules in the kingdom of darkness.” NLT

More is involved in sin than infracting the Law of God. That is what sin is Godward – but there is another dimension to sin. There is a domain into which one must enter before sin can be committed – the realm of darkness. Once entered, the door shuts behind the transgressor – a door he is powerless to open. There is also a powerful personality behind sin – the devil. To sin, the individual must listen to the devil, and do his bidding. Once sin is committed, Satan gains control of the transgressors – a control the sinners are powerless to break.

The Race Had Been Captured

Because of Adam's sin, the whole human race was captured by Satan. Although theologians have argued about this point, the Holy Spirit had made the matter quite clear.

- Sin entered and dominated through Adam. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom 5:12).
- All men died toward God because of one man's sin. "But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many" (Rom 5:15).
- Judgment unto condemnation resulted from one man's sin. "And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification" (Rom 5:16).
- Death reigned over the human race because of one man. "For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:17).
- By the offense of one man, judgment came to all men unto condemnation. "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Rom 5:18).
- By one man's disobedience, many were made sinners. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom 5:19).

Confirming Evidence

While men may argue about these things, the evidence speaks for itself. Satan has "deceived the whole world" (Rev 12:9). The "whole world" lies under the power of the wicked one (1 John 5:19). Everyone has sinned and comes short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). By nature, we are "the children of wrath" (Eph 2:3).

What Is Darkness?

Darkness is the objective realm of evil – that is, it is an authoritative empire that promotes and maintains wickedness. It is headed up by Satan, who maintains this vast empire through "the rulers of the darkness of this world" (Eph 6:12). This is a domain in which God is neither seen nor known. So far as men are concerned, the realm of "darkness" deals exclusively with "this world," making it one's solitary focus.

This realm militates against any thinking about God Himself, Christ Jesus, the salvation of God,

or the Law of God. It does not allow men to think about the inevitability of death, the end of the world or the day of judgment. None of these things can be clearly seen in “darkness,” and thus they do not occupy the minds of those under its power.

“Darkness” has to do with ignorance. Basically, this is an ignorance of God, which actually alienates the individual from Him (Eph 4:18), and guarantees condemnation (2 Thess 1:8).

Darkness is the realm in which sin is committed, and those who sin “walk in darkness” (1 John 1:6). Transgressions are called the “works of darkness” (Rom 13:12; Eph 5:11). Prior to being in Christ, we ourselves were called “darkness” – the epitome of ignorance and sin (Eph 5:8).

The Rule of Darkness

Our text affirms we were delivered from “the POWER of darkness.” We were not simply guilty of sin, but were held within the confines of guilt, ignorance, and condemnation. The “power of darkness” is stronger than the ability of the transgressor. It keeps men locked up just as surely as Israel was kept in bondage in Egypt, and Samson in the grinding mills of the Philistines. It is no more possible for the sinner to break his own bonds than it was for Joseph to escape from prison through his own ingenuity. If God does not intervene, there simply is no hope.

Darkness rules! If a person chooses to walk in darkness – in the ignorance of God – he will be ruled by that darkness. Darkness does not ask for permission to rule, but takes the dominion over all who are within its confines.

The Jeopardy of Our Times

We live in a time when the scholars and psychologists have captured the church. They have taught men to speak in such a manner as to minimize the power of darkness, and overstate the power of men. Men now speak of addiction, substance abuse, the disease of alcoholism, habits, inherited behavior, and the likes. They have emitted an obscuring fog that hides the truth from men. What they call “addiction” is really “the power of darkness.” Let us not be confused about the matter, “substance abuse” is actually “the power of darkness.” Alcoholism is not a disease, but the evidence of “the power of darkness.” Men are not addicted to pornography, they are under “the power of darkness.” When men cannot break away from sin, they are not wrestling against mere habits, but against “the power of darkness.” Men may glibly speak of the need to manage their anger, but what they really need is deliverance from “the power of darkness.”

God Has Delivered Us

The truth of the matter is that God has “delivered us from the power of darkness.” The deliverance is as real as Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. Through Christ, men can walk out of darkness

just as surely as Israel walked out of Egypt.

Like Peter's Deliverance

Our deliverance from darkness is much like Peter's deliverance from prison. When Peter was "kept in prison," he was "sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison." When the delivering angel "came upon him," a "light shined in the prison," and "his chains fell off from his hands." The angel told him to gird himself, put on his sandals, wrap a garment around himself and follow him. They walked past two guards without the guards even noticing them. When they came to a great iron gate that led into the city, the gate "opened to them of its own accord" (Acts 12:6-10). Peter had been delivered from the power of the prison!

When God delivered us from "the power of darkness," the moral chains that bound us simply fell off. Satan's lieutenants did not even know we were leaving their domain, and the moral and spiritual gates that held us in darkness opened to let us out. We were able to come to Jesus, believe the Gospel, and obey the Lord from the heart.

Like Job's Deliverance

While there are some things about Job's deliverance that do not exactly parallel our rescue, here are some comparable circumstances.

First, the experience of Job is called "the captivity of Job," and God alone "turned" the circumstances for Job's advantage (Job 42:10). During the period allotted to Satan to test Job, the patriarch was powerless to thwart the working of the devil. Of that period God said to Satan, "Behold, all that he hath is in thy power ; only upon himself put not forth thine hand" (Job 1:12). In a single day, the devil liquidated Job's assets, and Job could do nothing to stop him.

In his second attack, Satan "smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head" (Job 2:7). There was nothing Job could do to negate Satan's power. He could not reject the boils, as some are wont to say today.

However, when God "turned the captivity of Job," the devil's attack was abruptly ended, and blessings were so abundant that it is written, "So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning" (Job 42:12).

That is how it was when God delivered us "from the power of darkness." The misery caused by sin was over, and Satan's dominion was ended.

SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS

Until men comprehend the magnitude of their former enslavement to sin, and dominance by the devil, the salvation of God will not be viewed as it should. The Holy Spirit extends Himself to emphasize what we have been delivered from, as well as what we have come to. A few examples will serve to confirm this to our hearts.

- “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin , but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (Rom 6:17).
- “For when ye were the servants of sin , ye were free from righteousness” (Rom 6:20).
- “Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air , the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others ” (Eph 2:2-3)
- “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world ” (Eph 2:11-12).
- “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another ” (Titus 3:3).

These are a commentary on the effectiveness of “the power of darkness.” Our condition required a Divine work, not mere human ingenuity or resolve. Anyone who is honest knows that is the case.

The Beginning

Our deliverance from “the power of darkness” was the beginning of our experience of salvation. It started with deliverance, just as Israel’s salvation from Egyptian bondage started with their exodus from the land that held them.

The Implications of this Teaching

There are some powerful implications in this teaching. If those in Christ have, in fact, been delivered “from the power of darkness,” then continued involvement in sin reveals the person is deceived – for Satan can only work through deception.

The reality of our deliverance “from the power of darkness” is why the Lord demands that we be holy (1 Pet 1:15-16). It is why we are told no man will see God who is not holy (Heb 12:14). Give thanks for such a marvelous deliverance! Then, accept the responsibility that accompanies that deliverance. Leave the area wherein you were once held!

“ 13b . . . and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son.”

There are two sides the coin of redemption: what we are saved from , and what we are saved to . There is what we have come out of , and what we have come into . There is something removed , and something given . There is deliverance out of the hand of the enemy , and deliverance into the hand of the Savior . There is the settling of a debt , and the establishment of an inheritance . Old things pass away, and all things become new . We put off “the old man,” only to put on “the new man.”

There are two kings and two kingdoms. Christ heads up one, and Satan the other. One kingdom is of light, the other of darkness. Both kingdoms are entered by a birth. The natural birth brings you into the kingdom of darkness. The new birth brings you into the kingdom of light.

It is not enough to be “delivered from the power of darkness.” That is not the end of the matter. Much of the religion of our day treats conversion as though it only removed guilt and dealt with the past. However, our deliverance from “the power of darkness” was in order to something. We were not delivered to live on our own, for that brings no glory to God. It was living for self that characterized our former lives. It surely cannot be the focus of our new lives.

Now the Spirit will elaborate on WHY we were delivered. This will help to shape our understanding concerning salvation.

HATH

“ . . . and hath . . . ” We are still speaking of what God the Father has done. While it is apparent from the language of the text, our hearts must be continually reminded that we are “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:10). It is “ by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” NASB (1 Cor 1:30).

We are speaking of something that has already taken place – “hath.” The circumstance that follows exists, and all of the benefits associated with it are accessible.

Much is made of what God has already done. A brief view of this aspect of the Kingdom will serve to confirm the reality declared in this verse.

- God HAS set forth Christ as the propitiation for sin (Rom 3:25).
- God HAS raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 10:9).
- God HAS dealt to every person in Christ “the measure of faith” (Rom 12:3).
- God HAS prepared things for those who love Him (1 Cor 2:9).
- God HAS sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts (Gal 4:6).
- God HAS given to us eternal life, which is in the Son (1 John 5:11).

None of these things have been done independently of the accomplishments of the Son of God. Christ’s redemptive work is WHY God has been able to do these things, and be righteous in the doing of them.

We must always view salvation as wholly dependent upon the work of Christ and the will of God. In a marvelous summation of Christ’s mission in this world, the Spirit records Him saying, “Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me,) to do Thy will, O God. Above when He said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin Thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; then said He, Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second” (Heb 10:7-9).

This is why Jesus said, “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34). That work culminated in laying down His life “a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28). This was according to the commandment He received from the Father, to lay down His life, and take it up again (John 10:17-18). Until Christ did this, God could not do what our text affirms He now has done.

All of this may seem so apparent that one might imagine there is no need to say such things. However, that is not at all the case. Among many professing believers there is not clear and concise thinking concerning the salvation of God. Often it is oversimplified, as though God could just deliver people from the tyranny of the devil, and put them in heavenly places simply because He wanted to. Such thinking is too simplistic for a child of God.

Ponder what ramifications such a foolish theology has. That would mean that God really had no desire to save people for the first four thousand years of human history – for, during that time, none were delivered from the power of darkness in the sense of our text.

The fact that God “HATH” proves something has been accomplished that permits Him to righteously do what follows – something that satisfied God’s own requirements. That “something” is the vicarious and effectual death of Christ. It is said of that death, “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied ” (Isa 53:11). Blessed indeed is the person who finds himself also “satisfied” with the offering of Christ.

TRANSLATED US

“ . . . translated us . . . ” Other versions read, “conveyed us,” NKJV “transferred us,” NASB “brought us into,” NIV and “given us a place in.” BBE

The word “translated” means to transpose, transfer, remove from one place to another, or a change of situation or place. STRONG’S It involves changing one’s official position from one place to another. Enoch, for example, was “translated that he should not see death” (Heb 11:5). That is, he was transferred to the unseen realms without having to pass through the corridor of death.

There is a moral change that takes place in salvation – the static heart of stone is taken out, and we receive a malleable heart of flesh, which is given to us (Ezek 11:19). There is also a spiritual change that takes place, in which our fundamental constitution is altered. This involves God’s laws being written in our hearts and put into our minds (Heb 8:10).

But there is also a change of location – a translation into another realm. We are moved into a domain that is conducive to the development and maintenance of spiritual life. This is something that God does, and He does it for everyone who “receives” His Son, or “believes on His name” (John 1:12).

What follows is accomplished in everyone who is baptized into Christ (Gal 3:27). It is the experience of all who are “added to the church” (Acts 2:47). This is the lot of every single person who is “in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1), are “justified by faith,” and have “peace with God” (Rom 5:1). This is what God “hath” done!

INTO THE KINGDOM

“ . . . into the kingdom . . . ”

This is where we “are come” – a kingdom, a new domain. In delineating the “kingdom” we have “received,” or into which we have been “translated,” the Spirit says the following. “But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb 12:22-24).

This kingdom is bigger than people: it includes angels, God, Christ, and the blood of Christ. It is a conglomerate of many personalities – “the city of the living God.” It is apart from this world – “the heavenly Jerusalem.” Its citizenry are recorded in the heavenly log – “written in heaven.”

This is a “large room” (Psa 31:8), teeming with personalities and benefits. It is a vast domain, or realm with rights and privileges. This is the domain where Divine workings are found. It is the place where holy angels are occupied with holy activity. The real Ruler is here, and His will is the only will that is done.

Being translated into “the kingdom” is another view of passing “from death to life” (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14). This “life” is lived out in a specific domain. That domain is where our affection is to be “set” – on “things above” Col 3:2). This is a “kingdom” in which all of the resources required to maintain newness of life are found. This is an organized kingdom in which everything is orchestrated for a specific objective – the will of God.

Both Present and Future

The kingdom into which God has translated us is both present and in the future. In this world, we are occupying a colony of the kingdom – a heavenly outpost on earth. But it is not another kingdom. The one into which we have been translated is the same one we are going to inherit (Matt 25:34; Gal 5:21).

If we allow our vision to terminate with the modern church, we will scarcely be able to imagine that God has transferred us into a “kingdom” – a kingdom becoming of the God who has put us there. It is replete with resources, abounding with personalities, and overflowing with benefits.

OF HIS DEAR SON

“ . . . of His dear Son.” Other versions read, “the Son of His love,” NKJV “His beloved Son,” NASB and “the Son He loves.” NIV

This kingdom is presently being administered by the Son of God – the Lord Jesus Christ. He presently is “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim 6:15) – and He is not without a kingdom.

The kingdom over which Jesus is presiding is the same kingdom elsewhere called “the kingdom of God.” This is the kingdom men are to “seek first” (Matt 6:33). It is the “kingdom” we have “received” (Heb 12:28). It is the “kingdom” that came when Jesus walked among men (Matt 12:28). Jesus spoke of this kingdom to His disciples following His resurrection (Acts 1:3). It was the kingdom preached in Samaria: “Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). It is the kingdom we enter “through much tribulation” (Acts 14:22). This is the kingdom Paul preached (Acts 20:25) and expounded (Acts 28:23,31). This is the same kingdom that is presently “in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17).

Appointed to Jesus by the Father

This kingdom has been “appointed” by the Father to His Son (Luke 22:29). Presently, this vast kingdom is being ordered to bring many sons to glory – to bring them through the quagmire of this world into the presence of God Himself (Heb 2:10). Thus it is appropriately referred to as “the kingdom of Christ and of God” (Eph 5:5). Our ultimate entrance into glory is spoken of in this manner, “an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:11).

Revealed to John

On the Isle of Patmos John said he was a “companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9).

Daniel’s Vision

While men speak of Jesus coming back to earth to obtain His kingdom, Daniel was told the Messiah entered into heaven to obtain it. “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days , and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom , that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Dan 7:13-14).

A Special Parable

On one occasion, Jesus delivered a parable to those who “thought the kingdom of God should immediately appear.” Speaking about Himself He said, “A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom , and to return” (Luke 19:12). The “return” was not to set up His kingdom, but to cause His servants to give an account of their stewardship. At the time He came back, he was already in possession of the kingdom. “And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received

the kingdom , then he commanded these servants to be called unto him . . . ” (Luke 19:15).

Peter’s Proclamation

On the day of Pentecost, Peter referred to God’s promise to David. “Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne ” (Acts 2:30). He then affirmed that David foretold the enthronement of Jesus when He prophesied His resurrection – not His second coming. “He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption” (Acts 2:31).

Further, the sending forth of the Holy Spirit was Christ’s first work as King. “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted , and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirt, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear ” (Acts 2:32-33). Peter then proclaimed that God had made Jesus Lord – that is, that He had placed Him upon the throne as He promised David. “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ ” (Acts 2:36).

He will give it back to God

At the conclusion of this “day of salvation,” when “the end” comes, the Lord Jesus will deliver the kingdom back to God. All the sons will have been brought home to glory, and all competing authorities and powers will have been “put down.” Assuming identity with those He came to save, He will then Himself be subject to the Father. Thus it is written, “Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.

For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For He hath put all things under His feet. But when He saith all things are put under Him, it is manifest that He is excepted, which did put all things under Him. And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him , that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:24-28).

Everything and everyone has been put under Jesus with the single exception of the Father Himself. When the purpose of God has been brought to its conclusion, and the new heavens and the new earth are in place (2 Pet 3:13) – when there is no more foe, and death itself has been banished from the kingdom to the lake of fire (Rev 20:14) – then the Son, in all of His glory, will Himself be subject to the Father, who put everything under Him.

It is no wonder, therefore, that we are urged to “give thanks” to the Father who, through His Son, has qualified us for the “eternal inheritance.” That glorious redemption cost Jesus something! That price cannot presently be comprehended. In fact, it may very well be that it will never be fully discerned.

He who existed “in the form of God,” and “was God” will be “subject to God” (Phil 2:6; John 1:1).

This does not involve a sort of demotion. The Word volunteered to come into the world, and the Son will volunteer to put Himself under the Father. All of this is in order to be identified with His bride, which is the church. Those who view Jesus Christ as a created being are wrong, they have embraced a view that lessens the magnitude of salvation.

In the meantime, the kingdom into which we have been “translated” is the one over which Jesus presides. He has been “made the Head over all things to the church” (Eph 1:11). That is, He has been given to the church in the capacity as head over everything – the power of darkness included. At this present time, there is nothing that is not subject to Christ, except the Father Himself.

The Church Is Not the Kingdom

“Kingdom” is not a synonym for the church. The church is not “the kingdom.” It is involved in the kingdom, but is not itself the kingdom. The kingdom includes all subjects, which embraces “principalities and powers” of darkness, demons, Satan himself, and “all souls.” Holy angels are in the kingdom. Speaking of higher powers, Peter said of Jesus, “Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him” (1 Pet 3:22). They are all part of His kingdom.

A Special Place

Being “translated” into the kingdom, we have been brought into more close affiliation with Jesus, who by virtue of His manhood, is directly related to us. In fact, believers are His “brethren” (Heb 2:11,17). In Christ, we are not destined to be under His feet, but in His throne with Him. As He Himself said, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne” (Rev 3:21). God has determined “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (2 Tim 2:12). It is no small thing, therefore, that we have been “translated” into the Kingdom of God’s Son!

“Dear Son”

Because of His willingness to take a lower seat, fulfilling what was necessary to save the children, “the Man Christ Jesus” is especially precious to the Father. Because He willingly “humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:8), He is God’s DEAR Son.

Those who insist that God loves everyone alike must account for His special view of the Son. Is there a soul foolish enough to affirm that God has no higher regard for His “only begotten Son,” than for those who had sinned and come short of His glory? I would think such a view to be most repulsive, for

Christ's priority to the Father is everywhere declared with great clarity.

- In His baptism. "And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mat 3:17).
- At His transfiguration. "While He yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him" (Mat 17:5).
- In His life. "And he that sent Me is with Me: the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29).
- In His death. "Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again" (John 10:17).
- In His exaltation. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11).

Believers are admonished to "be followers of God as dear children" (Eph 5:1). Jesus is declared to be God's "dear Son." He is not only "THE Christ," He is "THE Son" (Matt 16:16).

There is a sense in which "the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5) is the only man God honors and receives. In order for Divine acceptance, Jesus Himself must receive us! Thus it is written, "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Rom 15:7). God be praised for that gracious and God-honoring reception!

" 14a In whom we have redemption through His blood . . . "

We are in the midst of a discourse on thanksgiving, which is within the context of walking worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing. That means we are speaking of things that are not to be taken for granted. We are not to allow these things to be excluded from our thinking. Furthermore, these are areas in which the Tempter is particularly active, seeking to blind men minds. These are sanctifying realities. The more clearly we see them, the more pleasing and thankful we become.

IN WHOM

“In whom . . .” Every version reads the same way – “IN whom.” The “whom” is God’s “dear Son.”

Through Christ

Many times we are said to receive things “through Christ.” We are an “heir of God through Christ” (Gal 4:7). We thank God “through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 7:25). God receives glory “through Jesus Christ” (Rom 16:27). The Holy Spirit is shed on us “abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Tit 3:6). God works in us “that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ” (Heb 13:21).

In the above texts, the Greek word used is **dia**. (dea). It means “through, by means of, or on account of.” BARCLAY-NEWMAN That is, Christ is the means through which the benefit comes. This is not the meaning of the word used in our text – “in.”

This word (dea) is also translated “by.” We come to God “by Him” (1 Pet 1:21). “By Him” we have access to the Father (Eph 2:18). “By” the blood of Christ’s cross we have been reconciled to God (Col 1:20). Again, the meaning is “by means of Christ.” That also is not the meaning reflected in our text.

“In”

But here, the word is different. “In” comes from the Greek word **en** (en). This is a preposition carrying the meaning of “within, in, or denoting a specific position.” STRONG’S Rather than Christ being viewed as the means through which the benefit comes to us, “in” sees Him as the environment in which we have been placed . The benefit that is mentioned is realized because of WHERE we are – “IN Christ.” “Through” emphasis the legal aspect of salvation. “In” places the accent on the experience itself.

Of the many glorious benefits of salvation, being “IN Christ” is the primary one. This is a relationship never before realized. Under the Old Covenant, men were actually held at a distance from God, confined to routines and procedures outlined in the ceremonial law. But a new day has dawned in Jesus in which we become “one” with Christ Himself.

Viewed from the functional viewpoint, we are “members of HIS body” (Eph 5:30) – “IN Christ.”

From the standpoint of the new nature , we are “one spirit” with the Lord (1 Cor 6:17). If we want to view this position from the point of its beginning , we were “baptized into Christ” (Gal 3:27). It is being in Christ that constitutes the new creation. “Therefore if any man be in Christ , he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor 5:17).

This is the most precise of all unions – being “in Christ.” It is the result of God’s own work, for “OF HIM are we IN Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:30). Elsewhere we are told that God actually “set the members every one of them” in Christ’s body “as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18).

What Is Involved in Being In Christ?

Being “in Christ” involves oneness with Him – unity with Him. His thoughts are no longer strange to us, and His will is pleasant to us. On the eve of His betrayal, the Savior prayed about those who believed on Him being one with Him and the Father. His language is most precise. “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in Me , and I in thee , that they also may be one in Us : that the world may believe that thou hast sent Me. And the glory which thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them , and Thou in me , that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved Me” (John 17:21-23).

The unity for which our Savior prayed is too complex for men to achieve. The Father is in the Son (Thou Father art in Me), and the Son is in the Father (I in Thee). The followers become one in the Father and in the Son (they also may be one in Us). Christ is in the believers (I in them), and the Father is in the Son (Thou in Me). In other words, the Savior prayed that believers would be involved in the union between the Father and the Son. That involves being made a “partaker of Christ” (Heb 3:14), and “partakers of the Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4).

This unity is so precise that it is expressed in the following ways.

- We are in the Father (1 John 2:24).
- The Father is in us (Eph 4:6).
- We are in Christ (1 Pet 5:14).
- Christ is in us (Col 1:27).
- We are in the Spirit (Gal 5:25).
- The Spirit is in us (Rom 8:9).

According to our text, Jesus Christ has become our habitat. He is the spiritual environment in which we live and move. Our union with Him is what puts us in “heavenly places,” for God placed us there “in Christ” (Eph 2:6). Salvation involves a merging of Christ Jesus with His people – a joining so precise that it is referred to as “one spirit” (1 Cor 6:17).

The Sureness of the Position

When we are in Christ, all of benefits accruing from His work become ours. They are ours by virtue of being “in Christ,” for He who is “in Christ” possesses everything He has to give. Notice how the Spirit speaks on this matter.

- **NO CONDEMNATION.** “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus , who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:1).
- **SANCTIFIED.** “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus , called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (1 Cor 1:2).
- **ALL ONE.** “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus ” (Gal 3:28).
- **MADE NIGH.** “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13),
- **NEW CREATION.** “Therefore if any man be in Christ , he is a new creature : old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor 5:17).
- **MADE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.** “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him ” (2 Cor 5:21).
- **PRESERVED.** “Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ , and called” (Jude 1:1).

There is no question about the applicability of all redemptive benefits to those who are “in Christ Jesus.” He is the blessed environ in which they are all realized. Now we will consider a particular aspect of salvation that is foundational.

WE HAVE REDEMPTION

“ . . . we have redemption . . . ” Some variant translations read, “in whom we have our salvation,” BBE “in Him we enjoy our freedom,” NJB and “purchased our freedom.” NLT

The word “redemption” means “a releasing effected by payment of a ransom.” STRONG’S More precisely, it is “a buying back of a slave or captive through payment of a ransom.” BARCLAY-NEWMAN Thayer’s Greek lexicon says of this root word, “releasing effected by payment of ransom; redemption,
THAYER

deliverance, liberation procured by the payment of a ransom.”

There are, then, several basic concepts encapsulated in the word “redemption.”

- There is a bondage from which one must be liberated.
- There is a price that must be paid, called a “ransom.”
- There is a freedom that will result from the purchase.
- The price is paid by the rightful owner of the one in bondage.
- The one being redeemed was not capable of redeeming himself.
- Redemption is a deliverance from bondage.
- It involves a transfer of ownership.

Israel Redeemed

When Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage, God said He was going to “redeem” them “with a stretched out arm and great judgments” (Ex 6:6). “Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed : Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation” (Exo 15:13). “But because the LORD loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen , from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deu 7:8).

Thus Israel was “redeemed” from bondage to liberty, and from Pharaoh to God. The people who were redeemed already belonged to God. But had been enslaved to another master.

Under the Law, #1

As a reminder of this deliverance, firstborn children were redeemed for God. “And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem. And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage” (Exo 13:13-14).

Here we see that what was dedicated to God needed to be redeemed. It was also imperative that those redeemed by God remember their redemption.

Under the Law, #2

A house that was sold could be bought back, or redeemed, within a year. “And if a man sell a dwelling house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold ; within a full year may he redeem it” (Lev 25:29).

Here we see there was a time frame within which redemption could take place.

Under the Law, #3

A person who had sold himself because of poverty, could be redeemed, or bought back, by one of his brethren. “And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family: after that he is sold he may be redeemed again ; one of his brethren may redeem him ” (Lev 25:47-48).

The redemption of one who had sold himself had to be by a relative.

In this brief sampling, we are introduced to the concept of redemption. It will become apparent that the redemption we have in Christ Jesus is necessary and thorough.

“We Have”

Redemption is something that those in Christ possess. The ransom has already been paid. The freedom to which they have been called already exists. They do not need to remain any longer within the confines that once held them. They are free to leave sin – free to walk away from the devil. The price that was paid is legal, and it is righteous. They “ have redemption.”

The “redemption that is in Christ Jesus” covers a wide range – all of these are effects of sin.

- Redeemed from the curse of the Law. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law , being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Gal 3:13).
- Redeemed from a vain and pointless life. “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers” (1 Pet 1:18).
- Redeemed from all iniquity. “Who gave Himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity , and

purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14).

- Our bodies have been redeemed, thus guaranteeing our resurrection from the dead. “And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:23). “. . . Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:13-14).

The costliness of this redemption confirms the seriousness of our natural condition.

THROUGH HIS BLOOD

“. . . through His blood . . .” The redemption price was the blood of Christ. This same statement is made in the book of Ephesians: “In whom we have redemption through His blood , the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph 1:7). Under the Law, redemptive sacrifices always involves the blood of an animal. However, in our redemption, Jesus “obtained eternal redemption” through “His own blood” (Heb 9:12).

Much is made of the blood of Christ in Scripture. His blood stands for His life, for “the life of the flesh is in the blood” (Lev 17:11). More specifically, Christ’s blood stands for the willing forfeiture of His life as our Substitute. His life had to be taken before we could be given life. Ponder what great things are accomplished by the blood of Christ.

- We are brought near to God by Christ’s blood (Eph 2:13).
- The blood of Christ can “purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb 9:14).
- It redeemed us from pointless living (1 Pet 1:19).
- It gives us boldness to enter into the holiest place (Heb 10:19).
- It cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).
- We are justified by His blood (Rom 5:9).
- Jesus made peace through the blood of His cross (Col 1:20).
- The blood of Christ sanctifies (Heb 10:29).

Now the Spirit will summarize all of these benefits in a single sentence.

“ 14b . . . even the forgiveness of sins.”

EVEN

“ . . . even . . . ” This word is supplied by the translators. It is intended to show that the following expression is an elaboration of redemption itself. This is what redemption involves for those in Christ Jesus. It transcends all of the types and shadows of the Law, for the remission of sins was not included in those ancient ceremonies.

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

“ . . . the forgiveness of sins.” Forgiveness is a large word. Coming from the Greek word **aphesin** (aph-e-sin), it means freedom, pardon, deliverance, forgiveness, liberty, and remission . STRONG’S Forgiveness is letting go of the sin just as though it was never committed. No record is maintained of sins that are forgiven, and thus no one is able to lay anything to the charge of God’s elect (Rom 8:33).

Because sin is really the only thing that separates men from God, the forgiveness of sins fully addresses the dilemma caused by them. Whatever the guilt of sin caused, forgiveness takes away.

Jesus has now been exalted to “give” the forgiveness of sins, as well as the repentance that leads to it (Acts 5:31). Through Jesus Christ “the forgiveness of sins” is now preached (Acts 13:38). All men can “receive” this forgiveness, for the remedy for sin reaches as far as its effects (Acts 26:18).

Now, because of Jesus, God is just, or righteous, as well as the Justifier of sinners. As it is written, “To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom 3:26).

The redemption of Christ Jesus was retroactive, reaching backward to cover the transgressions committed under the first covenant. “And for this cause He is the Mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15). He mentions the “first

covenant” here because those to whom the book of Hebrews was addressed were reverting to a system of Law for justification. I do not believe the text limits the effectiveness of Christ’s blood to those under the Law. That would exclude Adam and Eve, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I do not believe such a supposition can be defended. The meaning is that Christ’s blood was effectual for those who, through faith, anticipated His coming as well as those who lived after He came. How gloriously extensive is His redemption!

It was in anticipation of the coming of Christ that God was forbearing with sins committed in old times. As it is written, “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past , through the forbearance of God” (Rom 3:25). That is, not only was God forbearing and longsuffering, but He was righteous in doing so.

We should not end this section without recalling some of the affirmations of forgiveness. These have a glad sound to the believing heart.

- “Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven , and whose sins are covered . Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Rom 4:7-8).
- “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you ” (Eph 4:32).
- “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses ” (Col 2:13).
- “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake” (1 John 2:12).

Thus the Spirit has provided us an overview of what the Lord has done through Christ Jesus. He has made us “meet,” qualifying us for the inheritance that is now reserved for us in heaven. He delivered us from the power of darkness, freeing us from moral and spiritual defilement and guilt. The power of darkness can hold us no longer.

Having liberated us from the tyranny of darkness, he translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son. All of the needed provisions are in this kingdom, and it is ruled exclusively by the exalted Christ,

and He is reigning in order to bring God's sons to glory.

Right now, in this world, you have every reason to be thankful. In fact, if you will give yourself to thanksgiving, you will find your life becoming more pleasing to the Lord. It will help you to walk worthy of the Lord, as you ought to walk.

WHO JESUS IS

Lesson # 6

The Spirit has affirmed the cause of our salvation – God the Father. It is He who has qualified us to participate in the inheritance – the “things He has prepared for them that love Him” (1 Cor 2:9). He delivered us from the power of darkness, in which we were hopelessly held. Having taken us from the power of darkness, He transferred us into the kingdom of His dear Son. This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes!

THE HIGHER VIEW

This is the high view of our salvation. At this point the Spirit is dealing with Divine causes. It is imperative that the people of God consider their salvation from the proper perspectives. For some, the primary approach is what men must do to be saved. To be sure, there are things that men must do to be

saved. Our experiential entrance into the Kingdom will be expounded in the second chapter of this book. That entrance is not minimized. The cause for it is to be expounded.

However, unless salvation can be viewed from this higher perspective, confidence and assurance will not be realized. Confidence and assurance are the daughters of faith – and faith must rest upon what God has done, NOT what we have done . The source of your confidence cannot be your obedience, even though that obedience is absolutely essential. Confidence, which is “the full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22), must be in God Himself. For this reason, the Apostle does not begin by referring to how they received the Word, or to their obedience. Rather, he begins by affirming their salvation is of God. This is a consistent manner in Apostolic writings.

- ROMANS. First they are referred as “the called of Jesus Christ,” “beloved of God,” and “called to be saints” (1:6-7).
- CORINTHIANS. He begins by saying they are “sanctified in Christ Jesus” and “called to be saints” (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:2).
- GALATIANS. Christ “gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father” (Gal 1:4).
- EPHESIANS. God the Father blessed us with “all spiritual blessings,” in heavenly places Christ, and chose us in Him (Eph 1:3-4).
- PHILIPPIANS. God, who had begun the work in them, would “perform it until the day of Christ” (Phil 1:6).
- COLOSSIANS. They had a “hope in heaven” that was laid up for them in heaven, as the Gospel announced (Col 1:5).
- THESSALONIANS. Paul knew “their election of God” (1 Thess 1:4).
- TIMOTHY. Paul opens by referring to “God our Savior, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope” (1 Tim 1:1).
- TITUS. Paul first refers to the “hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Tit 1:2).
- HEBREWS. Paul begins with a stirring declaration of God speaking to us through His Son (Heb 1:2-3).

- PETER. Writing to scattered believers, Peter speaks of them as being elected “according to the foreknowledge of God, through the sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience” (1 Pet 1:2). His second letter affirms they had obtained like precious faith through the righteousness of God (2 Pet 1:1).
- JOHN. John begins by affirming the reality of, and fellowship with, the Father and the Son (1 John 1:1-3).
- REVELATION. This book begins with John’s proclamation of Christ, and the record of his exposure to the glorified Savior (Rev 1:1-19).

It is not comely for the emphasis of any preacher or teacher to be placed upon what men do. The accentuation must be placed where it belongs – on the Father and the Son, and what they have done. Within that context honest and good hearts will not hesitate to do what is required of them.

The responsibilities of men can only be properly understood within the greater light of the persons of the Father and the Son. I am personally appalled at the meager level of the knowledge of God and of the Son of God that is found in the average church, or heard from the average preacher. It is indicative of the serious spiritual malady that is afflicting Western Christianity.

THE FOCUS OF CHRIST’S MINISTRY

Jesus Himself set the precedent for emphasis by declaring He alone could reveal the Father (Matt 11:27; Lk 10:22). In fact, Jesus is primarily the expositor of God. It is affirmed, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him (the Father)” (John 1:18). Christ affirmed He only did what He saw His Father doing (John 5:19). He said the Father loved Him and showed Him everything He was doing (John 5:20). He also declared the ultimate honor went to the Father: “That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him” (John 5:23).

He traced everything He did back to the Father, declaring the Father sent and commissioned Him (John 12:49), and taught Him (John 8:28). In fact, the purpose for coming to Jesus is to ultimately come to the Father (John 14:6). Jesus always kept these things before the people. He told men what they were to do, but that was not His emphasis. He showed compassion on the sick and afflicted, but that was not His emphasis. The truth of the matter was that men did not understand God. Those who heard Jesus with any degree of understanding sensed the heart of His message. That is precisely why Philip said “Show us the Father” (John 14:8). Christ’s answer to him confirms He was truly the expositor of God, both in His Person, and in His teaching: “he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” (John 14: 9).

THE SON MUST BE EXPOUNDED

There is a need to expound the person of Christ Jesus, just as Jesus expounded the Father. God could not be understood academically, and neither can His Son, Jesus Christ the Lord.

Paul once said he counted “all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord : for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Phil 3:8). The fellowship of Christ into which we have been called (1 Cor 1:9) can be no deeper than our knowledge of Him. No person can have a close and productive walk with a Christ who is not known. Thus, the need to declare Him, preach Him, and expound Him.

There is another reason that mandates the need for the proclamation of the Son of God. Jesus Himself set before us the stark realities concerning knowing Him. “All things are delivered unto Me of My Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father ; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him” (Mat 11:27). That is a most arresting statement. It takes the matter of knowing Christ out of the realm of academics, and puts it into the realm of the Spirit. If God is not personally involved in the matter, no person will know who Jesus really is, and thus will not come to Him.

False Christs

There is such a thing as “false Christs” (Matt 24:24). These are not always self proclaimed “Christs.” Paul spoke of those who delivered the message of “another Jesus,” “another spirit,” and “another gospel.” “For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus , whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit , which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him” (2 Cor 11:4). Consider what the Apostle said. He warned of those who preached “another gospel” – a message that spoke “another Jesus,” and promised “another spirit” could be received.

The Apostle preceded this statement by saying, “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ ” (2 Cor 11:3). That is, one of Satan’s chief delusive tactics is the fabrication of “another Jesus” – one who bears the same name as the real Jesus, and claims to be God’s Son.

Speaking through the Apostles, God has identified the real Jesus – His only begotten Son. He has spoken specifically about His Person, accomplishments, present activity, and future coming. Furthermore, the Father works through this message to draw people to the real Christ. Jesus said, “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him : and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44). And again, “Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of My Father ” (John 6:65).

As the message of the Gospel is preached and expounded, a proper view of Jesus is being

promoted. It is being brought within the reach of men. Working through that word, the Father draws people to the Son. This is why Jesus will not cast away those who truly come to Him. Such precious souls are being given to Him by the Father. That is why Jesus said, “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

Within the Context of Truth

God always works within the context of truth. Satan always works within the framework of the lie. A false Christ provides an opportunity for the devil to work – not God. There is a gospel through which Satan works. The apprehension of the true Christ, however, is evidence of the working of God, and a guarantee that He will continue to work. It is the Father who draws us to the Son. That is the rationale behind the following proclamation of Jesus Christ, which expands the horizon of truth.

“ 1:15a Who is the image of the invisible God . . . ” We now enter a most lofty proclamation of the Person of Christ. This is what Jesus IS in His redemptive capacity. This is God’s “dear Son.” It is the same Person who “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). This is the One who was “in the form of God,” and “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,” NASB or clung on to (Phil 2:6). His “goings forth have been of old, from everlasting” (Mic 5:2). Existing with the Father before the foundation of the world, He “had” a “glory” that has never been seen in this world. In fact, it will only be seen in the world to come (John 17:5). While He was in that inexplicable glory, He volunteered for enter the world in a specially prepared body, in which Divine requirements would be carried out. Those requirements would require His death for the sins of the world (Heb 10:5-10).

The exposition of Jesus that is given in Scripture always relates to His humanity. There is no extended teaching concerning His Person prior to Him coming into the world. Enough is said of Him to ensure us He is, in fact, “God manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim 3:16), and that He is the creative Source of all things (John 1:3). The thrust of the teaching, however, refers to what was involved in Him coming into the world, what He did while in this world, how He died, was raised, and exalted to the right hand of God, It concerns what He is doing now, and how He will come again and judge the world. These all pertain to His humanity.

It is not that this is all there is to Him. Rather, it is because there is no other way in which He can be properly understood. Also, He is presently bringing “many sons to glory” (Heb 2:10) as the risen, glorified, and enthroned “ Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). Therefore, the Spirit will declare who and what Jesus is NOW, for that bears directly upon the matter of us getting to glory.

IMAGE

“Who is the image . . .” All of the major versions of Scripture read the same: “who is the image.” The New Living Translation reads, “Christ is the visible image.”

Etymologically

Etymologically, the word “image” means “an image, figure, or likeness.” THAYER It comes from the Greek word **εικων** (ei-kon), which is used in at least form six times in Scripture.

Coins

Two of them are found when Jesus asked whose “image” was found on the local coins (Matt 22:20; Mk 12:16).

Man

One is found in First Corinthians 11:7, where man is said to be “the image and glory of God.” This confirms the statement made in Genesis 1:26: “And God said, Let us make man in Our image, after our likeness” (Gen 1:26). This particular image, found uniquely in mankind, was marred by sin, causing it to lose its exactness. However, even though it was marred, yet it placed man at a higher level than the brute creation. Therefore, after the flood God commanded Noah, “Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man ” (Gen 9:6). In redemption, this image is renewed, as it is written, “And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Col 3:10).

The Second Beast

Still another use of “image” is found in Revelation 13:14-15, where a second beast is said to make an “image” of the first beast, giving life to it that is should speak.

The Lord Jesus

The same usage of the word “image” as in our text is found in Second Corinthians 4:4, where Christ Himself is again said to be “the image of God.” It should be obvious that this is a special use of the word “image,” and not strictly as used in the other passages.

The point that is being made here is that God the Father can only be manifested in the Person of Jesus Christ. While some of His qualities, even God’s “eternal power and Godhead,” are “clearly seen” from the creation (Rom 1:19), that does not constitute a saving manifestation of God.

By saying Christ is “the image,” the Spirit affirms He is the means by which God is perceived. A person knows no more of God than He knows of Jesus. He accurately and fully reveals God, as compared with the testimony of nature, which is partial or fragmentary. A precise reflection of God is seen in Christ, as compared with the incomplete and now distorted reflection that is seen in fallen man. The idea is that God is made conspicuous to us in the Person of His Son.

An Express Image

The book of Hebrews contains a phrase concerning Jesus that is relevant to this text. “. . . His Son . . . Who being the brightness of His glory , and the express image of His person . . .” (Heb 1:1-3).

The Father is never seen more clearly than He is in the Person of Jesus Christ, who is the “brightness of His glory,” precisely reflecting the resplendence of God. That reflection is in no way diminished, and clarifies the Father’s Person and purpose. Jesus is in every way precise – “the express image” of God’s Person. Jesus never conducted Himself in any way that tended to misrepresent or hide the Person of God. He was, in every sense, “God manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim 3:16). He faithfully revealed how God thought, how He speaks, and what He has purposed. What He said of men is exactly what God thought of them. How He responded to men and circumstances is precisely how God responds to them. What He said He came to do was what the Father was doing. What He said is what the Father was saying. His assessments were the judgments of the Father. He was “the image of God” – the “express image of His person.”

These things being true, we must depend upon Christ to provide us with an understanding of God. That is His exclusive ministry – and to know God IS eternal life (John 17:2). Thus John writes, “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding , that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ . This is the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 5:20).

INVISIBLE GOD

“. . . of the invisible God . . .” Elsewhere God is referred to as “Him who is invisible” (Heb 11:27). That is, He is in no way visible to the natural senses. John said of Him, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him” (John 1:18). God Himself is “invisible.”

Jesus Himself affirmed He was the only Man who had seen the Father. “Not that any man hath seen the Father, save He which is of God, He hath seen the Father” (John 6:46). He also declared to the people, “And the Father Himself, which hath sent Me, hath borne witness of Me. Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape ” (John 5:37). Again, John wrote, “No man hath seen God at any time” (1 John 4:12).

Seeming Contradictions

It may appear on the surface as though these statements contradict certain texts. For example, it is said of Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel, “And they saw the God of Israel : and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness” (Ex 24:10). It is also said of the “nobles of Israel,” “And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God , and did eat and drink” (Ex 24:11).

It is written of Jacob, “And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face , and my life is preserved” (Gen 32:30). After receiving a message from God, Manoah, father of Samson, said, “we have seen God” (Judges 13:22). Isaiah wrote, “And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left” (1 Ki 22:19). Ezekiel wrote, “I saw visions of God” (Ezek 1:1).

The unlearned assume there is a contradiction in these texts. On the one hand, we are told no man has ever seen God. On the other, there are several texts that speak of people seeing Him. We read of God being “invisible,” yet being seen.

- In Exodus 24:10-11, the people saw the glory of God , not the Person of God. It is specifically stated, “And the glory of the LORD abode upon mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud. And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel” (Ex 24:16-17). And again, “And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire : and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly” (Ex 19:18).
- In Genesis 32:30, Jacob referred to the time he wrestled with “a man” (Gen 32:24). Referring to this incident, Hosea declares it was “the angel” (Hos 12:4).
- In Judges 13:22, the occasion referred to is when Manoah saw “the angel of the Lord” (13:21).
- In referring to Isaiah’s experience of seeing God, John said, “These things said Esaias, when he saw His glory, and spake of Him” (John 12:41).
- Ezekiel’s reference to “visions of God” also referred to a revelation of the glory of God, described as “the likeness of the glory of the Lord” (Ezek 1:28).

Thus, God Himself is never said to have been “seen” by men. Rather, He was manifested in glory, through an angel, or some other visible and sensible means.

Moses is said to have “endured as seeing Him who is invisible.” It is very carefully stated, however, that this was the seeing of “faith,” not of the eye (Heb 11:27).

No saving knowledge of, or acquaintance with, God can be gained through the natural senses. Because the entire universe has been contaminated by sin, the immediate presence of God tends to be destructive. Thus, when only His glory appeared on Sinai, there was a great disruption of the natural order. Although His glory only appeared on the top of the mount, the “the whole mount quaked greatly” (Ex 19:18). There was “darkness, clouds, and thick darkness” (Deut 4:11). Even “the mountains melted from before the Lord” (Judges 5:5), the “earth shook,” and the “heavens also dropped” (Psa 68:7). The whole universe is subject to extinction at the presence of the Lord. In fact, it is written that the final revelation of the Lord will mean the demise of the natural order. “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them” (Rev 20:11).

In all of nature, therefore, there can be no immediate knowledge of God. Were it not for a Divine initiative, man would be forever ignorant of God, and unable to know Him – which ignorance will bring damnation. As it is written, “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 1:8).

HALLELUJAH

It is with great joy, therefore, that we read of the Lord Jesus being the “image of the invisible God.” Through Him, and Him alone, we gain the knowledge of God, through which we are justified. That is why it is said of Jesus, “by His knowledge shall My righteous \Servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities” (Isa 53:11). That is, by the knowledge of God that He imparts.

Now, let us hear the words of Jesus again. “All things are delivered unto Me of My Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him” (Mat 11:27).

Within the context of that revelation, we learn that Jesus is not only the “express imaged of God,” but that as such He desires to reveal Him to all those who come to Him – to learn from Him (Matt 11:28). He is “meek and lowly” in teaching us – gentle, yet effective.

“ 1:15b . . . the Firstborn of every creature.” Other versions read, “the Firstborn of ALL creation,” ASV “coming into existence before all living things,” BBE “Firstbegotten of every creature,” GENEVA “the Firstborn OVER all creation,” NIB and “He existed before God made anything at all and is supreme over all creation.” NLT

This is a text that has been subjected to all manner of corrupt human analysis and explanation.

THE FIRSTBORN

In this text, the word “firstborn” comes from the Greek word **prwto,tokoj** (pro-tot-ok'-os) and means “firstborn,” or “firstbegotten.” It is used in this precise form (adjective) three times in Scripture – all of them applying to the Lord Jesus.

- “Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature” (Col 1:15).
- “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Col 1:18).
- “And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev 1:5). Other versions translate this verse “firstborn.” NKJV/NASB/NIV/NRSV

The same word is used in another form (**prwtoto,kwn** , pro-tot-kon) one time, and also refers to Christ.

- “To the general assembly and church of the firstborn , which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:23).

The same word is used four times in Scripture, in an alternative form (**prwto,toko n** , pro-tot-ok-os), also applying exclusively to the Lord Jesus. This use is slightly different.

- “And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called His name JESUS” (Mat 1:25).
- “And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7).
- “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29).
- “And again, when He bringeth in the Firstbegotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him” (Heb 1:6).

One time the same word is used in in the neuter gender (**prwto,toka** – pro-tot-oka), applying to both man and beast. This refers to the slaying of the firstborn of all Egypt, including “both man and beast” – the tenth and last plague sent upon Egypt (Heb 11:28; Ex 12:12).

- “Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them” (Heb 11:28).

The Issue

The issue with this text arises from the arguments of those who are not willing to acknowledge the Divinity of Jesus. Chief among these are the Jehovah’s Witnesses, although they are not alone in their view. The corrupted view is that Jesus Christ is essentially less than God – that He is, in every way, a created being. He is, in this view, more related to angels than to God.

Based on the texts in which “firstborn” is applied to Jesus, this erroneous view states that He was the first created personality – even before the foundation of the world. He is considered older than any angel or other lofty spirit, yet not eternal in His essential Person.

I am affirming that this is a gross corruption of the text, is blasphemy against the Son of God, and a denial of Christ’s Person and position prior to Him entering into the world. In His entrance into the world, our Lord “humbled Himself and became obedient unto death” (Phil 2:8). This was a condescension of the greatest magnitude – one in which He laid aside the prerogatives, or rights and authority, of Deity, in order to become subservient to the Father. In this unparalleled humility He Himself did not become less or smaller, but voluntarily took a lower seat. As it is written, “But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant , and was made in the likeness of men” (Phil 2:7).

If the Lord Jesus is, in His essential Person, a created being, the fact of His deep humility is of no significance. In such a case, He would, by nature, be subject to God, and a servant as well. But this is not the case. He took upon Himself the “form of a bondservant,” NKJV which means He was not a servant of God before. The corrupt view, namely that Jesus is totalloy a created being, means He was not, in fact, “in the form of God,” as is affirmed in Phil 2:6), nor could it be said of Him that He “was God” (John 1:1).

If this is thought to be an inconsequential position, the following must be considered.

- Scripture never regards a view of Jesus – any view – to be inconsequential.
- A correct view of Jesus is directly related to our salvation .
- The Spirit makes no provision for “another Jesus,” or one that is not precisely proclaimed in the Gospel.

- Knowing Christ, which is directly related to eternal life (John 17:2; 1 John 5:20), includes an understanding of who He really is.

Meaning of the Passages

MATTHEW 1:25 and LUKE 2:7. Here Jesus is referred to as Mary's "firstborn son." This does not refer to Him in His redemptive capacity, but in relation to Mary herself. She did bear other children after him, as all the people knew. "Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?" (Mat 13:56).

ROMANS 8:29, COLOSSIANS 1:18, and REVELATION 1:5. Here Jesus is referred to as "the Firstborn among many brethren," "the Firstborn from the dead," and "the First begotten of the dead." That is, He is the first of the "new creation" in which manhood and godhood are joined together. He is the prototype of all the children of God – the One to whom all of them are being "conformed." This does not have to do with His origin, but rather is related to Him being raised from the dead.

COLOSSIANS 1:15 (our text). As the "Firstborn of every creature," He is both the Source and the Head of everything created. Here the word "Firstborn" does not refer to Christ's relationship to God, but rather to all of creation. That includes the natural creation and the spiritual re-creation. The fact that this phrase is preceded by "Who is the Image of the invisible God," confirms this not a description of the Lord in His character, or essential Person, but in the position He assumed as Savior .

HEBREWS 1:6. In this text "Firstborn" is used of Jesus in relation to the Father – "HIS Firstborn." NASB This is in reference to the Word becoming "flesh," and dwelling among men (John 1:14). It is the sense in which He is also called "the ONLY begotten Son" (John 1:18; 3:16,18; 1 John 4:9) and "ONLY begotten of the Father" (John 1:14). He is the only man that was born without a fleshly father. In this way He differs from Adam, who himself was not born, but created by God. He also differs from Adam in that He is a different kind of creation – one in which Someone from eternity (Mic 5:2) entered into a human form.

HEBREWS 12:23. The "church of the Firstborn" is the body of the redeemed. These are being "conformed" to the image of the "Firstborn among many brethren," and are His body – the ones through whom He works.

References to His Manhood

All of these references have to do with Christ's manhood – with "the Word becoming flesh," "humbling Himself," taking upon Himself "the form of a servant," becoming "obedient unto death," and rising from the dead. None of them refer to the Savior as He was prior to His incarnation , when He was "in the form of God," or "was with God, and was God."

Uniquely Begotten

Whether we are speaking of Christ's entrance into the world as a "babe," or His resurrection from the dead, "First" makes Him unique. He was the first Son begotten by God. Adam was the first man created by God. If Jesus was created, He is a brother to Adam, not "the second man."

Jesus was also the first man to be raised from the dead to die no more . It is said of Him, He did "not see corruption" (Acts 2:27), "neither His flesh see corruption" (Acts 2:31), "no more to return to corruption" (Acts 13:34), "He ever liveth" (Heb 7:25), and "I am alive for evermore" (Rev 1:8).

Thus He was uniquely begotten from the womb, and from the grave as well.

Federal Head of the New Creation

Later the Spirit will affirm that Jesus is the "Firstborn from the dead," in order that "in all things He might have the preeminence" (1:18). I will comment further on this matter when we cover that verse.

Declared In the Types

The significance of the term "firstborn" was most fully developed under the First Covenant, although the concept did exist before that. There are several references to "firstborn" that simply refer to chronology (Gen 10:15; 19:31,33,34,37; 22:21; 25:13; 29:26; 36:15; 38:6; 38:7; 41:51). In the account of Jacob and Esau, "firstborn" is first associated with a "birthright," or a special inheritance and privileges (Gen 27:19-35).

When Joseph's brothers confronted him as a ruler in Egypt, they sat before him "the firstborn according to his birthright , and the youngest according to his" (Gen 43:33).

Jacob referred to his firstborn son, Reuben, as "my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power" (Gen 49:3). Here, the concept of the "firstborn " first began to be developed extensively.

The Lord referred to the nation of Israel as "My firstborn" (Ex 4:22). By this He meant Israel was the first nation, or group of people, begotten by Him. As such, certain privileges were vouchsafed to them.

All of the “firstborn” of the children of Israel were “sanctified” to the Lord, especially belonging to Him (Ex 13:2; 22:29; Num 3:13).

The Law spoke of “ the right of the firstborn,” showing that he had the preeminence in the household after the father (Deut 21:17). This will be developed further in verse 18.

EVERY CREATURE

The expression “every creature” means everything that was created, or “made” (Rom 1:20; Heb 12:27). The “Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5) is to all creation what the “firstborn” was to the family. All creation is subject to Him. There is nothing created that is not subject to Him. Whether good or evil, the risen Christ is Lord of all.

A BRIEF SUMMARY

The matters with which Christ being “the Firstborn” is related confirm the importance of this aspect of His redemptive role.

- Associated with the name “Jesus” (Matt 1:25).
- The One to whom we are being conformed (Rom 8:29).
- His resurrection (Col 1:18; Rev 1:5).
- Being “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15).
- Receiving the worship of holy angels (Heb 1:6).
- Being over the church (Heb 12:23). Having preeminence in all things (Col 1:18).

As with all matters pertaining to the Lord Jesus Christ, God has made no allowance for improper thoughts concerning the Son . We do not have the luxury of formulating our own ideas about the Savior, nor are we to assign any value to human notions concerning Him. The Gospel is properly called “THE record God has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10-11). That includes His Person as well as His works. Only the Father “knows the Son” (Matt 1:27).

Hence, we are wholly reliant upon His record concerning the Son, who He is, what He had done, what He is doing, and what He will do in the future. Our text is part of that record, and is thus essential for proper understanding.

“ 16a For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth . . . ”

The Holy Spirit is establishing the absolute priority of the Lord Jesus. As we will see later, the Colossians were being subjected to doctrines that tended to minimize the Lord Jesus by placing an emphasis on philosophy (2:8), meat, drink, and days (2:16), and ordinances that were “after the commandments and doctrines of men” (2:20-22). These doctrines did not clarify Christ, but competed with Him, shifting the emphasis to things pertaining to this world.

The relevance of this passage is seen in the continued practice of placing stress on matters other than Jesus. These range from the church itself and various ordinances, to the interpretations of men and matters pertaining to this world. This shift of emphasis is the mother of all denominations, and the cause of all division. As we will see from this text, the Spirit will not allow the emphasis established by God Himself to be changed. He has poured everything into the Son, and woe to that person or system that treats Him as secondary.

BY HIM

“For by Him were all things created . . . ” Some versions read “in Him” ASV/NRSV/RSV/YLT and “through whom.” NLT

In the exposition of the Son of God, the Spirit begins where the Scripture begins – with creation. The “Him” of this text is the essential Person of the Lord Jesus. This refers to Him before He was “the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). Everything – “all things” – were created by the Word, when He was “with God and was God.”

Here, the created is distinguished from the Creator. This again confirms that the Person of the Lord Jesus was not created. This is the Person who “took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phil 2:7). He is the Word that “was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). This is the One who possessed Divine glory with the Father “before the world was” (John 17:5). A body was made for Him (Heb 10:5), but He Himself was not “made,” or create.

Scripture makes much of the Jesus, when He was “in the form of God,” creating all things.

- “ All things were made by Him ; and without Him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3).
- “But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things , and we by Him” (1 Cor 8:6).
- “And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ ” (Eph 3:9).
- “Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom He hath appointed Heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds ” (Heb 1:2).

A Modern Heresy

The Scripture nowhere suggests that one who is created can himself create, or call something into being. Within the Christian community, there are some who affirm men can “create.” Certain men say that faith is a “creative force” or power. This erroneous supposition is based upon a corruption of Hebrews 11:3: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Heb 11:3). Rather than faith being the means by which we understand how the worlds came into existence, these men say that faith is the means God Himself used to create the world. It was, they say, the creative force of faith that brought them into existence.

This is a teaching that is embraced, and energetically taught, by Charles Capps, Kenneth Hagan, Kenneth Copeland, and others. It states: “Faith is the mightiest force in the universe. No other force can produce this kind of reaction. Faith is the creative ability of God. It is also the creative ability of man.” <http://www.servantsnews.com/sn0201/faith.htm>

In the book titled “Ye Are Gods,” Annalee Skarin writes, “YE ARE GODS shows that man himself creates every condition on earth, that the eternal source of power is released within man! It proves the truth of the great scriptures that ‘All that the Father has is yours.’”

Other similar statements that have been made are as follows. “Faith is a force just like electricity or gravity” (Copeland), “and it is the substance out of which God creates whatever is” (Capps). God uses faith, and so may we in exactly the same way in order to produce the same results through obedience to the same “laws of faith” (Capps) that God applied in creation. “You have the same ability [as God has] dwelling or residing on the inside of you” (Capps). “We have all the capabilities of God. We have His faith” (Copeland). “Words are the most powerful thing in the universe” because they “are containers” that “carry faith or fear and they produce after their kind” (Capps). God operates by these very same laws. “God had faith in His own words ... God had faith in His faith, because He spoke words of faith and they came to pass. That faith force was transported by words ... the God-kind-of-faith ... is

released by the words of your mouth" (Hagin). "Creative power was in God's mouth. It is in your mouth also" (Capps). Because man is a little god "in God's class: very capable of operating on the same level of faith as God" (Capps), and "because all men are spirit beings" (Hagin), therefore anyone, whether Christian or pagan, can release this "faith force" by speaking words if he only believes in his words as God believes in His (Hagin). "God is a faith God. God releases His faith in Words, [and we must do the same:] ... Everything you say [positive or negative] will come to pass" (Capps). "Spiritual things are created by WORDS. Even natural, physical things are created by WORDS" (Hagin). Beyond Seduction (pp. 51-53) and The Seduction of Christianity (pp. 28, 217)

This is a total misrepresentation of the Hebrews eleven text. Faith has to do with apprehending and understanding, not creating. There is no clear record of a personality that has been created accomplishing a creation, whether by word of any other means.

But there is no need to labor to establish this point. The Holy Spirit is clear on this matter. "All things," with no restrictive word, were created "by Him and for Him" (Col 1:16), and "without Him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3).

IN HEAVEN

" . . . that are in heaven . . ." Jesus Christ created the things "that are in the heavens." This appears to refer to the vast multitude of heavenly hosts (2 Chron 18:18), including angels (Heb 12:22), seraphim (Isa 6:2,6), cherubim (Gen 3:24; Ezek 10:1), principalities Eph 3:10), powers (Lk 21:26), the four living creatures (Rev 4:6), etc. It also includes all of the heavenly bodies, which are also called "the host of heaven" (Deut 4:19). The vastness of their number is beyond all human comprehension. There may be much more involved in "the heavens."

IN EARTH

" . . . and that are in earth . . ." Not only is the earth itself involved in this, together with the waters that are upon it, but a vast array of living things have been created as well. These include grass, trees, herbs, and all that has seed in itself (Gen 1:11-12). There are all manner of moving creatures in the sea, including "great whales, and every living creature that moveth" (Gen 1:19-21). There is also "every winged fowl" (Gen 1:21), livestock, creatures that move along the ground, four footed beasts, and all manner of creatures the creep upon and within the earth (Gen 1:24-25). There is also humanity itself, that is the creation of the Lord.

Briefly summarized, the Scripture speaks of creation in this manner: "For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is" (Ex 20:11). The Christ who has redeemed us made them all, and He is presently ruling over them all. Believe it: "without Him was not anything made that was made."

“ 16b . . . visible and invisible.. .” These are a further breakdown of things created by the Lord, and over which He presides. While it is possible to be diverted to scientific considerations, that is not the focus of this passage. These are matters within the circumference of salvation. They are things that can either contribute to, or take away from, spiritual life. This is not a lifeless academic observation in which things created are merely classified.

VISIBLE

This is a category of “things that are made” (Rom 1:20). The word “visible” does not merely mean things that are seen with the naked eye. It refers to the whole realm of matter – things that are accessible to the natural senses. “Visible” things have primarily to do with the earth. They are things for which the eye can lust, and things the child of God can also employ for “necessary uses.” (Tit 3:14).

“Visible” things are within range of our natural faculties, whether observed by the naked eye, through a microscope, or through a telescope. They are adapted to natural vision, and only need to be close enough or large enough for us to see them.

There are visible things in heaven also, such as “the fowls of heaven” (Job 35:11) and the heavenly bodies, called “the host of heaven” – “the sun, and the moon, and the stars ” (Deut 4:12). There are also “the clouds,” which are but a “chariot” for the Lord (Psa 104:3).

The whole realm of the “visible,” unspeakably vast and complex, was created by the Lord Jesus. Celestial and terrestrial bodies (1 Cor 15:40-41), bodies of birds, beasts, fish, and creeping things (1 Cor 15:38-39), plant life, the great waters of the earth, and above all mankind – Jesus made them all!

INVISIBLE

This is another category of the “things that are made.” However, we know of them only by testimony, for they are not visible, or accessible to the senses. Although there is a vast kingdom of unseen temporal things, such as atoms, molecules, bacteria, etc., that is not the focus of the word “invisible.” There are vast interplanetary systems, measureless galaxies and solar systems that are behind human vision. However, I do not understand these to be the “invisible” things to which our text refers.

“Invisible” things do not accommodate themselves to human vision. They are of another order,

and are not a part of the material universe. The angelic order is in this category, together with “things under the earth” (Phil 2:10). The lake of fire, “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41; Rev 20:10), together with the unseen abode of the dead in which Abraham, Lazarus, and the rich man were found (Luke 16:22-26).

The Lord Jesus Christ made them all, and they are all subservient to Him. That is why all things are ours (1 Cor 3:21-23). It is also why nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:37-39).

“ 16c . . . whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers . . . ” This is a breakdown of the “invisible” things which have been created by our Lord. We know of them only because God has revealed them. These are personalities, not mere sources of natural energy. They confirm that we live in a vast and fathomless moral universe that is teeming with personalities. Among them are workers, rulers, and interested spectators. We cannot see them, but they can see us. They move in and out among us undetected, yet under the strict and beneficent control of our Lord and Savior.

As we ponder this measureless array of lofty personalities, it will assist us in ceasing to live for ourselves. The knowledge of them will contribute to great sobriety, and foster hope and comfort to those who are aware of the great number of both amiable spirits and fierce adversaries that exist in the unseen world.

THRONES

Some translations read “kings,” NLT and “authorities.” BBE “Thrones” are stately seats that are associated with dominion, kingly power and sovereignty. ROBERTSON

DOMINIONS

Other versions read “powers,” NIV “lords,” BBE “lordships,” DARBY “dominations,” DOUAY “ruling forces,” NJB and “kingdoms,” NLT

“Dominions” refer to those who possess a dominion, of territory, over which they exercise authority.

PRINCIPALITIES

Other versions read, “rulers,” NASB “principalities,” RSV “powers,” NIB and “sovereignties.”
NJB

“Principalities” refers to the first thing of a series – like a leading angel. The picture is of powerful personalities that lead great and powerful hosts.

POWERS

Another version reads, “authorities.” NASB

“Powers” are those with great competency, and freedom to do their will. They are noted for their mastery, jurisdiction, and control. They have decision-making power or authority.

A HIERARCHY OF POWER AND AUTHORITY

It is apparent from this description that God’s kingdom involves the allocation of power and authority. The angels, for example, are said to “do His commandments” and “hearken unto the voice of His words” (Psa 103:20). But they do not do so as mere vassals. They also “excel in strength,” or the ability and the power to do what they are commissioned to do (Psa 103:20a).

Nothing in God’s vast kingdom is left to chance or happenstance. Not only is the Lord “over all,” He has also given authority to those who serve Him, whether for good or for evil.

Take Satan as an example. Like Pilate, he only has power where it has been given to him by God. He was right when he said the kingdoms of this evil world, together with their glory, had been given to him. The Scriptures declare, “And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, showed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it” (Luke 4:5-6). Jesus did not contest what he said, for He had Himself been given the greater kingdom that presided over the one given to Satan.

Holy Hierarchy

Michael the archangel, “one of the chief princes” among the heavenly host (Dan 10:13), is the commissioned caretaker of the nation of Israel, and is called their “prince” (Dan 10:21). He is also referred to as the “archangel,” or chief among the angels, which is the meaning of “archangel.”
STRONG’S

The book of the Revelation speaks of an angel who had “power over fire” (Rev 14:18). Another is described as “the angel of the waters” (Rev 16:5). Still another angel was “given power to scorch men with fire” (Rev 16:8). Yet another “come down from heaven, having great power, and the earth was lightened with his glory” (Rev 18:1). Another angel clothed with a cloud, with a rainbow on his head firmly planted his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot upon the land. With great power he roared as a lion, and seven mighty thunders answered in response (Rev 10:1-3). Four angels were seen “standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, or the sea, nor on any tree” (Rev 7:1). Another angel ascended from the East, having the seal of the living God. With authority he cried to the four angels holding the wind, telling them not to hurt the earth, sea, or trees, until he had sealed the servants of God (Rev 7:2-3). Yet another angel was given authority to give liberty to four angels to slay a third part of humanity (Rev 9:14-15).

These mighty powers cannot possibly be resisted or fought against by men. They have been given dominion that cannot be contested. Whenever they were aligned against men, men fell, whether it was the vast army of Sennacherib (2 Kgs 19:35), or wicked king Herod (Acts 12:23).

All of these powers were created by the Lord Jesus. Their dominion was established by Him. The times during which they are effective have been established by Him. He has established boundaries beyond which they cannot go, and within which they are invincible.

Solomon seemed to sense something of the magnitude of the authority and power of these personalities. This is seen in a statement he made in Ecclesiastes 5:6. “Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?” (Eccl 5:6).

These principalities and powers behold our manners, hear our words, and see our deeds. That is precisely why Paul wrote, “For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels” (1 Cor 11:10).

God has revealed that even now, this holy hierarchy has been selected to learn of the manifold wisdom of God through the church. “And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph 3:9-10). That is, by means of God’s working within the body of Christ, “principalities and powers in heavenly places” are being exposed to facets of God’s wisdom that can be seen nowhere else. All of these lofty rulers have been created by Jesus and for Jesus.

What About Wicked Powers?

What about wicked spiritual powers – like the devil, the fallen angels demons, and the principalities, powers, spiritual wickedness in high places, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, against whom we wrestle (Jude 1:6; 1 Tim 4:1; Eph 6:12)? Did Jesus create them also?

We are to understand these were also created by Jesus Christ, but in an unfallen state. They all fell from the condition in which they were originally made (2 Pet 2:4; Isa 14:12-15; Ezek 28:12-18). This should not be difficult for us to see, for man pursued the same course – he was created without fault, yet fell from that unsullied state.

The Sense of This Can Be Lost

This is an aspect of the Kingdom that is utterly obscured by a worldly emphasis. When the church becomes “this-worldly” instead of “other-worldly,” the thought of this vast army of principalities and powers vanishes from their minds. Men are then left to grapple with circumstances in their own human strength and energy. This produces all manner of frustration, weakness, and fear.

Knowing the nature of the Kingdom, Jesus referred to this Divine arsenal of personalities when He was arrested in the Garden. When Peter drew his sword and was set to do battle for the Lord, Jesus quickly reminded him of the real circumstance. “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Mat 26:53). These angels had power. They would not merely make an effort to win, but would have utterly devastated the enemy in the twinkling of an eye. They had power, Peter did not. They were principalities and powers, Peter was not.

The Manner of the Kingdom

This is the manner of the heavenly kingdom. We are introduced to it in the body of Christ, where each is given a “measure of faith,” and a gift by grace (Rom 12:3; 1 Pet 4:10-11). Their gift is a domain over which they have been granted a measure of power, or authority. Paul, for example, was given power to edify, or build up, the body of Christ. Thus he wrote, “Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction” (2 Cor 13:10). And again he wrote, “For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed” (2 Cor 10:8).

Note, there was a circumference to the power – a boundary beyond which it was not effective. The power was to edify, or build up, not to destroy or tear down.

When Jesus sent out His disciples, He gave them power to accomplish their mission. He said, “Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10:19). Again it is said of the sending of the twelve, “And He called unto Him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits ” (Mark 6:7).

Following His resurrection, He commissioned His disciples to go into all the world, preaching the Gospel to every creature. However, they were not to go in their own strength. It is written that He said, “And, behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

There is no work in God’s kingdom, whether in heaven or on earth that can be done independently of the authority that comes from Him. Men have argued over this point, ascribing the allocation of authority only to the Apostles. But they have greatly erred. The Apostles received power to do the work of an Apostle, which is distinguished from the work of the other members of the body. They were authoritative in that domain.

Peter affirms that other members of the body also had abilities from God (1 Pet 4:10-11). When Paul wrote “spiritual gifts,” He was speaking of areas of authority and power, where various members of the body of Christ could do things transcendent to natural abilities. He spoke of God setting “the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18). These various abilities are distributed, administered, and made effective by the Holy Spirit. The purpose of each endowment is to “profit” the entire body – to assist it in “growing up into Christ in all things” (Eph 4:15). In confirmation of this, it is written, “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” (1 Cor 12:4-7).

Thus we are being introduced to the manner of the kingdom. We are made custodians of a segment of the kingdom, and given power to be a good steward.

Being Cultured for Reigning

We are being cultured for a future reign, and have been told so. “For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:17). Again it is written, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny him, he also will deny us” (2 Tim 2:12).

The Lord Jesus has “washed us from our sins in His own blood.” But this is in order to a rule and a reign. “And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen ” (Rev 1:5-6). Again it is written, “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art

worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth ” (Rev 5:10).

The truth of the matter is that the Kingdom in all of its greatness will be “given to the saints of the Most High God” (Dan 7:22). That appointed allocation of the kingdom will be remarkably great – far beyond the thinking of the average churchman. Of it Daniel wrote, “The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them” NRSV (Dan 7:27).

Perhaps some of these domains have not yet been fully occupied? It is possible that some of them were vacated by “the angels which kept not their first estate” (Jude 1:6). These are areas in which very little revelation has been given. However, enough has been revealed to know the time is coming when the saints will “be the head, and not the tail,” and “above only,” and “not beneath” (Deut 28:13). They will “inherit all things” (Rev 21:7), and reign with Christ.

Jesus did not overstate the case when He said overcomers would reign with Him in His throne (Rev 3:21). “He who conquers, I will grant Him to sit with Me on My throne, as I Myself conquered and sat down with My Father on His throne” RSV (Rev 3:21). A marvelous promise, indeed, and worthy of all acceptance!

“ 16d . . . all things were created by Him, and for Him.” The American Standard Version reads “and unto Him.”

Not only is Jesus Christ the origin of all things, He is the intent and purpose for them as well. Those who are in Christ will “inherit all things,” but they were not created for them – they were created for Christ! The saints inherit them as “joint heirs,” not as primary heirs (Rom 8:17). Not only are the heavens and the earth, together with their fulness, “for Him,” but all of the powers and authorities are for Him as well. By virtue of this condition, they are all answerable to Him, and He uses them as He wills.

The words “for Him,” or “unto Him,” indicate that “all things were created” to ultimately bring glory to Him. This glory will either be the result of them being brought under His feet in utter defeat and subjugation, or in being perfected through His power and grace. In the end, every personality, whether wicked or holy, defiled or pure, will bow the knee to Him, and confess with persuasion that He is “Lord of all.” Thus it is written, “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth ” (Phil 2:10). “Things in heaven” refer to holy angels, principalities, and powers. “Things in earth” refer to all mankind, from Adam until the end of the world. “Things under the earth” refer to Satan, his vast hierarchy, the fallen angels, and demons as well. They will all render obeisance to Jesus, and acknowledge before the assembly of all created personalities that Jesus is Lord. They were all made “for Him.”

Those who, prior to the day of judgment – a day in which both men and angels will be judged (1 Cor 6:2-3) – have not willingly served Christ will be consigned to perdition, or the “lake of fire.” That includes the devil, his chief leaders, his angels, demons, and wicked men. Christ will be glorified by their consignment to perdition, for if their rebellion did not conclude with their banishment, His dominion would have been negated. Christ cannot be ultimately glorified by the casting away of those who lived for Him, or the salvation of those who did not.

THIS IS THE MAN CHRIST JESUS

It is to be understood that the whole creation was accomplished by Jesus Christ when He was “in the form of God,” and “was with God and was God.” He did not create all things as “the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). However, all things were created “FOR HIM” as “the Man.” This is the Man of whom it is written, “But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one Man, Jesus Christ , hath abounded unto many” (Rom 5:15).

The federal head of the first creation was Adam. He was given dominion, but not over things in “the things in heaven,” or “things under the earth.” The scope of his intended dominion is described as “over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth . . . and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen 1:27-28). That dominion was lost when sin entered into the world, for the dying cannot have dominion . Even in Divine intention, however, what is that to compare with the dominion given to “the Man Christ Jesus!”

We know from our text, that everything was ultimately created for the Lord Jesus. Not only does He presently rule over the natural creation, which is in the “bondage of corruption” (Rom 8:21), He is the Head of the “new creation.” It is particularly in this regard that our text makes the affirmation, “all things were created . . . for Him.”

Here the grand conclusion is seen – the time when the present heavens and earth have passed away (2 Pet 3:10-12), and death and hell (Hades) have been cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:14). After the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:52), after the saints have been glorified (Rom 8:17,29), after the

day of judgment (2 Pet 2:9), after the devil, his angels, the false prophet, and all wicked have been cast into the lake of fire (Matt 25:41; Rev 20:10,15), after all things have been made new (Rev 21:5) – then “the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne” will preside over the entirety of the new creation . Then, as eternity rolls its ceaseless cycles onward, He will reign with His saints, fulfilling lofty objectives that have not yet been revealed. He will be voluntarily subject to the Father (12 Cor 15:28) – not because of His nature, but because of Divine purpose. Then the redeemed, under the administration of Jesus, will begin to realize the intent for which they were re-created in Christ. Then the fulness of this text will burst upon them as the noonday sun: “all things were created by Him and for Him.”

OUR RELIGION MUST REACH INTO ETERNITY

This ultimate objective is the reason for Christ’s entrance into the world. It is the reason for His death, resurrection, and present intercession. It is why He is coming again, bringing His reward with Him. This is why the new birth takes place. It is ultimately why grace is given to us, teaches us, and sustains us. It is why the Holy Spirit has been given to us, makes intercession for us, and strengthens us.

Take this ultimate purpose away, and there is no reason to be a Christian – no reason to separate from this world. That is precisely why the Spirit witnesses, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Cor 15:19). This is why “we are saved by hope” (Rom 8:24-25), for hope reaches upward, into the very citadel of heaven (Heb 6:19).

A religion that is centered in this world is an evil paradox. It is like an unholy God, or a righteous devil. It simply cannot be! The purpose of the church cannot be at variance with the purpose of its Creator! The objective of the Christian cannot contradict the purpose of his Lord! If men are not preparing for eternity, they really are not preparing at all – they are moving swiftly toward condemnation. Death is overtaking them, and the wrath of God is abiding upon them.

The church must be wholly intolerant of any emphasis that tends to lull men into sleep, causing them to forget “the world to come.” It must rid itself of the preachers and teachers that make men feel at home in this world. Those who bring the world close to them, and put heaven far from them, are their enemies.

Whatever there is about the contemporary church that solicits the respect and tolerance of those who are enemies of God must be purged from it.

All of that, and much more, is involved in the statement, “all things were created by Him and for Him.” The magnitude of the statement must not escape us. Even if we cannot fully perceive it, we must meditate upon it.

“ 17a And He is before all things . . . ” Other versions read, “He Himself is before all things,” NRSV “He existed before everything else,” NLT and “Himself is before all things.” YLT

This is a reference to the Person of Christ, in distinction from His Manhood. This is Jesus in the capacity of “the Word,” who was “with God and was God” (John 1:1). This is the Savior when He was “in the form of God” (Phil 2:6), before He “humbled Himself,” taking upon Himself “the form of a servant,” and becoming “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:7-8). While He was, by Divine intention, “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8), in eternity past, He was not in the form of a servant, nor did He humble Himself to become obedient unto death. His humiliation began when He entered the world , brought into it by the Father (Heb 1:6).

However, Christ Himself, apart from the body that was prepared for Him (Heb 10:5-10), was “before all things.” That is, He Himself was not created, for “all things” refer to all that were created. As I have already affirmed, the Holy Spirit never represents a creation – any creation – being accomplished by someone who himself was created. Wherever the word “create” is used, it refers to Deity (Psa 51:10; Isa 4:5; 45:7; 57:19; 65:17-18). The word “created” is used forty-five times in Scripture – they all refer to the Lord (Gen 1:1,21,27; 2:3,4; 5:1,2; 6:7; Deut 4:32; Psa 89:12; 102:18; 104:30; 148:5; Isa 40:26; 41:20; 42:5; 43:1,7; 45:8,12,18; 48:7; 54:16; Jer 31:22; Ezek 21:30; 28:13,15; Mal 2:10; Mk 13:19; 1 Cor 11:9; Eph 2:10; 3:9; 4:24; Col 1:16; 3:10; 1 Tim 4:3; Rev 1:11; 10:6). The word “creation” is used six times, always referring to God (Mk 10:6; 13:19; Rom 1:20; 8:22; 2 Pet 3:4; Rev 3:14). “Creates,” or “createth,” is mentioned once, referring to the Lord (Amos 4:13).

The affirmation “He is before all things, ” is the declaration of Christ’s Deity, and of His consequent eternity. Those who teach that Jesus is created have demeaned His Person. While there have been some who were tolerant of such teaching, such toleration cannot be justified. We cannot be wrong in our views about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our salvation hinges upon Him, and our perception of Him. That is why our faith is based upon the “record” God has given “of His Son” (1 John 5:10-12). As this passage affirms, our faith rests in Christ – we “believe on the Son,” thus obtaining “life” – “eternal life.” It must never be affirmed that faith can be in one who has been created! Faith has to do with Deity, and can never be placed in anyone who is not of Himself eternal.

The passage with which we are dealing is providing the proper view of the Savior. He must be seen correctly if our understanding of Him is to be fruitful. Jesus is the Creator, and nowhere is the

Creator said to have Himself been created! If He was “created,” Jesus cannot have existed before the creation of all things.

“ 17a . . . and by him all things consist.” Other versions read, “all things hold together,” NASB/NIV/NRSV “all things have being,” BBE “all things subsist together,” DARBY and “He holds all; creation together.” NLT

The word “consist” comes from the Greek word **sune,sthken** (soon-is-tah-ken). The word means “to place together, to bring or band together, to put together by way of composition or combination, to unite parts into one whole.” THAYER It also means “to continue to have existence.” This is the word from which the term and concept of “system” is derived. The word implies organization or arrangement.

In the ultimate sense “consist,” or being “held together,” is the opposite of the pre-creation condition: “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep” (Gen 1:2). It is not necessary to philosophize about some form of creation prior to the details provided in the rest of the first chapter of Genesis – such as the pre-existence of matter, etc. The purpose of the account of creation is not to define the beginning of matter. Rather, it is to show that the worlds were created deliberately and in an orderly manner.

This text confirms that the creation was not wound up like a clock, and left to run on its own. It is ever true that what the Lord begins He finishes, holding everything together in an orderly and productive manner until the completion of the work. This is why we read of the Lord being “Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last” (Rev 1:11), “The Beginning and the End” (Rev 22:13), and “the Author and Finisher” (Heb 12:2). The affirmation of this text – “by Him all things consist” – describes what is taking place between the Alpha and Omega. It is the Divine activity of the interim between the first and the last, the beginning and the end. It describes some of the Lord’s activity between authoring and finishing.

This view is essential to the proper understanding of salvation as well as creation. If creation was accomplished by the Lord Jesus, and for Him, then, in some ways, it mirrors God’s eternal purpose. In the natural cosmos we are given a miniature picture of the spiritual cosmos of salvation – the “kingdom” to which we are “come,” and is “received” in Christ Jesus (Heb 12:22,28; Col 1:13).

A UNITED PURPOSE

Consistency is the offspring of purpose. So far as God is concerned, there is nothing that exists without reason or intention. Nothing that has been created is divorced from Divine purpose. Nothing in nature or in grace occurs randomly, without reason, or without objective.

The point of this verse is that the glorified Christ is holding everything together with that purpose in mind. He is working everything together for the good of His people (Rom 8:28). Harmony is, in fact, the working together of everything – orchestrating all things with a Divine objective in mind.

Both good and evil will blend with God's "eternal purpose." That purpose includes the bruising of the serpent's head as well as the enthronement of the Son of man – the Seed of the woman. It includes the subjugation of all inimical powers as well as the glorification of all who are justified. It includes the punishment of all who "know not God, and that obey not the Gospel" (2 Thess 1:8), as well as the reward of those who "work good" (Rom 2:10). Everything is working in harmony with God's purpose. The wicked are moving toward perdition (Phil 1:28; 2 Pet 3:7), and the righteous are moving toward glory (Heb 2:10). The ungodly are heaping up wrath (Rom 2:5), and the godly are laying up treasures in heaven (Matt 6:20; Heb 10:34).

All of this is being orchestrated by the Lord Jesus. None of it is happening automatically, or without Divine management. In Him all things "consist," or are held together.

HARMONY

There is a certain harmony in the natural, as well as the spiritual orders. The natural order is not noted for chaos and derangement. All true science depends upon the harmonious workings within nature. All spiritual progress relies upon the harmony of the workings of grace and power. Even in its groaning under the burden of mortality, all nature "groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Rom 8:22). It lifts up a single harmonious chorus of travail in anticipation of "the manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom 8:22). The Lord Jesus is the Director of this powerful choir. In Him all things "consist," or are held together.

Harmony in the spiritual order is found in "all things" being "worked together" for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28). This harmony is seen in the statement that "all things are yours" (1 Cor 3:21). The Holy Spirit is changing the saints "from one degree of glory to another" NRSV (2 Cor 3:18). All of this is accomplished in an intensely hostile realm. Our adversary the devil is walking about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet 5:8). Principalities and powers are aligned against us, and we must engage them in battle (Eph 6:12). There are imaginations and intrusive thoughts that must be cast down (2 Cor 10:4-5). All that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life (1 John 5:16) – compete for our attention, seeking to lure us out of the heavenly places. There is also our own "flesh" that "lusts against the Spirit" (Gal 5:17).

If it was not for the reigning Christ, who is sustaining all things, it would be utterly impossible for any of us to safely navigate through this present evil world. Harmony in any sense cannot exist independently of the exalted Christ .

SUSTAINED

This is the primary meaning of the word “consist.” The same truth is declared in the book of Hebrews. “. . .His Son, whom He hath appointed Heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of his power ” (Heb 1:2-3). Other versions read, “sustaining all things,” NIV “supporting all things,” BBE and “He sustains the universe.” NLT

To “uphold” means to carry the burden, guiding the creation along in strict conformity with Divine purpose. The Lord Jesus is carrying the creation forward to its appointed end.

Here, then, are two words that confirm the relationship of the glorified Christ to the present natural order – one in our text (Col 1:17), and one in Hebrews (1:3).

- “Consist.” This emphasizes keeping all creation in as state of harmony, keeping it from spinning out of control.
- “Uphold.” This has to do with moving creation toward the appointed consummation, causing it to serve its intended purpose.

Apart from the Lord, all things tend to dissipate. They are not held together by certain laws of nature. There is no such thing as “cosmic glue” that holds things together. Whatever may be said about the laws of nature, they are all in the hand of Jesus. None of them operate on their own.

This explodes the evolutionary hypothesis, showing it to be nothing more than a deliberate denial of the creating, sustaining, and upholding Christ.

This also demolishes the notion that the world could exist with the saints withdrawn from it. The entire natural order was created by Jesus and for Jesus. The earth will ultimately be given to the saints (Matt 5:5).

The thought that the world could continue to exist without the people of God, and in the unfettered control of the wicked one, is totally false. Yet, such a postulate is at the very heart of much of the end-time preaching that is common in our day.

“ 18a And He is the Head of the body, the church . . . ”

As marvelous and expansive as the natural creation is, Christ’s primary activity does not have to do with it. Jesus rules both nature and humanity with His people in mind. Nature was created and sustained by Him before He “became flesh and dwelt among us.” Let us ponder for a moment the greatness of the Lord Jesus, for it is within this consideration that the affirmation of our text is made.

There is presently nothing that is not under the feet of Jesus – subject to Him and controlled by Him. As it is written, “For He (the Father) hath put all things under His (Jesus) feet. But when He saith all things are put under Him, it is manifest that He (the Father) is excepted, which did put all things under Him” (1 Cor 15:27). The Father is the only One who is not subject to the glorified Christ! At this present time, everything and everyone else are subservient to Him.

- All of the heavenly host are subject to Christ. “Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him” (1 Pet 3:22).
- Satan and all of his hosts are subject to Christ. “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb 2:14). And again, “And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Col 2:15).
- All worldly rulers are subject to Christ. “. . . our Lord Jesus Christ: which in His times He shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim 6:14-15). And again, “And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth” (Rev 1:5).
- All men are subject to Christ. “As thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him” (John 17:2).
- All circumstances are subject to Christ. “For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come ; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's” (1 Cor 3:21-23).

- All power belongs to Him. “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth” (Mat 28:18).
- Christ has the keys of death and Hades. “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death” NKJV (Rev 1:18).

All of this is involved in Jesus being “Lord.” As it is written, “The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is Lord of all) ” (Acts 10:36). This is not something Jesus is going to be, but what He is at this present time. “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ ” (Acts 2:36). He is “Lord” in authority and “Christ” in work. He is “Lord” in scope, and “Christ” in focus.

This cannot be overstated. The church needs to put to silence such talk as “the future reign of Christ,” and “when He will rule.” At this present time we are living in the midst of His dominion. He will never be more a King than He is right now. He will never be Lord more fully than He is at this present time. The church must declare this!

Now the Spirit will focus on the REASON for Christ’s rule. He will emphasize its focus and intent. Only those who are in Him will be able to make any sense of this. However, it will be a great comfort and encouragement to them.

THE HEAD OF THE BODY

“And He is the Head of the body.” All versions read the same.

The transitional word here is “and.” That is, Jesus is ALSO the Head of the body. Special consideration will be given to this because it is the reason for all authority being given to the glorified Christ. This is precisely WHY He is “Lord,” over all things, and possessing all authority and power.

Ephesians

The book of Ephesians also places stress on this point. The phraseology employed in that Epistle differs slightly, providing an additional perspective of this affirmation. “. . . the working of the strength of His might, which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as Head over all things to the church” NASB (Eph 1:19-22).

The point being made in both Ephesians and Colossians is that Christ has been made the Head

over all things “FOR the church.” NIV That is, He has been given to the church in the capacity of Head over everything. Here, the Spirit is not saying He has authority over the church, although that is most assuredly true. Rather, He is saying that the appointed custodian of the church is the One under whose feet everything and everyone have been placed. The One who ministers life and direction to the body, and to whom the body is subjected, has effective authority over all of its friends and foes. All of the circumstances in which the members of the body are found are under Jesus. All of the enemies it faces are under Jesus. All of the resources it requires are under Jesus. That is the point of this text.

This in no way minimizes the obligation of the body to obey the Head. It does not diminish the fact that He is over the body, and is the solitary One to whom it is responsible. However, it is only as the truth of this text is seen with some clarity that obedience and responsibility can be joyfully and confidently rendered to Him. Those who love Jesus do keep His commandments. That is what He said: “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me” (John 14:21). Again He said, “He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings” (John 14:24). It is also written, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3). Those who have to continually be reminded to keep the commandments of Jesus have a heart problem. They really do not love Jesus, and what they profess is of no consequence whatsoever. Furthermore, they do not love Him because they do not know Him.

THE CHURCH

“ . . . the church . . . ” There is a “body” of people FOR whom the Lord Jesus is reigning. It is not a political or national body. It is not an ethnic or sectarian body. The body to which Jesus has been given, and over which He presides, is “the church.”

The words “the church” occur sixty-eight times in Scripture – all of them are in the New Covenant writings. This is the body of which Jesus said, “I will build My church” (Matt 16:18). Only the Lord can add someone to this body of people (Acts 2:47). This is the group of people that are to be fed (Acts 20:28). It is where ALL of the members of Christ are placed (1 Cor 12:18,28). This is the group of people that are to be edified, or built up and encouraged (1 Cor 14:12). “The church” is the exclusive place where principalities and powers in heavenly places are learning of the “manifold wisdom of God” (Eph 3:10). Here is where God receives glory (Eph 3:21). These are the people Jesus loved, and for whom He died (Eph 5:25). “The church” is what Jesus is presently nourishing and cherishing (Eph 5:29).

All of Epistles were written to “the church.” The Lord Jesus intercedes for those who are His body, the church (Heb 7:27). The Holy Spirit, residing in them, also intercedes for them (Rom 8:26). The holy angels have been dispatched to be their ministers (Heb 1:13-14). All of the spiritual gifts have been given to “the church.” Those who constitute “the church” are the only people in the world who have been made “partakers of Christ” and “partakers of the Divine nature,” (Heb 3:14; 2 Pet 1:4). Only they have been given the Holy Spirit (Gal 4:6), and all of the promises of God belong to them (2 Cor 1:20).

Jesus is ruling for them! He is working exclusively to bring them to glory and to God (Heb 2:10; 1 Pet 3:18). One of the great tragedies of our time is that many who come in the name of Christ, make very little mention of this. It is rarely seen as an emphasis. But this is God’s emphasis! This is why He has made Jesus “Head over all things,” and given Him in that capacity to “the church.”

“ 18b . . . who is the beginning . . . ” Other versions read, “the starting point of all things,” BBE and “the first of all.” NLT

The word “beginning” comes from a word meaning “origin, the person that commences, the first in a series, the leader, that by which anything begins to be.” STRONG’S Most strictly, it means “primacy,” ROBERTSON and “the beginning of all things.” THAYER This can only be said of one – the Lord Jesus Christ.

“The Beginning” is the Source of all things. It is the only means by which something can begin to be, or come into existence. As the meaning of the word indicates, “the Beginning” is also the first of a series of something totally new.

Jesus is frequently referred to as “the Beginning.” “Who is the Beginning . . . I am the Beginning and the End . . . the Beginning of the creation of God . . .” (Col 1:18; Rev 1:8; 3:14; 21:6,13).

THE SOURCE. Jesus is the Source of all things that come from God – the fountain from which the water of life proceeds. Nothing is received from God that does not come from Him.

THE INITIATOR. In the kingdom of God, nothing valid and accepted is started without Jesus. He is the “Author” of every valid person and work (Heb 12:2). He is also called “the Author of eternal salvation” (Heb 5:9). This being the case, it is a sin of the greatest magnitude to seek spiritual resources from anyone but Him.

THE FIRST ONE. Jesus is the “firstborn among many brethren” – the first of a new order of creation. Because of this, all of the saved are being conformed to His image (Rom 8:29), are made partakers of Him (Heb 3:14), and grow up into Him (Eph 4:15). In the end, when we see Him as He is, we “shall be LIKE HIM, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

In matters pertaining to life and godliness, there is nothing that is acceptable that did not come from Jesus. No work is accepted that was not started by Him. Ultimately, no one who is unlike Jesus will be accepted. He is, in every sense, “the Beginning.” This is not what He should be, it is what He is! It is not the objective of men to make Him “the Beginning,” but to acknowledge Him as such.

If Jesus did not start it, it will eventually pass away, and thus cannot enter into glory.

“ 18c . . . the Firstborn from the dead . . . ” Other versions read, “Firstborn from among the dead,” NIV “the first to come again from the dead,” BBE “First begotten from the dead,” GENEVA “the first of all who will rise from the dead,” NLT and “the First-born out of the dead.” YLT

This he a further elaboration of the expression, “the Beginning,” and refers to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus – a pivotal point of “sound doctrine.” In an inspired summation of the doctrine of Christ, Paul said, “That Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead , and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:23).

A special point is made of Christ’s resurrection in the Apostolic doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept . For since by man came death, by Man came also the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor 15:21). Just as the death of all men is traced to a single man and his sin, so the resurrection of all men is traced to a single Man and His resurrection. The resurrection of Christ was necessary to the final resurrection of all the dead, and the final change of those who remain until the coming of the Lord (1 Thess 4:15-17; 1 Cor 15:52). If He was not raised from the dead, none could have been raised from the dead.

WHAT ABOUT FORMER RESURRECTIONS?

The novice may object, saying there were several resurrections prior to that of the Lord Jesus. It is true, that several instances of the dead being raised are recorded in Scripture. However, they are not the same as Christ’s resurrection, but differ significantly from it.

- Elijah raised from the dead the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:17-23).
- Elisha raised from the dead the Shunammite’s son (2 Kgs 4:32-37).
- The body of a young man who had recently died was cast into the sepulchre of Elisha. When his body “touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet” (2 Kgs 13:21).
- Jesus raised from the dead the son of a certain widow of Nain (Luke 7:12-15).

- Jesus raised Jairus' twelve year old daughter from the dead (Luke 8:49-55).
- Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43-44).
- Peter raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:37-40).
- Paul raised Eutychus from the dead (Acts 20:9-12).
- Probably referring to the sons of the widow of Zarephath and the Shunnamite woman, the book of Hebrews says, "Women received their dead raised to life again" (Heb 11:35).
- When Jesus died, it is written that "the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many" (Mat 27:53).
- When Jesus first sent out the twelve, He told them to "raise the dead" (Matt 10:8).

How is it, then, that Jesus is said to have been "the first" to raise from the dead, and the "firstborn from the dead."

The resurrection of Jesus differed from all others because "Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him" (Rom 6:9). He is "alive for evermore" (Rev 1:18). He is the first one to be raised in an immortal or incorruptible body. His is the only body that "did not see corruption" (Acts 2:27,31; 13:35). He entered into glory in the body that came forth from the grave. He is absolutely the first to do this.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

The point of our text is that there is going to be another resurrection after the manner of Christ's. That is why it is written, "For since by man came death, by Man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:21-22).

This is of particular relevance to the saints of God. Thus it is written, "And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by His own power" (1 Cor 6:14). Again it is written, "Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you" (2 Cor 4:14).

The Reasoning Behind This

The reasoning behind the resurrection of the dead should be apparent to us. Our bodies are part of our human constitution. We are comprised of spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess 5:23). The body,

therefore, is not totally inconsequential. In fact, we are solemnly told, “Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body” (1 Cor 6:13). And again, “Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?” (1 Cor 6:15). The Spirit again affirms, “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Cor 6:19-20).

Salvation is associated with our body. In fact, the resurrection is referred to as “the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:23). Again, it referred to as “the redemption of the purchased possession” (Eph 1:14). For the people of God, the resurrection will be the culmination of their salvation.

This is precisely why Paul forsook all and pressed toward the mark, that he might “attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (Phil 3:11). In fact, he affirmed “if the dead rise not, let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die” (1 Cor 15:32). There is no point to living for Jesus and crucifying the flesh if the dead are not raised. In such a case, there is no advantage to godliness – none at all! Those who glibly say the Christian life is the best life even if there is no heaven have lied, willingly or not. They have contradicted both the revelation of God and the experience of grace. Here is the truth of the matter, “But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor 15:13-20).

If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ did not raise, and both preaching and faith are pointless. That would mean the Apostles were liars, and we are still in our sins. Those who died in the faith are no better off than the beasts of the earth. The whole of their lives was for nothing. If this world and time is really all there is, Christians are the most foolish, deceived, and wretched of all men. They are, in such a case, to be “pitied above all men,” NIV and are the “most miserable.” KJV

I hardly see how the Spirit could possible have made a stronger case for the necessity of the resurrection of the dead. Remove it, and nothing of any real substance remains. Futility and vanity rush in if there is no resurrection. And, if Jesus was not raised from the dead, there could not have been a resurrection of the dead – that is the point of “firstborn from the dead.”

It is time for the church to purge from its vocabulary words and expressions that contradict the revelation of God. It is further time for someone to ask the modern church why it speaks so little of both the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. The absence of such things in contemporary preaching is a sign of apostasy and degeneracy. It simply is not possible to follow Jesus, walk in the light, or live by faith, and have no regard for the resurrection of the dead. Those who profess they have accomplished such a feat have not told us the truth. They have only confirmed they are walking in the darkness.

If it appears as though this kind of language is too harsh, one must consider the gravity of the text before us. How is it possible that such teaching as this could be secondary, not essential, or not immediately associated with the Gospel and salvation? Why is there such an exaltation of the Son of God if it is only an optional matter, or, at the best, only a secondary issue? The verses that follow will make the truth to which we have just been submitted even more firm. It will confirm the indispensability of the exalted Christ being perceived as He really is.

“ 18d . . . that in all things He might have the preeminence.” Other versions read, “so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything, ” NASB “so that in everything He might have the supremacy,” NIV “so that in all things He might have the chief place,” BBE “so that He should be supreme in every way,” NJB and “so He is first in everything.” NLT

Jesus is the first to rise from the dead, in order that He might have the preeminence in everything. How is it that His resurrection was required for this to occur. Is not the Lord Jesus by nature “over all?”

The one who delivers us must Himself have unquestionably conquered the one or thing from which we are being delivered. The “strong man” of the house in which we are held captive must first be “bound” before the captives can be set free. Thus Jesus said, “how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except He first bind the strong man? and then He will spoil his house” (Mat 12:29).

THE REIGN OF DEATH

When sin “entered into the world,” death entered with it, being “passed upon all men” (Rom 5:12). From that very moment, death began a reign over the whole of the human race. It reigned uncontested from Adam to Moses, without respect of persons. As it is written, “Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses , even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come” (Rom 5:14). God has revealed that it “reigned” because of the offense of one man, Adam (Rom 5:17).

From Adam to Moses

During the era between Adam and Moses, the Lord provided confirmation that death would not have the last word – that it would finally be conquered. Enoch, a man who “pleased God,” was translated to the unseen world without having to die. It is said of him, “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God” (Heb 11:5).

From Moses to Christ

From Moses to Christ, death continued its ruthless reign. It is written that “sin reigned unto death” (Rom 5:21), and that death was the consequence of sin, of which all men were guilty (Rom 6:16,23). Yet, during this age the Lord provided confirmation that death would not have the ultimate victory. IN this age also a man was translated to glory without having to experience death. It is written of Elijah the prophet, “And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kgs 2:11).

Although Enoch and Elijah were translated to heaven without having to see death, they did not themselves conquer death, and therefore could deliver no one else from it. Deliverance would have to come from someone else.

The Lord Jesus

The Lord Jesus provides the third Person who went directly into heaven, while yet alive. His ascension, however, is different than that of Enoch and Elijah. He had died. However, His death was voluntary – His life was not “taken” from Him. Rather, He laid it down of Himself. Of this, the Savior said, “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again . No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again . This commandment have I received of my Father” (John 10:17-18).

In taking back His life, Jesus conquered death, rising from its domain. Having thoroughly conquered death, He arose to die no more, for “death hath no more dominion over Him” (Rom 6:9).

THE LAST ENEMY

Death is the last, or final enemy. As it is written, “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:26). After death, there are no more enemies the child of God will face – not a single one! If you are in Christ Jesus, death is the final foe, or enemy, you will face. Therefore, he who has power over death truly has “preeminence in all things.” For this reason it is affirmed that Jesus is “the firstborn from the dead; that in all things e might have the preeminence” (Col 1:18). Our salvation requires such a Savior.

But why is preeminence associated with raising from the dead? Judging from the thrust of

much that comes to us in the name of the Lord, one might think the resurrection had very little to do with our salvation. However, such thoughts are indicative of a sort of spiritual insanity in which men are not free to think properly. Even Job, without a Bible, knew the resurrection of the dead was a pivotal matter. He said, “If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come ” (Job 14:14). And again he said, “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God : Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me” (Job 19:25-27).

Salvation is not complete without the resurrection – the raising of the body out of the domain of the dead. The salvation we presently enjoy in Christ Jesus is described as “the firstfruits of Spirit” (Rom 8:23). This pledge of the fulness of redemption has produced a “groaning” within – a fundamental discontent with our present condition in this world. We have “this treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Cor 4:7), and this circumstance has introduced a fierce inner struggle. “The flesh,” which pertains exclusively to the body, “lusteth against the Spirit” (Gal 5:17), working through “the law of sin” that is resident in our mortal bodies (Rom 7:23,25; 8:2). Our bodies are not yet saved, even though they have been “bought with a price” (1 Cor 6:19-20).

This scenario is the occasion for Apostolic teaching concerning the resurrection of the dead – the time when our bodies will be saved, or delivered from mortality. The “firstfruits of the Spirit” are the pledge of this deliverance. As it is written, “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body ” (Rom 8:23). The book of Ephesians contains a similar statement, in which the body is called a “purchased possession,” and the Holy Spirit is declared to be an “earnest,” or pledge of the redemption of the body. “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession , unto the praise of His glory” (Eph 1:14).

The truth of the matter is that we are not yet fully saved – not until our bodies are raised incorruptible. Our bodies are a frail tabernacle, but they are an integral part of us.

Sin has infected our entire being – spirit, soul, and body. Salvation must deliver us in every realm into which sin thrust us. Grace must have as wide a perimeter as sin, else it will not be effectual. The remedy must reach as far as the curse, else it is no good.

What is more, this deliverance must come from one of our own race – a man . If sin came by man, salvation must come by man also. That is the reasoning of the Spirit: “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor 15:21). This is also the reasoning of Romans 5:12-19. Sin and death came through Adam. Righteousness and life came through Christ – the MAN Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:5).

Thus Jesus was raised from the dead that, as a Man, He might have the preeminence in all things. That preeminence involved the subjugation of all enemies – but that was not its primary purpose. That could easily be done by angels, to say nothing of the Almighty God Himself. The fuller purpose of this preeminence was to effect the full salvation of men, from their rescue from sin to their resurrection from the dead.

Because of flawed preaching and teaching, men have been led to entertain stunted and restricted views of salvation. All manner of false teaching has arisen from these views. Some teach that once you are saved, you are always saved. Others teach that saving the lost is the fundamental thing. Still others make the church itself the heart of all things. Yet others see involvement in social and domestic correction to be the most fundamental issue – helping people. Some see God as basically tolerant of any and every condition because He loves people so much.

While an element of truth may be found in all of these things, there is one thing they all have in common. They tend to minimize the greatness of salvation. Our text has declared the truth of the matter. In order to get you from earth to heaven, an all powerful Savior is required. He must be the “image of the invisible God” (1:15). He must be the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers (1:16). He must not only be before all things, but He must be the Maintainer of all things (1:17). He must be the Head of the body, the Beginning of all things, and the first to raise from the dead, under His own power and incorruptible (1:18a). Further, He must “have the preeminence” in all things (1:18b). If such a One is not bringing us to God, we simply will never get to Him. If this kind of Savior is not bringing the sons to glory, they will never arrive.

A Savior of this sort is declared to be necessary to initially rescue us from sin. But He is also required to sanctify us, keep us from falling, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (Jude 1:24; 1 John 1:7).

If, for example, the exalted Christ ceased to intercede for us, we would forthrightly drop into hell. That is precisely why it is written, “Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25).

If inimical principalities and powers were not subject to Him, even now, in their weakened state, they would easily overcome us. He plundered them, but did not stamp them out of existence. The devil, his angels, and all of his principalities still exist. They have no access to heaven, but they do to the earth. If they were not subject to Christ, they would triumph over us in a moment.

If Jesus was not presently mediating the New Covenant, we would not receive a single heavenly benefit. We could have no faith, for it comes to us “from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 6:23). We would have no understanding of God, essential to salvation, for it is Jesus who “is come and

hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true” (1 John 5:20). Neither grace nor peace could come to us if Jesus was not preeminent , for they both come “from God and Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:3). The same is true of mercy (2 John 1:3).

I do not believe the American church has heard enough about the Lord Jesus. There is too much talk about other things – things that do not have the preeminence. There is too much novelty, too much entertainment, and too much involvement in things that have no association with things pertaining to life and godliness. As a result, the average Christian is not duly impressed with the necessity of Jesus Christ right now . That is why there is not much devotion to Him. It is why there is not much inquiry concerning Him. It why we have the plague of disinterest.

“ 19 For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.”

Here we have a single statement that summarizes the whole of what has been declared. This is the ultimate reason for the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and present ministry of Jesus. It is why He has preeminence in all things.

PLEASED THE FATHER

Anything that pleases the Father must be of utmost importance to us. Something that pleases God meets with His approval, and He thinks well of it. He is willing for such a thing or person to continue, thereby guaranteeing effectiveness. Something that pleases God is what He chooses – it is what He has determined, and thus He is favorably inclined toward it.

It is not possible for something that pleases God to fail. A person who pleases God will surely succeed. No one who is well pleasing to God can come short of the goal. What is “pleasing” or “well pleasing” to the Lord is always good, and is always blessed (Col 1:10; 3:20; 1 John 3:22).

The Son of God is especially pleasing to Him. In the beginning, before He came into the world, He said, “I come to do Thy will, O God” (Heb 10:9). Isaiah prophesied of the Savior, “Behold My Servant, whom I have chosen; My beloved, in whom My soul is well pleased : I will put My spirit upon Him, and He shall show judgment to the Gentiles” (Mat 12:18). When Jesus was baptized, a voice from heaven was heard saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ” (Matt 3:17). When He was

transfigured a voice came out of an overshadowing cloud saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ; hear ye Him” (Matt 17:5). Jesus Himself confessed, “And He that sent Me is with \Me: the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him ” (John 8:29).

The Father is especially pleased with His Son in every respect. Never has He displeased the Lord as Adam and all of his progeny have. It is good to know that the One who is bringing us to God is well pleasing in His sight! Here, however, a very special view of this good pleasure is seen.

ALL FULNESS

“For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.” Other versions read, “For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him,” NASB “For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him” (Col 1:19). NIV “For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,” NRSV and “For God in all His fullness was pleased to live in Christ.” NLT

Both the language and the reality of what is being declared go beyond the reach of human wisdom. Yet, it is proclaimed in order to stretch our minds and hearts in the matter of the knowledge of God, which is critical to our salvation.

The word “fulness” means “completion, copiousness, to fill up.” STRONG'S It refers to what the Son is filled with, and not to the filling itself. The “fulness” is to Jesus what water is to a vessel.

It is said of believers, “And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). That is, we have not received the fulness itself, but a measure, or proportion of it. This measure is limited by our own persons. Therefore it is written, “And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God ” (Eph 3:19). That is a staggering consideration, but vastly differs from what is said of the Lord Jesus.

It is not said that Jesus was filled with the “fulness of God,” but that the “fulness” dwelt , or was housed permanently in Him. It was not measured as it is with us. This will be again affirmed in the second chapter (2:9).

What is being said is that everything God IS , He is pleased to have dwell in “the Man Christ Jesus.” His truth, love, and power are there – not in measure, but in “fulness.” His grace, wisdom, and goodness are in Christ – not in part, but in whole. All of God's attributes, in their full measure , have found their home in the exalted Christ. Whatever God has to give is received from Christ. Whoever God will judge will be judged by Christ. Whoever God wants to blessed is blessed in Christ. Having “all the fulness of God” dwelling in Him, the Lord Jesus has become the sole means of appropriating the things God has prepared for those who love Him.

Therefore, it is said of those who are in the Son, “Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours ; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's” (1 Cor 3:21-23). It is no wonder that God moved the Psalmist to write, “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry , and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him” (Psa 2:12).

This is why Jesus spoke with such finality concerning our acceptance and honor of Him.

- “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father . He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent Him ” (John 5:22-23).
- “He that believeth on Me, believeth not on Me, but on Him that sent Me. And he that seeth Me seeth Him that sent Me ” (John 12:44-45).
- “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth Me; and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me ” (John 13:20).
- “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father ; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?” (John 14:9).

All of the perfections and glory of God are in the exalted Son. They have thereby become accessible to us through Him – “the Man Christ Jesus.”

I understand this to be what Jesus prayed for in the Garden: “Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son . . . And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own Self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was . . . Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me : for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:1, 5,24).

All of the essential attributes of God are found in Christ Jesus – His eternality, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, immutability, immortality, and other such things. They are all in the glorified Son. Those, therefore, who would question the Divinity of Jesus has displayed a remarkable level of ignorance.

This fulness, as I have already affirmed, has particular relevance to the salvation of men. It is therefore said of Jesus, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth ” (John 1:14).

This is not something about which men are to speculate, or formulate creeds and theological positions. We are to understand that it took a Savior of this magnitude to pull us out of the quagmire of sin, and keep us out of it as well. Had any other kind of Savior appeared, no would – not a single person – would ever have been saved! Jesus is the kind of Savior we absolutely required. That is why He is totally effectiue.

We have been exposed to a remarkable exposition of the Person of Jesus Christ – the Savior of the world. This is the kind of Savior we had to have. Any other kind of deliverer would have utterly failed. God could not save us in the capacity of His Godhood, for the Savior had to walk among men, in a defiled world, and among a fallen race. He had to be exposed to the adversary, be tempted in all points, and ultimately die. None of this could be done by a holy and invisible God. It is not that God lacked the power, but that His nature did not allow Him to be subjected to such things. His nature would simply not permit it. Holiness and unholiness cannot be joined. Neither, indeed, can the righteous God be in close proximity to the unrighteous without destroying them.

The invisible God cannot draw near to the earth without it convulsing and breaking up. Neither, indeed, can He come close to fallen men without them being devoured, for He is “a consuming fire.”

From any human consideration, this would have made salvation impossible. However, God is infinitely wise as well as infinitely holy. The “Word,” who was “with God and was God,” and by whom all things were made, volunteered to enter a body prepared especially for Him. That body would allow Him to be tempted in all points like as those He would save. It also allowed Him to lay down His life and take it up again. He would conquer the devil in his own territory, and do so as a Man.

Our text expounds Christ in His essential character. Ponder again what remarkable things are said of Him.

- He IS the image of the invisible God.
- He IS the firstborn of every creature – both their Source and Head.
- Everything WAS created by Him that is in heaven.

- Everything WAS created by Him that is in earth.
- Everything visible WAS created by Him.
- Everything invisible WAS created by Him.
- All manner of power and dominions WERE created by Him, including thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers.
- All things WERE created for Him.
- He IS before all things, eternally existing.
- He holds everything together, maintaining its order, and IS orchestrating it for Divine purpose.
- He IS the Head of the body, given to the church as Sovereign over all things and personalities.
- He IS the Beginning – the Source of all things – the means whereby all things have their genesis.
- He IS the first one to rise from the region of the dead under His own power.
- In everything, He HAS the preeminence.
- The Father IS pleased that all of His fulness dwells in Christ.

Such things can be said of no other Man. For this reason, the church must make much of Jesus , for God has exalted His name above every other name – not only in earth, but also in heaven (Phil 2:9; Eph 1:21). No other name must be allowed to obtain more prominence among men than His. No other person or persons must be better known or more highly revered than Him. No institution or group can justly claim more attention than Christ Jesus. No position must be revered above His Person. Nothing must be allowed to upstage Him in any way.

If you are familiar with the thrust of modern Christendom, you know Jesus Himself has generally been placed in background. Such things as church names, theological positions, organizational structures, education, scholarship, church history, psychological views, and the likes have actually received more attention than the Son of God. In view of our text, as well as the entire thrust of Scripture and the nature of salvation, this is wholly unacceptable.

If God has given the preeminence to the Lord Jesus Christ, and it has pleased Him that all fulness dwell in Him, what can be said of those who place other things above Him? Let every soul take care to have a proper view and respect for the Lord Jesus. He will, after all, judge us.

WHAT JESUS HAS DONE

Lesson # 7

The salvation of God is worthy of the most profound and extended consideration. There is nothing about it that is infantile or simplistic. Anything requiring the purpose of God, the work of Jesus, the influence of the Holy Spirit, and the ministry of angels cannot be elemental and easy to be comprehended.

Consider the manner in which the Lord refers to this salvation that is in Christ Jesus. These texts confirm the greatness of salvation, and the purpose that is being realized through it.

- **ALL FLESH WILL SEE.** “And all flesh shall see the salvation of God ” (Luke 3:6). These very words challenge our thinking. Salvation is not only global in provision, but is also tailored for global perception.
- **UNTO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.** “For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth ” (Acts 13:47). The wake of salvation will reach the furthest extremities of the earth, stretching as far as the effects of sin.
- **THE TIME IN WHICH GOD SUCCORS.** “For He saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee : behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). Salvation not only has to do with coming out of sin, but with staying out of sin. It has to do with nurturing and sustaining the believer while in a hostile realm.
- **APPOINTED TO OBTAIN.** “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:9). Salvation is associated with Divine appointment. Although the nature and extent of this appointment may be the subject of disputation, the fact of it is to be believed.
- **CHOSEN TO.** “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thess 2:13). The salvation of God is implemented by Divinely chosen means. On God’s part, it is through the separating power of the Holy Spirit. On man’s part, it is through the belief of the truth.
- **WITH ETERNAL GLORY.** “Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory ” (2 Tim 2:10). Salvation comes with more than forgiveness – more than cleansing. It also comes with “eternal glory,” and it is not completed until that glory is experienced in fulness.
- **BROUGHT BY GRACE.** “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). Men cannot climb up to salvation, it has to be brought down to them. It cannot be brought within their grasp by humanly devised means, but can only come within our reach by the grace of God – something God alone gives and controls.
- **A GREAT SALVATION.** “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation ; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him” (Heb 2:3). Salvation is “great” – great in size or bulk. The word “great” includes the ideas of important and mighty as well as immense in extent and provision. It also carries the idea of great age, stretching from “before the foundation of the earth” into eternity, when time shall be no more.
- **SALVATION WITH A CAPTAIN.** “For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through

sufferings” (Heb 2:10). Salvation, in all of its phases, requires a Captain, or Chief Leader. The “sons” must not only be delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of Christ, they must be brought to God (1 Pet 3:18), and led to glory (Heb 2:10). That leading must take them through the “wiles of the devil,” all manner of temptation, times of ignorance and frustration, and all manner of testing.

- **ETERNAL SALVATION.** “And being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” (Heb 5:9). Salvation can only be viewed properly within the context of eternity. The framework of “this present evil world” is too small to contain the concept or experience of salvation. After the present heavens and the earth have passed away, and the devil, his motley host, and all who followed him, have been cast into the lake of fire, we read of “the saved of the nations” (Rev 21:24). Indeed, this is an “eternal salvation” with “eternal life” (Tit 1:2), an “eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15) and a “reign” that is “for ever and ever” (Rev 22:5).
- **WITH GREAT ACCOMPANIMENTS.** “But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak” (Heb 6:9). The salvation of God has certain accompaniments – things that blend with it, and are the consequence of it. The fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-25), the love of the brethren (1 Thess 4:9), the love of the truth (2 Thess 2:10), overcoming the world (1 John 5:4-5), and much more accompany salvation. Where they are found, salvation is found, and where they are absent, salvation is absent.
- **THE SUBJECT OF PROPHET’S INQUIRY.** “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you” (1 Pet 1:10). Holy prophets of God spoke of this salvation, and when they did it whetted their appetites and challenged their thinking. They sensed its largeness as well as its effectuality, and therefore probed into it, seeking to comprehend something of its nature and timing. Yet, they were told it was not for them to know such things (1 Pet 1:11-12).
- **READY TO BE REVEALED.** “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet 1:5). The salvation of God is experienced in this world, but only in a first fruits sense (Rom 8:23). There remains grace that will be “brought” to us at “the revelation of Christ” (1 Pet 1:13). We have yet to experience “The redemption of the body” (Rom 8:23), seeing our Lord “as He is,” and being “like Him” (1 John 3:2).

How could a salvation like this, in any way, be characterized by childlike simplicity? The modern church has not done well in its representation of the salvation of God. It speaks of “the salvation of the lost,” as though that exhausted the concept of salvation. This is a completely erroneous concept of salvation, and is nowhere reflected in the Word of God.

It ought to be noted that the word “salvation” is never mentioned together with the word “lost” or “sinners.” It is true, and it is to be proclaimed, that Christ “came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim 1:15). But even then, Paul added “of whom I AM (not “was”) chief” – that is, he himself was still in the process of being saved.

We believers are told, “now is OUR salvation nearer than when we believed” (Rom 13:11). The day in which we live is also called “the day of salvation,” and is associated with “succor,” which is relief or nourishment, which is an aspect of our salvation (2 Cor 6:2). Now, as we do battle with the powers of darkness, we must put on the helmet of “the hope of salvation” (1 Thess 5:8). Obviously, the whole of salvation has not yet been experienced, else we would not require “the HOPE of salvation.”

This is a salvation that can be “neglected” by those who possess it, which “neglect” closes off the way of “escape.” Thus it is written, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him” (Heb 2:3) . You cannot “neglect” what you have received in fulness.

For this reason, and many others, the Holy Spirit spoke to believers frequently about the Lord Jesus, the purpose of His mission, His accomplishments, and His appointed return. Whatever is said of those in Christ Jesus, they are not permitted the seeming luxury of forgetting their Savior or neglecting “so great salvation.” That is one of the reasons for this passage.

The Message to the Churches

When John was on the Isle of Patmos, Jesus revealed Himself to him (Rev 1:10-17). John saw the glorified Christ. The very first thing He told John was “Fear not; I am the First and the Last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Rev 1:17-18). In confirmation of the ongoing work of salvation, He then gave John a message to deliver to His churches in Asia (1:19-3:22). That message included an assessment of each church, exhortations, and promises. All but two of the churches received reprimands and a warning to repent. In the Revelation there is no word for sinners, and no correction for social or governmental leaders. It is exclusively a word to the churches – to those who have been given “ears to hear.”

If we knew nothing more than this, we should be able to readily conclude there is still a work going on in the churches – a work that is within the circumference of salvation. The work in them upon the earth is not yet completed.

This is precisely why Paul now affirms what the Lord has done. It all relates to salvation. You might call it the salvation of the saved , for all who are in Christ Jesus are in the process of being saved. The power that accomplishes that salvation comes through the Gospel, which is God’s “power unto salvation” (Rom 1:16).

Therefore, the good news about Jesus will now be declared. That Gospel must be proclaimed.

“ 1:20a And, having made peace . . . ” Other versions read, “by making peace,” NIV and “through peace made by.” GENEVA

Having declared who the Lord Jesus Christ is, the Spirit now unfolds what God the Father has accomplished through Him – for Jesus came to do God’s will (Heb 10:9). The Father is the One who sent the Son into the world (1 John 4:14), and it is His will that the Son accomplished. It was, after all, “the pleasure of the Lord” that would prosper “in His hand” (Isa 53:10).

We should not expect the One who is “the Image of the invisible God,” to accomplish small and eternally inconsequential things. You may rest assured that the one who created all things, and who is the One for whom they were all created, will not engage in menial tasks, or devote Himself to works that have nothing to do with God’s eternal purpose. The One who is “before all things,” and by whom all things are sustained will not be devoted to mere temporal matters. We should not look for small and unimpressive things from the One who is the “Head of the body, the Beginning,” and “the Firstborn from the dead,” to give Himself to trivia. The One who has preeminence in all things will not be associated with passing fads. The One in whom the Father is pleased to have “all fulness dwell,” will surely devote Himself to some grand enterprise that will bring great glory to God, and be impressive to the vast array of heavenly hosts that surround the throne.

Some versions place this clause (v 20) after the statement concerning reconciliation: i.e., “and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.” NKJV/NASB/NIV These versions state the effect first (reconciliation), and the cause second (having made peace through the blood of His cross). The KJV merely states it chronologically, confirming that the reconciliation resulted from the peace that was made through the blood of Christ’s cross.

AND

“And . . . ” This word connects with the previous declaration of the Person and position of the Son of God. That is, the works that follow are the result of who He is. To put it another way, God sent Jesus into the world in the capacity of a Man in order to achieve the matters that follow. These are part of the purpose He was to achieve. They are matters that are essential to salvation. If men are to be rescued from the dilemma of sin, these are the things that had to be done. They are not optional. They are not matters that can be ignored, despised, neglected, or treated with disinterest. We could not be saved without the accomplishment of these realities. They had to be done, and done effectively, timely, and to the thorough satisfaction of God.

Two prevailing reasons can be cited for the Word becoming flesh, and all of the attending circumstances that resulted from it.

- In order to qualify Him to be the Savior of men.

- In order to accomplish what was required for men to be saved.

The things addressed in this text deal with the later – what was required for men to be saved. Without these accomplishments recovery from the fall – salvation – could never be realized.

HAVING MADE

“ . . . having made . . . ” The language here is very precise. The phrase “having made peace” actually comes from a single Greek word – **ειρηνοποιη, saj** . It means to make peace, or establish harmony. THAYER Through Christ God has, in fact, established this harmony, or peace. It is already been established. No further work is required upon which to ground this peace. It has been “made.”

The phrase does not mean that the experience of the peace has been thoroughly realized, but that the basis for it has been established . In other words, this is an affirmation addressed to the believing heart. It is a statement faith can grasp, for we are ever saved “by grace through faith” (Eph 2:8), and faith must have a word from God .

PEACE

“ . . . peace . . . ” Peace is a large word, indeed. The making of peace confirms that sin had introduced hostility between God and man. Man’s lostness includes more than simply being apart from God. It also involves being at enmity with God, or at war with Him, as well as God being firmly set against man. I fear this picture has not faithfully been declared by the professing church. It is true that “God so loved the world,” yet sin introduced a situation that drove a wedge between man and God. This is stated in a number of different ways in Scripture.

- “ . . . he that believeth not is condemned already , because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).
- “ . . . he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him ” (John 3:36).
- “That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world ” (Eph 2:12).
- “For if, when we were enemies , we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom 5:10).
- “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God : for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7).

There is no possible way this circumstance could be remedied by man himself. The keeping of a code, or the fulfillment of a procedure, could not remove the enmity that sin created. The wrath of God cannot be lifted from man by a system of works, or by man fulfilling a routine. Something had to be done at a higher level. Peace had to be “made,” not negotiated. A sound basis for peace had to be established – one that permitted God to be just in the justifying of sinners.

The Proclamation of Ephesians

A parallel passage in Ephesians establishes the scope of this peace. Not only did sin create enmity between God and man, there was also hostility between Jew and Gentile, a division of peoples resulting from God making a covenant with Israel. The whole of this situation was resolved by God through Jesus Christ. Thus is it proclaimed, “For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” (Eph 2:14-18).

Now, the One through whom the peace was made, Himself becomes our peace, so that if we have Jesus, we have peace with God . Notice the complexity of the situation brought on by sin, and the thoroughness of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

- The peace has united Jew and Gentile in one body: “who hath made both one.”
- The Law, which was the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile, has been broken down. Christ has ended it as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4): “ and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances .” That is, the Law as a covenant separated Jew and Gentile, for it was an agreement made solely with Israel.
- There could be no peace with God while the larger segment of humanity was without a covenant, having no access to God or promise from Him: “ having abolished in His flesh the enmity . . . having slain the enmity thereby .”
- Having made the peace, the Lord Jesus had to come and preach it, else we would never have known about it: “ and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh .”
- Twice in this Ephesian text, the condition of men is described as “enmity:” “Having abolished in His flesh the enmity . . .having slain the enmity thereby.” In the first instance, the “enmity ”is identified as “the law of commandments contained in ordinances.” In the second, the enmity itself that was resident in fallen humanity was “put to death.” NASB

- This “peace” resulted in men, through Christ, having access to the Father “by one Spirit.”
- This marvelous peace is described in these words: “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ ” (Eph 2:13).

The making of peace, therefore, involved the death of Christ. It also involved the removal of the hostility created by sin. There was also the removal, or abolishment, of the Law as a covenant, or means to righteousness.

The “peace” of reference involves deliverance from sin by which men had become God’s enemies. It also involves the freedom of the conscience which, when defiled, forbids us to come to God. It causes God to welcome those upon whom, His wrath once abode. The ground of it all is found in what occurred on the cross of Jesus Christ.

Much Is Made of this Peace

It is unfortunate that a strain of religion has risen in the land that does not make much of the peace God made through Christ. This failure is directly traceable to the insipid views of sin and transgression that are being hawked by religious leaders. When sin is attributed to disease, social maladjustment, physiological disorders, and other such things, the peace made through Jesus no longer has any significance. However, when sin is seen as rebellion against God, creating hostility and enmity, and causing the wrath of God to rest upon sinners, the peace of reference is seen as precious. Notice that is said of this peace.

- God is on the initiative “give” peace (Rom 1:7).
- Being justified by faith, “we have peace with God” (Rom 5:1).
- The Gospel is called “the Gospel of peace” (Rom 10:15).
- The kingdom of God “IS” in peace (Rom 14:17).
- God can “fill” us with peace through our faith (Rom 15:13).
- This is a peace that “keeps” both heart and mind (Phil 4:7).
- The peace of God can “rule” in our hearts (Col 3:15).
- God can give His people peace “always by all means” (2 Thess 3:16).

This is not a mere psychological tranquility, which is nothing more than the absence of agitation. This is a peace that sustains one in the very presence of God – a peace that even constrains one to come into the presence of God.

The point of our text is that this peace was “made” – made by God in Christ Jesus. God could not make this peace by means of the Law. Nor, indeed, could it be created by simply overlooking the hostility that existed between fallen man and Himself. Hostility cannot be eliminated by simply ignoring it. Therefore, the means through which this peace was made will be powerfully declared, because it was effectively made to the glory of God..

THE NECESSITY OF THIS PEACE

It ought to be noted that “peace with God” is absolutely essential. In fact, it is the confirmed result of being justified by faith. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1).

“Peace with God” results from no longer being His “enemies” – a status into which sin had thrust us. As it is written, “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Rom 5:10). In the state of nature, dominated by “the carnal mind,” we were at “enmity against God” (Rom8:7). That condition kept us from the Lord, raising up an impenetrable wall between us and God – a wall only God could remove.

Not only that, we had no desire come to Him, but were rather repulsed by His presence, drawing back from Him. Jesus “made peace” in order to correct that situation. Had He not “made peace,” we would have remained in that alienated condition.

“ 20b . . . through the blood of His cross . . . ” Nearly all versions read the same: “the blood of His cross.” The NIV and NIB read, “through His blood, shed on the cross.”

The required peace was not made by Jesus being born, but by Him dying. It was not the result of His life on earth, but His death upon the cross.

THE BLOOD

Under the Law the Lord established the significance of blood. “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” (Lev 17:11). Because of the sanctity of the blood, and in anticipation of the sacrifice of Christ, the Law forbade men to eat blood. “For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eateth it shall be cut off” (Lev 17:14).

In this text “the blood” encapsulates the voluntrary and very literal death of the Lord Jesus. This was the laying down of His life, which the Father commanded Him to do (John 10:17-18). It was a substitutionary death, with its merits being realized by those whose own death counted for nothing. This death resulted in the ultimate atonement for the soul , being prefigured in the sacrifices offered under the Law (Lev 17:11). It was required because sin took life from man – both in the natural and in the spiritual. In order for life to be restored to man, it must be taken from another , whose life was thoroughly acceptable to God – without sin or any form of defilement.

All of this was introduced in the various animal sacrifices that were offered under the Law. Because an atoning death required remarkable complexities, it could not be fully depicted in a single Levitical sacrifice. What was required was so extensive that many different kinds of sacrifices were required to reveal its nature. A brief review of these sacrifices of life will help us appreciate the thoroughness of Christ’s death. Here, I will look at only the creatures offered.

- **LAMB.** “If he offer a lamb for his offering, then shall he offer it before the LORD” (Lev 3:7). Here was an offering depicting innocence and weakness. The Lord fulfilled this type in being “crucified through weakness” (2 Cor 13:4), and being led as a Lamb, dumb to the slaughter (Isa 53:7; Acts 8:32).
- **FEMALE LAMB.** “And if he bring a lamb for a sin offering, he shall bring it a female without blemish” (Lev 4:32). Here the capacity to give birth was offered. The lamb forfeited the right to bring forth natural seed. Jesus fulfilled this figure in His death, being cut off prematurely, and having no earthly generation (Isa 53:8).
- **HE LAMB.** “And the priest shall take one he lamb , and offer him for a trespass offering, and the log of oil, and wave them for a wave offering before the LORD” (Lev 14:12). Here was a lamb that had the potential of having progeny, yet that capacity was terminated when it was offered to God. Jesus fulfilled this type by offering a life of great earthly potential to God.
- **BULLOCK.** “If the priest that is anointed do sin according to the sin of the people; then let him bring for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the LORD for a sin offering” (Lev 4:3). The offering of a young bullock was the offering of strength and vitality. Jesus offered Himself a sacrifice to God in the strength of young manhood, thus fulfilling this figure.

- **HEIFER.** “This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke” (Num 19:2-17). The heifer was one that had never been used for other purposes. Its sole utility pertained to the Lord. Jesus fulfilled this figure in never being used to fulfill another person’s will, like the lost whom He came to save had done.
- **SLAIN GOAT.** “And if his offering be a goat , then he shall offer it before the LORD” (Lev 3:12). Goats were much like sheep, except they excelled in strength, living in higher places , whereas sheep inhabited plains and valleys. Jesus fulfilled this type by sacrificing a life that was strong, and lived in the higher domains of godliness and accord with God.
- **LIVE GOAT.** “And when he hath made an end of reconciling the holy place, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat : and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness” (Lev 16:20-22). The living goat could navigate in uninhabitable realms more safely than a sheep. It was strong and able to move about where weaker animals would succumb. Jesus fulfilled this type by moving into a realm that could not be penetrated by any other man. There He presented His own blood, thereby making His death effective.
- **SLAIN BIRD.** “And he shall take to cleanse the house two birds, and cedar wood, and scarlet, and hyssop: and he shall kill the one of the birds in an earthen vessel over running water: and he shall take the cedar wood, and the hyssop, and the scarlet, and the living bird, and dip them in the blood of the slain bird , and in the running water, and sprinkle the house seven times” (Lev 14:49-51). The bird was more noted for beauty and dexterity than strength and servitude. Jesus fulfilled this type by offering a life of unexcelled beauty before God – a life that was lived freely and with great spiritual dexterity among men.
- **LIVE BIRD.** “But he shall let go the living bird out of the city into the open fields, and make an atonement for the house: and it shall be clean.” (Lev 14:53). The living bird could soar from an open field into the spacious heavens, moving about freely and without the restraints to which the beasts of the earth were subject. Jesus fulfilled this type by offering a life that was without guile – a life that had been lived out in the heavenly places, soaring where others could not go.
- **TURTLEDOVE.** “And if he be not able to bring a lamb, then he shall bring for his trespass, which he hath committed, two turtledoves , or two young pigeons, unto the LORD; one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering” (Lev 5:7). The turtledove was a gentle and sensitive bird, most often domesticated. It is known for its migratory nature and timid disposition. Jesus fulfilled this type by offering a life that had been gentle and lowly – a life that often preferred lonely vigils with the Father in the higher and less agitated realms.
- **RAM.** “If a soul commit a trespass, and sin through ignorance, in the holy things of the LORD; then he shall bring for his trespass unto the LORD a ram without blemish out of the flocks, with thy

estimation by shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for a trespass offering” (Lev 5:15). A ram obtained special value, being considered of greater worth than a sheep. When fattened, it was a favorite article of food. Our Lord fulfilled this type by offering a life that was noted for strength – a life that was fully capable of overcoming adversaries. He was also a source of great nourishment and encouragement, as all of the disciples could attest.

- **BURNT OFFERINGS.** “And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering ; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him” (Lev 1:4). These were offerings that were consumed, leaving no residue – the whole of it was offered to God. The Savior fulfilled this type by being “made a curse for us,” tasting of death for every man, and being “made sin for us.”

These are not merely interesting observations. In the various sacrifices, the Savior was not only set forth as doing these things. It was also confirmed that the status of humanity **REQUIRED** this kind of sacrifice – this kind of death – this kind of blood!

Like the lamb , the life that was sacrificed for us **HAD** to be one that was innocent, and characterized by seeming weakness – a life that was allowed to be ravaged by others. Like the female lamb , it **HAD** to be a life that was capable of reproducing – not one like Abraham when he was as good as dead. Like the he lamb , it **HAD** to be a life with great potential for earthly progeny – like Adam in the beginning. Like the bullock , the life **HAD** to excel in strength, and be at the peak of that strength. Like the red heifer , the life **COULD NOT** have toiled in another purpose – the distracting yoke of sinful men **COULD NOT** have been upon him. Even as the slain goat , the life that was given **MUST BE** noted for strength and being able to navigate in high places. As the live goat , the sacrificed life **MUST BE** able to go where no other could go, presenting the atonement to God. Like the slain bird , the atoning life **MUST BE** one of unexcelled beauty and mobility. As the living bird , that life **MUST BE** able to soar from the open field into the majestic heavens. Even as the turtledove , the life **MUST BE** able to migrate into the heavens and have a disposition that did not crave worldly attention. Like the ram , the life **MUST BE** noted for greatness of value and nourishment for the soul. And, like the burnt offering , this life **WILL NOT BE** allowed to return to the form in which it was offered to God.

This is the kind of blood that had to be shed! No other blood could atone for sin. No other blood could reconcile. No other blood could bring satisfaction to God. This is the kind of complication that sin introduced – a complication that could only be resolved by the coupling of mercy and truth, and the wedding of righteousness and peace (Psa 85:10). Only the shedding of Christ’s blood could bring about such things. Only the willing forfeiture of His life could result in such effectual achievements.

There is nothing simplistic about the death of Christ Jesus – the shedding of His blood. That is precisely why various aspects of it were introduced through the Law over a period of 1,500 years.

This is the kind of death that was required for peace to be “made.” Jesus did not die as a martyr, or a soldier on the battle field – and His death should never be portrayed in a manner that leaves such an impression. His death is not like a man dying for his country.

In speaking to His disciples about their love for one another Jesus said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). He then told them they were actually His “friends” in prospect : “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14). Technically – and this is the sense of our text – Christ died for us “when we were enemies” (Rom 5:10). His death was necessitated by our enmity, not our friendship.

THE INVOLVEMENTS OF THE BLOOD

Ponder something of the involvements of the blood of Christ, for it reveals the magnitude of the peace made by it. Notice they are all powerful affirmations.

- **THE REMISSION OF SINS.** “For this is My blood of the new testament , which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mat 26:28).
- **THE NEW TESTAMENT.** “Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood , which is shed for you” (Luke 22:20).
- **ETERNAL LIFE.** “Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life ; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:54).
- **PURCHASE OF THE CHURCH.** “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with his own blood ” (Acts 20:28).
- **PROPITIATION.** “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood , to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Rom 3:25).
- **JUSTIFICATION.** “Much more then, being now justified by His blood , we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Rom 5:9).
- **REDEMPTION AND FORGIVENESS.** “In whom we have redemption through His blood , the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph 1:7).
- **MADE NIGH.** “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13).
- **PURGED CONSCIENCE.** “How much more shall the blood of Christ , who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb 9:14).

- **BOLDNESS TO ENTER.** “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus ” (Heb 10:19).
- **SPEAKING BLOOD.** “And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling , that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb 12:24).
- **SANCTIFICATION.** “Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood , suffered without the gate” (Heb 13:12).
- **ELECTION.** “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ : Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied” (1 Pet 1:2)
- **REDEEMED FROM VAIN LIVING.** “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ , as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet 1:18-19).
- **CONTINUAL CLEANSING.** “But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).
- **PRESENT WITNESS.** “And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood : and these three agree in one” (1 John 5:8).
- **WASHED FROM OUR SINS.** “And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood ” (Rev 1:5).
- **REDEEMED TO GOD.** “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Rev 5:9).
- **LIVES CLEANSED.** “And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb ” (Rev 7:14).
- **OVERCOMING THE DEVIL.** “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb , and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death” (Rev 12:11).

It is no wonder that spiritually minded people make much of the blood of Christ! God makes much of it. Before the life of God could come to us, Christ had to forfeit His life, voluntarily laying it down. Before we could live, He had to die.

HIS CROSS

When referring to Christ's blood, the Spirit is careful to make proper associations – associations that reflect the purpose of God Himself. When Judas lamented that he had betrayed Jesus, he cried out, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood" (Matt 27:4). He was referring to Christ's life on earth, not His death. However, Christ's life on earth is not what brought us peace – it was the "blood of His cross." The great works of Jesus prior to His crucifixion did not effect peace with God. His mighty miracles, gracious healings, and good that He accomplished did not bring peace between God and man. Those were acts of mercy and compassion, revealing the Divine nature. But they did not bring peace. It was the "blood of His cross" that "made peace" – that is, the blood that was shed there.

This was not the blood that fell to the ground in Gethsmane , when "His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). That was not the blood that "made peace." It was not the blood that resulted from the scourging delivered by Pilate, when "he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified" (Matt 27:24). Nor, indeed, was it the blood that appeared when "the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on His head" (John 19:1).

The Spirit is precise: peace was made "through the blood of His cross." This blood came from the wounds immediately related to the cross, where Jesus was "made a curse for us" – on the tree (Gal 3:13). Specifically, the wounds were in His hands, feet, and side. When Jesus rose from the dead, He showed His disciples "His hands and His feet" (Luke 24:40). He also showed His "side" (John 20:20), later urging unbelieving Thomas to thrust his hand into the gapping wound left by the spear (John 20:27). John relates that after Jesus had already died, a soldier "with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water" (John 19:34). The blood that came from these wounds is particularly the blood that "made peace." That is the specific point made by Paul in Galatians 3:13: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal 3:13). Peter makes the same association. "Who his own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree , that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Pet 2:24).

We were redeemed, and peace was made, at the particular point where our sins were laid upon Christ Jesus. It is when He "bore our sins," and He was "made sin for us" that peace was forged and reconciliation was wrought. Let it be clear in your mind, Jesus did not bare the sins of humanity in the manger. He did not carry them in the Temple. They were not laid upon Him in the Garden. Nor, indeed, did He "taste" of death in Caiaphas' palace (Matt 26:57-68), Pilate's hall (John 18:28-19:11), or when being judged by Herod (Luke 23:7-11). It was through "the blood of His cross" that Jesus "made peace," accomplishing atonement and reconciliation.

It Was " HIS Cross"

Jesus was not crucified on a Roman cross, as some thoughtlessly affirm. It was, in every sense, "HIS cross."

It belonged to Him by appointment. It belonged to Him by choice. It belonged to Him by purpose.

Just as every disciple has his own cross (Matt 10:38; 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:34; 14:27), so Jesus had “ His cross” (Matt 27:32; Mk 15:21; John 19:17; Col 1:20; 2:14). Elsewhere it is called “the cross of Christ” (1 Cor 1:17; Gal 6:12; Phil 3:18). The point is not the cross itself, but the One to whom it belonged. It is not the material of the cross, but the accomplishments wrought upon and through it that are the real point.

A Technical Point

Right here, there is a technical point to be made. It is necessitated by the spiritually juvenile and surface view that is often taken of the accomplishments of Christ’s death. Although Peter refers specifically to what Jesus bore “in His body on the tree,” many associate his words relating to that occasion to some of the sufferings He endured before being crucified. I refer specifically to the words expressed by Isaiah and confirmed by Peter. “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5). “Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Pet 2:24).

The position is espoused that these are the stripes related to the scourging Jesus received before His crucifixion – even though very little mention is made of it. It is written that Pilate “had Jesus scourged” (Matt 27:26; Mk 15:15; John 19:1). Prior to His betrayal, Jesus told His disciples that He would be scourged (Lk 18:33). I do not believe the postulate that we were healed by this scourging, delivered prior to our Lord’s crucifixion, can be substantiated. Nor, indeed, does the Holy Spirit associate our redemption, atonement for sin, reconciliation to God, or the making of peace with that malicious and hateful deed.

When Zechariah prophesied of Jesus being “wounded” in the house of His “friends,” and a consequent fountain being opened for sin and uncleanness, he affirmed it was God who initiated the wounding. “Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow, saith the LORD of hosts : smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones” (Zech 13:1,7).

The effectiveness of Christ’s death is nowhere traced to what men did to Him. Those atrocities were endured by our blessed Lord, and pondering them produces sorrow in the sensitive of heart. However, no inspired man has ever called upon us to consider the death of Christ from a purely human point of view. The physical sufferings of Christ are not the point, even though they were stark realities. It is what God did to Christ that is the real point, not what Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod did to Him! It is God Himself who “made Him to be sin for us” (2 Cor 5:21). It is God Himself who “laid upon Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:6). It is God Himself who “made” Him “a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). It is God Himself who “spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all” (Rom 8:32). He was “the Lamb of God,” not of Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, or the people (John 1:29,36). God is the one who delivered Him “for our offences” (Rom 4:25). The “affliction” through which peace was made came from God, not from men.

Thus Isaiah prophesied, “yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isa 53:4). God is the One who “wounded” Him, “bruised” Him, and “chastened” Him (Isa 53:5).

God did not take the scourging of Pilate and turn it into peace! He did not take the buffeting and spittle of men and convert it into peace. What happened to Jesus in the courts of men is not the basis of our reconciliation, nor was it intended to atone for our sins. That ought to be so apparent to us that no word need ever be said about it.

I realize this is disruptive to certain teachings that are extant in the professing church – but such teachings need to be disrupted! Jesus did not die because of sickness, because sickness does alienate us from God, and is nowhere said to do so. His death was not necessitated by illness, but by sin. The “stripes” by which we are healed resulted in our return “unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls” (1 Pet 2:25). All of that relates to peace being made through “the blood of His cross.”

The Christian community needs to be more demanding about the truth being preached! The Lord is a God of truth, and sanctifies us through the truth (John 17:17). We are saved through the love of the truth (2 Thess 2:10). The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim 3:15). God has spoken clearly, concisely, and extensively, about Christ’s blood. It is our business to preach it.

“ 20c . . . by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself . . . ”

The Spirit now unveils the magnitude of the salvation “that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10). We should not expect that something requiring an “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11), the Word being “made flesh” (John 1:14), and Jesus laying down His life and taking it up again (John 10:17-18) to have small consequences. Something requiring the exaltation of Jesus above all things, and the subordination of everything in heaven and earth can be neither small nor simplistic. Whatever requires the continual involvement of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy angels, must be exceedingly large.

BY HIM

“ . . . by Him . . . ” Other versions read “through Him.” NASB/NIV The “Him” of reference is “the Man Christ Jesus,” whom God has “glorified” (Acts 3:13) and “exalted” (Phil 2:9).

The Holy Spirit is very definitive in revealing that all of God's dealings with us are through the Lord Jesus Christ. No person has a direct relationship with the Father. It is all through the Son. This further accentuates the extent to which sin has complicated the human condition. A brief review of Christ's pivotal position in the entirety of salvation will serve to confirm this.

- Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17).
- Peace is preached by Jesus Christ (Acts 10:36).
- God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ (Rom 2:16).
- Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ (Rom 5:12).
- God will raise us from the dead by Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:14).
- God reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:18).
- God predestinated us to adoption to Himself by Jesus Christ (Eph 1:5).
- The fruits of righteousness are by Jesus Christ (Phil 1:11).
- Our spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet 2:5).
- We are alive to God through Jesus Christ (Rom 6:11).
- The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ (Rom 6:23).
- We thank God through Jesus Christ (Rom 7:25).
- God receives glory through Jesus Christ (Rom 16:27).
- The blessing of Abraham has come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ (Gal 3:14).
- The Holy Spirit is shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ (Tit 3:6).
- God works in us what is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ (Heb 13:21).
- Consolation abounds in us by Christ (2 Cor 1:5).

- God is given glory through the church by Christ (Eph 3:21).
- God supplies all of needs according to His riches in glory by Christ (Phil 4:19).
- God has called us to eternal glory by Christ (1 Pet 5:10).
- We come to God by Christ (Heb 7:25).
- By Christ we offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually (Heb 13:15).
- By Christ we believe in God (1 Pet 1:21).
- We are heirs of God through Christ (Gal 4:7).
- God’s kindness is toward us through Christ (Eph 2:7).
- The peace of God keeps our hearts and minds through Christ (Phil 4:7).
- We can do all things through Christ (Phil 4:13).

There are twenty-seven pivotal aspects of salvation, and they are all accomplished in Christ, and in Him alone. No part of salvation can be realized independently of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is by Divine intent. As soon as the Lord Jesus recedes into the background, all of the benefits realized in Him begin to disappear. When Jesus is upstaged, taking a subordinate position to anyone or anything else, it is at the expense all that comes through Him.

I labor this point because it has been shrouded by modern day religious trends and teaching. God simply does not have anything to give us that does not come through the exalted Christ! This is precisely why we are “called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9). Note, the relationship is a “fellowship,” not a mere formal identity. Everything that is included in salvation is no more secure to us than the fellowship that we have with the Lord Jesus. If we are obtuse concerning Him, the blessings – all of them – are out of reach. If we refuse to hear Him who is speaking from heaven, we become incapable of receiving what comes through Him.

In my judgment, this is why Paul was so zealous to “win Christ ,” and to “know Him , and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death” (Phil 3:10). He knew that was the only way to obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus “with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10).

You will be hard pressed to find this kind of mind-set in the average church, or even on an

individual level. That circumstance is indicative of a falling way (2 Thess 2:3) , a departure from the faith, and the heeding of seducing spirits (1 Tim 4:1).

Now, in strict keeping with the nature of salvation, reconciliation is said to be realized by Christ Jesus.

RECONCILE

“ . . . to reconcile . . . ” The word “reconcile” presumes the existence of hostility or enmity between the parties being reconciled. Where there is no reconciliation there can be no harmony or acceptance by either party. To reconcile involves moving a person from one state to another – from a state of antagonism to one of concord. It also carries the idea of restoring to favor and good will, those who had fallen under Divine displeasure.

Some limit reconciliation to an effect wrought upon man. Those espousing this opinion cannot see God’s attitude toward man changing. He is thus viewed as always loving toward man, with only man having any hostility toward God. However, this is a wholly improper view of the matter. God Himself was impacted by what Jesus did. It is the Father who saw the travail of Christ’s soul and was “satisfied” (Isa 53:11). It must ever be remembered that God has forgiven us “for Christ’s sake” (Eph 4:32). That is, were it not for Christ, God would not have forgiven us.

Prior to being in Christ “the wrath of God” abode upon us, not the love of God (John 3:36). It is written, “God is angry with the wicked every day” (Psa 7:11). Those who do not believe on the Son are “condemned already” (John 3:18). Such utterances do not describe the attitude of men toward God, but of God toward men. The very fact that God is “longsuffering” toward us, and “not willing that any should perish,” reveals a certain impact that sin has had upon God Himself. Sin has not changed His nature, but it has changed how He views man. The holiness of God will not permit Him to be drawn toward those who are fundamentally unlike Himself. That is precisely why some will be cast into the lake of fire, forever thrust from the presence of the Lord.

The trite saying that God hates the sin but loves the sinner is not an inspired one. It was spawned in finite minds. Whatever people are trying to say by this clumsy expression needs to be iterated in a better way. It is categorically said of God, “the wicked and him that loveth violence His soul hateth” (Psa 11:5). God is also said to abhor the covetous (Psa 10:3). There are people whom God considers His “enemies” (Psa 21:8; James 4:4). There were false shepherds God is said to have “loathed” (Zech 11:8). He is also declared to hate those who “sow discord among brethren” (Prov 6:19). The reconciliation accomplished through Christ Jesus addressed all of these circumstances.

The reconciling work of Christ has, in fact, changed the way God views those who “have now received the atonement” (Rom 5:11). That is one of the things being established by this text, and is pivotal to an understanding of the Gospel. God is kindly disposed to us because of Christ. Apart from

His Son, our person's and nature are abrasive and offensive to Him.

ALL THINGS

“ . . . all things . . . ” Whatever has been affected by sin must be impacted by the reconciliation as well. There cannot be a lesser circumference to reconciliation than there is to transgression. What Christ has done must reach as far as what Adam did. His work must be as extensive as that of the “ first man.” The “ gate” is strait, and “ the way” is narrow “ which leadeth unto life” – but it is not owing to any “ ineffectiveness” found in either the gate or the “ way.” There is nothing about salvation that places a limit on the number of sinners it can transform.

In confirmation of this, our text speaks in tones of staggering depth and scope: “ ALL things.”

The word “ all” means every one, throughly, whatsoever, whole, everyone, and everything collectively. **STRONG'S** The idea transmitted by the English word “ things” is included in the word translated “ all.”

This expression means that Christ's reconciliation is applicable to every domain impacted by sin, providing a sufficiency that will bring Divine approval and acceptance. It means that, because of Christ's death, there is provision for “ all things” to be in harmony with the God of heaven. The reconciliation effected by Christ is, therefore, most excellently adapted to the dilemma caused by sin.

The expression “ all things” will be more fully expounded in the next phrase.

HIMSELF

“ . . . unto Himself . . . ” The reconciliation is with God because the alienation was from Him. God was offended by the transgression, and thus it is He that is the objective of the reconciliation.

We are thus said to be “ reconciled to God” (Rom 5:10), be “ alive unto God” (Rom 6:11), and made “ acceptable to God” (Rom 14:18). Those who believe are turned “ to God” (1 Thess 1:9), draw nigh “ unto God” (Heb 7:19), and “ come unto God” by Christ (Heb 7:25). Christ is bringing us “ to God” (1 Pet 3:18), and by the Spirit we have “ access unto the Father” (Eph 2:18).

Here the whole of our salvation is traced back to God Himself. He is the One who reconciled us unto Himself by Christ Jesus. As it is written, “ that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Cor 5:19).

This does not conflict with the statement that Christ Himself reconciled us to God: “And that He (Jesus) might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross” (Eph 2:16). Jesus did this as God’s exclusive representative. Therefore, from one point of view, it was actually God Himself who was reconciling us.

The purpose belonged to God the Father, and therefore God Himself reconciled us. The appointed means through which the reconciliation was accomplished was the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore He is said to have reconciled us to God.

“ 20d . . . by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.”

Because man is prone to trace salvation to his own works, the Spirit labors a point which appears on the surface to be very obvious. Once men are reconciled to God, the devil goes to work to convince them the whole matter was of their own doing. If he can ever bring men to think in such a way, a lesser value will be assigned to Christ by them than that which has been assigned to Him by God. Further, if that ever happens, the “power” required to save the person is withdrawn, for that power can only come through Jesus Christ.

All of this may seem painlessly simplistic, but that is not at all the case. From the very beginning the church has wrestled with the temptation to demote, as it was, the Lord Jesus, giving priority to other things. It is not uncommon to hear people assigning more preeminence to men, the church, a procedure, a work, or even to the Holy Spirit Himself, than to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this section of Colossians, the Spirit is laying down the foundation for sound spiritual thinking. He is establishing the borders of “spiritual understanding,” and raising up the pillars of godly wisdom.

BY HIM I SAY

“ . . . by Him, I say . . . ” The “Him” is Jesus Christ. The One who is reconciling all things “by Him” is the Father – “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 11:31; Eph 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3).

It is as though the Spirit is assisting us to avoid focusing on the blessing instead of the Blesser, or on the work instead of the Worker, or upon the benefit rather than the Benefactor. The reconciliation has not been effected by us, but “by Him.” It has not been made effectual by a procedure, but “by Him.”

Sometimes people trace their reconciliation to a point in time, ascribing the cause to a certain ordained response. Without demeaning any act of obedience, or any response of faith, the cause of salvation in all of its aspects is Christ Himself. It is He that caused the obedience to be effective, and response to bring the blessing. If God Himself is so particular about the role of Jesus, what possible reason can be adduced for men not doing the same?

Also, the role of Jesus is to be stated: i.e., “I say.” It is not to be taken for granted, as though once a person knew this it is locked into the memory, never to be forgotten. Some people who seem to understand that once we are saved we are not always saved, appear to think that once we have heard we have always heard, or once we have believed we have always believed. Such suppositions are not always actually stated, yet are embraced by the mind. They are not true. The reiteration of truth is as necessary as its iteration.

The Spirit now elaborates on the “things” God has reconciled to Himself through Christ. He will limit the reconciliation to two domains: earth and heaven. He will not apply it to hell, or the lake of fire, or to things “under the earth” (Phil 2:10). The reconciliation will not reach into the “power of the air,” which is occupied by Satanic forces. It will not remedy that heavenly defection in which a host of angels “left their own habitation,” and therefore “kept not their first estate” (Jude 1:6). The sin that is remedied by the reconciliation came through Adam (Rom 5:12-19) .

The Spirit does not assume that we know such things. Further, drawing this to the attention of our hearts will cause us to be the more thankful because we have been reconciled to God through Christ Jesus.

God has elsewhere stated that His purpose in Christ Jesus has to do with both heaven and earth, and the bringing of them together in a oneness that glorifies Him. “Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself: that 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 ; even in Him” (Eph 1:10).

THINGS IN EARTH

“ . . . whether they be things in earth . . . ” The thoroughness of the reconciliation is seen in this expression. Men can correctly be lumped into one great group. They are all sinners, and have all come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23; 5:12). They can also be viewed as all coming from Adam (Acts 17:26). However, mankind can also be viewed by category – like Jew and Gentile, bond and free, and male and female (Gal 3:28). They can also be viewed by nation (Matt 28:18; Acts 2:5; 10:35). There are

also categories like “sons and daughters,” and “young men and old men” (Acts 2:17). The phrase “things in earth” includes all of these categories. The reconciliation wrought by God through Christ filters down to the finest detail of humanity.

The reconciliation reached backward as well as forward, bringing those who had already died in faith into full acceptance, as well as those who were not yet born. This aspect of the reconciliation must also be seen. Ponder these categories without being unduly distracted by them.

- Those living before the Law. Adam, Eve, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Melchizedec, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc.
- Those living under the Law. Moses, Aaron, Israel, David, the Prophets, etc.
- Those living during the Law, but not under it as a covenant . Nineveh, the Queen of Sheba, king Cyrus, etc.
- Those living from John the Baptist until Pentecost. Lazarus, the thief on the cross, etc.
- Those living from Christ to the end of the world.
- Infants. Those slain by the edict of Pharaoh in the land of Egypt, and by Herod when Jesus was born, as well as all premature and untimely deaths.
- Creation. The creation itself impacted is by the reconciliation of Christ. It too will be liberated from the bondage of corruption (Rom 8:19-22). That liberation is directly related to the reconciliation accomplished through Jesus by the blood of His cross. Creation will be freed from mortality only when the sons of God are raised from the dead and made fully known.

Behold the magnificent scope of the reconciliation! Do not think of it only in relation to yourself, or your friends, nation, or even the church.

THINGS IN HEAVEN

“ . . . or things in heaven.” We learn from Scripture that sin caused certain effects in heaven as well as upon earth. Here we are told “things in heaven” are “reconciled” through Christ’s blood. Hebrews 9:23 reveals that “the heavenly things themselves” were “purified” with “better sacrifices” – referring to the sacrifice of Christ. In this text, “purified” is equivalent to “sanctified” – not cleansed from corruption, but cleansed for use – like the book of the Law, the tabernacle, the altar, its furniture, and the various utensils employed in it (Ex 29:36; Lev 16:19; Num 31:20; Heb 9:19).

It is not that “things in heaven” were actually polluted by man’s sin, and that is not what is intended by our text or the one in Hebrews. The situation created by sin is much like this: a “do not handle” tag was placed on heavenly things, rendering them inaccessible to man. “Things in heaven” could not join together with fallen man, nor could they be contained within the natural creation.

These heavenly realities may now be the object of an optimistic quest by men, as the redeemed set their “affection on things above,” seeking them wholeheartedly (Col 3:1-2). These are included in the “things God has prepared for them that love Him” (1 Cor 2:9), and, having been reconciled, they have now been revealed to us through the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10).

NOT YET FULLY REALIZED

The fulness of this marvelous reconciliation has not yet been realized. Complete harmony between heaven and earth has not yet been experienced. There still remains a part of us that cannot “inherit the kingdom of God” – flesh and blood (1 Cor 15:50). There is also “another law” resident in us (Rom 7:23), and our “members that are upon the earth” (Col 3:5). There is “the old man” (Eph 4:22) as well.

However, the reconciliation has fully addressed this situation. Our bodies will yet be raised from the dead incorruptible. That resurrection is the “redemption of the purchased possession” (Eph 1:14), and is itself based upon the reconciliation God accomplished through the blood of Christ’s cross. We ourselves have been reconciled to God. However, that is only the beginning of the work that will yet be accomplished because of the reconciliation Christ accomplished through the blood of His cross.

How magnificently large is this great salvation! It has height and depth and length and breadth (Eph 3:16-20) . It is no wonder it is the object of angelic inquiry (1 Pet 1:12). It is no wonder that sensitive souls and purified hearts have a desire to comprehend it more completely and understand it more fully!

“ 21a And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works . . . ”

The absolute need for reconciliation will now be expounded. These words are not addressed to those who are not reconciled, but to those who have experienced reconciliation to God – to those who

have been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

The redeemed must never take their identity with God for granted. They do well to look "to the hole of the pit from whence they were digged" (Isa 51:1). Nothing about their past recommended them to God, and everything about it required His gracious intervention. Where these stark realities are not kept in remembrance, serious liabilities are introduced.

SOMETIME ALIENATED

"And you, that were sometime alienated . . ." Other versions read "once were alienated," NKJV "formerly alienated," NASB "Once you were alienated from God," NIV "were once estranged," NRSV "who were in the past cut off," BBE and "in times past strangers" GENEVA

The word "alienated" means to be shut out from one's fellowship and intimacy. THAYER In the sense of our text, a person who is "alienated" is not allowed in the presence of God. Their character and the nature of God forbade them to approach to Him. They were to God what a Philistine was to the holy of holies. They had no right to God, His blessings, or His benefits. Ephesians 4:18 says we were "alienated from the life of God." That is, not only were we "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1-2), but the separation between us and God could not be remedied by us. If God did not, through His grace, undertake to do something about our condition, it was absolutely hopeless. We were, in every sense of the word, had "no hope, and were without God in the world" (Eph 2:12).

Today, when theology has been watered down with the wisdom of this world, people speak casually about going to God for help in the time of trouble. Often those who are not believing on the Son are even counseled to pray and seek guidance from the Lord. While we can certainly speak of the grace of God to the most wretched and hopeless of our race, it is not in order to the correction of their temporal dilemmas. Our text is confirming that a change in our condition occurred at the point we were delivered from the power of darkness and translated into Christ's kingdom. It did not occur when our social, marital, or economic status changed.

Jesus did not die to merely deliver men from day-to-day troubles, and solve domestic and social difficulties. Although He often grants His children grace in these areas, that is not the focus of salvation. The redemption accomplished by Christ has to do with moving us from the state of alienation to that of reconciliation. He not only changed our persons, but our status as well.

From A Moral Point of View

Speaking from a moral point of view, some of God's people were formerly in a most despicable state. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11).

All of Us Were Alienated

The past lives of many of the saints were not so characterized. They never tasted the dregs of sin as some poor souls have done. However, every child of God was formerly in a state of alienation, even though their external lives may not have reflected that alienation. That alienation existed by virtue of their association with Adam, through whom death was passed upon them and reigned over them (Rom 6:12,14), and condemnation was passed upon them (Rom 5:16,18).

The fact that many believers were not rescued from a state of deep immortality does not recommend them to God. According to appearance, they may have had the innocent beauty of Jairus' daughter. Notwithstanding, they were just as dead as Lazarus, in whom corruption was more evident.

It is good to trace our former state to a point common to all believers, lest we leave some thinking they were not so bad after all. All of us were "alienated from God," NIV regardless of age or moral attainment. We were "by nature children of wrath, even as others" (Eph 2:3).

If any of us were spared from falling into the bottom of the pit, we must give thanks. But we must give more thanks that we were rescued from the state of alienation. That is the point of our text.

ENEMIES IN YOUR MIND

" . . . and enemies in your mind." Other versions read, "hostile in mind," NASB/NRSV "at war with God in your minds," BBE and "of hostile intent." NJB

The word "enemies" means hated, hostile, opposing another, and adversary. THAYER Again, this might not have appeared to be our condition. Nevertheless, this is precisely what we were before we were delivered – "enemies." We were not in agreement with God, were not seeking Him, and were not living for Him. Regardless of the level in which that condition existed, it was nevertheless a state of enmity against God, for the closer one is with the world, the more one is the enemy of God (James 4:4). As long as men insist upon comparing themselves with themselves, this status will not be acknowledged, and therefore the grace of God will not be sought.

We must ever remember that God is set against those who are not like Himself. Our text states we were "enemies" in our "minds." We did not think like God. We did not have His values or His ways. We did not see the world as He sees it, to say nothing of our evaluation of His Son. It is not easy for some people to receive the statement that those who do not think like God are His enemies. However, whether this is palatable to them or not, it is the truth. This is why God indicted Israel so severely. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD" (Isa 55:8). Such people are referred to as "wicked" and "unrighteous" (Isa 55:7). This is a state from which we are

delivered in Christ, not one that is maintained. If not delivered from this condition, condemnation is sure, regardless of any imagined moral accomplishments.

I have often heard professing Christians confess their fundamental disagreement with God as though it were trite, and of no consequence. How utterly foolish to speak in such a manner. The blood of Christ's cross was required to rescue us from a state of disagreement and difference from God. How, then, can anyone be content to remain in such a deplorable state?

When "enemies" are "reconciled to God" (Rom 5:10), they are no longer enemies. Their thoughts and ways are no longer at variance with those of their "God and Savior." The cry of their heart is, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer" (Psa 19:14). When contradicting thoughts come into their minds, they cast them down, bringing them into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 5:4-5). Thanks be unto God for delivering us from being "enemies in our minds."

BY WICKED WORKS

". . . by wicked works . . ." Other versions read, "engaged in evil deeds," NASB "because of your evil behavior," NIV "doing evil deeds," NRSV "in your evil works," ASV and "through evil works." BBE

The idea here is that our deeds were the result of our thoughts. We did wrong because we thought wrong. Our minds were corrupt, and therefore so were our deeds. As rational beings, men do not sin instinctively – even though, outside of Christ, their primary nature is sinful. Their sin proceeds from their thoughts, for "as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov 23:7). Evil words come from an evil heart (Matt 12:34).

If it is true that "a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit" (Matt 7:17), then corrupt minds produce "evil deeds." Sin corrupted the mind like a virus corrupts whatever it invades. This being the case, "evil deeds," which are deeds that are not "wrought in God" (John 3:21), confirmed that we were, in fact, "enemies in our minds." God is greatly to be praised for delivering us from such a dreadful condition.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE TEXT

The nature of salvation is implied in this text. This is a salvation that involves both heart and mind, where thoughts are processed and determinations are made. The Kingdom of God is characterized by intelligence – lofty intelligence. Thus we read of "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16), and "the mind of the Spirit" (Rom 8:27). There is the "renewing of the mind" (Rom 12:2), and things to be thought upon (Phil 4:8).

The "spirit of wisdom and revelation" postulates purposeful thought, for without thought, there

really is no benefit to be gained from revelation (Eph 1:17-19; Col 1:9-11). Men may boast of a religion being simple enough for a child to understand. But if such a thing is true, what will we do with Epistles like Romans, Ephesians, Hebrews, and the likes. In fact, precisely what is there about the “Apostles’ doctrine” that is tailored for children? Are we not to “be men” in understanding? (1 Cor 14:20).

A religion that is based upon emotion, or is not challenging to, and productive in, the mind, contradicts the very idea of reconciliation with God. If the point of condemnation involves God NOT being in all of our thoughts (Psa 10:4), then reconciliation necessarily involves Him BEING in all of our thoughts. Those cogitations will be reflected in our deeds, for thoughts and deeds are always in harmony with one another. This is why Satan tempts men to imagine they can think one way and act another way. Such a notion is pure imagination and vanity. It is in contradiction of the Gospel of Christ, and there is no truth in it.

“ 21b . . . yet now hath He reconciled . . . ”

Salvation involves things so radically different from this present evil world, that those who look only upon its surface are led to imagine the fulness of it is experienced in this world . This erroneous conclusion is the mother of backsliding and flawed theology. However, the salvation is also of such magnitude that others are tempted to imagine it is all in the future, with no genuine participation taking place in this world. This attitude is the mother of discouragement and faintheartedness. It has also generated the view that our nature is not really changed, and thus believers must be governed by Law.

The Spirit will now establish that there is a very real participation in the reconciliation by those who are in Christ Jesus – and that it is taking place in “this present evil world.” There are very real benefits that are realized at this time, and in this world. Although they are not the fulness of the blessing, they are remarkably extensive and large. Paul referred to this circumstance when he said godliness is “profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is , and of that which is to come” (1 Tim 4:8).

NOW

“ . . . yet now . . . ” When the word “now” is employed in this kind of context, it does not merely refer to time, but to the effects of faith within time. That is, faith brings heavenly realities to the one who is living in this world.

Much is made of this “NOW” circumstance in Scripture. The particular Greek word that is translated “now” in this text is **nuni** . (nuni), which means “now, at this very moment; precisely now, neither before nor after.” THAYER It is not that the experience of “NOW” does not apply to the past, or will never apply to the future. Rather, what is mentioned is taking place at this very moment.

This is the posture of faith, for faith lives in the “now,” taking hold of what was accomplished by Jesus in the past, and also grasping what will yet be revealed in the future. It is as though faith has two hands – one to lay hold of what was wrought in the past, and one to take hold of what is to come. Both are apprehended “now,” at this present moment.

The following texts employ this word in precisely the same manner as our text. They all speak of conditions that exist at this very moment, which is the sense of our text.

- **THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD MADE KNOWN NOW.** “ But NOW the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets” (Rom 3:21).
- **JUSTIFIED NOW.** “Much more then, being NOW justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Rom 5:9).
- **THE ATONEMENT RECEIVED NOW.** “And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have NOW received the atonement” (Rom 5:11).
- **FREE FROM SIN NOW.** “But NOW being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (Rom 6:22).
- **DELIVERED FROM THE LAW NOW.** “But NOW we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom 7:6).
- **NOW THERE IS NO CONDEMNATION.** “There is therefore NOW no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:1).
- **MADE NIGH NOW.** “But NOW in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13).
- **WE ARE NOW LIGHT IN THE LORD.** “For ye were sometimes darkness, but NOW are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (Eph 5:8).

- WE ARE NOW THE PEOPLE OF GOD. “Which in time past were not a people, but are NOW the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet 2:10).
- WE HAVE NOW RETURNED TO THE SHEPHERD. “For ye were as sheep going astray; but are NOW returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” (1 Pet 2:25).
- WE ARE THE SONS OF GOD NOW. “Beloved, NOW are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

Here, then, is something that is presently being realized – something that has been effected by a work accomplished in the past.

HE HATH RECONCILED

“ . . . hath He reconciled . . . ” The wake of the tide of Christ’s blood has washed up on the shores of “NOW.” The blood of His cross has effected reconciliation with God at this present time. This means what was carried out on the cross is being honored by God at this very moment. Here is something that is both historical and contemporary at the same time. It took place in the past, yet is working its effects right now.

What Is Means to be Reconciled Now

To be reconciled “NOW” means that we have access to God “now” (Eph 3:12). It means we can come to the throne of grace “now” (Heb 4:16). It means God will bless us “now” (Eph 1:3). It means He will fill us with all joy and peace in believing “now” (Rom 15:13). He will hear us “now” (1 John 5:15). He will deliver us “now” and keep us from falling “now” (2 Cor 1:10; Jude 24).

The reason “the just” CAN “live by faith” is because they are reconciled “now.” This is why they can have the eyes of their understanding opened (Eph 1:17-18), be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man (Eph 3:16), and “abound in hope” (Rom 15:13). This is why they can obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16). It is why they are being changed from one stage of glory to another by the Spirit of God (2 Cor 3:13). It is why they can grow up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15), and shine as lights in the world (Phil 2:15). It is because they ARE “now” reconciled to God because of the blood of Christ’s cross.

We are not trying to be reconciled to God, we ARE reconciled to Him! We are not working to be reconciled to God, but are rejoicing because we ARE reconciled to Him.

This is one of the major differences between living under Law and living under grace. It accounts

for the superiority of the New Covenant, and the better promises upon which it is founded.

Faith puts the “NOW RECONCILED” into religion, removing the tediousness of serving God, and causing the commandments to no longer be “grievous.” It is what makes the yoke “easy,” and the burden “light.” That is because faith has taken hold of reality. Now serving the Lord is joyful.

“ 22a . . . in the body of His flesh through death . . . ”

The Holy Spirit does not take for granted that either the means or significance of the atonement has been grasped by the children of God. Sin has ravaged the minds of all men, so that the things of God cannot be easily grasped. Every affirmation of truth is answered by flaming arrows of corrupt thought, hurled at us by the wicked one. These temptations do not always take the form of openly denying what has been stated. Sometimes they are subtlety designed to cause Divine iterations to be doubted, or possibly considered beyond comprehension. Sometimes the devil tempts us to put them on an intellectual shelf, and just not think or meditate upon them.

However, if we will “hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches,” He will not let us forget these sayings. He will, as it was, nail them into our conscience so that they become an integral part of our thought processes.

Thus, the Spirit now elaborates upon the reconciliation that we have “now.” It is not enough to have the reconciliation. There is also a necessity to understand it. Where there is not some measure of understanding of the “great salvation,” the benefits of it will not be retained, and a falling away will be inevitable. That is precisely why Paul prayed believers would receive “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (Eph 1:17). It is why he prayed the Colossians would be “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). He is “now” providing for that filling.

THE BODY OF HIS FLESH

“ . . . in the body of His flesh . . . ” Other versions read, “in His fleshly body,” NASB “by Christ’s physical body,” NIV and “His own human body.” NLT

The language is most precise. A specific part of Christ's nature is defined: "the body." In distinction from His glorified body, it is said to be the body "of His flesh."

The reconciliation was accomplished "IN" the body of Christ's flesh – not without it, but by means of that body.

- This is the "body" to which Jesus referred when He said, "Take, eat, this is My body" (Matt 26:26).
- This is the body that is to be discerned, or comprehended at His table. "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Cor 11:29).
- It is the body by which we become dead to the Law. "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ" (Rom 7:4).
- It is the body with which we have communion. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16).
- This is the body that was offered as a sacrifice to God. "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10).
- It is the body in which the Lord bore our sins. "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Pet 2:24).

It is no wonder that the remembrance of Christ involves the communion, recollection, and discernment of His body! This is where the reconciliation was accomplished, and without it there could be no reconciliation with God!

THROUGH DEATH

" . . . through death . . . "

The Spirit is even more specific in identifying the place and means whereby our reconciliation to God was effected.

Our reconciliation was not through the body that was laid in a manger (Lk 2:7). It was not by the twelve year old body that reasoned with the doctors of the Law (Lk 2:46). Reconciliation was not realized through the body of Jesus when He was baptized (Matt 3:16-18), or when He was tempted in the wilderness (Lk 4:2). It did not take place in the body that “went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil” (Acts 10:38).

As great as Christ’s miracles were, we were not reconciled to God by them! As noble and above reproach as His young life was, we were not reconciled by it. His sayings abounded with matchless wisdom and unparalleled insights, but we were not reconciled by them. Our reconciliation required more than a noble example of how to live. If men were to be reconciled to God, it would take more than words – even “words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

Our reconciliation to God required death – not just A death, but the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. We were reconciled to God in the fleshly body of Christ WHEN He died. That is precisely why we are “baptized into His death ” (Rom 6:4), and are being “made conformable to His death ” (Phil 3:10). We are, in every sense of the world, “reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Rom 5:10). It is why, in the Lord’s table, we “show the Lord’s death till He come” (1 Cor 11:26).

This is the ultimate revelation of Christ’s humility. For Him to enter the world as a “Babe” required profound humility. In order for Him be “subject” to Mary and Joseph required humility (Lk 2:51). What marvelous humility was displayed in our Lord being in a state where He “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Lk 2:52). In order to be tempted, He had to be humble (Heb 2:18; 4:15).

However, all of that was not the ultimate humility. It was death on the cross that most thoroughly exhibited the humility of Jesus. Thus it is written, “And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross ” (Phil 2:8).

That is what it took to bring God and man together – to reconcile us to God. If Christ’s death had not taken place, we would have forever been cut off from the “Father of spirits” (Heb 12:9).

If we sin, we do have an Advocate the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous One (1 John 2:1). However, His advocacy is effective because He died, bearing our sins in His body on the tree (1 Pet 2:24). When we confess our sins, it is good – even necessary – to remember those sins required to death of the Lord Jesus. That recollection will help us to take transgression seriously.

“ 22b . . . to present you holy and unblameable . . . ”

There is an objective served by our reconciliation – a Divine objective. It has to do with God’s “eternal purpose,” and therefore is not anchored in time. The primary objectives of this purpose are not fulfilled in this world, and they do not have to do with temporal things. Every outworking of this purpose within this world is preparatory.

All of this may appear rather evident, until you consider the nearly universal thrust of Western Christianity. When reaching the lost, resolving domestic issues, and streamlining daily living are considered the hub of Divine purpose, reconciliation loses its significance. There is an enormous amount of theological smoke that is being blown about these days. It clouds the real issues, obscures Divine intentions, and blinds men to the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. It all sounds nice, and appears to be very helpful, yet much of what parades itself as being of Christ is actually more closely related to the Old Covenant than the New Covenant.

Human behavior was the thrust of the Old Covenant – “DO and live” (Lev 18:5; Gal 3:12). But that is not the thrust, direction, or primary objective, of the New Covenant. In Christ, the real issue has to do with AFTER the present heavens and earth pass away. It has to do with what will occur AFTER death, and AFTER the judgment. AFTER we see the Lord as He is, then the fulness of the purpose of God will be made known AND realized.

This will be made most apparent in the following statements.

PRESENT YOU

“ . . . to present you . . . ” Most versions read the same way : “to present you.” Some more liberal versions read, “to bring you before Himself,” NJB “As a result, He has brought you into the very presence of God.” NLT

When Is the Intended Presentation?

The word “present” means to place beside or near, to set at hand, to present a person to another, and to bring into fellowship and intimacy. THAYER The issue here is when that presentation is intended to be made. The New Living Translation places the time in the now: “He has brought you into the very presence of God.”

It is true that now we may come into the presence of the Lord, drawing near “with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:22). That, however, is not a presentation, but an invitation. Furthermore, our present access to God is by faith, and is not a true presentation.

In this world, WE “present” our bodies to God as a “living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1). Our text, however, speaks of the Lord doing the presenting.

The presentation of our text has to do with our appearance before the Lord AFTER the end of the world. It is consistently represented in this manner in Scripture. The focus of reconciliation is an eternal consummation – one that is satisfying to God and honoring of Christ.

- “Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you” (2 Cor 4:14).
- “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor 11:2).
- “That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27).
- “Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus ” (Col 1:28).
- “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 1:24).

This is speaking of a formal presentation, when the Lord Jesus receives His bride (Rev 21:2,9), and the Father Himself is joined with us (Rev 21:3). It all begins here, in this world, when we believe the record God has given of His Son, are baptized into His death, and are raised with Him to “walk in newness of life” (1 John 5:10; Rom 6:3-4). It continues in this world as we “live by faith,” and “perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord” (Rom 1:17; 2 Cor 7:1).

However, we have not yet been presented to the Lord. The work is still being completed. The Lord is finishing what He has begun, and performing the work until the day of Christ (Phil 1:6). We are still being “changed” (2 Cor 3:18), “renewed” (Eph 4:23), “conformed” (Rom 8:29), and perfected (1 Pet 5:10). We are still fighting and laying hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12), running (1 Cor 9:22; Heb 12:1), wrestling (Eph 6:12), looking (Tit 2:13; 2 Pet 3:12), and waiting for His Son from heaven (1 Thess 1:10).

But the time will come when we will be “presented” to the Lord before an assembled universe.

Everything about salvation is calculated to prepare us for that moment, and nothing about the reconciliation wrought by Jesus detracts from it.

Any approach to religion that fails to take this into account is void of the Spirit of God, and is therefore counterproductive to everything Jesus is doing. As strong as that may appear, it is not nearly strong enough.

HOLY

“ . . . holy . . . ” This is a characteristic of those who are to be presented. It is the aim of salvation to produce this result – make men holy.

The word “holy” means sacred, pure, and consecrated to God, and worthy of veneration. STRONG’S/THAYER At the time of the presentation, the holiness will be intrinsic, with no part of the individual being excluded. In this world holiness is realized in our spirits, not in our total persons. There is a part of us that must be

subordinated, and brought into subjection – a part that tends away from God rather than toward Him. Our bodies must be brought under subjection (1 Cor 9:27). There are imaginations to be cast down, and thoughts to be taken captive (2 Cor 10:4-5). Our minds must be “renewed” (Rom 12:2) because of the competitive influences to which it is subjected. We have “members” that are to be “mortified” (Col 3:5), lusts or desires that are to be “denied” (Tit 2:2:12), and the flesh to be “crucified” (Gal 5:24).

Our present condition, praise the Lord, is not our ultimate condition. The objective of our reconciliation to God is to be holy when we see the Lord “face to face” – when we no longer “know in part,” but will know even as we are known (1 Cor 13:12).

The Implications of this Truth

There are several implications in this stated objective – that we may be presented to the Lord “holy.”

First, everything about salvation contributes to this objective. Things pertaining to life and godliness have no utility in any other ultimate goal.

Second, those who have been enlightened concerning salvation will see the need for being holy. They will be able to associate the revelation of God with the purpose of God.

Third, those who are reconciled to God and are living by faith will have a longing to be presented holy. They will be discontent with imperfection and failings.

Fourth, those who are laborers together with God (1 Cor 3:9) will also have this objective. They will do their best, employing their gifts, in order to contribute to the objective of being holy when we stand before the Lord.

UNBLAMEABLE

“ . . . and unblameable . . . ” This may appear to be identical with being holy, but it is not. Being “holy” focuses upon character. Being “unblameable” emphasizes morality, or the expression of our persons. “Unblameable” means without blemish and faultless – free from faultiness. THAYER This is a condition in which there is no flaw, no imperfection, no defect, and no blemish – in ANY sense.

Elsewhere this condition is described as being “blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:8). Our aim is to be this way now, in the world (Phil 2:15), and salvation is intended to assist us in meeting that objective. Being unblameable begins in this world, but it is not culminated here. When we come into Christ, we begin without blame. However, the objective is that your “your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23).

The goal is to be characterized as “blameless,” or “unblameable” at the time of presentation. Therefore it is written, “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Pet 3:14).

Suffice it to say, it would radically alter the entire landscape of Christianity if this purpose was perceived and heartily embraced by those who profess to be followers of Jesus. It would change the program and purpose of most churches, eliminate many of their leaders, and so change the disposition of their members that they would scarcely be recognized. Oh, that men would pursue holiness, without which no man will see the Lord!

“ 22c . . . and unreprouable . . . ” Here another aspect of the Divine objective – the reason for reconciliation. Being “holy” has to do with character. Being “unblameable” addresses the matter of our expression. Being “unreprouable” is dealing with Divine assessment.

The word “unreproveable” means not accused of doing anything wrong, irreproachable, one that cannot be called into account. STRONG’S/THAYER This, of course, assumes a time of judgment and Divine evaluation. The Word of God will not let us forget that what we think, say, and do, will be ultimately subjected to the open and apparent judgment of Almighty God.

- “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Mat 12:36).
- “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom 14:12).
- “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God” (1 Cor 4:5).
- “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10).

Whether or not we will stand before the Lord to give an account is not a question. This will happen, and there is no way to avoid it. As it is written, “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27).

There is coming a time when the “books” will be “opened,” and the dead will be “judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Rev 20:12). The only question that remains is the outcome of the time of judgment – whether or not we are found “unreproveable.”

Believe me when I say, that day is not the time to be rebuked! It is not the time you want to be reproved! If the aim of the reconciliation is to make you “unreproveable” in that day, then you must make that your objective in this world, and during this time.

“ 22d . . . in His sight.” Other versions read, “before Him,” NASB “to bring you before Himself,” NJB and “into the very presence of God.” NLT

OUR LIVES ARE AN OPEN BOOK

Those who are in Christ Jesus are reminded “Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men” (2 Cor 3:2). It is even taught that God’s laborers are “made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men” (1 Cor 4:9). Redemption has not concealed the redeemed, but made them more apparent than they ever were before.

From the very beginning, those in Christ are taught by Scripture to consider how their manners appear to others. This is to be considered from a high point of view, and not with the intention of pleasing mere men.

- “Let your light so shine before men , that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt 5:16).
- “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men , him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men , him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Mat 10:32-33).
- “Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men ” (2 Cor 8:21).
- “For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men ” (Rom 14:18).
- “Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men ” (Rom 12:17).
- “I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully ” (1 Tim 5:14).
- “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles : that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet 2:12).

What will those who have difficulty meeting this requirement do when they hear of being “holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight” (Col 1:22)? What are appearances before men in comparison to appearing in God’s sight?

THE WONDER OF SALVATION

Right here a very wonderful aspect of salvation is seen. The truth of the matter is that we all will

appear before the Lord, standing in His sight. Even though NOW everything is “naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13), that stark reality sometimes eludes us. However, there is coming a day when we will be acutely aware that we are before Him, and so will the rest of assembled universe. This is an inevitable confrontation. There is no way to avoid it, postpone it, or cause it to be cancelled.

Behold the goodness of the Lord in this matter. He has made abundant provision for that very appearing to turn to our decided advantage. If we avail ourselves of the reconciliation Jesus made through the blood of His cross, that will be our blessed and most profitable time! We will never be more blessed than then! Our joy will rise to its most lofty peak, and our confidence will be its strongest. Here we experience a joy that is “unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet 1:8). Then – when we are “in His sight” to pass through His scrutiny – we will be “glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Pet 4:13). Then, we will have boldness – “boldness in the day of judgment” (1 John 4:17). It is possible to “have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 John 2:28).

God Is Able

And why is all of this so? For one thing, it is because God “is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 1:24). He is not only “able” to do this, but has revealed that ability to us. It is, therefore, in order to fervently seek to appropriate that blessing.

The Purpose for the Reconciliation

As if this is not enough, there is another reason for this possibility, and it is the focus of our text. It is this, namely that salvation, or reconciliation, is calculated to accomplish this benefit . That is WHY we have been reconciled to God, and it is WHY Jesus is reigning at the right hand of God, ever living to make intercession for us (Heb 7:25). It is WHY the massive hosts of angels have been marshaled to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation (Heb 1:13-14). It is WHY we have been given the Holy Spirit, who helps our infirmities, interceding for us, and leading us in the mortification of the flesh (Rom 8:13,26-27). It is WHY there is “grace to help in the time of need” (Heb 4:16).

This is the ultimate reason for “the whole armor of God” (Eph 6:10). It is why we have been “given all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). It is why we have “access” to God through the Spirit, and “into this grace wherein we stand” (Rom 5:2; Eph 3:2).

Remove the objective of being presented “holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight,” and there is no reason for salvation. In such a case, there is no reason to live godly, resist the devil, or crucify the flesh. In fact, without this purpose, there is no need for Jesus, no need for the Holy Spirit, and no need for the Word of God.

If our religion does not hold up in the day of judgment, there has been no point to it at all. If, when we stand before the Lord, we are ashamed, our life has been in vain, and we will obviously be of all the most miserable.

In order to fail the final test – the test of God’s site, there are several things that must be done. The Gospel of Christ must be ignored. The Holy Spirit of God must be resisted, grieved, and quenched. The Word of God must be neglected and thrust from us. We must forget the day of judgment, and refuse to consider death. We must refuse to be taught by Jesus or guided by the Spirit. In order for a person who has come into Christ to revert to the old manner of life, he must forget he was purged from his old sins, listen to the devil, and refuse to set his affection on things above.

When, therefore, we see slothfulness, indifference, disobedience, and hardheartedness among those professing the name of Jesus, it has betrayed a most lamentable situation. Such have “neglected” God’s “great salvation,” choosing to be deluded by the wicked one. How do I know this is the case? Simply because everything about salvation – everything – is designed to prepare us to stand before God. It is not possible to enter into eternity unprepared, without stubbornly refusing to receive what God has freely given in the Gospel, and resisting the Holy Spirit.

We have been subjected to a marvelous proclamation of the accomplishments of Christ Jesus. They have been declared as the work of God Himself, for Jesus was fulfilling the Father’s will in every facet of salvation. Jesus made peace because God desired, and purposed, that peace should be made. God reconciled all things to Himself through Jesus because that is what He desired, and therefore that is what He willed, or purposed. Those who were formerly alienated and enemies in their mind by wicked works have been reconciled because that is what God wanted. In the body of His flesh Jesus bore the sins of the world, laying down His life a ransom for many, then taking it up again. This He did in order that the reconciled ones might be presented to God holy, without blame, and without a single accusation against them. This is what the Father desired, and the Son, joining Him in that desire, heartily fulfilled the will of the Father.

God set before the Son the joy of a bride, the pleasure of having joint heirs, and many brethren. He promised to give Him the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession (Psa 2:8). When the Lord Jesus considered the greatness of it all, and the magnificent purpose for which He came into the world, He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. It was for “the joy that was set before Him” that He “endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2).

This is why Jesus Christ is the focal point of the Kingdom of God. It is why the Scriptures – all of

them – testify of Him (John 5:39). It is why it pleased the Father that in Him should “all fulness dwell” (1:19). The Gospel pertains to Jesus. It is not the Gospel of the Spirit, the Gospel of the church, or the Gospel of good works. The thrust of the Good News is not what men should do, but what Jesus has done. The “power of God” is not found in an institution, but in the Gospel. Everything was made by Him and for Him. These are the continual declarations of the Apostle’s doctrine, in which the people of God are to continue.

How is it that Jesus is so easily upstaged in the modern church? How can other themes be presented as though they

were the sum and substance of the Gospel? Why is it that religious careers, worldly wisdom, and passing fads and trends are getting so much attention? Why is “preaching the Word” being viewed as a secondary thing – a sort of auxiliary activity of the church? What reasons can be adduced for the prevailing ignorance concerning Christ Jesus that exists among professing believers?

Ah, these are merely rhetorical questions. The existence of these circumstances is no mystery. It is because neither the Lord Jesus nor the Gospel that proclaims Him is comprehended. The love of God has not been discerned, and thus other things have appeared to be more important.

This is precisely why this epistle was written. There were certain encroachments happening among the disciples that made days, seasons, and disciplines more important than Jesus. It was an intolerable situation, requiring that the hearts of the people be once again turned to the Captain of their salvation.

Now, in our time, and in our part of the world, it is time for the real people of God to stand up. There may be tremendous social issues that are demanding our attention – like the collapse of the family, the removal of religion from daily life, the spread of sodomy, abortion, and the likes. All of these things are completely unacceptable, and are to be condemned. But they are not the foundational issue. As evil as these things are, they are not where the brightest light is to be shined.

Do not think for a solitary moment that there were not social vices extant in the days of the Apostles. There were rulers like Herod, Pilate, and Caesar. There were goddesses of lust, where the base desires of people had been deified. There were temple prostitutes and all manner of occultic, or curious, arts. The majority of the Roman citizenry was slaves, and the form of entertainment that was on the horizon involved fierce bloodshed. Taxation was out of hand, and laws were being passed against the free expression of Christians. Troubles like this did not begin with this generation.

When the Apostles of Christ came, they did not bring a social Gospel, nor did they focus on the ills of Roman society. They held up the Lord Jesus Christ, proclaiming and expounding Him with power. They knew that sin was reigning because of the ignorance of God, and that immorality was the result of the lack of sanctification. They knew if ever people were born again, sin would lose its dominancy, and

people would be responsive to Divine directives.

Our day, however, is even more complicated than the first century. The Gospel has been preached, penetrating every segment of the world before the first century had entered its second half (Col 1:23). In our very country, the Gospel of Christ became a byword. Numerous revivals spread across the country, and morality was more advanced than in many other nations of the world. Some of us can remember when there was a far better spiritual climate than there is now. What has happened? Why is iniquity increasing and the wicked spreading themselves like a green bay tree? Why does the fabric of society seem to be tearing away at the seams?

In my judgment, the fault for these conditions may be laid at the feet of the professing church. Although it was Divinely appointed to be the custodian of the truth – the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15), it chose to refrain from lifting up the “banner” given to it by its Head (Psa 60:4). It chose to emphasize other things, train specialists in other fields, and be more entertaining than informative. It elected to entertain rather than edify, and to please sinners rather than to convict them. It converted its schools to scholastics formats that were more pleasing to the world, and opened their doors to all manner of carnality.

The short of the story is that God has nowhere pledged to dwell with such a people. He has never committed to undergird the kind of efforts that are now prominent in many churches. God’s standards have been the same from the very first days of the church. “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor 6:18).

The book of Colossians, together with several other Epistles, are intended to shut the door to the intrusions of the flesh. It is designed to readjust the focus of those who are in Christ Jesus, so that He is again seen as He really is. Solemnly we are told, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him” (Col 2:6). We initially “received” Him because we heard about Him. We received Him “at the first” because He became preeminent in our thinking. Herein is the secret to spiritual growth and recovery. This is the means whereby establishment will be realized, and the blessing of the Lord obtained. The Lord Jesus must be seen as preeminent. If He is not seen in this way, God will neither bless us nor be with us. Life is thus lived in vain.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE SAINTS

Lesson # 8

Within the Christian community, there is considerable philosophizing about the role individuals play in salvation. Articulated opinions range from men having no role whatsoever, to men having the most prominent role. Some are of the persuasion that once men are delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's Son (Col 1:13), their personal involvement is merely coincidental. Their salvation is more or less finalized at that point, and Jesus will bring them to glory regardless of their thinking or conduct. Others see salvation as wholly reliant upon man's conformity to a sort of moral and spiritual code, with those in Christ flopping in and out of salvation like a fish moved on and off the beach by the tide.

Such views bring no glory to God, honor to Jesus, or comfort to the saints. They contradict the nature of salvation, which requires the constant involvement of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the holy angels. The salvation of God requires His Word, the intercession of Jesus (Heb 7:25), the leading and intercession of the Spirit (Rom 8:14,26-27), and the ministry of holy angels (Heb 1:13-14). What would possibly lead any person of sound thought to the conclusion that such a circumstance obviated the necessity of human involvement? Conversely, how could any sane person conclude that salvation was an up-and-down and in-and-out affair, with no ground for assurance?

The truth of the matter is that there is a lot of religious folklore being hawked by religious charlatans that has muddied the theological waters. In Christ Jesus we become participants, not spectators. We are not merely the objects of Divine attention, but have ourselves been called into that activity. We are the ones being saved, and salvation postulates extensive involvement.

THE EXAMPLE OF ISRAEL

The Holy Spirit makes a point of this by referring to the first and foremost example of a people being saved – the children of Israel. The Spirit refers to their deliverance from Egypt in these words: “having saved the people out of the land of Egypt” (Jude 1:5).

We are not left to conjecture on this matter – their deliverance is a depiction of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. A determined point is made of this comparison in the exposition of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.

In a remarkably extensive exhortation, believers are urged to consider Israel’s deliverance. All of them passed through the Red Sea, were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, did eat the same spiritual meat, and drank the same supernatural water. Notwithstanding, God was not pleased with many of them, and they fell in the wilderness, coming short of the promised land.

On the basis of that comparison, those in Christ are admonished not to “lust after evil things,” be “idolaters,” “commit fornication,” “tempt Christ,” or “murmur.” What happened to Israel is said to have “happened unto them” for our example, and are “written for our admonition” (1 Cor 10:1-12). It simply is not possible for the relevancy of their experience to be made more clearly.

- Those in Christ are admonished not to harden their hearts, considering the Israelites who fell in the wilderness AFTER they were delivered (Heb 3:15-19).
- We are admonished to “fear,” lest any of us come short of realizing the appointed “rest” like many in Israel came short of the promised land (Heb 4:1-3).
- In writing of “the common salvation” that is found in Christ Jesus, Jude reminds us “how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not” (Jude 1:5).
-

The salvation of Israel from Egypt is clearly credited to God Almighty. He is the One who “saved the people out of the land of Egypt” (Jude 1:5). The Lord “brought” them out of Egypt (Ex 13:3). He is said to have “sent an angel,” and brought them out (Num 20:16). The Lord took them, and brought them “out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt” (Deut 4:20). He brought them out “by His mighty power”

(Deut 4:37), and “with a mighty hand” (Deut 6:21), with an “outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders” (Deut 26:8). Of their exodus God Himself declares, “I brought them out of Egypt” (1 Sam 8:8).

There is no question about this. If God had not brought the people out of Egypt, they would have forever remained there. Their deliverance was wholly of the Lord, and could not be attributed to any other power.

WAS ISRAEL INVOLVED IN THE DELIVERANCE?

The deliverance of the people from Egypt was clearly something accomplished by God Himself. Also, that deliverance pertains to the salvation we experience in Christ Jesus. It is categorically revealed that the deliverance and the events that followed “happened unto them” for an example to us, and that they are “written for our admonition.”

Therefore, it is in order to ask whether or not the Israelites were themselves involved that deliverance. Once they were delivered, were they always delivered? Once they were saved, were they always saved? Was their security guaranteed, regardless of their own response to their deliverance and the working of the Lord? Just how much were the Israelites themselves involved in this deliverance?

- On a specific day, and according to the house of their fathers, “every man” had to select a lamb (Ex 12:3).
- A judgment had to be made concerning the consumption of the lamb. If the household was too small, they were to include the neighbor next door in order that the lamb be fully eaten (Ex 12:4).
- The lamb had to be carefully selected: without blemish, a male, and under one year old (Ex 12:5).
- The lamb was to be kept until the fourteenth day of the month (Ex 12:6a).
- On the fourteenth day of the month, in the evening, the lamb was to be killed (Ex 12:6b).
- The blood of the lamb was to be meticulously applied to the two side posts, and the upper post of the door posts of their houses (Ex 12:7).
- The lamb was to be eaten during that night (Ex 12:8a).
- The lamb was to be roasted with fire (Ex 12:8b).

- The lamb was to be eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (Ex 12:8c).
- The lamb was not to be eaten raw or cooked in water (Ex 12:9a).
- The lamb was to be roasted with its head, legs, and inward parts (Ex 12:9b).
- No part of the lamb could remain until the morning. Anything that remained was to be burned with fire (Ex 12:10).
- The lamb was to be eaten while they were fully clothed, with the shoes on their feet, and their staffs in their hands (Ex 12:11a).
- The lamb was to be eaten in haste (Ex 12:11b).
- The people had to leave around midnight – all at the same time (Ex 11:4; 12:39)
- When they came out of Egypt, every woman was to borrow from her neighbor “jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment,” to put upon their “sons” and “daughters” (Ex 3:22; 11:2).
- The people had to leave quickly, taking their bread dough before it was leavened (Ex 12:34).
- They baked unleavened cakes to take with them “out of Egypt” (Ex 12:39).
- The people had to take their kneading troughs bound up in their clothes on their shoulders (Ex 12:34).
- The people took all of their flocks, herds, and cattle with them (Ex 12:38).

All of that was involved in leaving Egypt – to say nothing of journeying “from Ramese to Succoth” (Ex 12:37), crossing the Red Sea (Ex 14:29), gathering manna (Ex 16:16-18), and pitching their tents (Ex 17:1). I wonder how those Israelites would respond to an advocate of a “you-don’t-have-to-do-anything” philosophy of salvation, or deliverance!

There are a number of other things that could be said on this matter, but this will suffice to introduce our subject. The Holy Spirit has made a point of paralleling our situation with that of Israel, and we do well to take it to heart. Their deliverance was after the Divine manner. This is how God saves.

Now the Spirit will provide some amplification of the revealed purpose of God – the reason for redemption : “to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight” (1:22). This does have to do with going to heaven, being forever with the Lord, and standing up in our appointment with the Judge of all the earth.

Our theology must, therefore, make room for these expressions. They are the way the Spirit has of expressing truth.

“ 1:23a If ye continue in the faith . . . ” Other versions read, “If indeed you continue in the faith,” NKJV “provided that you continue,” NRSV “if so be that you continue,” ASV “if indeed ye abide in the faith,” DARBY “provided you persevere in the faith,” NAB “as long as you persevere and stand firm on the solid base of the faith.” NJB

To confirm the tenacious grip that erroneous teaching can have upon the soul, the following is a footnote contained in many standard Bibles.

“This verse is not teaching that loss of salvation is possible. The Greek first-class conditional sentence [ei, Gk., ‘If, since,’ plus the indicative mood] expresses Paul’s certainty that they will in fact continue. The word ‘if’ could well be translated ‘since’: ‘He has reconciled [you] . . . since indeed you continue in the faith.’ Paul’s purpose is to lead them to appreciate their reconciliation, not to doubt it. Every true believer will endure to the end (John 10:28-29; Phil 1:6).”
BSB NOTES

First of all, no standard English version of Scripture translates the word in this manner – i.e., “since.” Second , the condition that is being delineated is not reconciliation, but being presented “holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight.” Third , the solemn warnings of this book would all be pointless if every true believer will, after all, endure to the end.

First, let it be clear, there is not the slightest bit of ambiguity in the language of the text. There are no questionable words, no expression that is difficult to translate or comprehend. If men contradict this revelation in their theology, it is only because their thinking is contrary to the mind of the Spirit. They are, in fact, “alienated and enemies” in their “minds,” which is certainly not an enviable state (Col 1:21). No amount of purported scholarship or philosophical reasoning can erase that fact.

THE “IF” FACTOR

“If . . . ” The word “if” is a specific word translated from a specific Greek word. It is not a literary expression supplied by the translators. This word is translated from the Greek word **ei;ge** (i-gheh). This is a compound word consisting of two parts. “ **ei** ” is a conditional particle: i.e., it attaches a condition to

a previous statement. THAYER “ **ge** ” means indeed, truly, or at least. THAYER The full rendering of the word, therefore, is “If indeed.” Other versions reflect this meaning by reading “if so be,” ASV “provided that you,” NAB “ as long as you,” NJB and “if also ye remain.” YLT

The meaning of the word, therefore, fully coincides with the doctrine of Scripture.

This precise form of the word is used five times in Scripture.

- 2 Corinthians 5:3. “IF so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.”
- Galatians 3:4. “Have ye suffered so many things in vain? IF it be yet in vain.”
- Ephesians 3:2. “IF ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward.”
- Ephesians 4:21. “If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.”
- Colossians 1:23. “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister”

As used in this text, the word “if” does not assume the condition mentioned has already been met. That should be obvious, because the presentation of reference has not yet taken place, and the redemption has not yet been culminated. The “redemption of our body” has not yet taken place. In fact, we are presently waiting for that to occur (Rom 8:23-25). That will be when we are finally “conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom 8:29), and will be “like Him” (1 John 3:2).

Until then, we are in the period of the “IF FACTOR. This is the time of pilgrimage (1 Pet 2:11), striving (Lk 13:24), running (Heb 12:1), fighting (1 Tim 6:12), and wrestling (Eph 6:12). We are not in a vacuum, but a moral wilderness in which jeopardy and opponents exist – just as Israel was in route to the promised land. It is true that our faith will sustain us in the journey – but that is the whole point of the text. Faith must be sustained, nourished, kept, and increased.

The use of the word “if” fully reflects the character of our Lord’s teaching, as well as the doctrine of the Apostles, in which the church continues.

Because of the corrupt teaching that abounds within the professed church on this point, some examples of similar conditions are in order.

- Believers are likened to salt that can lose its “savor.” “Ye are the salt of the earth: but IF the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men” (Mat 5:13).
- Forgiveness is conditioned upon an “if.” “For IF ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (Mat 6:14).
- Discipleship is conditioned by an “if.” “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, IF ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (John 8:31). “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, IF ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).
- Friendship with Jesus is conditioned on an “if.” “Ye are my friends, IF ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14).
- Believers are told righteousness will be imputed to them on an “if” basis. “But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, IF we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Rom 4:24).
- The “if” factor is associated with living or dying toward the Lord. “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but i IF ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:13).
- Goodness is toward the saints on an “if” basis. “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, IF thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (Rom 11:22).
- We are Christ’s household on an “if” basis. “But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, IF we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (Heb 3:6).
- Being partakers of Christ is on an “if” basis. “For we are made partakers of Christ, IF we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end” (Heb 3:14).

There is, then, a perfect consistency throughout Scripture on the subject before us. From the very beginning, the salvation of God has been associated with the involvement of the ones being saved. There is no such thing as salvation for mere spectators, the slothful, and the idle – nor has there ever been. Noah had to build an ark – and it was associated with his salvation. Abraham had to leave Ur of the Chaldees – and it was associated with him being accepted by God. Lot had to get up and leave Sodom – and it was associated with his salvation. God has never represented His salvation as excluding the involvement of those He is saving. Further, it is a sin of the greatest magnitude that men have so represented Him.

Before going further, an additional word must be said concerning this matter. Over the years, I have noted that those who speak so vociferously about the possibility of falling, are rarely noted for any consistent or zealous quest for the kingdom of God and His righteousness. I come from a religious heritage that valiantly fought against the “once-saved-always-saved” dogma. Yet, these people were not noted for pressing toward the mark, growing up into Christ in all things, or laying hold of eternal life. It is altogether too easy to become involved in arguments about this subject without working out ones own salvation “with fear and trembling.” I respectfully suggest that any and every person who is not obviously living unto the Lord, refrain from any comments on the subject at hand. Their lack of involvement will only serve to muddy the waters for others. This isn not an area where vagueness is in order.

CONTINUE

“ . . . ye continue in . . . ” The word “continue” means to remain, abide, to stay at, and persevere.
THAYER

Here is an aspect of spiritual life that has been decidedly neutralized by professional and institutionalized religion. When the emphasis is place upon getting into Christ, there is an unavoidable diminishment of the necessity of abiding in Him. When Christians are told that the main thing is saving the lost, the necessity of working out their salvation with fear and trembling is shrouded with the dark and foreboding cloud of ignorance. When outreach is the fundamental thing, growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ is not given the emphasis the Spirit has assigned to it.

Our text does not say we will be presented holy, unblameable, and unreprouvable, if we win the lost. That presentation is not associated with the evangelization of the world, or the exponential numerical growth of the local congregation. It is not connected with domestic tranquility, social rectitude, or debt-free living. All of these things may be good, but they are not good enough. They may have some importance, but they are not important enough.

There must be continuity in our spiritual lives. They are to be noted for abiding, remaining, and standing fast. Jesus spoke to His disciples about continuing in His Word (John 8:31). On the night of His betrayal He urged them to continue in His love (John 15:9). Believers are urged to “ continue in the grace of God” (Acts 13:43), “ continue in the faith”(Acts 14:22), and “ continue ” in God’s goodness (Rom 11:22). They are exhorted to “ continue in prayer” (Col 4:2), and “ continue in the things” they have learned (2 Tim 3:14). Brotherly love is to “continue” (Heb 13:1).

How is it that with all of these exhortations and admonitions the modern church is so little known for consistency, growth, and stability? Has not the Spirit said enough on the subject? Indeed, He has, and zealously so. Yet, if His words are not consistently spoken to the people of God, they will soon forget them.

Let this be clear in your mind. You being presented to God holy, unblameable, and unproveable, is directly related to you continuing, remaining, abiding, and growing. There is not the slightest chance that God will continue to work in those who themselves do not “continue.” Any argument to the contrary is pure imagination, false to the core, and is to be thrown down with our spiritual weaponry (2 Cor 10:3-5).

FAITH

“ . . . the faith . . . ” And, in what are we to continue? This particular text declares it is to be “in the faith.” Faith, then, is not a step in a preconceived idea of “the plan of salvation,” and it is nowhere so represented in Scripture. So much is said on this matter, that is remarkable that this doctrine could be corrupted.

- “Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue IN THE FAITH , and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).
- “And so were the churches established IN THE FAITH , and increased in number daily” (Acts 16:5).
- “ Watch ye, stand fast IN THE FAITH , quit you like men, be strong” (1 Cor 16:13).
- “Examine yourselves, whether ye be IN THE FAITH ; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Cor 13:5).
- “Rooted and built up in him, and stablished IN THE FAITH , as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving” (Col 2:7).
- “Whom resist steadfast IN THE FAITH , knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1 Pet 5:9).

What does “in the faith” mean? Various translations emphasize that this is personal faith: “continue in your faith,” NIV/NIV and “continue to believe.” NLT

An Erroneous Teaching

There is a strain of teaching that views “the faith” as the body of doctrine that was delivered by the Apostles. This view would mean the text was an admonition to maintain the doctrine that was first delivered to them. While this sounds very noble on the surface, and seems to blend well with the admonition to speak things becoming “sound doctrine,” and maintain the “form of sound words,” no clear word of Scripture presents such a meaning for “the faith.”

The postulate that “the faith” refers to a body of doctrine is largely built upon Jude 1:3: “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3).

The phrase “the faith” comes from the Greek expression **toi/j a`gi,oi,j pi,stei** (“to the saint’s faith”). The argument is that since the word is in the dative case, it refers to doctrine that promotes faith, and not to faith itself. Some linguists acknowledge this is a possibility. However, the argument is drawn from etymological inference, not a doctrinal affirmation. That is, no inspired man made such an application of the word “faith.” There is a Greek word for “doctrine,” and it is frequently used (John 7:17; Acts 13:12; Rom 16:17; 1 Tim 4:16; 6:3; Tit 2:10; Heb 6:1; 2 John 1:9).

When referring to faith proceeding from the Gospel we read of “the faith of the Gospel” (Phil 1:27). However, this is not the way our text is expressed. It rather states that standing unreprieveable before God depends upon us continuing in the faith. It seems to me to be a stretch of the imagination to say this means continuing in the doctrine – although that is, indeed, to be done (1 Tim 4:16).

This refers to continuing to have faith, for “the just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17). It is living “unto God” (Gal 2:19), walking by faith (2 Cor 5:7), and holding the “beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end” (Heb 3:14). This is persevering in believing – believing that is firmly based upon the Gospel.

The Devil’s Assault On Believing

In his attack against the people of God, Satan has perpetrated a view of believing that departs from the kingdom norm. Quite often people equate “ what I believe” with believing. Thus the touchstone of valid fellowship is generally based upon what a person believes about this or that. People will ask, “What do you believe about . . . ?”

However, believing is not approached in this manner in the Word of God. Abraham “believed God” (Gen 15:6), meaning he trusted Him and yielded himself to the will of the Lord. Rather than saints represented as believing in this or that, they are said to “believe in God” (John 14:1; Tit 3:8; 1 Pet 1:21). Jesus said, “Have faith in God” (Mark 11:22). We also read of “faith in the blood” (Rom 3:25), “faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26), “faith in the Lord Jesus” (Eph 1:15). The nature of faith demands that it be in an object, not a mere tenet.

Continuing in the faith is continuing to live by faith. It is maintaining fellowship with Jesus, into which we were called (1 Cor 1:9), and abiding in Him. That is clearly what is intended in Acts 14:22, where the phrase “continue in the faith” is also used.

I have often pondered the obvious lack of an emphasis on continuing in the faith that exists

within many churches. Among those with whom I have walked, there is very little talk about faith. Faith is certainly not their strong point, and they subject themselves to very little that actually builds faith.

The Role of the Gospel

Faith does come “by hearing,” and the message that is heard is clearly the “Gospel of peace,” and those bringing it have beautiful feet (Rom 10:14-17). Continuing in the faith postulates continual exposure to the Gospel – to the proclamation of both its nature and content. Without that exposure, it is not likely that any person can actually continue in the faith. Faith must be fed by the Gospel of Christ.

“ 23b . . . grounded and settled . . .” Other versions read, “grounded and steadfast,” NKJV “firmly established and steadfast,” NASB “established and firm,” NIV “securely established and steadfast in the faith,” NRSV “stable and steadfast,” RSV “founded and firm,” DARBY and “stable and steadfast.” ESV

The words that follow confirm that the faith that accesses God’s grace is the environment of continuance, not a body of doctrine. While the maintenance of sound doctrine is absolutely imperative, we “stand by faith,” not by doctrine (2 Cor 1:24). We must not confuse the means through which faith comes and is nourished with the faith itself. We are not saved “by grace through doctrine,” but “by grace through faith ” (Eph 2:8).

GROUNDED

“ . . . grounded . . .” The word “grounded” refers to being erected on a solid foundation. It speaks of stability and establishment. This word is used in Ephesians 3:18, where it is affirmed to be the result of Christ dwelling in our heart by faith. “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:17). The next clause indicates that comprehension and true spiritual understanding result from being “grounded.” “May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:18-19).

SETTLED

“ . . . and settled . . .” The emphasis of this word is firmness and immovability. It has to do with being settled and steadfast. This word is used in First Corinthians where it is also associated with being

unmoveable. There it is translated “steadfast.” “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58).

The idea behind being “settled,” or “steadfast,” is that of a mighty tree that stands through great winds of trials and adversity. Yet, it goes further than that, speaking of a condition in which the individual consistently contends for the faith, runs the race, resists the devil, and seeks those things that are above.

Spiritual Maturity

Being “grounded and settled” has to do with being spiritually mature. In the book of Hebrews this condition is described as being “of full age,” being able to “discern both good and evil” (Heb 5:12). It is a condition that is associated with “time,” not intellect – with “time” not earthly aptitude. As it is written, “For when for the time [by this time NASB] ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb 5:12-14).

By associating spiritual maturity with time (“by this time”), the Spirit confirms that salvation is calculated to produce spiritual adulthood . If the Spirit is not quenched, and if the Word of God is ingested, men will “grow up into Christ in all things” (Eph 4:15). That is what the Holy Spirit does within. It is what faith is calculated to do.

Where, after a period of time, there is no spiritual maturity, the Spirit has been quenched, and the individual is not living by faith. There is no need to haggle about this point. That is simply the way it is, and no amount of defensive arguing can change that fact. There is no possible way that a person in fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9) and enjoying the “communion of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 13:14) can remain immature. When people live by faith, walk in the Spirit, and set their affection on things above, they cannot remain “babes” (1 Cor 3:1) . It is impossible for such a condition to occur when spiritual life is nourished.

This Present Time

The rarity of grounding and being settled within the professed church is most alarming. There is a wave of spiritual infancy that seems to be prevailing among those who wear the name of Jesus. Even among those who function in the role of spiritual leaders – preachers, teachers, elders, and the likes – there is a sort of spiritual poverty of understanding and lack of stability in the faith.

Clarifying the Matter

Allow me to clarify this matter. Our text has associated being “grounded and settled” with being exonerated in the presence of the Lord. It has to do with being presented “in His sight” as “holy and unblameable and unproveable” (1:22).

Who is the person willing to affirm that such a status can be attained by those who are not “grounded and settled,” and who have not “continued in the faith?” While it is not our place, or role, to condemn others, we do have a responsibility to lay the real issues before all who wear the name of Jesus. There is no promise of eternal life to those who remain immature. God is nowhere said to have prepared an inheritance for those who are not “grounded and settled.” There is not so much as a syllable of hope held out to those who do not “continue in the faith.”

These words are designed to provoke us to more steadfastness and continuance in the faith. They are calculated to point us in the right direction, and stir within us a fervent desire to have done with being babies and requiring a steady diet of milk and the reassertion of the elementary doctrines. When taken to heart, the child of God will find that every conscientious effort will be met with Divine grace.

No endeavor to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ will be in vain. It will consistently be blessed by the Lord, aided by the Holy Spirit, with holy angels ministering to assist us in our labor. I cannot conceive of anyone of tender heart not being encouraged by such a prospect, willing to throw themselves into the effort to be stable, consistent, and unmoveable, thereby prepared for the day of judgment.

“ 23c . . . and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel . . . ”

It is becoming more and more apparent in this text that the involvement of the saints in their salvation is not an option. Every person who is in Christ Jesus must have done with wavering too and fro, being unstable, and juvenile in their views and perceptions of spiritual matters. Now the Spirit takes the matter even further, showing us something of the involvements that attended our salvation, when we first turned from idols to serve the living God.

BE NOT MOVED AWAY

“ . . . and be not moved away . . . ” Other versions read, “are not moved away,” NKJV “without shifting.” NRSV “immoveable” DOUAY and “never letting yourselves drift away.”

The word “moved away” means to move from a place , STRONG’S or to be pushed away from FRIEBERG the position where we have been placed. Herein we find a summation of the intent of all opposition. It is to move us off of the foundation, and carry us into an area in which we were not placed by the grace of God. Every Satanic effort is directed to this end, and designed for this purpose. The flesh in all of its wretchedness, also has this as a solitary objective – to move us away, dislodge us, and cause us to drift. The world, with all of its machinations is also working to this end – to push us away from where we were placed, and where we belong in Christ Jesus.

In its most subtle form, our opposition consists of allurements, drawings, charms, and enticements. Seduction is the mode of our enemies’ attack. In its most apparent pattern, the opposition takes the form of persecution and all forms of external aggression. But whether subtle or apparent, the design is the same – to move us away.

And how does the Spirit address this matter. He tells us that being presented holy, unblameable, and unproveable in His sight is contingent upon us not being “moved away.” Child of God, it is your business not to be moved. At some point we must be able to shout with the Psalmist, “I have set the LORD always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved” (Psa 16:8).

THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL

“ . . . from the hope of the gospel.” And from what are we NOT to be moved away? Is it a favorite doctrine of men, or the official position of a sect? God forbid! It is more personal than that – something that is harmonious with the Gospel, and fundamental in God’s “great salvation.”

The reality from which we must not be “moved” is “the hope of the Gospel.” This is the hope that was mentioned at the very first of this Epistle, by which their faith in Christ and love of the saints was fueled. “Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven , whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel ” (Col 1:5).

The Object of Our Hope

In both verse five and verse thirteen, “hope” is a noun, not a verb. It refers to the object for which we “hope.” As a verb, “hope” means joyful expectation, and involves a dominating anticipation of realizing the objective for which we “hope.” This is the “hope” by which we “are saved” (Rom 8:24-25), and for which we were “begotten again” (1 Pet 1:3).

Jesus Himself

Encapsulated in a Person, that “hope” is the Lord Jesus Himself, who is referred to as “Christ

Jesus, who is our hope” NASB (1 Tim 1:1). Jesus is “our Hope” in the sense of being the Image to which we are being conformed (Rom 8:29). The Holy Spirit is changing us into that “image” by stages – “from one degree of glory to another” NRSV (2 Cor 3:18). We heard of this “hope” by means of the Gospel, and immediately were dominated by it. That hope is, in fact, the reason we “fled” to Jesus for refuge – “to lay hold on the hope set before us” by that Gospel (Heb 6:18).

An Eternal Inheritance

This hope also includes obtaining the promise of an “eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15). Stated yet another way, this hope is “the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him” (1 Cor 2:9). This includes a resurrection in which we put on immortality (Acts 23:6; 1 Cor 15:53), receiving the “crown of life” (James 1:12) and the “crown of righteousness” (2 Tim 4:8), judging the world and angels (1 Cor 6:1-3), reigning with Jesus as a “joint heir” (2 Tim 2:12; Rom 8:17), inheriting “all things” (Rev 21:7), and much more. This represents God’s incentive program, and it is set before us from the time we enter into the kingdom. The Gospel testifies of it from the very beginning.

This “living hope” is what enables us to maintain the posture of strangers and pilgrims in the world, abstaining from fleshly lusts (1 Pet 2:11). As soon as the glorious future recedes into the background, we immediately cease to make progress, and our future becomes gloomy.

You will be hard pressed to find a group of people today who have this kind of hope. The seriousness of the condition is that it confirms those without this dominating hope have been moved away from it. No person is born again in a hopeless state. No one who rises with Christ from the waters of baptism is lacking a determination to dwell with the Lord. Salvation is “with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10), and hope is the thing that links us with that glory while we remain in this world.

There is no promise of being presented “holy, unblameable, and unreprouvable in His sight” if we have been “moved away from the hope of the Gospel.”

Further, a vibrant and expectant hope is the only means of continuing in the faith, and being grounded and settled. If our future is not certain, our faith will, at the very best, be “little” and “weak.” You cannot “continue” in that kind of faith. It simply cannot carry you through the rigors of spiritual life in this world. A feeble hope (hope is faith in its forward posture), is not long enough, so to speak, to connect you with heaven. It does not enter “into that within the veil” (Heb 6:19) . Those are the facts of the matter, and the acknowledgment of them is imperative.

“ 23d which ye have heard . . . ” This is an elaboration of the Gospel, which brought the news of “the hope” that is essential to our salvation.

WHICH

“ . . . which . . . ” The word “which” refers to the Gospel itself – the Gospel of Christ. Thus the NIV reads, “the hope held out in the Gospel” – the Gospel which was “heard.” If men have not heard of “the hope,” they have not really heard the Gospel. The Gospel brings a message that opens up the future, therefore enabling “hope.” For those who believe, the Gospel unfolds a glorious future, or hereafter. It is an inherent part of the Gospel. The heart of the Gospel is Christ Himself – and He is presently remaining “in heaven” (Acts 3:21), “enthroned on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3). The Gospel announces “this same Jesus” has determined to come and gather us to Himself, that where He is, there we may be also (John 14:3). It declares a time when we shall “ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:17). It affirms we will not only be “with Him,” but that we will be “like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:1-2).

The Gospel announces a dominating and eternal kingdom – “the Gospel of the kingdom” (Matt 4:23). It proclaims the grace of God – “Gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). It is a message that publishes peace – “the Gospel of peace” (Rom 10:15), announcing a satisfied and blessed God – “the glorious Gospel of the blessed God” (1 Tim 1:11). This Gospel declares the good news of your salvation – “the Gospel of your salvation” (Eph 1:13). It was also “preached with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven” (1 Pet 1:12).

This is the Gospel that came to the Colossians – the Gospel that told them of the hope they so gladly embraced.

HAVE HEARD

“ . . . ye have heard . . . ” The hearing of the Gospel means more than being subjected to the sound of words. It is true, there is a sense in which everyone subjected to the Gospel “hears” – but that hearing is of a “sound,” and is not the hearing by which faith comes. Thus it is written, “But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world” (Rom 10:18).

The hearing to which Paul refers is “the hearing of faith” (Gal 3:2,5). It is the hearing through which faith “comes” (Rom 10:17). By speaking in this manner, Paul is saying the Colossians heard the right message, and responded in the correct manner. Remember, he was not the one who preached the initial message, because the Colossians had not yet seen him (Col 2:1).

THE CENTRALITY OF THE GOSPEL

The centrality of the Gospel is evident throughout this passage. Thus far, the focus has been placed upon it. It is woven throughout all of the reasoning to this point, and the affirmations have been placed squarely upon its foundation.

- God has made us “meet,” or qualified, to be partakers of the “inheritance of the saints in light” (v 12).
- He delivered us from “the power of darkness” (b 13a).
- He “translated” us into “the kingdom of His dear Son” (v 13b).
- We have “redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (v 14).
- Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (v 15).
- All things were created by Him and for Him (vs 16-17).
- He is the “head of the body, the church” (v 18a).
- He is “the Firstborn from the dead” (v 18b).
- It pleased the Father that “in Him should all fulness dwell” (v 19).
- God “made peace through the blood of His cross” in order that He might “reconcile all things unto Himself” (v 20).
- We who were “alienated and enemies in our minds by wicked works,” He has now reconciled “in the body of His flesh through death” (v 21).

Not a single one of these statements, or any portion of them, is understandable apart from the Gospel of Christ. Take away “the record God has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10-11), and there is not a person on earth or an angel in heaven that can make any sense of these texts. In fact, they are both a declaration and an exposition of the Gospel.

Those who recoil at the idea of the Gospel being preached to the church do not do well. Salvation does not move us away from the Gospel, for our salvation depends upon us not being “removed away from the hope of the Gospel” – or the hope that is generated and maintained by the Gospel. It is not possible for hope to flourish if the Gospel ceases to be proclaimed, for that Gospel fuels hope, keeping it alive and flourishing.

Let us have done with a theology that easily discards the Gospel of Christ, constraining us to move to other matters that are more closely associated with life in this world. Such a theology is dangerous, and actually brings jeopardy to the soul. It opens the door for the worldly wise to enter among saints.

“ 23e . . . and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven . . . ”

This verse will underscore the absolute essentiality of the Gospel, for it is what is preached. That is, the good news of Jesus, or the “record God has given of His Son,” is what is being declared.

PREACHED TO EVERY CREATURE

“ . . . and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven . . . ” Other versions read, “which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven,” NASB “has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven,” NIV “in all creation under heaven,” ASV “given to every living being under heaven,” BBE and “has been preached all over the world.” NLT

The strength of the statement is evident in every translation. This is not a hyperbole, or a mere figure of speech. It is significant, for preachers cannot preach “except they be sent” (Rom 10:15). Anywhere and everywhere the Gospel is preached, it is “with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven” (1 Pet 1:12). More than any other word, the preaching of the Gospel fulfills the words of the Psalmist: “The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it” (Psa 68:11). In the most precise sense, “the word of salvation” is “sent” (Acts 13:26).

Ultimately, this word is not a commentary on the activity of the church, but on the strong arm of the Lord. It is not the result of the supposedly brilliant strategies of men, but of the magnificent purpose and wisdom of God.

This word perfectly coincides with the commission Jesus delivered to His disciples: “Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature ” (Mk 16:15). Whatever is intended by Christ’s word

is declared to have been done in this word. The Gospel is intended for everyone, and is therefore to be declared to everyone. It is for all nations, and is therefore to be declared to all nations. It is for all languages, and is therefore to be declared in all languages. It is for all people, and is therefore to be declared to all people.

However a person may choose to view this passage, we are left with the unavoidable conclusion that the preaching of the Gospel had been most extensive. Within less than fifty years of the day of Pentecost, it had penetrated into every quadrant of the world, with no part of it being neglected.

In the very first preaching of the Gospel, men from all over the world heard it, believed it, and were baptized into Christ. These multitudes are described as “Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians.” (Acts 2:9-11) – and that was only the beginning of the Gospel’s widespread influence.

A short time later, when a severe persecution caused believers to be dispersed, “they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). Before ever an Apostle came to them, churches sprang up in Rome and Colossae. James wrote to believers described as “the twelve tribes that are scattered abroad” (James 1:1). Peter wrote to Gentiles described as “strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Pet 1:1). Within the space of two years, it is written that “all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10).

The Gospel was preached extensively in cities of commerce, where nations intersected: Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Athens, and the likes. It was declared among island peoples as well (Acts 13:6; 28:1).

History records the extensive travels of the Apostles themselves – to say nothing of the multitudes that heard their word and carried it to others also.

- Simon Peter – Britain, Gaul (France and Germany), Rome
- Andrew – Armenia (Turkey, Russia), Scythia (Central Asia), Asia Minor
- James – Martyred early after impacting Jerusalem
- John – Asia (Including Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Arabia, Egypt, Bangladesh, India, China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and Mongolia)
- Philip – Britain, Greece
- Bartholomew – Armenia (Turkey, Russia), India, Africa
- Thomas – Babylon, Persia, India
- Matthew – Persia, Ethiopia, Greece
- James the son of Alphaeus – Jerusalem
- Lebbeaus – Armenia (Turkey, Russia)

- Simon the Canaanite – Armenia (Turkey, Russia), Britain, Egypt, Cyrene, Africa, Lybia
- Matthias – Armenia (Turkey, Russia)
- Paul – Britain, Greece, Asia, Italy, Spain

THE SEARCH FOR THE TWELVE APOSTLES

William Steuart McBurnie, Tyndale House Publishers, 1978

If we read this verse in the context of the modern American church, it will prove too challenging for our intellects. If we read it within the context of the book of Acts, it makes perfect sense.

The truth of the matter is that the church of the contemporary Western world bears little, if any, resemblance to the church that existed from 30-40 years after Pentecost. With all of its super-tuned organization, technology, educational institutes, and rapid modes of travel, the modern church has not approximated the zeal and effects realized by those early believers. With parachurch organizations bounding, and an abundance of specialized ministries and resources, we hear more about who has NOT been reached with the Gospel than of those who have been reached.

THE POINT OF THE TEXT

The point of this text is that the Colossians had been partakers of a universal Gospel that had been extensively declared. They had not been subjected to a regional Gospel, or an ethnic one, or a sectarian one. They were the products of a Gospel tailored for “every creature” – one that had already been carried throughout the world.

In the end, the saved are described as “a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” (Rev 7:9). The Revelation also declares the Gospel, by Divine intention, was to be preached to “them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Rev 14:6). The world is appointed realm for the preaching of the Gospel, and no one in it is excluded from its message. Seeing this, early disciples carried the Gospel throughout the world, announcing liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound. The Colossians were included in this remarkable spread.

“ 23f . . . whereof I Paul am made a minister.”

Paul now identifies his area of kingdom expertise. It is the area of work to which He had been appointed, and for which Jesus Himself had qualified and commissioned him.

WHEREOF

“...whereof.” Other versions read, “of which,” NKJV and “of this Gospel.” RSV The comments that follow pertain to the Gospel of Christ Jesus. This is “the word of the truth of the Gospel” that announced the hope to which the Colossians were called (1:5). “The hope of the Gospel” is the pole star of our faith, declaring the purpose for which we have been called, and the ultimate destiny to which we have been appointed (1:23a).

Without the Gospel, therefore, there can be no lasting incentive to come to Christ, or to remain in Him. This is the Word through which the Father declares the Son (1 John 5:10-11), setting Him forth to be the propitiation for sins (Rom 3:25).

Whether speaking to the church or to alienated multitudes, the theme of Paul’s ministry was always the Gospel. With unswerving consistency, he brought the minds of his readers and hearers back to the good news of Christ’s person and accomplishments. Those who imagine that believers move on from the Gospel to more mature matters could not possibly be more wrong.

I PAUL

“I Paul . . .” Every version reads exactly the same: “I, Paul.” Paul often referred to himself in this manner, confirming his words were coming from the deepest part of his person. “I Paul myself beseech you . . . Behold, I Paul say unto you . . . I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ . . . we would have come unto you, even I, Paul . . . I Paul have written it” (1 Cor 10:1; Gal 5:1; Eph 3:1; 1 Thess 2:18; Phile 1:19). Paul himself was in what he said. He neither wrote nor spoke as a robot, or the representative of a religious system or organization. What came from his mouth was in his heart as well as in his mind.

Often I have heard preachers say, “Now I did not say that. That is what God has said.” Such expressions have the faint sound of humility, but that is not really what they are. If the words that we speak in the name of the Lord are not our own, then we had best not speak them, keeping them to ourselves. That is why Paul referred to the Gospel as “MY Gospel” (Rom 2:16; 16:25; 2 Tim 2:8).

MADE A MINISTER

“ . . . am made a minister.” Other versions read, “became a minister,” NKJV “have become a servant,” NIV and “appointed by God to proclaim it.” NLT

Paul was not trained by men to be a minister of the Gospel. He was “ made a minister” – a

minister of the Gospel. Thus he spoke of himself as “ministering the Gospel” (Rom 15:16).

Some versions read “servant” instead of “minister.” NIV/RSV/BBE/ NIB/NJB While this is technically a proper translation of the word **dia,konoj** (dia-ok-o-nos), from which we get the word “deacon,” it does not convey the real intent of this passage. Although Paul was, indeed, serving the Lord in declaring the Gospel, it is the activity itself that is being emphasized – declaring and expounding the Gospel of Christ. Capturing this sense of the text, the NLT reads, “appointed by God to proclaim it [the Gospel] .” In this case, what the servant DOES is the point, or what he ministered.

Paul was chosen by Christ and “made a minister” – a person who declared the Gospel of Christ. He was a “minister” in the same sense as Jesus was, although not in exactly the same capacity. Jesus once said, “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister , and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Paul was made a “minister” of the Gospel in the sense of serving it to others in the name of Jesus. He placed the nourishing Gospel before those who were hungry and thirsty, feeding and nurturing them in Christ’s behalf.

Paul’s expertise in the Gospel was not the mere result of much study and research. It was rather traced to the fact that Christ had “made” him a “minister,” placing him in the body in that capacity.

Elsewhere Paul refers to his Divine placement into the ministry of the Gospel. “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry” (1 Tim 1:12). This is a remarkable synopsis of Paul’s call to the Apostleship. He was “enabled” by the Lord Jesus to accomplish the ministry. He was considered by Jesus to be “faithful.” Other versions say of Jesus, “He considered me faithful,” NASB “He judged me faithful,” NRSV “He took me to be true,” BBE and “He considered me trustworthy.” NAB

The Lord Looks on the Heart

When the Lord calls someone, He does not look at their worldly credentials. Men may do that, but Jesus does not. The Lord “looketh on the heart” (1 Sam 16:7) – and He does know the hearts of all men (1 Kgs 8:39; Acts 1:24). The Lord also tries, or tests, the heart, seeing what is in it (Psa 7:9).

The employment of men in God’s kingdom does, in part, depend upon what the Lord finds when he searches their hearts. If that heart is fundamentally corrupt, or is not kept “with all diligence” (Prov 4:23), the Lord Jesus will not put the individual into the ministry.

Some Implications

Using Paul as an example – his placement into the ministry because the Lord considered him faithful – accounts for the scope of His understanding of the Gospel. God unveiled much to Paul because he could be trusted to handle the truth properly. He did not spend a little time declaring and expounding it. In addition to being “counted faithful,” Paul said he had also “obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful,” or “by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy.” NIV (1 Cor 7:25).

When the situation called for a declaration of the Gospel, Paul was able and willing to do so. When it required an exposition of the Gospel, he was also faithful to do so with insight and zeal.

This may serve to explain why some professed ministers have very little understanding of the Gospel, and therefore indulge in rather anemic efforts to declare and expound it.

“ 24a Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you . . . ”

To this point Paul has focused on the Colossians, and their rescue from the power of darkness. They were delivered from that power, and translated into Christ’s kingdom. They possessed faith in Christ and a love for all saints, both of which grew out of the strong hope declared through the Gospel.

Because of their glorious condition, Paul had prayed they would be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. This was in order that they might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, and be patient and longsuffering with joy.

All of this was set within the context of the Person of Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, and in whom all fulness dwells. He created all things, and for Him they were all created. He is the one who “made peace through the blood of His cross,” reconciling us to God. The objective of it all was the presentation of the saints holy, unblameable, and unproveable in God’s sight.

Paul has further declared the necessary involvement of the saints. They are to “continue in the faith,” in a grounded and settled condition, not being moved away from the hope produced by the Gospel.

Now Paul turns our attention to himself. He is doing so as an example of one who is himself

continuing in the faith. Here is a man who is grounded and settled, and is not being moved away from the hope of the Gospel.

This is how faith is lived out – in the crucible of suffering! Faith uproots us from this evil world, and sufferings are the result of that process. Our faith is not philosophical or theoretical. It has very real consequences, and erupts in very real conduct under duress.

The life of faith is not lived out in a vacuum. That is precisely why spiritual wisdom and strength are required to live by faith.

NOW

“Who now . . .” Other versions read, “I now,” NKJV and “Now I.” NASB

The use of the word “now” shifts the emphasis to another related subject. This word is not used in the sense of “right now, at this time” – although Paul is currently experiencing what he will mention. The sense of the word is like saying, “And now, consider this. . .”

REJOICE IN MY SUFFERINGS

“. . . rejoice in my sufferings . . .” Other versions read, “I have joy in my pain” BBE “It makes me happy to be suffering,” NJB and “I am glad when I suffer.” NLT

This kind of language makes no sense at all to the disinterested the lukewarm, and the apathetic. No person can say or understand this who is not in fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 Cor 1:9; 1 John 1:3).

These sufferings are the result of involvement in the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom 12:2). They come because of the conflict between the children of God and the children of the wicked one. They are the experience of the world’s reaction to a person who speaks for God.

Our blessed Lord once said, “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad : for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt 5:12). Early in the history of the church, the Apostles were subjected to suffering for righteousness’ sake. After being beaten by the Jewish leaders and commanded “not to speak in the name of Jesus,” they “departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41).

Whether we are speaking of the sufferings of those early days of the church, those of Paul, or others, we must be able to make the association between suffering and the inheritance. Jesus said our sufferings should enable us to recall a “great” reward in heaven: “great IS your reward in heaven.”

There is a sense in which the reward reserved for us in heaven determines the degree of suffering we are called to endure. It is with this in mind that the Thessalonian brethren were told, “So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer ” (2 Thess 1:4-5).

FOR YOU

“ . . . for you . . . ” Other versions reads, “for your sake,” NASB and “because of you.” BBE

These were genuine “sufferings.”

The word is not used to portray mere personal inconvenience, or social difficulties. Paul was in prison, no doubt in chains, and enduring much of which he said absolutely nothing. From his perspective he was the “prisoner of the Lord” (Eph 3:1). That is, it was because of his labors for Jesus that he was incarcerated. He was not a social rabble-rouser, nor was he imprisoned for social disobedience or sounding out objections to government policy. However noble those things may be, they are not to be compared with suffering for Christ’s sake (Phil 1:29).

Here, however, Paul adds another dimension to suffering. He says he is suffering for the sake of the Colossians. By this he does not mean they had caused his suffering, for he had never been to Colossae. Rather he was suffering in prison that they might hear his word, and be strengthened by what he had been given to see – “for you .” Just as John was on the Isle of Patmos to receive the word of God (Rev 1:9), so Paul was in prison to receive a word for the Colossian brethren.

While in prison Epaphras had declared to Paul certain matters concerning the Colossian church. They had faith in Jesus and love to all saints. They were also being assaulted with trying doctrines, and stood in need of having their faith strengthened (2:16-18). Thus, Paul concluded his sufferings were for the sake of the Colossians – that is, that they might receive stabilizing truth from him, and thus be enabled to stand against the wiles of the devil.

This is a sterling example of how the spiritual mind functions – one that is filled with all wisdom and spiritual understanding – the “mind of Christ” (2 Cor 2:16).

“ 24b . . . and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh . . . ”

Paul now elaborates on his sufferings, confirming there is Divine purpose in them, and that they are not without objective. In the words that follow he unfolds an aspect of salvation that is most lofty.

FILL UP

“ . . . and fill up . . . ” Other versions read “complete,” NRSV “completing,” RSV “am filling up,” ESV “fulfill,” GENEVA and “make up.” NJB

The idea is that there is something left that is to be completed – a work that remains to be accomplished. This is an area in which we participate in the salvation – where we have a particular and productive fellowship with the Son of God. Suffering is something that, according to Divine purpose, is ongoing. The primary sufferings – i.e., the ones in which there are both merit and redemptive effectiveness – are those of Christ. These are the sufferings associated with the cross, where Jesus was “made sin” and “made a curse for us” (2 Cor 5:21; Gal; 3:13). These were the sufferings of which the prophets wrote (1 Pet 1:11).

There is, however, another aspect to Christ’s sufferings that is made known in this marvelous text. These are sufferings that are “filled up” by those who are in Christ Jesus. This is the “fellowship of His sufferings” to which Paul alluded in Philippians 3:10.

AFFLICTIONS LEFT BEHIND

“ . . . that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ.” Other versions read, “ what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ ,” NKJV “what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions,” NIV “whatever is still needed to make the sorrows of Christ complete,” BBE “fulfill the rest of the afflictions of Christ,” GENEVA “all the hardships that still have to be undergone by Christ,” NJB “what remains of Christ's sufferings for his body,” NLT and “ things lacking of the tribulations of the Christ.” YLT

There is a most wonderful perspective declared in this text. Paul, in suffering for the sake of the body of Christ, is a partner with Christ. The Word affirms that we will be glorified “together with” Christ if we “suffer with Him ” (Rom 8:17). That is precisely the sufferings to which Paul refers – “the fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil 3:10). When God called us “unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus

Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9) , it involved suffering with Him.

This is one of the ways in which God is conforming us to the “image of His Son” (Rom 8:29). It is involved in the Spirit changing us from one stage of glory into another (2 Cor 3:18). Those who do not suffer with Jesus are not participating in the Divine nature to an acceptable extent (2 Pet 1:4). Conformity to the image of Christ, being changed from glory unto glory, being made partakers of the Divine nature, and being partakers of Christ (Heb 3:14) , are, indeed, extensive involvements.

Paul also alludes to this conformity in Second Corinthians – a conformity that involves sufferings that have been left behind for us to experience. “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body” (2 Cor 4:10). “Sufferings” are, in this view, the death throes of the flesh, or Adamic nature. They assist in severing us more completely from “this present evil world,” confirming we are “strangers and pilgrims” in it (1 Pet 2:11). Our primary citizenship is in heaven, “from whence we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:20), and sufferings endured for the sake of Christ and His kingdom confirm that is the case.

The Spirit testifies, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim 3:12). It is not that such ought to suffer. They WILL suffer the oppositions of this world. This is not a goal, it is a reality. Those who do not, to some extent, endure persecution are simply not living godly in Christ Jesus. The word “all” provides for no one to be excluded.

These are sufferings that have been “left behind,” and are the means through which our fellowship with Christ is gloriously enhanced. It is also one of the means through which we are qualified to obtain the eternal kingdom. “So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer” (2 Thess 1:5).

IN MY FLESH

“ . . . in my flesh . . . ” The sufferings to which Paul refers are not mental – like anguish, distress, or anxiety – even though some of those may very well be involved. These were sufferings “in the flesh” – sufferings that were more readily apparent.

Elsewhere Paul said, “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus” (Gal 6:17). Again he said he was “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body” (2 Cor 4:10).

In remarkable detail, Paul once testified of the extent of his sufferings for Christ, and for His body, the church. “Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant,

in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one . Thrice was I beaten with rods , once was I stoned , thrice I suffered shipwreck , a night and a day I have been in the deep ; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness , in watchings often, in hunger and thirst , in fastings often, in cold and nakedness . Beside those things that are without , that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches” (2 Cor 11:28).

In our text Paul takes such sufferings and wraps them in a single expression: “what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of His body, which is the church.” NIV That is a most arresting statement!

These sufferings really belonged to Jesus, yet were experienced by Paul, who was in fellowship, with Jesus. They are also experienced today by those who walk in the light as He is in the light, declaring His Gospel, and bringing solace and encouragement to His brethren – the church, which is His body.

“ 24c . . . for His body's sake, which is the church . . . ”

The sufferings to which Paul refers are experienced WITH Christ. But they are FOR the sake of Christ’s body, “which is the church.”

HIS BODY’S SAKE

“ . . . for His body's sake . . . ” Other versions read, “on behalf of His body,” NASB “for the sake of His body,” NIV and “for the salvation of the body.” BBE

The interest and welfare of the church required Paul to suffer. In order for Christ’s body to receive the succor and correction it needed, Paul had to suffer in his body. Just as the salvation of God was brought to us through the sufferings of Christ, so the edification of the body comes through the sufferings of His ministers.

It is not that Paul suffered in the place of the church, bearing, as it were, the pain that properly belonged to them. That is the kind of suffering Jesus bore. This, however, is suffering of another kind or type. In order for the church to be built up, Paul had to be, as it was, extruded through the narrow straits of affliction. Just as surely as all saints enter the kingdom “through much tribulation” (Acts 14:22), so those who minister for Jesus pass through the crucible of conflict in order to build up Christ’s body.

This circumstance is owing to several different conditions.

- The flesh lusts against the Spirit, requiring that the minister of the Word press toward the mark with great aggression.
- The devil is set to resist any effort to strengthen the saints of the most High God.
- There are principalities and powers aligned against any effort to build up the people of God.
- Many who profess allegiance to Christ strongly object to the edification of the body, preferring spiritual froth to spiritual substance.
- Religious institutionalism will vigorously oppose independent efforts to minister to the people of God – as Jewry did to the ministry of Paul.

Any individual who determines to bring advantages to the saints of God will experience suffering of an extraordinary measure. When this happens, the servant of God must remember these are sufferings that have been “left behind.” They are a means whereby we invest of ourselves in the purpose of God.

WHICH IS THE CHURCH

“ . . . which is the church . . . ” Christ’s “body” is constituted of individual members through whom He works (Eph 4:16; Col 2:19). There are no nonfunctional members in Christ’s body – no members that do not need to grow, be built up, comforted, and matured. There is not a single member in the body that has been placed in a position from which nothing is required. The church is not a mere institution or organization. It is, in the strictest sense of the word, an organism, or living thing. For that reason, it must be fed, nourished, stabilized, and matured. Every member is included in that process. None are excluded from it.

However, the edification of the body will cost those who minister to it. If a church is not growing up into Christ in all things, the true minister “travails in birth again until Christ be formed in” them (Gal 4:19). That is the kind of suffering to which our text refers. It is the suffering of travail, required in the faithful servant in order to bring needed resources to “the church.”

This is “the church” Jesus Himself is building – but He is doing it through faithful ministers. That “church,” or assembly whose names are written in heaven (Heb 12:23), remains in a hostile realm. There are such fierce forces aligned against the church that it cannot be advantaged without some suffering in order that the advantage can be realized.

Ultimately, this is most precisely seen in Jesus Christ Himself, and the redemption that He accomplished. But it is also realized in the work that has been left behind, and the suffering related to it. Those who would minister to believers cannot avoid this suffering. It is a part of laboring and having fellowship with Christ.

“ 25a Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God . . . ”

WHEREOF

The word “whereof” refers to Christ’s body, which is “the church.” Other versions read, “of which,” NKJV “Of this church,” NASB “I have become its (the church’s) servant,” NIV “I became its servant,” RSV and “God has given me the responsibility of His church.” NLT

Elsewhere Paul clearly states that he was sent by God to “preach the Gospel.” As it is written, “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel : not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect” (1 Cor 1:17). Some have in, error, limited the preaching of the Gospel to those who are in sin, and not in Christ. Indeed, Paul was determined to “preach the gospel in the regions beyond you [the Corinthians], and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand” (2 Cor 10:16), and where Christ had not already been named (Rom 15:20).

Paul also determined to “preach the Gospel” to the well established church in Rome (Rom 1:15), bringing the “fulness of the blessing of the Gospel to them” (Rom 15:29). He did not see them as beyond the need to hear the Gospel.

Paul declared the Gospel again to the fledgling Corinthians (1 Cor 15:1; 2 Cor 10:14; 11:7). The realization of partaking of God’s “promise in Christ” is ever “by the Gospel” (Eph 3:6). Paul’s ministry consisted of defending and confirming the Gospel, as well as initially declaring it (Phil 1:7).

Life and immortality are brought to light through the Gospel (2 Tim 1:10), two aspects of spiritual life that are rarely, if ever, known in the beginning of newness of life. Peter told seasoned believers the Gospel was “now reported to you through those who have preached the Gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven; things which angels desire to look into” (1 Pet 1:12). Is it possible that those in Christ have now ceased their inquiry into the Gospel, while holy angels continue such pursuits? I should think one to be foolish indeed who dares to embrace such a postulate. Peter later affirmed to believers, “But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Pet 1:25). Is there such a thing as an enduring word that ceases to be preached?

Can there be a people who no longer have need of an enduring word – which is preached, or declared, “by the Gospel?”

Paul has been “made a minister” of the Gospel, and He is now, in fulfillment of his ministry, declaring that Gospel the Colossians. They were in Christ (1:2), possessed faith in Christ and love to all saints (1:4), and “knew the grace of God in truth” (1:6). They had been “delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son” (1:13). Yet, because of false teachers (2:16-19), they stood in danger of being moved away the hope produced through the Gospel.

Therefore, as a “scribe which is instructed in the kingdom of heaven,” Paul reaches into the treasury of the Gospel to bring out “things new and old” (Matt 13:52). He will tutor them from the same message that initially was delivered to them.

ACCORDING TO THE DISPENSATION

“ . . . I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God . . . ” Other versions read, “according to the stewardship from God,” NKJV “the commission God gave me,” NIV “the Divine office which was given to me,” NRSV “the purpose of God which was given to me,” BBE and “the responsibility of serving the church.” NLT

The word “dispensation” means administration, economy, or stewardship. It refers to the management of a household, and the proper administration of property belonging to someone else. STRONG’S It is associated with a plan or purpose that did not originate with the steward, but with the Owner.

The Reasoning

God had placed the Gospel of His Son into the hands of Paul, charging him with making it known. One of his fundamental responsibilities was to declare this Gospel to the body of Christ, who is the primary audience to whom the Word of God is addressed. That is why no book of the Bible is

addressed to the heathen. It is why all of the spiritual gifts, including Apostles and Prophets, were placed within the church for “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12).

Those, therefore, who say the Gospel is not to be preached to the church could not possibly be more wrong. The church is the fundamental, or primary, audience to whom the Gospel is addressed. That is precisely what Paul has affirmed. The “dispensation of the Gospel,” he says, was given to him “for you” – the saints.

To be sure, the Gospel is to be “preached to every creature,” and is the means through which disciples are made (Matt 28:18-19; Mk 16:15-16). But we are not finished with the Gospel once we are “added to the church,” and nothing in all of Scripture suggests such an idea. That is not an insightful suggestion.

There is no need to further establish this point, for the very Epistle of Colossians is confirmation enough of the criticality of the Gospel to spiritual life .

The power of God unto salvation is still “the Gospel” – whether that is salvation initially, or when it is being worked out (Phil 2:12).

“ 25b . . . which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God.”

GIVEN TO ME FOR YOU

“. . . which is given to me for you.”

Other versions read, “bestowed on me for your benefit,” NASB “God gave to me to present to you,” NIV and “which is given me towards you.” DARBY

What was “given” to Paul was a stewardship of the Gospel – the responsibility of proclaiming and clarifying it to people – in particular to the church – “for you.” Obviously, it is necessary that the church hear it.

The economy (which is the meaning of dispensation) of God gives a preeminent place to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Where this Gospel is declared, God will work. Where it is not proclaimed, salvation will not be realized, for the power that works salvation is found in the Gospel of Christ.

It should not surprise that the fruit of salvation is not found where the Gospel is not regularly declared and expounded. Newness of life, the fruit of the Spirit, and righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, cannot spring up in soil that is not watered with the Gospel. It simply cannot happen! If “the record God has given of His Son” recedes into the background of the agenda of the church, God will cease to work within it.

- The Gospel of God (Rom 1:1). How is it possible for any thoughtful person to associate such a Gospel only with beginnings, or one’s initial entrance into Christ Jesus?
- The Gospel of His Son (Rom 1:9). Has everything about “the Son” been exhausted with the initial declaration of the Gospel? Indeed, the whole letter to the Hebrews is about “the Son” – a most extensive proclamation of Him.
- The Gospel of Christ (Rom 1:16). “The Christ” is God’s Anointed One, through whom every Divine benefit comes. Who can affirm nothing more is to be declared or reported of Him after one has been baptized into Him?
- The Gospel of peace (Rom 10:15). Are we finished with the declaration of peace after we have “put on Christ?”
- The Gospel of your salvation (Eph 1:13). Is the church to hear no more of God’s great salvation? Is that a message reserved for “that which was lost?” What honest disciple cannot confess that he has learned more of salvation AFTER being born again, than he ever imagined when the newness of life was first experienced?
- Glorious Gospel of the blessed God (1 Tim 1:11). Is there a single person within the body of Christ who at the first saw with clarity how thoroughly God was blessed by the accomplishments of His Son?

May the saints of God have done with this nonsense about the Gospel being preached only to sinners. Such a postulate can in no way be supported. Paul has clearly stated that he received a stewardship of the Gospel for Christ’s body, which is the church.

In the Epistles there are no less than seventy-nine references to the “Gospel.” By way of comparison, there in all of its varied forms, baptism is mentioned fourteen times directly, and twice

indirectly. Repentance in all of its literary forms is mentioned eleven times. “Church” is mentioned forty-nine times. The words “husband” and “wife,” in both singular and plural forms, are mentioned forty-one times, with fourteen of them being found in the seventh chapter of First Corinthians. The phrase “Word of God” is mentioned nineteen times. Teach, in all of its varied forms is mentioned fourteen times. How is it possible miss the Apostolic emphasis.

In keeping with the declaration of the Gospel, the word “faith” is mentioned in the Epistles (Romans through Jude) one hundred and ninety-seven times, and “believe,” in all of its forms, is mentioned fifty-three times.

Those who object to this line of reasoning are obliged to tell us what the emphasis of teaching is to be in the church. Is it the home? Is it our manner of life? Is it interpersonal relationships? Is it the purported pattern of the church, or its government? Just where is the emphasis to be placed? What kind of word is to be found in its preachers and teachers? With what food is the flock to be fed?

The church has a solitary message – only one. All doctrine, or teaching, revolves around that message. It is the only message by which salvation in all of its facets comes. It is the only message that can stimulate and maintain faith. This is the solitary message that produces and nourishes hope.

There is no other message, no other word, no other teaching, that has Christ at its center – which declares and expounds His Person, purpose, and works. He alone is the Vine. He alone is the means through we come to God – whether initially, or in the twilight of a godly life in this world.

Those who would take the Gospel from us take Christ from us. Those who refuse to preach the Gospel have taken away the means of faith, and the way of illumination.

Here is a most salient word. “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18). Another version reads, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” NKJV

This is why Paul says a dispensation of the Gospel was given to him “for you” – for the people of God. In this message we find germ of every good and perfect work. It is the seat of all power, and the resource for everything pertaining to life and godliness. The Spirit never minimizes the Gospel of Christ!

FULFILLING THE WORD

“ . . . to fulfil the word of God.” Other versions read, “that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God,” NASB “to present to you the Word of God in its fulness,” NIV “to make the Word of God fully known,” NRSV and “by proclaiming His message in all its fullness to you Gentiles.” NLT

To “fulfill the word of God” means to fully carry out its proclamation, presenting a thorough declaration of the great salvation of God. It is to declare “the whole counsel of God,” withholding nothing from the people (Acts 20:27). Essentially, this involves proclaiming Christ and the redemption that is in Him. It also includes declaring the implications of the Gospel, which include the promises to those who believe and obey that Gospel, and the consequences of not doing so. If the Gospel is true, any other core message is untrue, and will not be attended by the power of God.

Another Gospel

All of this begins with the proclamation of the Gospel itself. It becomes the Divinely appointed touchstone by which all other messages are measured. Thus Paul wrote to the Galatians, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8-9).

“Any other Gospel” is one that is not centered in Jesus Christ. It is one that offers hope by some other means. Such a Gospel; is the vehicle of condemnation, for God will not bless through it.

Keep in mind, by his own word, the Colossians had never before seen Paul’s face (Col 2:1). They had already heard the Gospel, believed it, obeyed it, and were producing fruit to God. They were already believing on Jesus and loving all the saints. Yet, Paul associates preaching the Gospel to them with the commission that Jesus had given him – a commission that involved fully, or completely, declaring that Gospel.

Notice, Paul equates “the word of God” with “the Gospel” (1:5,23,25). This representation is found throughout Scripture. The Gospel is called “the word ” (Acts 4:4; 8:4,14; 10:36,44; Acts 16:6,32; 17:11; 1 Pet 1:25) “the word of the Lord” (Acts 8:25), “the word of truth” (Eph 1:13), “the word of the truth of the Gospel” (Col 1:5), “the word of God” (Acts 6:7; 11:1,19; 13:7,46,48; Rom 10:17), “the word of His grace” (Acts 14:3), and “the word of this salvation” (Acts 13:26).

The Idea

The idea is that Paul, as a faithful custodian of the Gospel, declared it with an aim to its blessing being realized. This text does not insinuate that fulfilling the Word is accomplished when every jot and tittle of it has been delivered. That is the means to the appointed end, but is not the end itself. Jesus was sent “to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:26). The proclamation is not fulfilled, in the sense of our text, until the intended blessing is realized – until men are turned away from their iniquities.

The “word” that was delivered was one described as “preaching peace by Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:36). As used in our text, that word is not fulfilled until the declared peace is actually experienced.

Paul did preach to discharge his duty, as he himself declared: “For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me ; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me” (1 Cor 9:16-17). Yet, this was not the totality of what constrained him.

When Jesus commissioned Paul, He did not command him simply to preach the Gospel. That preaching was imperative to the fulfillment of his appointment, but it certainly was not the whole of it. Here is what Jesus told him. “But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes , and to turn them from darkness to light , and from the power of Satan unto God , that they may receive forgiveness of sins , and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:16-18).

Paul’s preaching was calculated to accomplish these things – to “fulfill the word.” Now he is going to preach to the Colossians with a mind for these things to happen, for the Gospel is the appointed vehicle through which men’s eyes are opened, they are turned from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God. It is the means by which they receive forgiveness of sins and appropriate the inheritance that is common to those who are sanctified by faith.

As long as there is a church among whom a person or persons exists whose eyes are not opened, the Gospel must be preached. As long as there is anyone in the body of Christ who is waffling between darkness and light, the Gospel must be preached. Where there is a professed believer who is in the grip of Satan, the Gospel must be preached. Wherever a Christian can be found that is not sure their name is written in heaven – who is unsure of their inheritance – the Gospel must be preached.

Anyone who is honest knows that the churches of our land are filled with people who have been overcome by sin and the devil. Multitudes are in the grip of spiritual darkness, unable to navigate in the light. Satan has his way with countless numbers of people who once professed the name of Jesus and rose from baptism to walk in the newness of life. Who is able to estimate the masses of church members who are totally lacking the full assurance of faith and the rejoicing of the hope?

These conditions are why Paul preached the Gospel to the churches. He knew that was the only message that is attended with “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16). Although men may fiercely object to these conclusions, all of their arguments are like weightless motes and powerless wisps of smoke. The church needs to hear the Gospel! It is the elixir that comforts the weary soul, strengthens

the feeble knees, and causes hope to shine brightly within the heart of believers.

Thus Paul presents himself as an example of continuing in the faith, grounded and settled, and not being moved away from the hope of the Gospel. With him, this was not a theoretical matter. It was associated with fulfilling his role in the body of Christ, for there is no abiding in Christ without fulfilling our function in His body.

The personal perception of the Gospel was essential for Paul to continue in the faith. It simply is not possible to be faithful while ignoring the message through which faith comes and is sustained.

Where there is an underlying ignorance of the Gospel, it is not possible to continue in the faith. Spiritual life cannot be sustained when the very Word by which we live is strange to us. This is the failing of the Western church. It is fundamentally ignorant of the Gospel itself, which is God's power unto salvation. Its view is too much on the surface, and too lacking of moral and spiritual power.

The Gospel is declared and expounded throughout the Epistles, as I have already pointed out. The Gospel affirmations that are spoken to believers are staggering for number. Allow me to cite just a few of them from the first ten chapters of Romans. These are indicative of the kind of affirmations that are found throughout the Epistles.

- The righteousness of God is revealed (Rom 1:17).
- The righteousness of God is revealed without the law (Rom 3:22).
- We are justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ (Rom 3:24).
- God has set forth Jesus to be the propitiation for sins (Rom 3:25).
- God is just and the Justifier of the one believing in Jesus (Rom 3:26).
- In Christ, God imputes righteousness without works (Rom 4:6-8).

- Righteousness will be imputed to us if we believe on Him who raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 4:24).
- Jesus was delivered for our offences and raised for our justification (Rom 4:25).
- We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1).
- By Christ we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand (Rom 5:2).
- When we were without strength, Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5:6).
- God commended His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8).
- When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son (Rom 5:10).
- By Jesus Christ, the grace of God and the gift by grace has abounded to many (Rom 5:15).
- By the righteousness of Christ, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life (Rom 5:18).
- By the obedience of Christ, many were made righteous (Rom 5:19).
- Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound (Rom 5:20).
- We have become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that we should be married to Christ (Rom 7:4).
- There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1).
- What the Law could not do, God did by condemning sin in the flesh of Christ (Rom 8:4).
- He that spared not His own Son, will much more freely give us all things with Him (Rom 8:32).
- It is Christ that died, yea rather is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us (Rom 8:34).
- Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Rom 10:4).
- If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom 10:9).

There are twenty four affirmations – solid declarations of the result of Christ’s accomplishments. They are all Gospel – good news concerning the Person and works of Christ Jesus.

What is more, these were rarely delivered to alien sinners. They were nearly always preached to those who were in Christ Jesus. If you are honest, you will acknowledge that very few of these were known by you when you were buried and raised with Christ. For some of us, it was a long time before we actually heard any declaration of them.

Such things ought not to be! Paul faithfully carried out His commission by preaching the Gospel to the Colossians. He did so because continuing in the faith and being grounded and settled cannot be realized independently of that glorious Gospel.

If we expect to not be moved away from the hope of the Gospel, we must hear the message of the Gospel from which that hope is realized. It must be proclaimed with power and spiritual insight to the churches. That is a stewardship that must not be neglected.

THE MYSTERY REVEALED

Lesson # 9

Colossians is a message delivered to all of the saints: the elder and the novice, men and women, bond and free, young and old. No segment or individual member of the body of Christ is excluded. Further, the focus is singular.

JESUS CHRIST

From the standpoint of a person, that focus is Jesus Christ. Thus far in this Epistle, this has been powerfully stated.

- We have been “translated” by God the Father into Christ’s kingdom (1:13).
- We have “redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (1:14).

- He is the “Image of the invisible God” (1:15a).
- Jesus is “the Firstborn of every creature” – the Federal Head over everything that was created (1:15b).
- Everything was created by Him and for Him (1:16).
- He is before all things, both by existence and by authority (1:17a).
- In Him all things “consist,” or are held together (1:17b).
- He is “the Head of the body, the church,” and the one from whom all spiritual nourishment and direction are received (1:18a).
- He is “the Beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence” (1:18b).
- It has pleased the Father that “all fulness” dwell in Him (1:19).
- Jesus made peace through “the blood of His cross” (1:20a).
- God reconciled “all things unto Himself” through Jesus Christ (1:20b).
- We who were “alienated” in our “mind by wicked works,” have now been reconciled to God through Christ (1:21).
- Our reconciliation was accomplished in the body of Christ’s flesh, and through His death (1:22).

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

From the standpoint of a message, word, or declaration, the Gospel of Christ is the focus.

- The “hope” from which faith in Christ and love for all saints sprang, was declared in “the truth of the Gospel” (1:5).
- The “Gospel” was brought to the Colossians, as it was “in all the world” (1:6a).
- The “grace of God in truth” was communicated through the Gospel (1:6b).
- Our presentation in God’s sight as “holy and unblameable and unproveable” is contingent upon not being moved away from “the hope of the Gospel” (1:23a).

- In accord with the purpose of God, and through His power and wisdom, it was the Gospel that “was preached to every creature under heaven” (1:23b).
- Paul was primarily “made a minister” of the Gospel (1:23c).

PERCEPTION REQUIRED

It is imperative that believers perceive the intent of Christ’s words to the churches, and what the Spirit is saying to them. The thrust of the heavenly message does not concern the church itself or what it is to be doing. The message is, in a sense, separate from the church itself. Every word revolves around the Person of Christ as declared in the word of the Gospel.

The truth of the matter is this: there is no valid ministry that does not have Christ’s person at its center, and the message of the Gospel as its primary word. Whatever makes Jesus appear secondary is in no way related to the truth of God. A message that does not have the Gospel of Christ at its center point, has no power unto salvation. In fact, such a message becomes an obstacle to the salvation of men, for the power of God is not in it.

For some, this is too difficult to receive. They had rather have a core message of family values, organizational success, political independence, or problem resolution. A word of promised health and wealth is more acceptable to some, and thus they even dare to call such a word “Gospel” – but it is not. The Gospel has to do with Christ’s Person and work, not man’s temporal betterment.

THE COLOSSIAN DILEMMA

The brethren at Colossae were being subjected to “another gospel” – similar to the experience of “the churches of Galatia” (Gal 1:2). The spotlight was being turned away from Christ – the One whom God has exalted above all – to meats, drinks, holy days, new moons, and sabbaths (2:16-17). Instead of pursuing the knowledge of Christ, they were being called to consider “voluntary humility, and the worshiping of angels.” Teachers to whom they were being subjected were actually intruding into things they had not seen, and were “vainly puffed up” by their “fleshly mind” (2:18). However, these pretentious teachers were “not holding the Head,” Jesus Christ, from whom all valid edification and strengthening proceed (2:19).

These teachers were no doubt scholars, and would readily be accepted in the religious schools of our country. But God had no use for them, and thus denounces them through the Apostle whom He had made a valid minister.

I do not believe the average American church has a satisfactory grasp of either the indispensability of Jesus, or the essentiality of the Gospel. There are too many religious specialists lacking acquaintance with Christ and the Gospel. There are too many purported “ministries” that do not

rely upon Christ and the Gospel. We have, in fact, precisely the same condition in our day that the brethren of Colossae were facing. The Lord Jesus is being upstaged, and the Gospel is exchanged for powerless words.

To those caught in the wake of this tidal wave of religious nonsense, the words that follow will have no importance. Those who have been deluded by the variant messages of this day will write this text off as too deep, or intended only for more astute Biblical scholars. It just does not fit in with what they are accustomed to hearing.

However, this message is not addressed to the scholars, or the leaders, or some other religious professionals. It is delivered to “the saints and faithful brethren” (1:2), to those who have “faith in Christ Jesus,” and love “for all the saints” (1:4). This is a word to those who have received “the hope of the Gospel,” and “know the grace of God in truth” (1:5-6). It is for those who have “love in the Spirit” (1:7). It is for those who have been “delivered,” “translated,” “have redemption” and “forgiveness,” and have been “reconciled” to God (1:13-21).

It is not possible for a word to be more relevant, more central, more applicable to all who are in Christ Jesus! This word must not be brushed aside, or treated as though it was in any sense of secondary importance. This is a word that has to do with being prepared to stand before the Lord Himself!

“ 1:26a Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations . . . ”

This is a continuation of a lengthy and involved thought beginning in verse twenty-one. The KJV presents a single sentence that includes verses twenty-one through twenty-nine. The NASB and NIV represents verse twenty-four as a single sentence.

With a broad stroke, the Spirit tells us of our past, our present, and the future God has determined in Christ Jesus.

Our past was sordid, and thrust us into a hopeless and helpless situation. There was nothing we could do about it.

In Christ Jesus, our present condition is wholly owing to the work of the Lord. He has delivered us from the power of darkness, and placed us in the kingdom of His Son, giving us every required advantage and resource. It is He who has reconciled us to Himself through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, thereby making us suitable to receive His inheritance.

The message of all of this comes to us through the Gospel – a word that will be relevant and essential to us in every phase of spiritual life. The Gospel is to spiritual life what blood is to the body. It is the sole means described as “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16).

EVEN

“Even . . .” Other versions read, “that is,” NASB “which is,” GENEVA and “the message which was a mystery,” NJB , and “the message was kept secret.” NLT

Paul now elaborates on the Gospel itself , of which he has been “made a minister.” The word “even” refers to the Gospel, of which Paul has been “made a minister.” Moved along by the Spirit of God, the Apostle will now refer to the Gospel in a different manner, confirming its centrality in God’s “great salvation.”

His words will reveal something of the majesty of the Gospel, as well as its universality and goodness. This is a message conceived and delivered by God Himself. It is “ the record God has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10-11). The words that follow should assist to deliver us from juvenile views of the Gospel – something that has long plagued the American church.

THE MYSTERY

“ . . . the mystery . . .” This is the first time Paul uses the word “mystery” in this letter. He will use it three more times (1:27; 2:2; 4:3).

Coming from the Greek word **musth,rión** (mus-ta-ri-on), the word “mystery” means “ a hidden thing, secret, not obvious to the understanding, a hidden purpose or counsel.”It refers to a message “that is confided only to the initiated.” STRONG’S A Scriptural “mystery” is “what can be known only through revelation mediated by God .” THAYER

What Gods calls a “mystery” cannot be discovered by any form of human wisdom or religious discipline. It is hidden within the framework of Divine counsel, and can only be known if God reveals it. The fact that it is a “mystery” puts the matter beyond every form of human wisdom.

This word is used twenty-seven times in the New Covenant Scriptures. In the KJV and NKJV versions of Scripture, the English words “mystery” and “mysteries” are not used in Genesis through Malachi.

The NASB, NIV, and NRSV versions do employ these words. These versions use “mystery” six times in the book of Daniel (Dan 2:18,19,27,30,47; 4:9). The KJV uses the word “secret” in these passages. The NASB uses “mysteries” once in Job (Job 12:22), and three times in Daniel (Dan 2:28,29,47). The KJV uses “deep things” in the Job text, and “secrets” in the others. The NIV employs “mysteries” in Job 11:7, and Daniel 2:28,29,47). The NIV translates the Job text “Can you fathom the mysteries of God,” while the KJV reads, “Canst thou by searching find out God.”

The Use of the Word

The various uses of this word will confirm both the nature and necessity of revelation.

- Jesus spoke of the “mysteries of the kingdom,” declaring only certain people were “given” to know them (Matt 13:11; Mk 4:11; Lk 8:10). This was His response to His disciples when they asked Him to explain why He spoke in parables to the multitudes. Contrary to the idea that parables simplified the truth, making it understandable, Jesus said they concealed the truth to those who were not granted the privilege of knowing the mysteries.
- Through Paul, the Spirit spoke of the present condition of Israel, together with its future, as a “mystery” that was beyond human understanding (Rom 11:25).
- The “mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” is now made known through the preaching of the Gospel (Rom 16:25).
- Now, the “wisdom of God” is spoken “in a mystery” – that is, in a manner that cannot be discerned by those who are limited to the wisdom of this world (1 Cor 2:7).
- There are appointed servants who have been made “stewards of the mysteries of God” – not to conceal them, but to declare them (1 Cor 4:1).
- The Gospel is a revelation of “the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He has purposed in Himself” (Eph 1:9).
- Paul affirmed God had, by revelation, made known to him “the mystery” (Eph 3:3).
- This “mystery” is an exposition of the Lord Jesus Christ, and is therefore called “the mystery of Christ.” Paul said he had knowledge in this “mystery” (Eph 3:4).

- Now that God has unfolded this “mystery,” He desires that His people have a working acquaintance with it, and participation in it. This is referred to as “the fellowship of the mystery” (Eph 3:9).
- Pointedly, Paul refers to “the mystery of the Gospel” (Eph 6:19).
- There is such a thing as “the mystery of the faith” that can be contained “in a pure conscience” (1 Tim 3:9). That is, there are unknowable things that can be known and appreciated by those with pure hearts.
- The Spirit refers to various facets of the Lord Jesus’ person and accomplishments as “the mystery of godliness” (1 Tim 3:16).

Ever keep before you that Paul is now referring to the Gospel, of which he has been made a minister, as “the mystery.” It is not, then a simplistic message that is easily discerned. This very Gospel, so precious to those who believe, is “a stumblingblock” to the Jews, and “foolishness” to the Greeks (1 Cor 1:23). The “cross,” through which we have been reconciled to God (Col 1:20), is immeasurably precious to those who are being saved. However, to those who are perishing, it is utter foolishness. As it is written, “For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” NASB (1 Cor 1:18).

Those who have a disinterest in the Gospel are, in fact, “perishing.” Whatever they may boast about their identity with God is only a lie, and is not the truth. There is no such thing as a person who is “being saved” that has no interest in the Gospel of Christ. The fact that men do not want the Gospel is an acknowledgment that it is hidden to them. That condition betrays that they are actually “perishing,” and are in a state of alienation from God.

HID FROM AGES AND GENERATIONS

“ . . . which hath been hid from ages and from generations . . . ” Other versions read, “hidden from past ages and generations,” NASB “hidden throughout the ages and generations,” RSV “kept from all times and generations,” BBE “hid since the world began, and from all ages,” GENEVA and “kept secret for centuries and generations past.” NLT

Hid

Although this Gospel involved an intelligent purpose, intelligent creatures could not discern it – it was “hid” from them. It was hidden by Divine intent. God did not intend for it to be known, and therefore neither man nor angel was privy to it.

Something that is hidden is concealed – placed where it cannot be found, regardless how ardent the search for it may be. There are three classes of personalities from whom this Gospel was hidden.

- **THE PRINCES OF THIS WORLD.** When making known this marvelous Gospel, the Spirit draws our attention to the “princes of this world,” and their total ignorance of it. “Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory ” (1 Cor 2:6-8).
- **THE HOLY PROPHETS.** God made known certain aspects of this Gospel to the holy prophets. However, it was not enough for them to draw any satisfactory conclusions. It is written, “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently , who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Pet 1:11).
- **THE HOLY ANGELS.** It is also written that holy angels desire to know something of this Gospel AFTER it has been revealed to men. It is written, “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you . . . unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into ” (1 Pet 1:12).

Observation

The world’s most astute wise men did not see the truth of the Gospel, and therefore “crucified the Lord of glory.” The most learned of a race cultured by Divine tutelage, including the Scribes, Pharisees, Lawyers, Sadducees, and the High Priest, could not see the wisdom of God. It was hidden to them. The most expert of the political realm, Pilate and Herod, themselves with some expertise on Jewish affairs, could not decipher this wisdom, and therefore consented to the death of Jesus Christ.

If one desires to consider Satanic powers among “the princes of this world,” they too failed to see the purpose of God, and thus moved men to crucify the Lord of glory.

At every level, therefore, the mystery of the Gospel was hidden: hidden to men, hidden to holy angels, and hidden to inimical principalities and powers.

Ages

“Ages” have to do with periods of time. These are epochs during which the revelation of God was held at a rudimentary level – long periods of time that were not marked by a significant increase in revelation.

Patriarchal Age

Prior to Christ, there was an “age” during which little revelation was received from God – and when it was, it was on a personal, not collective, level. Some have called this the “patriarchal age.” It was a period in which individuals were most prominent: i.e., Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. What is now revealed through the Gospel was hidden during this period. Although there were allusions to the coming Gospel, and some introductions to certain aspects of it, it remained hidden in its fulness. Those patriarchs never did see what those in Christ Jesus now see.

The Age of Law

There was also the “age,” or period during which a people became most prominent. The people was Israel, and the means through which they gained their prominence was the Law, or First Covenant. During this time, there were prominent individuals within this prominent nation: i.e., Moses, Aaron, David, and the holy prophets. Although this age was filled with types and shadows of the coming redemption, yet what is now perceived by the saints was hidden to those living under the Law.

Generations

Generations views the past from the standpoint of persons, or people, rather than time. The descendants of Noah – Ham, Shem, Japheth – were “generations” through whom the world was populated (Gen 10:1-5). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were “generations” through whom the Messiah came. There were also other generations of Abraham through Keturah. “And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah (sons of Abraham, Gen 25:2), and Ishmael, and Esau, through whom many other Gentile nations sprang (Gen 25:13-15; 36:5-43).

The things now revealed through the Gospel of Christ were hidden to all of those generations. No wise man among the Jews or Gentiles was able to decipher the grand purpose of God. In fact, only those to whom God had particularly revealed Himself even knew there was such a thing as Divine purpose or intent. It could not be seen in nature or in Law. Generations of kings could not see it. Generations of teachers and wise men could not see it. Even generations of prophets were unable to perceive it. High priests could not comprehend it. It was “hidden” from them all – all ages and all generations.

Prior to this day of salvation, God did not reveal His purpose as it has now been revealed in the Gospel. Thus, it could not be known. No natural ability could uncover it. No human discipline, however astute, could discover it.

As long as it was unrevealed, it remained locked in the unknown. Men were utterly helpless to open it, or even to know it existed. Four thousand years of accumulated wisdom could not discover this mystery.

“ 26b . . . but now is made manifest . . . ”

NOW

“ . . . but now is . . . ” Other versions read, “but now has been,” NKJV “But is now,” NIV and “but now.” NRSV

The Spirit now moves Paul to declare the advantage of this present age – the “day of salvation” and “the accepted time” (2 Cor 6:2). What is taking place “now” is not merely something that has been appointed – although this is an appointed time. Rather, what is now made known is one of the results of Christ’s declared accomplishments. What is “now” done is based upon the “redemption” wrought by Christ (1:14). It is founded upon the peace that He made “through the blood of His cross” (1:20), and the reconciliation of those who were formerly alienated from God, and enemies in their minds through wicked works (1:20-21).

If these things had not been accomplished, no more could be known of God’s purpose now than was known in past ages and generations.

The truth of the matter is that an understanding of the Gospel could not be given to men until sin had been removed, and men could be justly delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of His Son. Where sin is not forgiven, and men are not reconciled unto God, the truth of the Gospel cannot be seen. However, these things have “now” been accomplished because of Christ Jesus, and thus God is “now” making known this glorious Gospel.

MANIFEST

“ . . . made manifest . . . ” Other versions read, “revealed,” NKJV “manifested,” NASB “disclosed,” NIV and “made clear.” BBE

The word “manifest” means to make known what was formerly hidden or unknown. It means to make the matter understandable, discernible, and perceptible. What could not previously be known can now be comprehended.

The “truth of the Gospel” must not be approached as though it was unknowable. This can be done

in at least two ways.

First , by approaching the Gospel in an overly simplistic manner, as though it was appropriate to have a childish understanding of it. The admonition of First Corinthians 14:20 is never more appropriate than in the matter of understanding the Gospel: “in understanding be men.” Surface views of the Gospel bring blessing to no one, for there is more to the Gospel than meets the eye. Men ought to reason that things “made manifest” by God Almighty cannot be basically simplistic.

Second , the depth of the Gospel can so stagger the human spirit that it is actually neglected – placed to the side as though it is beyond our reach. This view can be driven by the misconception that only more disciplined thinkers can really understand the Gospel. However, this is not a proper view of something that has been “manifested” by the God of heaven.

There is a certain class of people to whom this mystery is being manifested. Their distinction, however, is not found in the flesh. Worldly achievements and natural aptitude are not the requirements for having this mystery revealed. The Spirit is very specific concerning those who are graciously granted insight into this otherwise hidden “mystery.”

The truth of the matter is that this understanding is clearly within the reach of everyone who has taken advantage of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus! This is done through faith.

“ 26b . . . to His saints.”

The manifestation of the Gospel had not been to mankind in general. Our text does not mean that the Gospel had been simply written down, and can therefore be deciphered by the human intellect. If this was the case, the holy angels could surely understand the Gospel of Christ. Yet, we are categorically told that they continue to “desire” to “look into” this Gospel (1 Pet 1:12).

Certain professed believers have taken the position that “we have the Bible and a brain,” and that is sufficient to gain an understanding of the Gospel of Christ. This is a very foolish view. It is not only contradictory of Scripture, but is also confirmed to be untrue by the ignorance of the Gospel that prevails among those holding to this view. The Word of God is clear on this point, and there is no justifiable reason for remaining in such ignorance.

This revelation of “the mystery of the Gospel” (Eph 6:19) is confined to “His saints.” Only they are “given” to know these things.

The word “His” refers to God Himself. He is the One who “delivered” us from the power of darkness. He is the One who “translated” us into the kingdom of His dear Son. He is the One who “made peace” through the blood of Christ’s cross. He is the One who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus.

“His saints” are the people God has delivered from the power of darkness and translated into His Son’s kingdom. They are the ones who have been reconciled to Him, and are at peace with Him. “His saints” are not an institutional identity. Rather, this is a term that applies to all who are in Christ Jesus, and are appropriately described by what has been declared of such people.

The word “saints” means “holy ones,” or sacred and dedicated ones. These are people who belong to God by personal choice and commitment, as well as by redemption and reconciliation. They are people whom the Father Himself has “qualified . . . to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light” NIV (1:12). They are “holy” by virtue of being “washed” from their sins (Rev 1:5). They are also “holy” because they are living by faith (Gal 3:11), living in the Spirit (Gal 5:25), and walking in the light (1 John 1:7).

Unholy people cannot comprehend the Gospel, for God will not make it known to them. The Lord will not unveil the glory and effectiveness of the Gospel to those who have not experienced deliverance from the power of darkness, or fellowship with His Son.

HIS SAINTS

Those to whom this “mystery” is being revealed are not merely people who live separated lives from the world. They live “unto God” (Gal 2:19) because they have been “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17), and have been made a “peculiar people” – that is they are peculiarly the Lord’s, belonging exclusively to Him. The Lord has purified His people for Himself. As it is written, “Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit 2:14).

Saints Are Related to God

In Christ, we are made “alive unto God” (Rom 6:11), are being brought “to God” (1 Pet 3:18), and are intended to “bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom 7:4). Collectively, the saints are “the church of God” (1 Cor 1:2), “the house of God” (1 Tim 3:15), “the temple of God” (1 Cor 3:16), and “the children of God” (Rom 8:21).

Saints Are Partakers

Those in Christ are not “saints” by name only, or by institutional identity. They have been made “partakers of Christ” (Heb 3:14), “partakers of the Divine nature,” and “partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel” (Eph 3:6). They have partaken, or participated in, the “heavenly calling” (Heb 3:1), and have been “made partakers of the Holy Spirit” (Heb 6:4).

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

Why is it necessary to say such things? Is not the text very apparent? What was once a mystery is now being made known “unto the saints.” However, there remains among professed believers the notion that the Gospel is understood academically, and by the employment of natural aptitude. Those embracing this view, whether unwittingly or deliberately, have removed God from the immediate picture. To them, the manifestation is historical, not contemporary. It has been embalmed, so to speak, in print, and is thus available to all men. All they need is a good mind and, perhaps, a few study helps. They will be able to figure out the mystery – at least that is what some are inclined to think.

The condition of the American church should confirm to our hearts that something more than mere human discipline and effort is required to decipher the “mystery of the Gospel.” Let it be clear, I am not speaking of being able to rehearse the essential elements of the Gospel – the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15:1-3). It is what was accomplished through these realities, together with their implications, that is the subject of the manifestation of reference.

These things will only be effectively made known to those who are in right relation with God through the Lord Jesus Christ – “His saints.” Only those who have separated from the condemned order and are pressing toward the mark will be shown the mystery – “His saints.” Only those who are holy, do not quench the Spirit, and are walking by faith will receive this blessing – “His saints.” To everyone else, the message of the Gospel remains a “mystery.”

This is confirmed in the lack of relevance that non-saints see in the Gospel of Christ. This is pointedly declared in the Apostles’ doctrine. There is no valid reason for any professing believer to remain in ignorance of it. “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor 4:3-4).

Admittedly, this has some alarming implications. Yet, it is the truth, and is worthy of our hearty embrace. Let every person take heed to these words.

“ 27a To whom God would make known . . . ”

If there is a single mortal on the face of the earth who does not comprehend “with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:18-19), it is NOT because there is any reluctance on God’s part to make these things known.

TO WHOM

“To whom God . . . ” This refers to “His saints” – the holy ones. The eyes of the Lord are upon these people, and His ear is open to their cry. As it is written, “The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry” (Psa 34:15). Peter also affirmed, “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers” (1 Pet 3:12).

With holy intent, the “eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him” (Psa 34:15). He “upholdeth the righteous” (Psa 37:17), sustains them, and “shall never suffer the righteous to be moved” (Psa 55:22). Those who “are upright in their way” are described as “His delight” (Prov 11:20). How marvelously the Lord has revealed His attitude toward those who have availed themselves of His goodness and “plenteous redemption” (Psa 130:7).

WOULD MAKE KNOWN

“ . . . would make known . . . ” Other versions read, “willed to make known,” NKJV “has chosen to make known,” NIV “pleased to make known,” ASV “was pleased to give knowledge,” BBE and “God’s purpose to reveal.” NJB

What is set before us is not a Divine reaction, but a deliberate purpose. This is something that God has determined, and there is no possible way for it to be countermanded.

Not only has the message of the Gospel been determined by God, and concealed from all ages and generations, He has determined to make it known to “His saints.” He is pleased to do this, and has deliberately chosen to do so. He does not want this mystery to be concealed from “His saints.” Likewise, He has determined no others will be granted this knowledge.

This is one of the privileges that is vouchsafed to those who cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart. It is a blessing that those who come out from among defiling people and elements, refusing to touch the unclean thing, will be given to know these things. God will show them His secret.

How marvelously this is spoken by the “sweet psalmist of Israel.” “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant” (Psa 25:14). The Lord “confides in those who fear Him,” NIV divulging secrets to them that remain a “mystery” to all others. This was involved in our Lord’s tender words to His disciples. They were spoken on the eve of His betrayal. “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15).

This is God’s nature: to unfold His purposes to those who are “His saints.” Such souls have a strong desire to know what God has purposed, and to understand His Word. That is why the Psalmist prayed, “Show me Thy ways, O LORD; teach me Thy paths” (Psa 25:4), and “Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law” (Psa 119:18). No soul driven by such strong desires will be disappointed. To them the word of Jesus will be fulfilled: “These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father” (John 16:25).

Closing Remarks

Wherever there is a soul that is not satisfied to remain ignorant of God, His purpose, and His Gospel, a candidate for the knowledge of the mystery has been found. Such a soul can be trusted with an understanding of the “the mystery of the Gospel.” It will be a source of nourishment to that person.

This verse accounts for much of the ignorance of the Gospel that prevails within the professed church. Those who cannot be appropriately called “His saints” are, because of NOT being holy ones, confined to a state of ignorance concerning this Gospel.

There is no such thing as an unholy person who possesses an understanding of the Gospel. When a person chooses to “live after the flesh” that person dies towards God (Rom 8:13). They may boast of having a love for God and an understanding of the Gospel, but they do not, and have not told the truth of the matter. God will now allow this wonderful knowledge to abide in fundamentally corrupt and wayward hearts. This is an unavoidable aspect of not being able to serve two masters, and it is strictly honored in heaven.

“ 27b . . . what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles . . . ”

The Spirit now opens something of the magnitude of the “mystery” God is revealing to “His saints.” This is not something that will appeal to “the natural man,” which has no capacity to receive the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:14). This is what is opened up to “His saints.”

WHAT

“ . . . what is . . . ” This is a word of definition. There are wondrous things inherent in the Gospel of Christ – “the mystery of the Gospel.” These are the things “contained” in the Gospel, much like a sweet morsel is contained in within the shell of a walnut.

RICHES OF THE GLORY OF THE MYSTERY

“ . . . the riches of the glory of this mystery . . . ” Other versions read, “the glorious riches of this mystery,” NIV “the wealth of the glory of this secret,” BBE and “how rich is the glory of this mystery.” NJB

Anything that possesses “riches of the glory” has the evidence of God upon it. “The riches of the glory” speaks of abundant provisions supplied by God for the sons of men. It speaks of Divine adequacy that is the result of Divine purpose and intention. These riches are the means by which life in Christ is sustained.

It is imperative that we take note of the way in which the Apostle speaks of the Gospel. His language is lofty, and His teaching profound. There is an element of joy as well as profundity – two things that are not often joined. There is simplicity for faith, and depths for understanding – all in the same message. Here the novice and the mature can meet to be challenged, comforted, and to learn. Nowhere does the Spirit ever associate the Gospel of Christ with intellectual simplicity, spiritual rudiments, or mere beginnings. This remains as the staple diet for spiritual nutrition.

The “mystery” itself – which is the Gospel – possesses this repository of Divine plentitude. This is not something intended for sinners, but for “His saints.” It is not for those who are unreconciled, but for those who have been reconciled to the God from whom they were once alienated.

Although the Gospel is preached “to every creature,” its richness is manifested only to “His saints.” Those, therefore, who do not declare the Gospel to the church have, in fact, robbed them of Divine provisions. They have taken from them “the riches of the glory of the mystery.” When these riches are not declared, the church becomes anemic and malnourished, for it cannot subsist without “the riches of the glory” that are declared in the Gospel of Christ.

There is an abundance in the Kingdom of God that is often the subject of proclamation. We read of “the riches of His goodness” (Rom 2:4), the “riches” of “wisdom and knowledge” (Rom 11:33), and “the riches of His grace” (Eph 1:7). There are “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:18), the “exceeding riches of His grace” (Eph 2:7), and “the riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8). There are also “the riches of the full assurance of understanding” (Col 2:2). The salvation of God is an economy of unspeakable richness and abundance.

In this text, the Spirit uses the phrase “the riches of the glory” – an expression that is used elsewhere in Scripture: “the riches of His glory” (Rom 9:23; Eph 3:16), “the riches of the glory” (Eph 1:18); and “His riches in glory” (Phil 4:19). This is a unique phrase denoting abundant provision that is inherent in things pertaining to life and godliness. It also describes the very fabric of those things, which exude the very nature of God. That is, something that is “rich in glory” reveals Divine qualities and supplies Divine provisions.

The “glory” of a thing is what reveals it. It is also what brings benefit. Take, for example, the sun, which has a glory of its own (1 Cor 15:54). The earth is lightened and sustained by the glory of the sun – its rays and other things projected from it to the earth. The glory of the sun enables us to perceive something of it, and obtain resources necessary for our survival.

The expression “the glory of the riches of the mystery” makes known that the Gospel itself brings Divine resources within our reach. There is a revelation of God in the Gospel that nourishes and sustains the human spirit. Much of God’s nature and will is comprehended in the Gospel, and an abundance of what salvation brings is obtained through it. The Gospel is, in this sense, “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16).

I cannot understate the seriousness of failing to declare and expound the Gospel of Christ. This is one of the great sins of the modern church. It has allowed itself to be pulled unto areas of lesser importance. The result of such distorted emphases is that Jesus Himself is no longer the Object of fervent quest (Phil 3:7-12), and, consequently, God is not known and understood (Jer 9:24-25).

When it comes to the revelation of God Himself, the Gospel of Christ outranks all other revelations. It supercedes the revelation of nature, and is greater than the revelation of the Law. More of God is seen in the Gospel. More of His purpose is seen in the Gospel. More of His wisdom is made known in the Gospel. This is the premier message from heaven. What possible reason can be adduced for failing to major on the Gospel of Christ? Those who do so are like those who close up a gold mine in order to play in a sand pile.

THE GENTILES

“ . . . among the Gentiles . . . ” Several decades after Pentecost (A.D. 58-62), the grandeur of the Gospel being presented to the Gentiles still challenged the Apostle. Even from a jail cell, he was driven

by the desire to make this Gospel known – particularly to the Gentiles.

Actually, the Gentiles constituted the vast majority of the human race. Until the era of the Gospel, everything from God pertained to the Israelites. As it is written, “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5). Jesus said, “salvation is of the Jews,” or “from the Jews” NASB (John 4:22). However, it is not confined to them – which is the point Paul is making.

The word “Gentiles” means “heathen,” or “nations.” From the religious perspective, they are “heathen,” because they “know not God” (1 Thess 4:5). From the political viewpoint, they were “nations,” or bodies of people, grouped by language, geography, or government.

Using the present population of the world to gain a perspective of the Jew-Gentile ratio, the following may be seen. Presently there are around six billion people in the world, with something over fifteen million of them being Jews. The percentage of Jews is approximately .025 of one percent. I do not know how similar this ratio is to the that of the first century. It no doubt does provide a proper perspective, for God refers to Israel as “the fewest of all people” (Deut 7:7).

The salvation announced in the Gospel is too large to be confined to a small nation, like Israel. Isaiah spoke of this condition when foretelling the coming of the Messiah. “And He said, It is a light thing that Thou shouldest be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles , that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isa 49:6). The New American Standard Bible reads, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

A “great salvation” is made for a lot of recipients, and an extensive proclamation.

Now Paul provides a marvelous summation of the rich glory of the mystery of the Gospel. His words are few, but they are weighty. They have seeds of thought in them that are capable of producing a rich harvest of understanding and spiritual perspective. Here is a focused statement of truth in seed form.

“ 27c . . . which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

How can the profound richness of the Gospel be summarized? Is it possible to compress into a single sentence what the Gospel announces and empowers to be accomplished? If you were to ask uninspired men to provide such a summation, you would no doubt receive a variety of answers. Some would view deliverance from the power of sin as the whole of the matter. Others would see thorough adequacy in the flesh as the bottom line. Still others would consider receiving the Holy Spirit, or doing things in the power of the Spirit, as the grand total of salvation.

Every thoughtful person can see that articulating a single sentence that conveys the nature and effect of salvation is a challenging assignment, indeed. Further, this is not the only summation of the “mystery” of the Gospel. John sums up the whole of the matter by saying, “And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life” (1 John 2:25). Elsewhere Paul speaks of the bottom line as being “conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom 8:29). Jesus once stated it in these words, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3).

WHICH IS CHRIST IN YOU

“ . . . which is Christ in you . . . ” Most versions read precisely the same: “which is Christ in you” (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, NJV, NRSV, RSV, BBE, DARBY, DOUAY, NAU, NIB, RWB, WEB, YLT) . Some versions read differently : “which riches is Christ in you,” GENEVA “it is Christ in you,” NAB “it is Christ among you,” NJB and “Christ lives in you.” NLT

What a glorious affirmation: “Christ IN you!” Never before has such a thing taken place. Enoch “walked with God,” yet could not dwell within those of his own generation. As great a leader as Moses was, faithful in all of God’s house (Heb 3:2,5), he was never “in” the people. They never partook of his mind, his spirit, or his desires. His perception of God never was found in the people he led. Even though David was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam 13:14), yet he was not able to dwell in those over whom he ruled. They did not have his love for the Lord and His word, and the driving desire that he had to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. John the Baptist, unexcelled prior to Jesus, and who was “filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15), could not dwell in those of his generation. They did not partake of his insight, purity, or commitment to God.

But now, in this “day of salvation,” a new thing has taken place. The supreme Man, in whom God is pleased to have “all fulness dwell,” is found within those who have experienced reconciliation to God.

While yet with His disciples in the body, Jesus told them of this spiritual phenomenon – Himself residing in them. “If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him ” (John 14:23). He also spoke to the multitudes about the one in whom He would personally dwell: “He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him ” (John 6:56). Paul spoke of the indwelling Christ to the Romans: “And if Christ be in you , the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (Rom 8:10). He also

confessed to the Galatians, “Christ liveth in me” (Gal 2:20). Later Paul says of those who are in Christ that Christ Himself is “in all” of them (Col 3:11).

There can be no question about what is being said. It is perfectly consistent with the rest of Scripture. In Christ the promise of Isaiah is fulfilled: “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa 57:15).

Certain religious bodies have made much of how we get into Christ – and rightly so. We are, after all, “baptized into Christ” (Gal 3:27), by virtue of being “baptized into His death” (Rom 6:3). This is of critical importance, and the Spirit makes no provision for denying this reality or balking at its affirmation. However, getting into Christ is not the end of the matter, and ought to be treated as though it was.

“Christ in you” refers to our post-baptism life, and not to baptism itself. It is part of the spiritual “now” perspective. Furthermore, Christ being “in” us is never associated with our baptism, or any other response associated with our induction into Christ Jesus.

A Remarkable Prayer

In a most salient statement of the case, the Apostle to the Gentiles speaks of Christ dwelling in believers. He is very specific about how this is accomplished, and the purpose that is achieved by it. “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:16-19).

Here is something that cannot be accomplished by a mere procedure, or any single act of obedience. God Himself must come into the picture. Our “inner man,” where Christ is intended to reside, must be made strong, so that we are blessed and benefitted by Christ within. This inner strength cannot be accomplished by means of a routine or discipline. One of the functions of the Holy Spirit is to strengthen and fortify our inner man so Christ “may,” or “can,” reside within us. We must not assume that an indwelling Christ is a simplistic matter – it is not. Christ does not take up residence in weak and emaciated believers. They must be made strong by the Spirit for this to occur.

The objective to be accomplished by Christ dwelling within is also stated. It is in order to our spiritual stability: being “rooted and grounded in love.” And that is not the end of the matter. The Divine intention is that we may be able to perceive the marvelous extent of this salvation, and have productive knowledge concerning the love of Christ: “May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” Still, the Divine objective does not end there. The ultimate intention is that we might be “filled with all

the fulness of God.”

When, therefore, our text says “Christ in you,” a lot has been said, and much has been implied. Further, this is something to be realized by those who are already in Christ – who already have faith, and already love all the saints.

What Does This Involve?

There are several things involved Christ being in us. Some of them include having “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16), receiving ministrations from the Head, (Col 2:19), and maintaining fellowship with Jesus (1 Cor 1:9). There is also the matter of being “joint heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17), and walking in the light “as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7). There is even the process of being “taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus” (Eph 4:20-21).

Now, behold the Spirit’s revealed objective in Christ being “in you.”

THE HOPE OF GLORY

“ . . . the hope of glory.” Most versions read the same. One exception is the New Living Translation which reads, “this is your assurance that you will share His glory.” The sense of the text is not violated by this translation.

The “hope of glory” is the same “hope” Paul formerly said “is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the Gospel” (1:5). It is the “hope of the Gospel,” from which we are not to be moved (1:23).

Here, the “hope” is viewed from the standpoint of what we will be rather than where we will be. God has already revealed His ultimate objective for us is glorification. As it is written, “Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified” (Rom 8:30). Presently, we are in the “justified” state. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, we are progressing to the “glorified” state.

Glorification is the culmination of our salvation, when “we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (I John 3:2). This is the “glory” to which we have been “called” (1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 2:14; 1 Pet 5:10). It involves our bodies as well as our spirits and souls. In our totality, we will be “glorified together” with Jesus (Rom 8:17).

David sensed this objective and put into these words: “One thing have I desired of the LORD,

that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple” (Psa 27:4). Paul, speaking from an even more illuminated point of view, said: “If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead . . . I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:11,14).

Remove “the hope of glory,” and there is no purpose for being a Christian. That is precisely why it is written, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Cor 15:19). This is none other than the “hope” by which we are saved (Rom 8:24-25).

What keeps this indispensable hope alive? It is not some creedal profession. It is not something sealed, or finalized, when you come into Christ. The “hope of glory” is maintained by Christ dwelling within – productively and consciously. Where there is no fellowship with Christ there can be no hope – no confident expectation of being forever with the Lord. Any claim to such a hope when Christ is not dwelling within is a mere delusion.

This has some rather alarming implications, for much of what we see in the professed church accents neither Christ nor hope. Notwithstanding, our hearts must be able take hold of the truth, else it will not make us free (John 8:32).

“ 28a Whom we preach . . . ”

WHOM

“Whom . . . ” Other versions read “Him,” NKJV and “it is He.” NRSV The subject of reference is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It is the “Christ” who is “in you.” He is the heart of the Gospel, the Administrator of salvation, the Mediator of the New Covenant, and the appointed “Heir of all things,” through whom God has spoken to us in these last days (Heb 1:2).

The Significance of “Christ ”

“Christ” is a designation of great significance in Scripture, being used some 555 times in the New Covenant writings: sixty times in the Gospels, thirty-one times in the book of Acts, four hundred and fifty-three times in the Epistles, and eleven times in the Revelation.

The word “Christ” means “the Anointed,” or “the Messiah.” To be more particular, it means “the One who has been anointed” – anointed by God. This anointing has exclusively to do with the salvation of God – with bringing men to Himself (1 Pet 3:18) by removing their sin and conducting them through the straits of this world to glory (Heb 2:10).

Throughout the Prophets, God revealed that the rescue of men was going to hinge upon a single Man. Various descriptions of this single individual were given – all of them pertaining to a person who would be raised up among men. It would not be an angel, or some other form of spirit. It would be a man. A brief rehearsal of some of these terms is necessary to the exposition of this text.

- The “Seed” of the woman (Gen 3:15).
- A “Prophet” like unto Moses, to whom the people would hearken (Deut 18:15,18).
- “Shiloh,” a person to whom the people would gather (Gen 49:10).
- God’s “King” (Psa 2:6).
- God’s “Firstborn” (Psa 89:27).
- A “Son” called Immanuel (Isa 7:14).
- A Person who would be for a sanctuary and a stone of stumbling (Isa 8:14).
- One upon whose shoulders the government would be placed, whose name would be “Wonderful Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6).
- A “Rod” out of the stem of Jesse (Isa 11:1).
- A “Branch” upon whom the spirit and wisdom would rest (Isa 11:1-2).
- A person of “quick understanding in the fear of the Lord” (Isa 11:3).
- A Person to whom the Gentiles would seek (Isa 11:10).
- A “Man” who would be for “a hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a mighty rock in a weary land” (Isa 32:2).

- God’s “Servant,” His Elect, in whom He would put His Spirit (Isa 42:1).
- A Person whom God would give as a “covenant of the people, and a light of the Gentiles” (Isa 42:6).
- A Person who would bear our griefs and sorrows, and be “stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isa 53:4).
- One who would be “wounded for our transgressions,” “bruised for our iniquities,” who would bear “the chastisement of our peace” 53:5).
- A Man upon whom the Lord would lay “the iniquities of us all” (Isa 53:6).
- A Man who would be removed from the earth at a relatively young age, “cut off from the land of the living,” and without any fleshly offspring (Isa 53:8).
- A Person who would be buried with the wicked, and with the rich in His death (Isa 53:9).
- A Man who would be “numbered with the transgressors,” “bare the sin of many,” and “make intercession for the transgressors” (Isa 53:12).
- A “King, who would reign and prosper,” in whose days Judah would be saved, whose name would be called “The Lord our Righteousness” (Jer 23:5).
- One “like unto the Son of man,” who would be given “dominion, and glory, and a kingdom” that would “never be destroyed” (Dan 7:13-14).
- “Messiah the Prince” (Dan 9:24-25).
- God’s Servant, “the Branch” (Zech 3:8).
- The “Messenger of the covenant,” who would purify the people “that they may be unto the Lord an offering in righteousness” (Mal 3:1-3).

SALVATION THROUGH A MAN

Over and over the Prophets emphasized that salvation would come through a Man – a Man sent from God. Peter accents how this stirred the hearts of the prophets. “As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know WHAT PERSON or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow” NASB (1 Pet 1:11).

The salvation of man would not come through a religious system – even a God-ordained system, like the Levitical order and the tabernacle service. It would not come through a body of people, even a people who had been chosen by God, cultured by His prophets, and led and cared for by Him. The deliverance of men would come by a Man – a single individual.

Salvation would not come through a code, or set of laws – even ones that were written with God’s own finger in tables of stone. It would not come through an institution – even one that had been ordained by God, like Jewry. The rescue of the human race would come through a Man – one solitary Man!

It is no wonder that the revelation of the Savior to Peter included Him being “the Christ.” You will remember that Jesus asked His disciples how the people perceived Him. After they had answered, He asked them, “But whom say ye that I am?” In the glow of a sudden burst of insight, Peter replied, “Thou art THE CHRIST, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16). At that moment, Peter saw Jesus as the promised Man – the One through whom God would fulfill all of the Messianic promises.

This is the indwelling “Christ” who is “the hope of glory” – the Pledge of eventually being glorified – made to be “like Him” in all of the components of our person. There is no system that compensates for a lack of Christ within. There is no institutional identity that can make up for a lack of Christ. There is no amount of religious work that can counterbalance a deficiency of the Person of Christ dwelling within.

When Christ is “in you,” everything that He brings is accessible to you! When He is not dwelling with you, nothing that He brings can be possessed. Further, the presence of Christ is not to be assumed. If He is within you, earnest self examination will confirm that to be the truth. Here is how the Scripture states the case. “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Cor 13:5). Nothing is more important than this discovery.

PREACH

“ . . . we preach . . .” Other versions read, “Him we preach,” NKJV “And we proclaim Him,” NASB “whom we announce,” DARBY and “we tell everyone about Christ.” NLT

The subject of proclamation is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is at the heart of the message. In a sense, He Himself is the message. Philip “preached Christ” (Acts 8:5). As soon as Saul of Tarsus was converted, he “preached Christ” (Acts 9:20). Paul told the Corinthians, “But we preach Christ crucified” (1 Cor 1:23). In Thessalonica, Paul confirmed it was Christ that He was preaching (Acts 17:3). He said that he had “fully preached the gospel of Christ” (Rom 15:19). The establishment of the saints is

according to “the preaching of Jesus Christ” (Rom 16:25). Paul said he did not preach himself, “but Christ Jesus the Lord” (2 Cor 4:5). Among the Gentiles Paul preached “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8).

As already mentioned, “Christ” is mentioned in the Epistles and the Revelation (all written to those who are in Christ), four hundred and sixty-four times. It is exceedingly difficult for me to imagine what would prompt any person to imagine Christ is not to be preached, or proclaimed, to the church. This is especially true when we consider that all of the letters written to the churches are filled with proclamations of Christ. Believers are told it is “by” Christ that we “believe in God” (1 Pet 1:21). Grace and peace are coming to us from Him (Rom 1:7), as well as “love with faith” (Eph 6:23).

Christ is associated with the appropriation of righteousness (Rom 3:22), justification and redemption (Rom 3:24), and having peace with God (Rom 5:1). He is necessary for receiving the atonement (Rom 5:11), the “gift by grace” (Rom 5:15), reigning in life (Rom 5:17), and grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life (Rom 5:21). He is the one who loves and nourishes the church (Eph 5:29), intercedes for us (Heb 7:25), and from whom the whole body is built up (Col 2:19). Christ destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14), spoiled principalities and powers (Col 2:15, and is bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). His present relevancy is consistently proclaimed as well as the effectuality of His death and resurrection.

“ 28b . . . warning every man.”

Paul now elaborates on the preaching of Christ, confirming he is not speaking of only introducing men to the salvation of God. It will at once become apparent to you that the things described are not at all common in the nominal church.

WARNING

“ . . . warning . . . ” Other versions read “admonishing every man,” NASB and “guiding.” BBE It is important to emphasize that this is a sort of breakdown preaching Christ: “This is the Christ we are proclaiming, admonishing . . . ” NJB That is, the preaching involves the warning, or admonition. It is incorporated in the message.

Here, the word “warning” does not mean warning of impending danger. As used in this verse, the word “warn” means to put one in mind of what has been declared, moving the people to believe it and

act upon it. Warning would include the recollection of the inadequacy of nature, the weakness of the flesh, and the futility of worldly wisdom. Paul pressed the message, confirming its centrality. Nothing must be allowed to subvert its effect upon the soul. No place can be made for competing influences. The heart must be carefully guarded, lest an “evil heart of unbelief” overtake us (Heb 3:12). All of that is involved in warning.

The modern church is not doing well in the areas of preaching, warning, and teaching. There is too much entertainment, commitment to eternally inconsequential things, and things and relationships that will pass away.

This is a message that requires a response. It is not like the daily newspaper that one can read and lay aside. It is imperative that men respond to this Gospel by believing and embracing it, whether initially or in spiritual growth and advancement. If men do not believe and embrace this Gospel, they have responded by rejecting or spurning it, and it will be laid to their account – whether they are presently in Christ or not.

The word “warning” comes from a word meaning “to admonish, warn, instruct, as giving instructions in regard to belief or behavior.” THAYER There is a note or urgency in the word. The admonition refers more to preparation than to procedures related to mundane relationships. This should be apparent to us from our exposure to the Epistles . While there are a number of issues addressed in the letters to churches and individual believers, the burden of their content does not relate to such things. Instructions concerning family relationships, master and servant relationships, and conducting ourselves toward political leaders are surely contained in Scripture. However, the percentage of Scripture dealing with such matters is nowhere near 10%.

The warnings and admonitions of Scripture are generally addressed to all of the saints, with a few references to certain groups like children wives, husbands, masters, servants, etc. This should be apparent enough to confirm this point is not to be labored.

The “warning” of reference is emphasizing the call to take the way of escape that God has provided in Christ Jesus. It relates to keeping ourselves in the love of God and not being moved away from the hope of the Gospel. The reason for such warning should be obvious. God has nothing to give us that does not come from Christ, the appointed Vehicle of all blessing. Furthermore, those who are not in fellowship with Christ, living by faith and walking in the Spirit, are incapable of receiving from Christ.

Therefore, as long as we are in this world, we must hear of Christ and be stirred to avail ourselves of His ministry. As long as we are faced with competing interests, we must hear of Christ. As long as our adversary walks about, seeking whom he may devour, we must hear of Christ. As long as we are tempted, we must hear of Christ. That is why anyone who heard Paul, whether an Athenian philosopher, a member of a Jewish counsel, a Roman ruler, or a leading Christian – they all heard of Christ. That is the Person Paul preached.

Some preach a plan. Some preach a movement. Some preach a church. Paul preached Christ, warning and admonishing his hearers in view of the Christ that he preached. No preacher or teacher who fails to major on Christ will escape the judgment of God!

EVERY MAN

“ . . . every man . . . ” Sin has leveled the field in which preaching occurs. There is no special Gospel for the young or the old, for male or female, or the slave or the master. There is not a special Gospel for the Gentiles, and another for the Jews. The dreadful innovation of specialized ministries has introduced more liabilities than advantages. At some point the salvation of God must be seen as a “common salvation” (Jude 1:3), and its message as a singular one. There is not a syllable of Scripture that justifies any other approach.

The same application of the Gospel is made to “every man.” This is because the thrust of the Gospel is singular. There is something common that is to be found in the response of every person subjected to the Gospel. They are to believe on the Son. They are to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. They are to put on the whole armor of God and resist the devil. They are to watch for the coming of the Lord, and be ready to meet Him. These are warnings that are common to “every man.” No one is excluded. They are for all who are in the Son!

“ 28c . . . and teaching every man in all wisdom . . . ”

The “teaching” of reference is like branches on the tree of preaching. Teaching is nothing less than the elaboration of the Gospel. It is the opening up of the Gospel, like Joseph opening the storehouses of Egypt. Teaching is not a separate activity, unrelated to preaching. It is not that one person preaches and another teaches. In our text the same individuals did the preaching and the teaching. Preaching and teaching are the two sides of the coin of spiritual communication.

TEACHING

“ . . . and teaching . . . ”

The word “teaching” means “to hold discourse with others, impart instruction,, instill doctrine, and expound a thing.” THAYER

Preaching emphasizes our responsibility to God, as stewards of the mysteries of God. Teaching emphasizes the responsibility of men, who are to respond to the preaching. They are the ones who are “taught.”

When the Apostles first went throughout Jerusalem preaching Christ, their enemies commanded them “not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18; 5:28). In summing up the activities of the disciples the Spirit said “they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42). When the Apostles stood and spoke the words of life in the Temple to unconverted Jesus, their activity was described as “teaching the people” (Acts 5:25). When Paul preached from a rented house while a prisoner of Rome he was described as “Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” (Acts 28:31).

The “teaching” of which Paul speaks is the extended exposition of the Gospel. It parallels the ministry of the priests of Nehemiah’s day who, after the book of the Law was read distinctly, “gave the sense and caused them to understand the reading” (Neh 8:8).

Here is an example of “teaching.” “And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). The “preaching” is, “He died for all,” and “rose again.” The teaching is, “they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him.”

EVERY MAN IN ALL WISDOM

“ . . . every man in all wisdom . . .” Other versions read, “with all wisdom,” NASB and “with all the wisdom God has given us.” NLT

The person communicating the Word of God has the responsibility of doing so wisely – that is, “handling accurately the Word of truth” NASB (2 Tim 2:15). The people must be left with spiritual advantages. A considerable amount of contemporary preaching actually produces more questions than answers.

The wisdom in which teaching is done is not a carnal wisdom, designed to manipulate and exploit people for personal advantage. Elsewhere Paul spoke of those who “serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom 16:18). Other false teachers are described as “Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1 Tim 1:7). These are descriptions of those who do NOT teach

“in all wisdom.”

Teaching “in all wisdom” is teaching through which the Holy Spirit works. It is teaching that is in harmony with God’s objectives, and lends itself to making “ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17).

“ 28d . . . that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”

Now we get at the heart of why Paul both preached and taught. It did seek to reach the lost, but that was not his ultimate objective. As noble as the statement, “The objective is to reach the lost” sounds, it is not a spiritually well phrased expression. Jesus said He came to “seek and to save the lost” (Lk 19:10). That salvation, however, extends beyond the gate of entrance. He presently “is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). Our salvation is still in its introductory, or firstfruits, stage (Rom 8:23). As long as this is the case, there is still a salvation “ready to be revealed” (1 Pet 1:5). It is this aspect of salvation that Paul now addresses, stating that this is the determined objective of his preaching and teaching.

THAT WE MAY

“ . . . that we may present every man . . . ” Other versions read, “so that we may present,” NIV “to the end that we may.” DARBY

There is a sense in which the teacher and the taught stand together. In fact, Paul said this of his labors: “For what is our hope , or joy , or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?” (1 Thess 2:19). He also referred to the Philippians as “my joy and crown” (Phil 4:1). John urged those he taught to “abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, WE may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 John 2:28). He knew that if those on whom the preacher and teacher has expended labor do not pass the test of Divine judgment, the preacher and teacher will endure some loss. That is the precise point being made in the third chapter of First Corinthians. “If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Cor 3:15). The “work” of reference are those who were taught. Paul said of the Corinthians to whom the above words were spoken, “are not ye my work in the Lord?” (1 Cor 9:1). Paul further told the Corinthians that he knew God would “present us with you in His presence” NIV (2 Cor 4:14).

There is a sense in which each laborer for Christ will “present” their work to the Lord for inspection and approval. Jesus Himself will say, “Behold I and the children which God hath given me” (Heb 2:13). The same kind of presentation will be made by the various laborers in the kingdom. Spiritual, leaders, for example, will give an account of the flocks that have been placed in their charge. As it is written, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Heb 13:17). The aim is for every one who is made an overseer by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28), to present those in his care “perfect in Christ.”

No administrative or organizational duties must be allowed to supercede or minimize this objective. In the day of judgment, God will not quiz leaders about their institutional involvement, or how well the organization functioned.

PERFECT IN CHRIST JESUS

“ . . . perfect in Christ Jesus.” Other versions read, “every man complete in Christ,” NASB “mature in Christ,” NRSV and “perfect in their relationship to Christ.” NLT

The idea is that Paul desired for every person he taught to not come up short on the day of judgment. He wanted them to have availed themselves of the provisions of God’s “great salvation.” If any one fell short of what they could have been, he did not want it to be because of deficient preaching and teaching on his part.

Salvation is designed to bring the people of God to a state where they are “ no more children , tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things , which is the head, even Christ” (Eph 4:14-15). If this does not occur, it is not owing to any deficiency in the salvation of God. Either the people were not taught in “all wisdom,” or they refused the message, choosing a form of godliness that denied the power thereof.

Paul expressed this same desire to the Corinthians, explaining why he labored so tirelessly among them. “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor 11:2).

No person, however learned and capable in communication, should endeavor to preach to, or teach, the people of God who does not have this objective: to present the people perfect in Christ. Wherever this is not the aim of preaching and teaching, selfish ambitions will tend to dominate. Perhaps the preaching and teaching will be tailored to please the people, or to avoid any unfavorable response from them. A person so motivated should immediately leave the ministry, for he is an obstacle

to the progress of the people.

Jesus ever lives to perfect the people. The Holy Spirit is laboring to this end. The holy angels are ministering spirits contributing to this cause. All of the spiritual gifts placed within the church are intended to serve this purpose: to make people “perfect in Christ.” How could any other objective possibly be defended? The beginning of the process is justification, and its conclusion is glorification (Rom 8:29). Anything or anyone that is not harmonious with that purpose has no place among God’s people. This is particularly true of purported preachers and teachers.

“ 29a Whereunto I also labor...”

Although he journeyed through a wide variety of debilitating and discouraging circumstances, Paul never lost sight of his focus. Whether on a boat about to be shipwrecked, in a dungeon, a synagogue, a marketplace, or the school of higher learning, his was focused on the purpose of God. The manner in which he expressed this focus is most edifying. It reveals the nature of kingdom efforts.

WHEREUNTO

“Whereunto . . .” Other versions read, “To this end,” NKJV “And for this purpose,” NASB “For this,” NRSV and “And it is for this reason.” NJB

Paul, is referring to the objective of presenting every person “perfect in Christ” – every person, whether young or old, male or female, bond or free!

This was the target, the aim, the goal – to “present every man perfect in Christ.” He would not allow this objective to be dwarfed by lesser intentions. If he was speaking to an uninformed Philippian jailer, he kept this in mind. If he was preaching to contentious Jews in a Thessalonian synagogue, he maintained this perspective. If he was on a barbarous island, with sick people being brought to him, he did not forget this aim. If he was coming to the established church in Rome, or a spiritually meandering church in Corinth, this was his objective: to present every man perfect in Christ. Everything he said and did was pointed in this direction.

LABOR

“ I also labor . . . ” Other versions read, “toil,” NRSV “am working,” BBE and “I work very hard at this.” NLT

The word “labor” is not a casual word. The meaning of the word is “to grow weary, tired, exhausted; to labor with wearisome effort.” THAYER It speaks of “strong exertions: work hard, strive, struggle.” This is the word Peter used when Jesus asked him to “Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.” Peter responded, “Master, we have TOILED all the night, and have taken nothing” (Luke 5:5). The word is translated “wearied” in John 4:6: “Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being WEARIED with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour” (John 4:6). A saint named Mary is said to have “bestowed much LABOR” on Paul (Rom 16:6), and one Persis is declared to have “LABORED much in the Lord” (Rom 16:12).

Elsewhere Paul acknowledged “I labored more abundantly than they all” (1 Cor 15:10). He classed his “labors” along with “stripes,” imprisonments,” “tumults,” “watchings,” and “fastings” (2 Cor 6:5). He said his “labors” were “more abundant” than other ministers (2 Cor 11:23). Of his practical activities he wrote to the Thessalonians, “For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail : for laboring night and day , because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God” (1 Thess 2:9).

The words “I also labor” do not refer to a convenient occupation or line of work. Like David, Paul had been lifted from a horrible pit, and his feet set upon a solid rock (Psa 40:2). His efforts were the only appropriate response to such marvelous grace. The work of the Lord demands this kind of effort. There is no place in the harvest fields or among the flock of God for casual and half-hearted laborers. They all should be purged from the ministry.

Today the church is inundated with religious professionals and casual leaders with too much time on their hands. If they engage in a lot of activity, it seems to be the wrong kind of activity, and for the wrong reasons. The church has been buried under an avalanche of bureaucracy and administration. O that there were more men who were willing to “very gladly spend and be spent” for the people of God – to present them “perfect in Christ.”

May there be a spiritual ingathering of laborers in the Lord’s harvest who are willing to be “poured out as a drink offering” in behalf of the saints NKJV (Phil 2:17). The work of the Lord demands this kind of effort. There is no place in the harvest fields or among the flock of God for casual and half-hearted laborers. They must be purged from the ministry.

“ 29b . . . striving according to His working . . . ”

The ambitious undertaking of the Apostle cannot be accomplished by a casual effort. He therefore speaks further of it, giving an account for his prodigious labors. In this he offers great encouragement to everyone who has obtained a fervent interest in presenting the people of God “perfect in Christ.”

STRIVING

“ . . . striving . . . ” Other versions read, “struggling,” NIV “using all my strength,” BBE and “combating.” DARBY

As if the word “labor” was not strong enough, the Apostle extends himself in speaking of his endeavors to present the saints “perfect in Christ.” The word “striving” means “to contend with adversaries, fight, struggle with difficulties and dangers, to endeavor with strenuous zeal.” THAYER

In this we see that Paul’s ambition to present the saints “perfect in Christ” was met with certain Satanic aggression. It may have come in the form of human opposition, storms, or other adverse and hindering circumstances. Whatever form they took, Paul had to battle through them in order to meet his objective of presenting the saints “perfect in Christ.”

Something of the magnitude and quantity of these adversarial influences are provided in Second Corinthians: “ . . . in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (2 Cor 11:23-27).

Again he testifies, “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor 4:9). Another time he spoke of being “pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life” (2 Cor 1:8).

Mark it well, in order for the people of God to be presented “perfect in Christ,” someone must

labor exceedingly and strive against numerous foes and adversaries. These are the kind of ministers God “gave to every man” (12 Cor 3:5). This is one of the reasons it is so serious to “neglect so great salvation” (Heb 2:3).

Those who are looking for religious careers will find no comfort in such words. However, those who have a heart for believers to be presented “perfect in Christ” find a sweet elixir in these words. They help to interpret some of the struggles associated with bringing benefits to the people of God.

ACCORDING TO HIS WORKING

“ . . . according to His working.” Other versions read, “His power, which works mightily in me,” NASB “all His energy, which so powerfully works in me,” NIV “all the energy which He mightily inspires within me,” NRSV and “by the help of His power which is working in me strongly.” BBE

The prodigious labors of Paul were not the result of his self-discipline, but of his faith. That was the means through which God’s mighty power worked in him. Actually, it was God who was working in him, “both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil 2:12). To put it another way, God was “working in” him “that which is well pleasing in His sight” (Heb 13:21).

We know from Scripture that “ the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him” (2 Chron 16:9). Here, in Paul, such a man was found, and the Lord did, in fact, “show Himself strong” in him. Elsewhere Paul accounts for his labors by saying, “yet not I, but the grace of God which was in me” (1 Cor 15:10).

Here was a man who had perceived what he now prayed for others: that they might see “what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:19-20). God is truly “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph 3:20). Paul confesses that this is actually happening in him.

For those who may feel inadequate for the ministry of preparing the saints to be presented “perfect in Christ,” consider this. Does not the contemplation of God’s mighty power working within you lift such a noble work into the domain of possibility? Let every kingdom laborer take heart!

“ 29c . . . which worketh in me mightily.”

It is as though the Apostle cannot glide over such lofty statements. He must linger upon them, bringing greater clarity, and putting them within reach of the people of God. This is one of the key factors that will contribute to presenting every man “perfect in Christ.” The same power that enabled Paul to fulfill his ministry is designed to make them “perfect in Christ.”

WHICH WORKETH IN ME MIGHTILY

“ . . . which worketh in me mightily ” Other versions read, “which so powerfully works in me,” NIV and “which is working in me strongly.” BBE

This is the explanation for the effectiveness of Paul’s ministry. In another place he states that he ministered “according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification , and not to destruction” (2 Cor 13:10). Again he wrote, “For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification , and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed” (2 Cor 10:8).

The power of God, which was working mightily in Paul, made him equal to the challenge of presenting “every man perfect in Christ.” Every person who has taken his teaching to heart is a testimony to the truth of that statement. The power of God, in other words, is designed to bring those in Christ to maturity, or perfection, where they can stand “faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 1:24). That is what it is designed to do, and that is what it will do when received.

This effectiveness can be traced back to the spiritual mind-set Paul possessed. He shared this most fully to the Philippians. “*But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:7-14).

He stated it briefly to the Galatians in these words: “I am crucified with Christ: 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, and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

Therein is the secret to the remarkable power that was working in Paul the Apostle. The Lord had a lot of Paul, and thus gave Paul a lot of Himself. He lost his life for Jesus sake, and thus gained a life that transcended anything nature could offer (Matt 10:39). He forsook all, took up his cross, and followed Christ – regardless of the cost, inconvenience, or hardship. He saw what Jesus had done for Him, and what was being offered to Him – and he responded in faith. The result was that he was used mightily and effectively for the perfecting of the saints.

This is the heritage of every person who chooses to abandon all competing interests in order to serve the Lord of glory. Every person who has a focused and consistent interest in the people of God – in seeing them presented “perfect in Christ,” will be given power to contribute to that Divine objective.

The burden for the welfare and perfection of the church is central in the Divine economy. Every recorded laborer of God has carried a burden for God’s people. Moses was noted for his care for the people, as well as all of the holy prophets. The Lord Jesus strengthened faith wherever He found it, as He walked among us. In His remarkable prayer on the eve of His betrayal, He sought the protection and welfare of His disciples, praying for none but those who believed, or would believe, on Him. The Holy Spirit has also been called into the work of perfecting the saints. He assists them in crucifying the flesh, brings forth fruit within them, and even intercedes for them when the infirmity of ignorance dominates them. All of the Apostolic writings, together with those of Luke, James, and Jude, are addressed to the people of God, and are designed to contribute to their perfection. There is not the slightest room for any doubt on this matter.

It is time for the attention of religious leaders to be turned to the people upon whom God’s eye rests, and those to whom His ear is opened. There is no acceptable excuse for the people of God being spiritually starved in preference of religious froth. Such conditions contradict both the nature and content of the Gospel. A weak church will not be used by God, for it a contradiction to the whole economy of salvation.

However, wherever there is a sensitive soul, the eyes of the Lord will find that person, and employ him in His great work. I encourage you to be one of those people. Be willing to lose you life for Jesus’ sake, and the Gospel’s, and you will enjoy eternal gain, as well as the blessing of your present life in Christ Jesus.

GREAT CONFLICT FOR THE CHURCH

Lesson # 10

In all of God's dealings with the world, His people are central. This is the Divine manner, and has always been.

PRIOR TO THE LAW

After the fall, and prior to the Law, God gave extended attention to those who were, due to His own initiative, in relation with Him. This included Abel Enoch, Noah, Job, Melchisedec, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. If the Lord revealed consideration for anyone else – like Abimelech (Gen 20:17) – it was for the sake of those with whom He already had chosen affiliation.

DURING THE LAW

During the administration of the Law, and the First Covenant, this manner continued. Israel was the heart of God's attention, and were referred to as "My people" (Ex 3:7), "My servant" (Isa 41:8), and "the apple of His eye" (Deut 32:10). Of them Moses said, "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen Thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (Deut 7:6).

Commenting on the uniqueness of Israel, Paul wrote, "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." (Rom 9:3-5).

While there were occasional displays of the Lord's mercy upon Gentile people (Nineveh – Jonah 3:5-10, Nebuchadnezzar – Dan 2:18, and Cyrus – Ezra 1:1), it was within the context of His dealings with Israel. During the era of the First Covenant, the Lord's primary workings centered in Israel.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

The time during which John the Baptist ministered was a special time. It represented a sort of line of demarcation between the dominance of the Law and the Prophets and "the day of salvation." Jesus said, "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John " (Mat 11:13).

The exclusive ministry of John the Baptist was toward the Jews. If any Gentile profited from his ministry, it was because they chose to be identified with the Jews. John did not go to the Gentiles, but to the Jews. He came preaching "in the wilderness of Judaea" (Matt 3:1), Betharaba (John 1:28), and Aenon near to Salim (John 3:23).

THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

The ministry of Jesus was primarily among the Jews. He "went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" (Mat 4:23). He was consistently found in Jewish "cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues" (Matt 9:35). Luke summarized the latter period of Christ's ministry by saying, "And in the day time He was teaching in the temple; and at night He went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of Olives" (Luke 21:37).

When He sent out His disciples, it was exclusively to the Jews. As it is written, "These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of

the Samaritans enter ye not” (Mat 10:5).

Any Gentiles benefitting from His presence – like the wise men from the East (Matt 2:1-12), and the Syrophencian woman (Mark 7:25-30), – were generally found in Jewish areas. If Jesus went into remote areas like Gadara, where He healed the man dwelling among the tombs (Mark 5:1-18), He did not stay long. Such visits were the exception to His ministry.

WHAT THIS DOES NOT MEAN

These circumstances do not mean the Lord had no interest in the Gentiles. The Prophets had foretold that His mercy would be extended to the Gentiles, and that the coming Messiah would be sent to them as well as the Jews (Isa 11:10; 42:1,6; 49:6,22; 60:3; 62:2; Jer 16:19; Mal 1:11). Rather, this reflects God’s manner of focusing upon those with whom He has established identity. This is brought to its fullest revelation in the body of Christ, which is the church.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Although this had once escaped my attention, it has become very clear to me that God’s focus is upon the body of Christ. This is now so apparent that I find it difficult to comprehend why it was hidden to me. I know now that it was because of a distorted emphasis designed to perpetuate a religious institution. Because this text is an expression of this principle, I believe it is necessary to establish that the attention of heaven is upon the church – God’s people. This by no means suggests that the Lord has no interest in anyone else. I am speaking of focus, emphasis, or thrust – where the burden of the attention is given, and the majority of the work is done.

- Jesus is building His church (Matt 16:18).
- The saved are added to “the church” (Acts 2:47).
- When God worked among the Gentiles, it was reported to “the church” (Acts 14:27).
- Paul exhorted the elders of Ephesus to “feed the church of God” (Acts 20:28).
- All of the Epistles are to the churches, or individual members of the church.
- All of the spiritual gifts have been placed within “the church” (1 Cor 12:28).
- Spiritual excellence is associated with edifying “the church” (1 Cor 14:12).

- God is teaching principalities and powers in heavenly places His “manifold wisdom of God” by “the church” (Eh 3:10).
- Glory is being, and will be, brought to God by “the church” (Eph 3:21).
- Jesus “loved the church and gave Himself for it” (Eph 5:25).
- The Lord nourishes and cherishes “the church” (Eph 5:29).
- “The church” is God’s house, the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15).
- Jesus declares God’s name in the midst of “the church” (Heb 2:12).

Jesus Is Reigning for His Church

The reign of Jesus Christ is for “His body, which is the church, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:23). All of the resources that Jesus gives are deposited with His church, which is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). Apart from the church, there is no point to Jesus, as the glorified Man, being “Lord of all.” His supremacy over all did not require Him to humble Himself, taking upon Himself the form of a servant, and being obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2:8). He is “before all things,” and being “in the form of God” was already Lord.

Jesus Christ has been exalted over all, and has been given in that capacity to the church. As it is written, “And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way” NIV (Eph 1:22-23). These are the people for whom He intercedes (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25). They are the ones He leads and protects (John 10:27-29). Grace, mercy, peace, love, and faith come to the church from Jesus (Eph 1:2; 6:23). There is not the slightest suggestion that these graces are given in sizeable measure to anyone else.

AN UNFORTUNATE EMPHASIS

Today, there is an unfortunate emphasis within the professed church of focusing attention on those outside of the church. Whether it is called “evangelism,” “missions,” “ministries,” or some other term, the people of God are made to feel that the most important work of the church is reaching the outsider. This is such a generally accepted approach that anyone who questions it is viewed as peculiar, or maybe even apostate. Let it be clear, no person of understanding is set to oppose any effort to reach the lost, rescue sinners, or minister to the needy. I am not speaking of the legitimacy of such activities. However, when the body of Christ is neglected in order to supposedly carry out these missions, we have a serious situation on our hands.

There has NEVER been a person sent from God who neglected the people of God in order to

reach those uninitiated in the ways of the Lord. Moses, all of the Prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Apostles did not engage in such neglect, nor did they suggest that others do so. During the Egyptian bondage, no prophets were raised up for the Egyptians to the neglect of Abraham's seed. During the Babylonian captivity, no prophets were sent to the Chaldean Empire. All of the prophets of that era were sent to Israel. There is no question that many Egyptians and Babylonians were influenced by godly Jews – and that is not the question being addressed here. We are speaking of an emphasis.

What About the Lost Sheep

This may appear to contradict the spirit of Christ's parable concerning the retrieval of the lost sheep. "How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray" (Matt 18:12-13).

This was our Lord's commentary on seeking and saving "that which was lost" (v 11). Note, the sheep that was "lost" was one from the fold – one of the one hundred originally in the fold. The sheep was further brought back to that very fold, as confirmed by Luke's account of this parable (Lk 15:6). Also, the fold was not abandoned. Luke reminds us that the parable was given in response to the Pharisees and scribes who had "murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them" (Lk 15:2).

Jesus had refused to spend time with the Pharisees and scribes, choosing rather to speak comfortably to sinners who sought to hear Him. But He did not leave His disciples to do so. There is no record of Jesus forsaking His disciples in order to speak to the lost. He rather took them with Him. And, when it came to preferences, Jesus chose to be with His disciples – the ones who delighted to sit at His feet. Those are the ones He took into the garden, on the mountain, and to observe the Passover. There were even times when He "withdrew Himself with His disciples," in an obvious preference for them (Mark 3:7).

So far as the record is concerned, Jesus never withdrew from a Mary, who sat at His feet, to speak to the uninitiated. Nor, indeed, is He ever depicted as leaving His disciples to minister to the uninformed. Such activities, therefore, cannot be what is intended by His reference to leaving the "ninety and nine."

The Lord Jesus will not withhold the truth from wayward souls like the Samaritan woman (John 4), the Greeks (John 12:21-26), and others. But He will never do so at the expense of those who have received the love of the truth, and it is wrong to represent Him as condoning such a manner.

THE REASONING

The current condition of the body of Christ – particularly in America – requires that something be said on these things. All manner of purported evangelistic activity is taking place within the professed church. However, much of this is being done at the expense of feeding the “lambs” and “sheep” of Christ’s flock (John 22:15-17). Our text will show how such a contradiction is totally unacceptable. The words of our text come from the Apostle to the Gentiles – one who zealously avoided building on “another man’s foundation” (Rom 15:20). Yet, the burden of his heart was for the people of God – those who had been reconciled to God. He had great conflict within for the saints of God – particularly those who came from the Gentiles. There is no question about Paul’s focus. All of his writings are alive with it.

“ 2:1 For I would that ye knew . . . ” Other versions read, “I want you to know,” NKJV “I would have you know,” ASV and “it is my desire.” BBE

Paul has spoken extensively about his participation in the body of Christ.

- He is an “Apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1).
- He gives thanks for the Colossians, and prays for them (1:3).
- He has prayed that they will be “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (1:9).
- He prays to the intent they may walk “worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (1:10).
- His objective is for them to be “strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (1:11).
- He rejoices in his sufferings for their sakes, knowing he is filling up “that which is left behind of the afflictions of Christ” (1:24).
- Jesus has given him a ministry for the brethren, to “fulfill the word of God” (1:25).

According to God’s dispensation, he is making known “the riches of the glory of the mystery” of the

- Gospel among the Gentiles (1:27).
- He is preaching and warning every man in all wisdom in order that he may “present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (1:28).
- His arduous efforts were “according to His working, which worketh in me mightily” (1:29).

AN ECONOMY OF INVOLVEMENT

The salvation of God is an economy of involvement. To be sure, men are delivered from sin and its power. They are delivered from Satan and the power of darkness, as well as the world and its corruption. All of that, however, is in order to partake of Christ (Heb 3:14), the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4), and the inheritance of the saints in light (Col 1:12). The grace of God enables us to become participators in both the nature of God and His work.

This involvement is not intended for selected members of the body of Christ – like Apostles and Prophets. It is for all who are in Christ Jesus. There is no such thing as an “eternal salvation” (Heb 5:9) that does not bring people into involvement and intimacy with God Himself. The salvation of God is “not of works” (Eph 2:9), but neither is it without them. In fact, the very next verse after the proclamation that salvation is “not of works” states, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works , which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them ” (Eph 2:10).

These works are not confined to being good neighbors, helping the needy, and general good behavior. Paul’s life is an example of this. The “labor” of which he spoke was of different order. It required the power of God to work within him – doing so “mightily.” Any work that does not require Divine enablement is not inherently “good.” There is not the slightest suggestion in Scripture that God will ever honor a work in which He Himself cannot be found.

What Paul is now expressing is his desire for the Colossians to participate in the life and work of God. He was seeking for God to work in them “both to will and to do of His own good pleasure” (Phil 2:12). He is seeking for Christ to live in them, and for their lives to be lived “by faith in the Son of God” (Gal 2:20). In keeping with the purpose of God, his aimed was that these people “should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). He knew that the purpose for being “married” to Christ was in order to “bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom 7:4).

A lethargic and uninvolved church is out of synch with the purpose of God. A congregation that has been diverted to engagements that do not require the mighty power of God is out of the way and stumbling in the dark. Paul’s understanding of this is precisely why he is writing to the Colossians. They were being exposed to a form of powerless religion that rested in routines and disciplines. While they had not yet been diverted into the darkness, a very real danger was present among them.

Paul has presented himself as an example that spiritual discipline and labor is not according to the wisdom of this world. It involves a living fellowship with both the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3), and working together with God (1 Cor 3:9).

The weakness of Religious Systems

There is a certain weakness in religious systems, even though there is an undeniable propensity among men to gravitate to such things. It is handy for the flesh to embalm its religion in a theological creed or system. Such things make men more like lifeless puppets than those who are “alive unto God.”

The fundamental weakness of religious systems is that they do not require participation in the Divine nature, and walking in the “good works” God has ordained for us. That is a polite way of saying God is not in them. If men could be saved by crystallized theology and physical routines, then Israel would have surely been saved. That is exactly what they had – and it was given to them by God. Their conduct was molded by a moral code, and their understanding of God was by precept. They were not born again, did not have the indwelling Spirit, and were not reconciled to God. Yet, they were intensely religious – and that by Divine compulsion and ordination.

This is precisely the point that Paul makes to the Galatians, who had already been diverted from the Gospel and spiritual life by false teachers. “For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law” NASB (Gal 3:21). The Law was never given to promote life, but to point out that men were actually dead toward God, and thus needed a Savior. Yet, if men could actually be saved by routine, surely the God-given routines of the Law would have done so. You may rest assured, if God’s holy, just, good, and spiritual Law could not bring life toward Him, the laws and disciplines of men will be totally impotent to do so!

PAUL’S DESIRE FOR THE COLOSSIANS

There is a certain “fellowship” among those who are in Christ Jesus that cannot be realized outside of Him. Paul’s fellowship with the brethren included profound and godly desires for them. He was not content for them to merely master moral behavior, enjoy domestic tranquility, and be generally beneficial to society. Salvation is larger than these things, although it effectively impacts upon them all.

Now, because of Paul’s closeness to and fellowship with the Lord, he divulges his profound desires for the Colossians. Even as Jesus Himself did, Paul tells the brethren what he wanted for them. It is not a secret desire, but an open and public one.

It is tragic that many of the saints of God are rarely exposed to anyone who has strong and godly desires for them. Further, it is not at all common for believers to be told what is expected of them, and what is being prayed and sought for them. Many religious leaders do not carry a burden for the people

over whom they preside – at least they do not reveal such a burden.

Let it be clear, that we are being exposed to the manner of the kingdom – the way godly leaders view those in their care. This is not an exception to the rule, but is the rule itself. Where such a frame of mind is not found, leadership, to say the least, is grossly deficient. Spiritual advancement will generally take place in a spiritually public arena, with godly desires being articulated – where the focus of prayers are shared.

“ 1b . . . what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh . . . ”

Here we are exposed to the heart of the Apostle. He did not view his labors for the Lord as a mere profession or occupation. A professional doctor or lawyer can fulfill most of the demands of their occupation without having a real care for and interest in those to whom they sell their services. A good mechanic can fix your car without having any particular concern for you personally. This, however, is not the manner of the kingdom.

WHAT GREAT CONFLICT!

“ . . . what great conflict I have. . . ” Other versions read, “how great a struggle I have,” NASB “how much I am struggling,” NIV “how greatly I strive,” RSV “the great fight I am making,” BBE “what combat I have,” DARBY “what manner of care I have,” DOUAY and “how much I have agonized.” NLT

In the arena of professional religion, men have a primary concern for their careers, salaries, etc., and choices are made on the basis of such considerations. When evaluations are made of religious professionals, it is generally measured by institutional and numerical success. Perhaps the church grew from fifty to one thousand, or the meeting facility is unusually impressive, or the congregation has been a major contributor to the social needs of the community. Such things may be very impressive to men, but they are never cited as being commendable in Scripture. Whatever a person may choose to think of this kind of success, no minister or congregation was ever commended for such things. There is not a single church in Scripture that is lauded for its young people’s ministry, divorce recovery, counseling services, or assistance of the poor in their community. No man of God was ever commended for bringing a numerically small congregation to one with large and impressive numbers. This simply is not the way the Spirit commended kingdom laborers.

This may very well be viewed as an unnecessary observation, and wholly without merit. However, when one considers that such things are almost the sole contemporary means of measuring the success of a preacher or teacher, it is necessary to underscore the total wrongness of such evaluations.

Paul is revealing how commendably he has carried out his Apostleship. He makes no reference to numbers and organizational success – and he is the premier laborer for Jesus among men , having “labored more abundantly than they all” (1 C or 15:10).

At one point, the Apostle spoke of the manner in which he was approved as a minister of God. He refers to these points as a standard for those who are in “the ministry.”

“But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor 6:4-10).

The “great conflict” to which Paul now refers falls into several of the categories mentioned in the Second Corinthians text: afflictions, labors, watchings, longsuffering, kindness, love unfeigned, honor, true, and making many rich. This is significantly different from a purely professional association with the people of God. Paul had a genuine interest in the people, thereby reflecting the life of Jesus Himself.

An interest was expressed to the Galatians that reflects the nature of Paul’s expression, “what great conflict I have.” The Galatians had been even more distracted than the Colossians, and thus the expression is very strong. “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you” (Gal 4:19).

The “conflict” or struggle Paul was experiencing includes the idea of travail – giving birth to spiritual life in others. It also is associated with the experience of opposing influences – like Satan making every effort to keep Paul from delivering edification to the Colossians, for which he had been empowered (2 Cor 10:8; 13:10).

Here Paul was, in Rome, having conflict for the brethren in Colossae.

An Application

There is a sense in which all believers partake in this conflict for all saints of God. An interest in the welfare and continuance of all saints everywhere is woven into the fabric of spiritual life. When delineating “the whole armor of God,” the Spirit makes particular mention of this matter. The final word concerning this indispensable armor is this: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Eph 6:18). This is the kind of conflict Paul to which Paul is testifying. It is something that is impossible to avoid if we walk in the light.

FOR YOU AND THEM AT LAODICEA

“ . . . for you, and for them at Laodicea . . . ”

When the incarcerated Apostle heard of the things to which the Colossians were being subjected, it caused a great turmoil within. This was not the agitation of unbelief of carnal concern, but of godly travail and interest. It was the expression of a good steward, who is not only faithful to deliver the message, but is profoundly concerned about it bearing fruit in the hearers.

Paul did not stand aloof from the people, but came along by their side to assist them in their pilgrimage to glory. This was not the kind of interest that caused him to become involved in the daily details of the lives of the brethren. Although this kind of interest is often promoted in religious bodies, this is not the manner in which the Lord brings His people along. That approach is more psychological than spiritual, and does not produce a godly walk of life. Those who insist on men and women of God becoming involved in the minutia of the brethren’s life are not doing well.

While believers do have a closeness to one another, it is based upon their love of the truth and their quest for glory. Early in the history of the church, when brethren met “daily,” from “house to house,” and were of “one accord” (Acts 2:46), it was not to discuss the domestic and social issues of life. However critical those areas may be, the context in which spiritual growth and stability occur is that of “the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

This is one of the great functions of the assemblies of the brethren. When saints of God come together in one place, and at one time, there are precious resources ministered to them. Jesus is especially among those who meet in His name. As He Himself said, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mat 18:20). Following His resurrection, Jesus joined His disciples when they were “assembled” (John 20:19,26). Remembering this, the admonition to “forsake not the assembling of yourselves together” (Heb 10:25) takes on a fresh meaning.

Even in this Epistle, Paul enjoins the brethren to read this among themselves, and also “in the church of the Laodiceans” (4:16). Also, he admonished them to “read the letter from Laodicea” – that is, the letter that he wrote to the Laodiceans, and which they were bringing to the Colossians.

Paul's concern for them would become evident as they read his letters. Also, the assembly of the brethren would provide a most excellent context in which the optimum benefit could be realized from his expressions.

AS MANY AS HAVE NOT SEEN MY FACE

“ . . . and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh . . . ” Other versions read, “those who have not personally seen my face,” NASB and “all who have not met me personally.” NIV

There is a special blessing to be realized by seeing the brethren “face to face.” When Paul left the Ephesians to go to other areas, he told them they would see his face “no more.” This brought great sorrow to those brethren. As it is written, “Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more ” (Acts 20:38). When Paul was taken from the Thessalonians, he wrote that he “endeavored the more abundantly to see your face with great desire” (1 Thess 2:17). He even stated that he prayed “night and day exceedingly” that he might “see” their “face” (1 Thess 3:10).

When writing to the saints in Rome, Paul also addressed people who had, for the most part, never seen him. He longed to personally be with them. “For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established” (Rom 1:11).

John wrote to the “elect lady” that he had “many things to write” to her. However, he trusted that he would be able to speak to her “face to face, that our joy may be full” (2 John 1:12). John said much the same thing to Gaius: “But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face” (3 John 1:14).

Longing to see brethren personally is a kingdom quality – something that is a part of the new heart and spirit received in Christ Jesus. Having strong desires for the betterment of the saints is involved in all genuine spiritual labors. Where these two qualities are missing – desiring to see the brethren, and fervently seeking their betterment – serious deficiency exists.

“ 2a . . . that their hearts might be comforted ”

Here is Paul's expression of the great conflict he was enduring for the saints in Colossae and Laodicea. This is what he desired for them, and what he fervently sought to obtain for them. His desires were honed to a fine edge in the crucible of conflict and warfare.

THEIR HEARTS

“ . . . that their hearts . . . ”

The “heart” is the most critical part of our being. As used by the Holy Spirit, “the heart” applies to the central part of man's spiritual constitution. It is to the total man what the human “heart” is to the flesh and blood body. To my knowledge, the Word of God rarely speaks of the heart that is resident in our body. Of the 830 times “heart” is used by the Holy Spirit, very few of them apply to man's physical constitution (exceptions include 2 Sam 18:14). This is a rather elementary observation, but is necessary to affirm in order that a sound perspective of our salvation can be maintained.

The Centrality of the Heart

Notice the way the Spirit speaks of the heart.

- Prior to the flood, the degeneracy of the human race was described as one in which “the thoughts of the heart were only evil continually” (Gen 6:5).
- Following the flood, the fallen race was described as one in which “the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth” (Gen 8:21).
- When Abraham entertained an unspoken thought, it was said to be in his “heart” (Gen 17:17).
- Words that were spoken honestly were said to have been said with “the integrity of my heart” (Gen 20:5).
- When Pharaoh became obstinate and would not yield to God's command, it was described as the hardening of his heart (Ex 7:3; 8:15).
- The ability of people to love God is traced back to the circumcision of their heart, which enabled them to love God with their whole heart (Deut 30:6).
- The determination of David to build a house for God is said to have been in his heart (1 Kgs 8:17).

- God is said to try, or test, the heart (1 Chron 29:17).
- The prophecy of regeneration was described as God giving people a “new heart” (Ezek 36:26).
- When Lydia was enabled to respond favorably to the word of the Lord, it was described as the result of the Lord opening her heart (Acts 16:14).
- The blinding of men to the glory of God is described as “their foolish heart was darkened” (Rom 1:21).
- The perception of God’s great love is said to be the result of the Holy Spirit pouring out God’s love into our hearts (Rom 5:5).
- Obedience that is wholly sincere is described as being “from the heart” (Rom 6:17).
- Believing is done “with the heart” (Rom 10:10).
- Regeneration is described as God shining “in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6).
- The heart is mentioned with the mind, but is always given priority over it (1 Chron 28:9; Matt 22:37; Phil 4:7; Heb 10:16).

The “heart” is at the core of our being. This is the engine of our person, and determines what we really are. When it comes to sin, “out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matt 15:19). When it comes to words, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt 12:34). When it comes to thoughts, “as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov 23:7).

The Nature of Regeneration

When a person is born again, the fundamental person is changed. This is depicted by certain words and phrases portraying the newness found in Christ Jesus.

- “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:26).
- “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh” (Ezek 11:19).

- “And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Col 3:10).
- “. . . according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).
- “I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts” (Heb 8:10).
- “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).
- “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11).
- “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2).
- “But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30).
- “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).

In all of these expressions, the “heart” is pivotal. Regeneration changes man’s essential nature! It is not a mere external procedure, as the various washing and ceremonies found in the First Covenant (Heb 9:10).

Why Say These Things?

It is necessary to draw our attention to these fundamental considerations because of the doctrinal distortion that exists in our time. The present day demands being placed upon preachers and teachers are actually at variance with the entire tenure of the Gospel and its exposition. As is characteristic of an apostasy, men are, “after their own lusts,” heaping “to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Tim 4:3). That is, their preferences are at variance with those of God, and thus they demand preachers and teachers that God has not placed in the church. Because they have departed from God’s agenda, they have variant requirements.

The thrust of Apostolic doctrine is addressed to the “new man” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10), also referred to as the “inner man” (Eph 3:16), or “inward man” (Rom 7:22; 2 Cor 4:16). God has no word for “the flesh,” other than “keep silence” (Habakkuk 2:20). The “flesh,” or unregenerate part of man, is to be “crucified,” not cultured (Gal 5:24). Its desires are to be subordinated, not given the ascendance. The

ONLY life that God accepts is “newness of life” (Rom 6:4). Even the legitimate activities of temporal life are to be lived out in the name of Jesus and for the glory of God (Col 3:17; 1 Cor 10:31). This is elementary, yet has escaped the attention of many professed believers.

One of the great secrets to powerful preaching is addressing it to the proper part of man. For the saints, this means speaking to the part of them that is in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17), seated in heavenly places (Eph 2:6), in fellowship with the Son (1 Cor 1:9), and reconciled to God (Col 1:21).

Now Paul tells the Colossians he is writing with a primary consideration for their heart. He has the “hearts” of the brethren in mind – who they really are in Christ Jesus.

COMFORTED

“ . . . might be comforted” Other versions read “encouraged.” NASB/NIV

The word “comfort” is a key one in the Divine vocabulary. It comes from a word meaning “to console, to encourage and strengthen by consolation, to comfort.” STRONG’S It also means to relieve sorrow or distress, to cheer up. The picture is one of the believer being pressed down, strength depleting, and falling into disheartenment. In the case of the Colossians, their subjection to flawed teaching was creating this condition. This is one of the aspects of false doctrine that makes it so serious. It actually throws people upon the flesh, in which there is “no good thing” (Rom 7:18). It deprives the “new man” of needed nourishment, giving the ascendancy to the flesh. As a result, spiritual weakness begins to make inroads.

False teaching is not the only thing producing a need for comfort or encouragement. Persecution can also have this effect upon the soul. Paul expressed this experience in these words, “we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life” (2 Cor 1:8).

Thus the apostle has had a “great conflict” for the hearts of all those who had not seen his face. He wanted them to be encouraged, strengthened in the inner man, and made equal to the challenges they were facing.

It is essential that the saints be continually encouraged. We cannot fight the good fight of faith while in a discouraged state. Therefore, those who are sources of discouragement do great harm to the body of Christ.

When a person is “comforted” faith and hope sit upon the throne of the heart. The work of God does not seem too great, and the enemies of the people of God do not appear formidable. Confidence and assurance are summoned to the foreground, and boldness enters with joy. Every spiritual advantage is

found when the heart is comforted. Then, the commandments are not grievous, and afflictions experienced because of faith seem brief and light. Heaven comes closer, and God is seen as a “very present help in the time of trouble” (Psa 46:1). Comfort is a most marvelous and needful provision!

“ 2b . . . being knit together in love ”

A Divinely appointed means whereby the saints will be “comforted” is now expounded. While comfort does come from the Lord to individual believers, that is not the particular focus of this text. This is addressed to the whole church, and the benefits that will be accented are those which are realized within the context of brotherly fellowship.

KNIT TOGETHER

“ . . . being knit together . . . ” Other versions read, “having been knit together,” NASB “united in,” NIV “being joined together,” BBE “brought together,” AB and “bind them together.” NJB

The expression “knit together” is most accurate from both the etymological and doctrinal points of view. The word “knit” means, “to drive together, unite in association or affection, to compact.” STRONG’S Other meanings are “ to cause coalesce, to join together, put together.” THAYER

This is togetherness like that of a cloth that is made up of interwoven threads, or blocks that are cemented together so they adhere to one another. It involves both thought and affection, together with preferences and objectives. This is the kind of unity that is depicted by the words “one body in Christ” (Rom 12:5), and “we being many are one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). It is also seen in the very challenging expression, “and every one members one of another” (Rom 12:5).

The practical outworking of this knitting is stated in First Corinthians. “And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1 Cor 12:27).

A Particular Kind of Unity

This is more than institutional camaraderie. It is not the result of adopting the same creed, or even understanding the Word of God the same way. While it is true that faith brings unanimity in the understanding of Scripture, and a oneness in the Object of our faith, that is not the oneness that is intended in this text.

The book of Ephesians, which bears many similarities to Colossians, expresses this thought most precisely. “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:16).

Growing Up Into Christ

In order for the real work of the Lord to be done within the church, every member must grow up into Christ. That is the objective being served by the various gifts Jesus has placed within the church (Eph 4:8-15). If the individual members of the body are immature and dwelling at a practical distance from the Lord, the will of the Lord will not be done among them. A church program, therefore, that does not target the personal growth of every member into Christ Jesus is actually contributing to the exclusion of that church from participation in the working of the Lord.

Compacted

The word “compacted” speaks of the solidity of the body – as a building whose stones are held together by strong mortar or cement. Elsewhere it is called “the unity of the faith” (Eph 4:13), or “perfectly joined together” (1 Cor 1:10). The church is “the body of Christ,” which implies the productive unity of diverse members. Like any other house, a church “divided against itself” will fall (Mark 3:25).

In order for the church to function, the Lord Jesus must work within it. If this does not happen, there is no purpose for a congregation. It is not honored in heaven, and is useless upon the earth. Such an assembly might have a name that it is alive, but it is not, for where Jesus does not work, spiritual life does not exist (Rev 3:1).

The question is, How does Jesus work within the church? What is the manner of the Kingdom? The next clause spells it out for us.

Every Joint Supplies

First, every member must be holding to the Head (Col 2:19); that is, be in vital fellowship with the Lord Jesus. This fellowship is initiated by God Himself when we are brought into Christ. He calls us into this fellowship (1 Cor 1:9), and it is the business of each believer to develop that fellowship by

living by faith, walking in the Spirit, and walking in the light.

As the individual members abide in Christ, He ministers through them to the other members of His body. In this way nourishment is “ministered” by Jesus to His people (Col 2:19). With this in mind, statements concerning “spiritual gifts” can be seen with greater clarity. “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all” (1 Cor 12:5-7).

The Effectual Working

The effective working takes place in “the proper working of each individual part” NASB (Eph 4:16). The “proper working” is according to the “measure” of faith that has been given to each member (Rom 12:3) – a measure that is designed to assist the whole body to reach spiritual maturity.

Increasing the Body

As seemingly sacred as the concept may appear, the purpose of God for the church is not its numerical growth. The Lord is not effected by numbers as men are. When He chose a nation for Himself, for example, it was “the fewest of all people” (Deut 7:7). His people are often referred to as a “remnant” (Isa 11:11; 37:32; Jer 31:7; Joel 2:32; Zeph 3:13; Zech 8:12; Rom 9:27; 11:5; Rev 12:17).

It is true that in the end, a great host will be among the saved – a great multitude which no man can number (Rev 7:9). However, the number itself is not the point, but the transformation and maturity of them before the Lord of hosts, and the heavenly hosts themselves.

The “increase of the body” is nothing less than the preparation of the people for presentation in the sight of God – a presentation that will find them “holy and unblameable and unreprouable in His sight” (Col 1:22). This is the presentation of “every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” No church that is lacking in this respect has experienced true “increase,” regardless of the number on the church roll. What is more, this “increase” cannot take place unless it is ministered by Jesus to the members. Furthermore, that ministration will not take place unless the individuals have grown up into Christ – a work for which all valid ministries are designed.

The Edifying of Itself

The Spirit is even more specific, not leaving this matter to be settled by the surmisings of men. The increase that Jesus accomplishes through the individual members is “the edifying of itself in love.” That is, the church is built up by the effective ministry of each individual member – as the Lord Jesus works through them.

The revealed function of the instructive gifts to the church is this: “for the equipping of the saints

for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” NKJV (Eph 4:12). This is the stated objective for “Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers” (Eph 4:11). The “work of the ministry” does not belong to a “church staff,” but to the individual members of the body. The church is not to hire people to do “the work of the ministry,” but is itself to become a working body of living members.

I know of relatively few assemblies capable of edifying themselves – where individual members, holding to the Head, minister nourishment to the body of Christ. This condition contradicts the revealed purpose of God, and is indicative of a great falling away that is maintaining a form of godliness, yet refuses the power that is extended to the church through the glorified Christ. This is a most serious situation.

IN LOVE

“ . . . in love ” Edification is not accomplished by an empty routine, like the ceremonies under the Levitical order. It comes through individuals in whose hearts the love of God has been “shed abroad” by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). Building up in the most holy faith is aided by those who have received “the love of the truth,” and have a fervent love for the brethren (2 Thess 2:10; 1 Pet 4:8). These are people who have been effectively taught by God to love one another (1 Thess 4:9).

“Love” – love that is the fruit of the Spirit – is the environment in which spiritual life is nurtured and matured. This love has a wide scope, including God (1 Cor 8:3), Christ (Eph 6:24), the truth (2 Thess 2:10), and the brethren (1 John 3:14). This is a love that is “unfeigned” (1 Pet 1:22), “fervent,” and “with a pure heart” (1 Pet 4:8). It is brought to us by the grace of God, and is coupled with faith. As it is written, “Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 6:23). And again, “And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 1:14). Where such an environment exists, members have been growing up into Christ, and Christ Himself is ministering through them to His body, “which is the church” (1:24).

When we speak of the church edifying itself in love, we are not speaking of a law, but of a purpose – a Divine objective. The salvation of God is calculated to produce this kind of result – a church edifying itself in love . The gifts Christ has given to the church are for this purpose.

Holy men and women labor for this intent, and their prayers are that it will be accomplished with power.

“ 2c . . . and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding . . . ”

The nature of spiritual life is seen in these expressions. The particular thing to be noted here is the progression from glory unto glory – moving from one stage of glory to another. This is how the Spirit is conforming us to the image of God’s Son, which is God’s predetermined purpose (Rom 8:29). Notice the progression that has been affirmed thus far.

Paul’s Prayer

Filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding IN ORDER THAT we might walk worthy of the Lord “unto all pleasing” (1:9-10a). Walking worthy of the Lord IN ORDER THAT we might be “fruitful in every good work,” and increase “in the knowledge of God” (1:10b). Increasing in the knowledge of God IN ORDER THAT we might be “strengthened with all might according to His glorious power” (1:11a). Strengthened with all might IN ORDER THAT we might have “all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (1:11b).

Christ’s Glorious Accomplishments

God reconciled us to Himself through Christ IN ORDER THAT we might be presented “holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight” (1:20-22).

Paul’s Preaching

Paul preached, “warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom,” IN ORDER THAT every man might be presented “perfect in Christ” (1:28).

Paul’s Great Conflict

The passage presently being expounded is also an expression of Paul’s intention to provoke a change from glory unto glory. He fervently desires that the hearts of the brethren be “knit together in love” IN ORDER THAT “all riches of the full assurance of understanding” might be experienced. The “full assurance of understanding” is IN ORDER THAT “the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ” might be realized.

This, then, is the mode of the Kingdom. It is how the Lord works, and what salvation is designed to do. Let it be clear that there is no such thing as a salvation that does not do this.

ALL RICHES

“ . . . and unto all riches . . . ” Other versions read, “all the wealth,” NASB “full riches,” NIV “the

full wealth,” BBE and “all the richness.” NAB

Here is the appointed outcome of “comfort” and being “knit together in love:” “all riches of the full assurance of understanding.”

There is a plentitude in salvation that is scarcely known in the American church. Because much of the spread of the Gospel has come from America, there is a certain spiritual poverty that also characterizes Christianity throughout the world. This spiritual deprivation is of such magnitude that an honest and hungry soul is thought to be a mature one. This, however, is not necessarily true. A hunger and thirst for righteousness is not the indication of spiritual maturity, but is rather the means, or path, to that maturity. Desiring “all riches” that are found in Christ Jesus is not the same as possessing them. It is, however, the necessary prelude to receiving them.

The appropriation of the rich provisions of salvation is conditioned upon two things. First, there must be awareness that they exist. Second, there must be a desire for them. The awareness of these provisions comes through exposure to the Gospel of Christ. The desire to appropriate them is stimulated by faith, or the belief of the record God has given of His Son.

Wherever the Gospel is not preached, a poverty of understanding exists concerning the richness of salvation . The consequence of that poverty is that a desire for what Christ has provided cannot be spawned within the heart. Those, therefore, who do not preach the Gospel, opening it to the hearts of the people, have actually, like the lawyers of old, “taken away the key of knowledge” (Lk 11:52). Like the scribes and Pharisees, they have “shut off the kingdom of heaven from men” NASB (Matt 23:13).

“ALL Riches”

The economy of redemption is NOT one in which mere samples are acceptable. If God provides an abundance, it is expected that an abundance is to be desired and appropriated. Nothing about salvation suggests that the benefits of Christ can be realized in small and paltry measures. There is not a syllable of revelation that leaves the impression believers can survive the assaults of the devil and be well pleasing to God while choosing to neglect the richness of redemption.

The tendency to settle for introductory knowledge and remain in spiritual infancy has not come from God. As Paul would say, “This persuasion cometh not of Him that calleth you” (Gal 5:8). This is a way of thinking that has been prompted by the devil himself. It is designed to keep people out of heaven. Furthermore, unless it is overcome, it will do precisely that!

This is the very point the Spirit is developing when He challenges the thinking of lethargic souls. “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and

wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?" NKJV (Heb 2:3-4). What soul is foolish enough to imagine that God would honor a person who despised the greatness of His salvation, or ignored His Son?

Note, our text does not say "some riches," but "ALL riches." Men are expected to obtain ALL that has been provided for them. They may not offer the miserable excuse that they are not able to obtain them, for the salvation of God equips them to receive them, and puts them within their reach. That is why we are given new hearts and spirits, and the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (Ezek 36:26; 2 Tim 1:7).

Our text will now focus upon one aspect of these "all riches." As ordinarily perceived, what is now mentioned is not considered riches – but that is only because "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:14).

FULL ASSURANCE OF UNDERSTANDING

" . . . of the full assurance of understanding . . ." Other versions read, "complete understanding," NIV "assured understanding," NRSV "certain knowledge," BBE "fulness of understanding," DOUAY and "fully assured understanding." NAB

How will those who speak of a "simple Gospel" and making things easy enough for a child to understand respond to a text like this? Our text does not refer to the "full assurance of feeling," or "the full assurance of miraculous experience," but to "the full assurance of understanding!" It does not speak of "some assurance," but of "full assurance."

It is possible to receive the Gospel "in much assurance," as confirmed in the Thessalonian brethren: "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance" (1 Thess 1:5) – which is a lesser measure than "FULL assurance."

Certainty

"Full assurance" speaks of certainty, certitude, confidence, conviction, and sureness. The words "full assurance" come from a single Greek word: **plhrofori,aj** (play-rof-or-ias). It means "full assurance, complete certainty, and full confidence." Contrasting words are suspicion, uncertainty, disbelief, unsureness, and doubt.

There is a level of "spiritual understanding" that dashes doubt to the ground. Believers do not have to live in a state of uncertainty, wondering whether they are accepted by God or not, or whether or not their names are written in heaven. While such poor souls are found in abundance in the professed church, it is not because of any inadequacy in the salvation of God! There is nothing about the Gospel that promotes or condones such unacceptable

attitudes!

A religion that majors on appearance necessarily deprives the people of “full assurance.” The same may be said of a religion of law, procedures, and routines. The more a person is locked into ceremony and tradition the more prominent ignorance becomes. Certainty will not be found in such environments.

Those who are deceived into thinking a mere sampling of spiritual benefits is sufficient will find that surface views make for confusion rather than assurance. Those who linger on the surface of truth, like a spider walking upon water, will inevitably have more questions than answers. They will spend more time “wondering why” than rejoicing in the truth. Of course, there is an approach to religion that attempts to sanctify mystery, considering that a thing that is not known will somehow bring great blessing to the soul. This is, however, a delusion, and there is no truth in it.

FULL ASSURANCE

Assurance is associated with three things. Each of them comes from God. Each is remarkably affective as well. An exposure to these expressions will confirm the nature of assurance, and how precious it is to the tender of heart.

“Full Assurance of Faith ”

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith , having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:22). Here, drawing close to God requires the assurance that is produced by faith. This is being assured of Divine acceptance because we have believed the report (1 John 5:10-11), hearts have been cleansed from a defiled and condemning conscience (Heb 9:14), and we have obeyed from the heart the form of the doctrine, being baptized into Christ (Rom 6:17).

It is not that it is unlawful to attempt to come close to God without the full assurance of faith. Rather, it is that it is hardly possible. A condemning conscience will drive us from God, not bring us to Him. However, when faith “groweth exceedingly” (2 Thess 1:3), it constrains us to draw near to God with great confidence and expectation.

“Full Assurance of Hope”

“And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end” (Heb 6:11). The hope that saves us (Rom 8:24-25) also brings great assurance to us. Hope clarifies the future – our eternal destiny. It move us to proceed through life with joyous expectation and the anticipation of dwelling forever in the courts of the Lord. The stronger the hope, the fuller the assurance.

“Full Assurance of Understanding”

“That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding , to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ” (Col 2:2). Our text speaks of an assurance that proceeds from understanding – “spiritual understanding.” This assurance has to do with our perception of God and Christ, and is most marvelous.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

If we are to be effective in our lives, pleasing the Lord and becoming ready to stand before Him, we must be delivered from a religion of opinion. Personal views of a matter may obtain some value in this world, but they have none in matters pertaining to life and godliness. The best of this world’s wisdom is vain in the arena of redemption. God’s ways are inaccessible to the natural mind.

The “full assurance of understanding” has nothing whatsoever to do with human opinion or mere fleshly persuasion. It is not the result of accepting statistical surveys, the views of scholars, or archeological finds. It does not come by means of logical presentations and impressive philosophies. It cannot be birthed by a theological creed or an impressive religious movement.

The kind of “full assurance” we are speaking of can only come from a spiritual understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That understanding brings a certitude to the believer that enables him to walk confidently in “this present evil world.” It moves the child of God away from a doubting and halting religion in which fear and uncertainty produce a flood of questions for which no answer seems available. It will move the child of God beyond the boundary of unbelief, which is a most blessed and satisfying experience.

“ 2d . . . to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ . . . ”

It will become very apparent that this language has a strange sound to the mind schooled in contemporary Christianity. There is no place for this kind of expression in the mega-church movement. The modern praise and worship trend does not speak like this. Religious education does not generally speak in this manner. The sentence simply does not blend well with the ordinary concepts of God, Christ, salvation, godly living, and the church.

That condition exists because of the off-centeredness of modern Christianity. When expressions employed by the Holy Spirit become strange to the ear, the individual has wandered into forbidden and dangerous territory. It is not possible to understate the seriousness of this circumstance.

One of the aspects of the New Covenant is that of the language employed by its constituents . Through the prophets God promised a time when a pure language would be given to the people. “For then will I turn to the people a pure language , that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one consent” (Zeph 3:9). This language would impact upon both prayer to God and serving Him. That promise is fulfilled in the Gospel of Christ, and its exposition, as made known in “the Apostles doctrine” (Acts 2:42). When Apostolic expressions become confusing to us, or do not blend with the ideas we have concerning the Kingdom of God, we have fallen upon hard times.

Even though the following expression may sound strange at the first, the tender and sensitive heart will eventually be able to make sense of it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

“...to the acknowledgment of . . .” Other versions read, “to the knowledge of,” NKJV “resulting in a true knowledge of,” NASB “in order that they may know,” NIV “and have the knowledge of,” NRSV “the certain knowledge of,” BBE “the full knowledge,” DARBY and “have complete understanding.” NIV

The word “acknowledgment” means, “precise and correct knowledge, absolute” or “recognition.” STRONG’S/THAYER The English meaning of the word “acknowledgment” is “recognition.” The idea is that the thing that is acknowledged is seen to be the truth. Its reality is recognized. This is NOT knowledge as in book learning, memorizing mathematical tables, being familiar with history, and the likes. It is a higher form of knowledge.

The word from which “acknowledgment” is translated is **evpi,gnwsin** (epi-gno-sin), and is used several times in Scripture.

- “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin ” (Rom 3:20).
- “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him ” (Eph 1:17).
- “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God , unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph 4:13).
- “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God ” (Col 1:10).

- “And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Col 3:10).
- “Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth ” (1 Tim 2:4).
- “Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness” (Titus 1:1).
- “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ , they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning” (2 Pet 2:20).

As used in our text, “acknowledgment” means that the truth of Divine utterance has been recognized, or perceived. It is the reaction of the believing heart to Kingdom realities, as declared in the Gospel of Christ.

It is important to note that this knowledge has to do with the Gospel itself, and the message that it proclaims.

THE MYSTERY OF GOD, EVEN THE FATHER AND OF CHRIST

“ . . . the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ . . .” Other versions read, “the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ,” NKJV “of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself,” NASB “the mystery of God, namely, Christ,” NIV “the secret of God, even Christ,” BBE and “God’s secret plan, which is Christ Himself.” NLT

As you can see, the various translations introduce a somewhat confusing picture. Two completely different meanings are introduced. First, the mystery consists of both the Father and Christ: “of the Father, and of Christ.” KJV/NKJV/DOUAY/YLT Secondly, the mystery is represented as Christ Jesus Himself: “that is, Christ Himself,” NASB/NLT or “even Christ” NIV As Adam Clarke points out, there are numerous translations and views of this text. Here are some of them:

- The mystery of God
- The mystery of God in Christ
- The mystery of God who is in Christ
- The mystery of God concerning Christ
- The mystery of God who is Christ
- The mystery of the God Christ
- The mystery of God and Christ
- The mystery of God the Father of Christ
- The mystery of God the Father, and our Lord Christ
- The mystery of God and the Father of Christ
- The mystery of God the Father, in Christ
- The mystery of the God Christ Jesus, Father and Lord.

The very existence of these diverse translations and interpretations confirm the truth of the text. There is a very real “mystery” that is to be known – a “mystery” that involves both the Father and His Anointed One – Christ Jesus.

It Is the Mystery of God

The mystery, or what is hidden, is God Himself. It is “the mystery of God .” The acknowledgment of that mystery comes when God Himself is known, perceived, or recognized. What is revealed in this “mystery” cannot be seen in nature. It is true that the creation bears witness to the God’s “eternal power and Godhead,” or Divinity (Rom 1:20). The heavens do, indeed, “declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night uttereth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard” (Psa 19:1-3). It is a marvelous witness, indeed.

However, in all of creation there is not so much as a syllable, or even the faintest whisper, of the things revealed in the Gospel. Even the things to which nature testifies were not grasped by humanity. The only understanding of God that has ever been appropriated has been the result of God revealing Himself to certain men. No one wrote of God until God spoke to them! Not a single soul had, in any sense, a proper view of God until He spoke to them. Those are the unvarnished facts in the case.

The Role of the Gospel

Now, in “the mystery of the Gospel,” (Eph 6:19), what was formerly hidden is made known. The “mystery of God” is “acknowledged,” or recognized. God is seen as He really is, and His purpose is opened to the understanding. This is all accomplished through His Anointed One, “Christ.” It has pleased God that all of His fulness should dwell in Christ – not some of it, but all of it (Col 1:19). That is, apart from Christ, God cannot be known. Outside of Christ, who God is and what He is doing are hidden, thus remaining a mystery. Only Jesus can make God known. As He Himself declared, “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him ” NKJV (Mat 11:27). Jesus also affirmed that He wills to reveal the Father to all who come to Him (Matt 11:28).

The exclusive message that acquaints us with Christ is the Gospel, and Christ alone can acquaint us with God. Because the fulness of God dwells in Christ, the full knowledge of God is attainable only through Him.

A Clearer Statement of the Case

The meaning of this verse is this: when the saints are comforted, being knit together in love, their understanding will be brought to maturity, thereby producing “full assurance.” This understanding is the immediate result of perceiving the truth of the Gospel, which is the primary

message of the church. It is the Gospel itself that is referred to as “the mystery of God.”

That “mystery” is unfolded in the simplistic yet profound phrase, “both of the Father and of Christ.” That is, the Gospel is a record of the workings of the Father through Christ, and of Christ fulfilling the purpose of the Father. The Father promised the Christ and brought Him forth. He commissioned the Christ, sustained Him, and laid on Him the iniquity of us all. The Father raised Christ, exalted Him, enthroned Him, and gave Him all power in heaven and in earth. In all of that, there is a certain revelation of God – a revelation that cannot be obtained outside of the Gospel of Christ.

Let us hear the testimony of one who acknowledged this “mystery” – one who has perceived and recognized the true God. “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day” (2 Tim 1:12). That is an acknowledgment of “the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.

John also speaks of the acknowledgment of the mystery of God. He approaches it in this way: “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true , and we are in Him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God , and eternal life” (1 John 5:20).

No person will ever see the truth about God until they have comprehended the Christ of the Gospel. Furthermore, no person will comprehend the Christ of the Gospel until they have been comforted, and knit together in love with the other members of the body.

Stated Yet Another Way

It is not possible to know God apart from the salvation that is found in Christ Jesus, and is announced by the Gospel. It is in the rescue of sinners and perfection of saints that God is made known . He cannot be comprehended philosophically, or through human reasoning alone. Only the faith that comes by hearing the Gospel brings an understanding of God to men.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

There is a considerable amount of confusion among professing Christians concerning the Father and Christ. Some feel that Christ is an independent creation, and is not God. Others are persuaded that the Father and Christ, together with the Holy Spirit, are a single personality, functioning in differing roles – like John the carpenter, and John the husband. There is also much discussion concerning whether or not Christ is God.

These varied opinions are an admission that God is not known among those professing them.

They are not able to “acknowledge the mystery of God.” They are confused about both the Father and Christ because their understanding is not shaped by the Gospel. That is precisely why they have formulated their own unique message, choosing to corrupt the Gospel rather than to declare it. Those who do not preach the Gospel enable such men to have more success.

When men acknowledge the mystery, perceiving the Father and Christ, faith leaps forward, taking hold of the truth. As long as the Father and Christ are vague, faith lies weakened upon the ground. But when a perception of the Father and Christ is possessed, as revealed in “the Gospel of your salvation” (Eph 1:13), a bold confidence follows that enables one to confidently fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12) . No person can assume their acceptance with God, or surety of glory, until they possess this marvelous knowledge. Let every child of God know that this precious knowledge can be possessed. It is inherent in the great salvation of God, and is accessible by faith in Jesus Christ..

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

The spotlight of revelation now focuses upon the Person of Christ, who is the Subject of the Gospel, which contains the “mystery of God.”

IN WHOM ARE HID

“In whom . . .” That is, in Christ – the Christ in whom the Father is made known.

Elaborating on “the acknowledgment of the mystery,” the Spirit now reveals the thoroughness of what is possessed in Christ Jesus. Not only is there a plentitude in Christ, that copious supply is the ONLY one of its kind.

What is found in Christ cannot be found anywhere else. He is not one of the needed resources, but the exclusive one. God has nothing of eternal value to give to us that does not come from Christ. There is no other way of becoming “worthy of God,” or obtaining what is required for that condition. It comes exclusively through Jesus Christ. This is involved in Christ’s word to His disciples on the night He was betrayed: “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me” (John 14:6). He who has Jesus is on the way to God, has the truth of God, and is

alive to God. The one who does not have Christ is wandering, has no knowledge of the truth, and is dead in trespasses and sins.

Since the scholars and psychiatrists have captured the church, the need for Jesus has been reduced in the minds of the people. A plethora of things are offered by the modern church that have little to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. Some actually place a greater emphasis upon pedantic forms of knowledge than on Jesus. For them, a library has become a replacement for the Son of God. They spend more time there than with Christ, and have more confidence in the writings of men than the words of Christ Jesus. It is not that it is sinful to read after godly men, or to acquire lawful knowledge of various things. However, the acquisition of such knowledge must be subsidiary.

For others, human assessments of the makeup and needs of men shape their ministry, and are the means of defining what they do in the name of the Lord. Men like Sigmund Freud, Spencer, and the likes, have actually shaped their understanding of the human personality. It ought to be evident that an appropriate knowledge of humanity cannot be gained from those who themselves come short of the glory of God.

The heart must not be drawn away from Christ in order to acquire knowledge. Whatever moves us away from Christ moves us toward damnation. That may appear brutally frank, but it is precisely correct, and must be seen as such. When it comes to the key to understanding, it is “HID” in Christ: i.e., “in whom, are hid.” That is, it can only be found in a living relationship with Christ. God has hidden these things in Christ, so that they cannot be found apart from intimacy with Him. It is thus ONLY in the fellowship of God’s Son (1 Cor 1:9) that the knowledge of God can be acquired – and men cannot be saved without that knowledge.

When the text says “IN whom,” it means that those who obtain these resources must themselves be in Christ. No one who is outside of Christ can obtain the things resident in Him. There is no human science or power that can grant one who is outside of Christ access to things that are hidden in Him. Something that is “hid in Christ” cannot be found in any measure anywhere else.

ALL THE TREASURES

“ . . . are hid all the treasures . . . ”

“Treasures” speak of wealth – something that enhances one’s worth. The word “treasures” does not refer to the wealth itself, but to where it is stored – like a treasure house, or the United States Treasury. The word “treasures” has a primary meaning of “treasury, treasure box or chest, storeroom, storehouse.” FRIBERG “the place in which goods and precious things are collected and laid up a. casket, coffer, or other receptacle, in which valuables are kept.” THAYER It has a secondary meaning of the precious goods themselves: “the things laid up in a treasury, collected treasures.” STRONG’S

Here the idea is that all of the required resources have been gathered together and deposited in Christ. They are “hidden” there, so that the very idea of them cannot exist with the knowledge of, and familiarity with, Jesus Christ. The person outside of Christ, or in whom Christ does not dwell, has no idea these treasures even exist. They are hidden like a treasure in a field – unseen and unknown (Matt 13:44).

The further people are from Christ, the more unaware they become of “all the treasures.” When Jesus recedes into the background of thought, the contemplation of “all the treasures” ceases as well. At precisely that point, the cheap baubles of this present evil world begin to appear valuable, the praise of men is coveted, and cursed things are thought to bring personal advantage.

If you have ever marveled that a person who was once in Christ could suddenly be wafted into iniquity, bartering their soul for the cursed thing, here is the answer. They drifted from Jesus Christ. He became vague to them, and thus “all the treasures” that are hidden in Him were no longer remembered or desired. This may not be what a counselor would tell such souls, but that is really what happened. It is not possible for Christ to be our central consideration and sin to have a primary appeal to us at the same time. It simply cannot happen. In order for “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life” to dominate our thoughts, Christ must cease to be prevalent in them.

If it is true that “all the treasures” are “hid” in Christ, then they are perceived only to the extent that Christ is loved and known. When a person can truthfully say, “I am crucified with Christ: 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, and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20), the repository of Divine goodness is fully accessible and will be fervently sought.

Under the Law

During the Old Covenant, treasures were associated with the house of God. When Israel sacked Jericho, they were reminded of this. Joshua commanded them, “And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD ” (Josh 6:19). When they burned the city with fire, “the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD ” (Josh 6:24).

In Solomon’s day, when he built the Temple, he was careful to consider the treasures associated with it. “So was ended all the work that king Solomon made for the house of the LORD. And Solomon brought in the things which David his father had dedicated; even the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, did he put among the treasures of the house of the LORD ” (1 Kgs 7:51).

When the Temple service was restored under Nehemiah, consideration was given to these treasures. “And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house” (Neh 10:38).

In a sense, all of these treasures were hidden in God’s house. They were not accessible to those who were not in the house of the Lord. However, they were provided for the Levites, who served the Lord in His house (Neh 12:44).

The Parallel

The situation under the Law perfectly parallels our place in Christ Jesus. The treasures of reference are not only hidden in Christ, they are intended for the ones who are themselves in Christ. No one else is aware of them, or has access to them.

WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE

“ . . . of wisdom and knowledge.”

Definitively, “wisdom” refers to “the ability to use knowledge for correct behavior insight, understanding, and skill.” FRIBERG

“Knowledge” is “the possession of information; what is known.” As used here, it is “the result of Divine enlightenment,” when certain realities are made known to men. FRIBERG

Technically speaking, “knowledge” comes before wisdom, for wisdom involves the proper use or employment of knowledge. However, here the two are listed in order of their priority, with “wisdom” being first, for “wisdom is the principle thing” (Prov 4:7).

For some, this is a peculiar treasure, indeed: “wisdom and knowledge.” The very idea of “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” militates against ignorance, which has no place in the kingdom of God. It puts the lie to any view of religion that allows professing believers to remain bereft of spiritual understanding. Those who are content to remain fundamentally ignorant of what is found in Christ have neither honest nor good hearts.

The “wisdom and knowledge” of reference pertain to “life and godliness.”

They have to do with the things “God has prepared for them that love Him” (1 Cor 2:9). The clear meaning is that if we know Christ, we are in no way deficient in either wisdom or knowledge. If, on the other hand, we do not know Christ, we are paupers in both areas.

When our text says that wisdom and knowledge are “hid” in Christ, it means that the person of Christ Himself obscures them. That is to say, to the world, “Christ and Him crucified” does not appear to be a place where wisdom and knowledge can be found. Such a Savior is repulsive to the world, for He does not appear to be either wise or knowledgeable. As it is written, “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness ; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24).

In the world, the life of a leader is what contributes to his greatness and effectiveness. However, with Christ, it is His death that is heralded as His greatest triumph among men. It is in His death that He destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14), plundered principalities and powers (Col 2:15), reconciled the world (Rom 5:10), and made peace (Col 1:20). All of this makes no sense at all to the carnal mind. Carnal men choose to think of Jesus, at the very best, as a noble man. Thus they “stumble” over Him, and are deprived of all wisdom and knowledge.

The knowledge that is hidden in Christ is not primarily intellectual – although it challenges the intellect. It deals with certain facts, but they are of a different order. Some of the things those in Christ “know” accent this fact.

- “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” (Rom 8:22)
- “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.” (Rom 8:28)
- “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (2 Cor 5:1)
- “Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.” (1 John 2:18)
- “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.” (1 John 3:2)
- “ We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.” (1 John 3:14)
- “And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us.” (1 John 3:24)
- “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.” (1 John 5:20)

To those outside of Christ, such knowledge has no relevance whatsoever. Further, if out of

human curiosity, such poor souls should attempt to acquire such knowledge, they would find such a thing impossible. This knowledge is “hid” in Christ, and only those who are in Him can acquire it. Even then, the reality, preference, and effectiveness of this knowledge is directly proportionate to one’s desire for Christ Himself. If the driving compulsion is not to “know Him,” all of these things fade from view. Unless the individual arrives at a point where the all consuming desire of the heart is to be “found in Him,” condemnation is inevitable (Phil 3:7-13).

The “wisdom” of reference is also most unique, having no earthly parallel. A few statements concerning it will confirm its essentiality.

- “I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.” (Rom 16:19)
- “But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God .” (1 Cor 1:24)
- “But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom , and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” (1 Cor 1:30)
- “Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom , which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (1 Cor 2:7)
- “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.” (1 Cor 3:10)
- “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.” (Eph 1:17)
- “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise .” (Eph 5:15)
- “Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom ; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” (Col 1:28).
- “If any of you lack wisdom , let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” (James 1:5)

It is not possible to appropriate such wisdom apart from Jesus Christ. It is “all” hidden in Him. It is made available to us only to the degree that we abide in Him. What is more, if we are not in fellowship with Him, we are not even aware of such wonderful wisdom.

If Christ is not dwelling within us, and we are not abiding in Him, none of the benefits that He brings are accessible to us. Separation from Christ includes separation from all the benefit resident in Him. If He does not abide in us, all of the benefits realized in Him are beyond our reach. As simplistic as that may seem, there are multitudes of professing Christians who are attempting to obtain “wisdom and knowledge” apart from fellowship with Him – living in practical aloofness from Him. Such efforts are totally vain.

The thrust of our religion must be to “win Christ,” and be “found in Him” (Phil 3:8-9). God has nothing to give us that is not found in Christ – nothing at all. Everything God provides for us comes with Christ, and without Him nothing comes. He is the Divinely appointed means fore appropriating all knowledge and all wisdom. Praise be to God!

The strength of this text confirms the danger of being diverted from the Lord Jesus Christ. This diversion does not always occur by reverting to the baser things of this world. Sometimes it happens – in fact the more frequently – by turning to powerless religion. This is what happened to the Galatians, and it is what was threatening the Colossians.

Note with what somber tones the Apostle addresses those who had relegated Jesus to a secondary position.

- “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?” (Gal 3:1)
- “Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing ” (Gal 5:2)
- “ Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace .” (Gal 5:4)
- “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love .” (Rev 2:4)

If God has made everything contingent upon His only begotten Son, it is the epitome of ignorance to disregard Him. If every spiritual resource is hidden in Him, what can be said of those who do not seek Him and abide in Him? What hope is there for any person or group of persons who choose to follow a course that minimizes Jesus, or views the Gospel as a secondary matter? If Christ “in you” is “the hope of glory,” what possible reason is there for neglecting Him?

God has exalted Christ in order that “He might have the preeminence” (Col 1:18). It is our business to fall in line with that Divinely established agenda.

WATCH OUT FOR MEN

Lesson # 11

Salvation is being accomplished in the arena of conflict and opposition. Although we have been raised up and made to sit together with Christ in heavenly places (Eph 2:6), there are certain dangers that we face. The dangers are as real as our positioning in the heavenly realms. Failing to see this will disarm the human spirit, creating a “place” in which Satan will be able to work (Eph 4:27).

Because of man’s natural tendency to gloss the Word of God, thus regarding salvation as an instant and complete possession, all manner of erroneous doctrines have filtered into the church. These doctrines have a philosophical tone to them, moving men to assume more than the doctrines actually state. They rely upon human reasoning rather than Divine affirmation. Some examples will serve to illustrate this difference.

SOME FALSE DOCTRINES

- The grace of God is irresistible. This doctrine correctly sees the grace of God as lifting us from the quagmire of sin, independently of human merit. However, it assumes that the grace of God brings salvation to an unwilling heart as well as a defiled one.
- Once you are in grace, you will always be in grace. Here the grace of God is perceived as moving God to ignore sin as well as make provision for its remission. It misrepresents God by suggesting He is tolerant of sin in His people, even though he will not abide it in sinners, and the devil himself.

- Eternal life can never be lost. In this doctrine, “eternal life” is viewed as an irreversible condition rather than the state of knowing God, as Jesus presented it (John 17:3). Men are viewed as presently possessing eternal life in its fulness – even though dwelling in a mortal body.
- Once you are saved, you are always saved. This doctrine represents salvation as a state into which one is eternally locked. It completely ignores the presence of a mortal bodies and “the flesh.” It does not take into account the requirement to crucify the flesh and resist the devil. Its chief error is its failure to consider that salvation is “by faith,” and that faith must be “kept.” It fails to take Israel’s deliverance from Egypt into account, even though the Spirit makes a point of paralleling it with salvation.
- Once you become a Son you can never lose that status. Here is a most subtle doctrine. It parallels being a child of God with a father having children in this world. The reasoning is that no matter what the children do, it does not really effect their status as children. The flaw in the reasoning is that all sons are not accepted as rightful heirs – such as Cain, Ishmael, and Esau. It also does not account for the fallen angels (and angels are called “sons” – Job 38:7).
- Satan is powerless. This doctrine presents Satan as totally powerless and helpless, having been utterly defeated by Jesus. Men, therefore, have nothing to fear from him, and may shout him down at will. The doctrine overlooks the fact that men are warned about his ferocity, and that he has targeted the people of God (Rev 12:12). Sobriety and vigilance are actually taught as absolute requirements (1 Pet 5:8-9), and fear is now expressed about infantile believers being again snared by the devil (2 Cor 11:3; 1 Thess 3:5)
- God loves you, no matter what you do. This heresy is represents God as having “unconditional love.” The idea reasons that since God loved us when we were “enemies,” His love is unaffected by human conduct. The doctrine overlooks the fact that God loved us “in Christ,” and that the experience of that love is directly related to our personal response to Jesus. The Savior took great care to make this clear (John 14:21,23; 16:27).
- God is with you, wherever you are. In this teaching, men are left with the impression that God is unaffected by earthly environments. Believers may thus wander into wicked realms, or conduct themselves in an ungodly manner, still receiving Divine protection and care. The doctrine conveniently overlooks Cain, the flood, Esau, king Saul, and Israel. It ignores Samson, Judas, and a host of others. It forgets there was a place where Jesus “could do no mighty work” (Mk 6:5). The promise of God’s presence presumes the individual is living by faith.

OTHER PERSPECTIVES

There is also an perspective of Christianity that perceives the approach to God to be primarily one of routine and exact procedure. There is little heart in this approach, with hardly any emphasis on faith, hope, and love. A minimal list of the imagined essentials is presented with the promise that adherence to the perceived rules may very well qualify one to dwell forever with the Lord. In this approach, time is primary, and eternity is vague. There is very little talk about glory, and eternal things are rarely mentioned.

Others, while vigorously opposing such doctrines, live as though they were true. Their lives are not characterized by strong faith, a dominating hope, and fervent love – yet they see themselves as being accepted by God. They do not see the world as dangerous, and thus flirt with it, exposing themselves to all manner of worldly enticements. Others see no real need for being with the saints of God, ingesting the Word of God, or putting on the whole armor of God. They imagine there is safety in mere human goodness, and thus give very little of themselves to the Lord.

Particularly in America, professing Christians have learned to live with these attitudes, treating them as though they were relatively harmless. However, they are not harmless, for they tend to erode a consciousness of God. They also minimize faith, and encourage spiritual lethargy. The general condition of the American church confirms this.

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

Our text has been written with the doctrines of men in mind – particularly the impact they can have upon the child of God. They are not incidental, nor are they harmless.

There is an unavoidable clash between the wisdom of this world and the wisdom of God. This is affirmed with unusual pungency by the Spirit.

- “For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent . Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world ? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God , it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor 1:19-21).
- “Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought : But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew : for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him” (1 Cor 2:6-9).
- “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God . For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain ” (1 Cor 3:20).

When the wisdom of this world, or the thoughts of “the natural man” (1 Cor 2:14) are brought into the realm of “pure religion,” they have an incalculably damaging effect upon the soul. Thus we read, “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called : Which some professing have erred concerning the faith . Grace be with thee. Amen” (1 Tim 6:21). And again, “But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes ” (2 Tim 2:23). And again, “But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness . And their word will eat as doth a canker : of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some ” (2 Tim 2:18).

This is why Paul was careful not to couch the Gospel in words of man’s wisdom. That tactic, however valued it may appear, voids the power of the cross, making it ineffective. As it is written, “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect ” (1 Cor 1:17).

In our day, a strange and powerless vocabulary is rapidly spreading in the Christian community. Its key words are taken from psychological textbooks, Bible interpreters, lexicons, and the likes. These words and expressions include the following: “addiction,” “depression,” “anxiety,” “hereditary,” “anger management,” “grieving process,” “fundamentalist,” “eternal security,” “cheap grace,” “New Testament Christianity,” “the plan of salvation,” “the great commission,” “missions,” “praise and worship,” “full time service,” “the original language,” etc.

Each one of these represents a body of thought. Frequently the Word of God is read with such terms in mind – terms that have been created and defined by men. In many circles, questioning these expressions is tantamount to heresy and a denial of the Word of God. People are evaluated, and often judged, upon the basis of such language.

Keep in mind what God has said about the wisdom of this world – regardless of the form it takes, or the one who espouses it. He has spoken with unusual candor on these matters. This has particular regard to the employment of this wisdom in things pertaining to life and godliness.

- God will destroy such wisdom, bringing it to nothing (1 Cor 1:19).
- God has made it foolish (1 Cor 1:20).
- It has no utility when it comes to knowing God (1 Cor 1:21).
- Paul did not employ it in the preaching of the Gospel (1 Cor 1:17).
- It cannot unveil a single thing God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor 2:9).
- It is foolishness with God (1 Cor 3:19).
- It is vain (1 Cor 3:20).

The articulation of such wisdom has caused some to err concerning the faith (1 Tim 6:21). The words emitting from the shallow well of man's wisdom can eat at the soul like cancer, and even overthrow one's faith (2 Tim 2:18). I hardly see how anything could be more serious, or introduce such jeopardy. Yet, the people of God have grappled with such things from the very beginning.

The warning that follows is particularly important in a day when worldly wisdom is being exalted, and academia has been enthroned in the pulpit. This is a day when many preachers have little more to recommend them than their educational credentials. Whatever may be said of formal education, it must be made subordinate to faith. Also, it is secondary to the enabling gifts that are distributed to the church through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:4-7). The Lord not only places every member in the body of Christ where it has pleased Him (1 Cor 12:28), each are endowed with spiritual aptitudes that are designed to edify the other members of the body. Divine placement and enablement are exclusive qualifications that bring true benefit to the body of Christ.

This is not to be construed as a repudiation of education and the appropriation of valid knowledge. However, when it comes to the building up of the saints, the increase of faith, and the enhancement of hope, the world is utterly impotent. These are not, and cannot be, accomplished through the world and its vain wisdom. Truth is too voluminous and too weighty to be held in the rotting paper bag of worldly wisdom – a “bag filled with holes.”

“ 2: 4 And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.”

THIS I SAY

“ . . . And this I say . . . ” Other versions read, “I say this in order that,” NASB “I tell you this so that,” NIV “I am saying this so that,” NRSV and “I say this to make sure.” NJB

Paul has expressed his profound desire for the Colossians: “For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea” (2:1). You might imagine some of the Colossians saying, “Why is Paul so concerned about us? We have faith in Jesus, and love all of the saints. What need is there to treat us as though we were standing on the precipice of ruin? He must be overstating the case. Surely we can be in no real danger. We have been doing real well, and now Paul speaks as though we were new Christians?” It is not unusual to hear people reason in this manner when warnings and admonitions are issued.

Paul does not write the Colossians because they are in a backward stance, or are about to overthrow the faith. Rather, there are dangerous and eroding influences at work among them. His words are not the only ones they will hear. It is a serious error in judgment when a preacher or teacher addresses the people as though he is the only one who will ever have access to their minds.

It is possible for one to become “dull of hearing” because of the solemnity of the message being delivered. Perhaps a humorous anecdote will make the word more palatable – or a reference to some everyday and common experiences. I cannot begin to tell you how many people have said to me, “Lighten up, Given. Don’t be so serious!” Rest assured, no such words will be spoken on the day of judgment, when one’s eternal destiny is about to be announced.

It is in order for those who speak for God to deliver their message in a way that leaves the listeners thinking it is important. There is enough entertainment and distraction in the world, without having it pour out of the pulpit. Whatever may be said in favor of entertainment and humor, they do tend to promote spiritual sleep and a forgetfulness of the Word of the Lord.

Those who are in Christ ought to be as persuaded of the vanity of worldly wisdom, as they are of the indispensability and purity of godly wisdom. As soon as a person comes in the name of the Lord, holding worldly credentials and success before us, we are to question their message. Things pertaining to life and godliness are never wrapped in the wisdom of this world. It is not the manner of God to deliver His truth to us in the shabby container of what He has said is “foolishness.” However, all men do not have this knowledge, and therefore Paul elaborates on WHY he has spoken in such somber tones and with great and godly concern.

ANY MAN

“ . . . lest any man should . . . ” Other versions read, “lest anyone should,” NKJV “that no one may,” NASB “lest any man should,” GENEVA and “that no one may be able to.” NLT

Jesus said, “Beware of men” (Matt 10:17), “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matt 16:6), and “Beware of the scribes” Mk 12:38). Speaking of religious men, particularly some of the aggressive Jewish teachers, Paul warned, “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision” (Phil 3:2). Peter said, “Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness” (2 Pet 3:17). These words were not spoken to children, but to the whole body of Christ. These are solemn notes of warning that spiritual contamination can come from our peers.

Warnings Alert the Soul

Warnings alert the soul to imminent dangers. No inspired man ever left his listeners disarmed, suggesting there were no genuine dangers in this world. They never used expressions like “unconditional love,” “eternal security,” “God loves you no matter what you do,” or “once saved always saved.” While there may be an element of truth in some of these phrases, it is overshadowed by the unfavorable impression they leave upon the soul. They contribute to lethargy, and tend to make the individual put down his guard in “this present evil world.”

BEGUILE YOU

“ . . . beguile you . . . ” Other versions read, “deceive you,” NKJV “delude you,” NASB and “be turned away.” BBE

The word “beguiled” means “to reckon wrong, to cheat one by false reckoning, to deceive by false reasoning.” THAYER It is leading a person to think wrongly, reason incorrectly, and be brought to improper conclusions. A person who has been “beguiled” has been led to reason amiss about spiritually critical matters.

This is what the devil did to Eve, leading her into erroneous thinking. Even though God had clearly stated the consequences of eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, yet Satan beguiled Eve about the matter. Once deceived she reasoned, “ that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise” (Gen 3:6). Humanity is still living with the consequences of that deception.

Can We Still Be Beguiled?

Perhaps there are those who reason that such delusion is not possible to those who are in Christ Jesus. After all, we have received remarkable benefits. Of course, those who think in such a manner forget that Eve was innocent when she was deceived. She had never sinned before she was beguiled. She was morally perfect before she was led to think incorrectly. Beside this, Paul reasoned with the Corinthians: “But I fear , lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor 11:3).

In this text we see the necessity of being “grounded and settled” (1:23). You may recall this was declared to be necessary if we are to be presented “holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight” (1:22). Yet, the Spirit does not allow us the luxury of relying upon our spiritual maturity, of itself, to keep us from being beguiled. In this world, we never reach a point where we can disengage from the good fight of faith (1 Tim 6:12) , remove the whole armor of God (Eph 6:10-18) , and cease to press toward the mark (Phil 1:14-15) . While we are in the body, there is no state where we can cease being vigilant (1 Pet 5:8), stop resisting the devil (James 4:7), or discontinue trying the spirits to see whether they are of God (1 John 4:1).

Faith Must Be Active to Be Effective

Faith must be in an active stance, dominating our hearts. Faith will not function while placed into the background. It cannot survive if it is not the motivating principle in our lives. This is because the child of God is constantly subjected to the aggressive wiles of the devil. Temptations are hurled at believers, while principalities and powers strive to wrestle them down from the heavenly places into which they have been raised (Eph 2:6).

Not In Our Own Strength

We do not confront these adversarial powers in our own strength – however, we DO confront them. When we throw ourselves into the good fight of faith, the Lord strengthens us for the battle – but only so. The strength of the Lord is not dispatched to idle Christians who are quite willing to limp through life while remaining as close to the earth as they conceive is possible.

Not only is it imperative the saints try the spirits and beware of men, they cannot rely on worldly wisdom and natural resources to protect them. The devices of the devil cannot be thrown down by worldly-wise arguments, statistical surveys, or institutional identity. There is a certain vanity in the wisdom of this world. It cannot keep us from being deceived, or beguiled. Thus Paul declares that he had spoken with the greatest sobriety “lest any man beguile you.”

ENTICING WORDS

“ . . . with enticing words.” Other versions read, “with persuasive words,” NKJV “with persuasive argument,” NASB “fine-sounding arguments,” NIV “plausible arguments,” NRSV and “loftiness of words.” DOUAY

We must ever be mindful that the power is in the truth itself, not in man’s representation of it, or the method in which it is made known. That being the case, one might think that persuasive words and convincing arguments are suitable in matters pertaining to life and godliness. This is true IF the words are not “words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” (1 Cor 2:13). But that is not the point of “enticing words.”

“Enticing words” are words and arguments that move men to adopt views that contradict the revelation of God. It may be an eloquent and supposedly logical argument that states “the resurrection is past already” (2 Tim 2:18). The speaker may weave together a tapestry of Scripture that meets with all the criteria of men in the flesh. Yet, those who

embrace such words will find it results in the overthrow of their faith (2 Tim 2:18).

Let it be clear, if the Word of God does not asseverate what a person is affirming – in the words that person is using – no believer is under obligation to receive them as truth. In fact, the point being declared may be nothing more than a heresy that will cause damnation (2 Pet 2:1). There are countless doctrines and preachments that are based upon human interpretation, institutional creeds, religious slogans, and human hypotheses. They become aphorisms by which men are judged and denominations are maintained.

While men have become accustomed to such approaches, they are wholly unacceptable. No man, regardless of qualification, scholarship, or position, can demand the embrace of a statement that God Himself has not made. When elaborate arguments are presented to buttress such statements, there is an attempt at beguilement, whether intentional or not. No inspired person ever anchored teaching to the original language, best manuscripts, oratorical skills, or philosophical reasoning – and neither should we! Those who resort to such methods to establish their message are tempering their syllogistic house with untempered mortar. We are to beware of such men, lest they beguile us.

AT their very best, “enticing words” are articulated sophistry. They are spoken as though they were weighty and laden with blessing. But they are only wisps of darkening smoke that tend to blind the eyes of the understanding. They

are too small to carry truth, and too fleeting to be of lasting benefit. They are nothing more than clanging symbols that are offensive to sensitive ears.

“ 5a For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit . . . ”

Paul is not writing as an uninterested religious philosopher, dwelling in his own comfortable habitation. He is not sending a formal letter to them as a religious professional who offers advice and counseling for a fee. Colossae is not hearing from a self-acclaimed expert who is filled with statistics, historical data, and a knowledge of the trends and demands of the times. The truth of the matter is that God has placed no such offices in the church. There are no spiritual gifts deposited with those who have no personal interest in the saints of the most high God. Jesus has given no gifts in the church (Eph 4:8) that are impersonal and withdrawn from the household of faith. Jesus Himself has a heart for His people, and gives them no ministers who lack that interest.

Notwithstanding this circumstance, the modern church is filled with religious professionals who have no real heart for the people, and do not seek their edification – an objective that characterizes every gift and ministry placed within the church (Eph 4:11-16). Paul now expresses the spirit of this reality to the Colossian brethren.

ABSENT IN THE FLESH

“For though I be absent in the flesh . . . ” Other versions read, “absent in body,” NASB “not present in the flesh,” BBE and “far away from you.” NLT

The phrase “absent in the flesh” is a refreshing reference to his physical circumstance. Actually, Paul was in prison at the time. This is confirmed by his reference to being “my sufferings for you” (1:24) , and “in bonds” (4:3,18) . Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon, written about this time, also refer to Paul’s imprisonment: “the prison of Jesus Christ” [Eph 3:1], “my tribulations” [Eph 3:13], “the prisoner of the Lord” [Eph 4:1], “ambassador in bonds” [Eph 6:20], “my bonds” [Phil 1:13,14,16; Philemon 1:10], “a prisoner of Jesus Christ” [Phile 1:9], and “the bonds of the Gospel” [Philemon 1:13]).

Most men would have written a biography of the suffering and inconvenience of the prison. Paul wrote out of a profound concern for the people of God, choosing to “prefer” them above himself (Rom 12:10).

Herein the nature of the kingdom of God is made known. In Christ men obtain a new nature that moves them to consider others “better than themselves” (Phil 2:3). This is a trait that is found in the teacher and the taught, the Apostle and the hearer, the leader and the follower. It first dwelt in Jesus, who Himself is “meek and lowly of heart” (Matt 11:29). Because the disciple is not above his master (Matt 10:24), this characteristic is found in those who live in

fellowship with the Son (1 Cor 1:9).

A Perspective of Scripture

There is a spirit in Scriptures that can be seen only if they are approached properly. This spirit is the channel through which life comes to those exposed to the Word of God (Lk 4:4). It is what produces edification, joy, and profitability. That spirit is nothing less than “the mind of Christ” that is projected in the words of the Apostle. That “mind” has a genuine interest in those for whom Jesus died, and compels Him to seek their welfare.

This spirit can be missed if men approach the Word of God with inferior motives. If, for example the Scriptures are approached as a cold and lifeless manual of conduct, a pattern for organization, a means of exposing error, or a historical document, this spirit will be missed. Such approaches take the heart out of Scripture, and are wholly lacking of power. Some of us know this by firsthand experience.

If I can perceive the heart of Scripture, both Divine demands and promises will more readily be seen. Understanding will be more fruitful, obedience more joyful, and hope more dominant.

By saying “absent in the flesh,” Paul has diminished his own circumstances and accented his love for the brethren, and interest in their spiritual welfare and advancement. He has taken the spotlight from himself, and thrown it upon matters requiring godly attention.

WITH YOU IN THE SPIRIT

“ . . . yet am I with you in the spirit . . . ”

There is a fellowship in Christ Jesus that transcends both time and space. This is declared in the twelfth chapter of Hebrews. “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God , the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels , To the general assembly and church of the firstborn , which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all , and to the spirits of just men made perfect , and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant , and to the blood of sprinkling , that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb 12:22-24).

These associations are very real, and may be perceived only by faith. It is as men walk in the Spirit and live by faith that they become aware of these realities, and benefit from them. The awareness of them cannot be realized in the flesh – as in seeing apparitions or having sensational feelings. Not only can flesh and blood NOT inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50), it can in no way realize or experience its benefits. “Spiritual blessings” cannot be experienced in the flesh, or by fleshly means. Newness of life, for example, cannot come to men through scholarship, language expertise, historical knowledge, or any other facet of the wisdom of men. Spiritual realities are not confirmed in the body – the part of us that remains under the curse, and cannot enter into the kingdom of God. This, as you might suppose, is highly disruptive of much religion that comes in the name of Christ.

What Paul Means

When Paul says he was “with” the Colossians “in the spirit,” he is referring to his own spirit. It is another way of saying his love and affection for the Colossians could not be held within a prison. It moved across the boundaries of space in a very real fellowship. It is much like saying his heart was with the Colossians, joined to them through faith and love.

Paul expressed this same thought to the Corinthians when addressing the issue of a fornicator among them. “For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed” (1 Cor 5:3). In both cases (the Corinthians and the Colossians), Paul had been moved by a faithful report. With the Corinthians, Paul heard the report that there was fornication among them (1 Cor 5:1). With the Colossians, Epaphras had given a faithful report of their “love in the Spirit” (1:8). In both cases, Paul was so knit with the people that he knew precisely what needed to be done, even though he was not “on site,” so to speak. He did not have to come and investigate the circumstances in order to give a proper appraisal.

Here was a fellowship that was enhanced by hearing what was occurring among the brethren. The common bond they had in Christ, the versatility of the renewed spirit, and the work of the Holy Spirit enabled Paul to be touched by the report just as though he had personally been with the Colossians. He was with them “in the spirit” – in his inner man, where real fellowship is experienced. The fellowship was real and so was the perception found in it.

“ 5b . . . joying and beholding your order . . . ”

The Apostle now reveals the impact the report of the Colossian’s faith and love has had upon him. That effect was just the same as if he had personally been with them. This is a most remarkable circumstance, and decidedly enlarges the scope of our experience in Christ Jesus. If we can be favorably impressed and spiritually enlarged and strengthened from the reports of faithful brethren, there are countless marvelous advantages we have been given in being “one” with the body of Christ!

JOYING

“ . . . joying . . . ” Other versions read, “rejoicing,” NKJV “delight,” NIV and “I am very happy.” NLT

This is the only place in the KJV where the word “joying” is found. The specific Greek word from which “joying” is translated (**cairwn**) is only used four times in the New Covenant Scriptures (Lk 15:5; 19:6; Acts 8:39; Col 2:5).

- (Luke 15:5) “And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing .”
- (Luke 19:6) “And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully .”
- (Acts 8:39) “And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing .”
- (Col 2:5) “For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.”

The idea in all of these instances is that joy was marvelously joined to the circumstances with which it was associated. The circumstance itself caused joy, and the joy brought the recollection of the circumstance. Thus the shepherd who found the lost sheep and brought it home on his shoulder was rejoicing in the circumstance itself (Lk 15:5). Zacchaeus was rejoicing while receiving Jesus into his house (Lk 19:6). The Ethiopian eunuch was made glad by his baptism into Christ, and in the recollection of it went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:39).

This is not the kind of joy the world associates with humor – which joy rapidly fades, and has no redeeming value. It is an insightful joy that recognizes the good that is perceived, bringing refreshment to the individual. It is not the kind of joy the disciples had when they first saw the risen Jesus. It is written of that joy, “And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat?” (Luke 24:41). Here, something has been perceived as the work of God among His people. It is a condition in which the Lord Himself takes great delight, and thus insight into that condition brings an invigorating joy to those who discern it.

An Observation

When men choose to live on the surface of spiritual life (if, indeed, such a thing is even possible), this kind of joy is forfeited. Real insight, or “wisdom and spiritual understanding,” cannot be experienced on the periphery of the kingdom, or in the outer court of spiritual life. This kind of joy is associated Divine fellowship – where the individual is given to comprehend with “the mind of Christ.” It is an aspect of the “fellowship” with Christ, into which we have been called (1 Cor 1:9).

BEHOLDING

“ . . . and beholding . . . ” The “eyes of” our “understanding” (Eph 1:18) can perceive things that are not accessible to the naked eye, or any other fleshly sense. In this case, Paul saw something in the report Epaphras had given of the Colossians – something that brought insightful and refreshing joy to his heart.

This kind of beholding is possible because spiritual life has certain characteristics – characteristics that only the insightful can put into words. When we the saints are “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15), all manner of advantages will be ministered. Our text is a case in point. Epaphras brought a discerning report of the work of the Lord in Colossae. The manner in which he gave this report provided a context in which the Holy Spirit could minister both understanding and joy to the imprisoned Apostle. This brought refreshment to his spirit, which in turn enabled him to elaborate on certain kingdom realities that needed to be perceived in Colossae. That perception was related to their survival.

A Thought

Where the truth of God is not articulated, and faithful reports of His works are not provided, a sort of spiritual robbery is taking place. Frothy religion closes the “wells of salvation” (Isa 12:3). It is then that all manner of religious pretense breaks forth, defiling all who are exposed to it. Truth is ever the environment of progress.

“ 5c . . . your order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.”

Paul now elaborates on what he perceived in the report brought to him. He speaks as one who lives in communion with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14) and fellowship with both the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3). These are the privileges of everyone who walks in the light “as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7). There are sacred privileges vouchsafed to those who live by faith and walk in the Spirit. One of them is being able to see refreshing realities that cannot otherwise be seen.

YOUR ORDER

“ . . . your order . . . ” Other versions read “your good order,” NKJV “your good discipline,” NASB “how orderly you are,” NIV “your morale,” NRSV “how well-ordered you are,” NJB and “you are living as you should.” NLT

The word “order” is pregnant with meaning. It carries the idea of being able to keep rank , as a hard-hitting military battalion. Such were the fighting men of the tribes of Zebulun, the Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh (1 Chron 12:33,38). That is, even though dangers were looming among the Colossian brethren, still their spiritual rank had not yet been broken. They were striving together for the faith of the Gospel (Phil 1:27), fighting the good fight of faith (1 Tim 6:12), and joined together by that which every joint supplied (Eph 4:16). They continued to have faith in Jesus and love all the saints.

The word “order” also carries the idea of disciplined, or consistent , living. Spiritual life cannot be lived ad hoc, or without regard to the wider implications of life. Life must be characterized by purpose (Rom 1:13; 2 Cor 1:17; Eph 6:22; 2 Tim 3:10), determination (1 Cor 2:2; 2 Cor 2:1; Tit 3:12), and deliberation (Phil 3:13). The race that is set before us cannot be successfully run without focus and consistency. A race cannot be run inadvertently, without cause, or independently of effort. Life cannot be lived “unto God” (Rom 6:11,13; 7:4; 12:1; Gal 2:19) casually or sporadically.

It is not that spiritual life ought not to be lived in this manner, it is that is CANNOT be lived in this way. Divine resources are not designed to be experienced when the heart and mind are disengaged. They all presume faith and involvement on the part of the receiver.

Therefore, when Paul beholds the “order” of the Colossian brethren joy and gladness come to him on the wings of his love for them. It is not that they have excelled, reaching plateaus of spiritual life that are not available to all of the saints. Rather, it is that they have seen what God has prepared for those who love Him, and have shaped their lives around those realities. Their response is the one that God has determined to bless.

Our lives are spiritually “ordered” when Christ is the Object of them, and they are lived as a thank offering to God. Actually, no other type of life is acceptable to the Lord.

THE STEADFASTNESS OF YOUR FAITH

“ . . . and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.” Other versions read, “stability of your faith,” NASB “how firm your faith is,” NIV “the firmness of your faith,” NRSV “your unchanging faith,” BBE and “your strong faith.” NLT

The word “steadfast” means that which has been made firm, stability, and firmness. STRONG’S That which furnishes a foundation; on which a thing rests firmly, support. THAYER This is the only place in the entire Scripture where this precise word is used. The English word “steadfastness” is only used twice in the Scriptures: “the steadfastness of your faith”

(Col 2:5), and “your own steadfastness” (2 Pet 3:17).

A “steadfast” faith is the kind Abraham had, who is described as being “strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom 4:20). It is a faith that stands under great adversity, like Joseph maintained his trust in God and integrity before Him in Egypt. “Steadfast” faith causes its possessor to stand up when thrown down, keep fighting the good fight of faith when assaulted by trouble and perplexity, and keep believing when persecuted (2 Cor 4:8-9).

A person who is “steadfast” is the opposite of one who “for a while believes, and in time of temptation falls away” (Lk 8:13). Such a one does not vacillate, moving from hot to cold, having continual setbacks, failures, and the likes. Such individuals are exceedingly rare – that is why Paul declared he was “joying” as he beheld the steadfastness of their faith.

A Word on Orderliness

Some people are of the opinion that “order” is out of place in the assembly of God’s people. They prefer to have an open environment, where everything is done on the spur of the moment. They are of the opinion that the Holy Spirit is prone to work in such an unordered environment. They equate being “led by the Spirit” with being in a state of empty-headedness and casualness. Such notions are wholly without merit, and reflect an unacceptable way of thinking.

God has placed certain gifts in the church that contribute to the maintenance of order: Apostles, prophets, teachers, governments, etc (1 Cor 12:28-29). In fact, the people of God are likened to a “body” having diverse and interdependent functions (1 Cor 12:14-25). Ponder the way the Spirit speaks of orderliness.

- Luke presents the Gospel and the acts of the Apostles in an orderly manner. “Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us” (Luke 1:1). “It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order , most excellent Theophilus” (Luke 1:3).
- The priest’s office was executed in an orderly manner. “And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course” (Luke 1:8)
- Peter rehearsed God’s dealings with the Gentiles in an orderly way. “But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying” (Acts 11:4).
- Paul traveled for Jesus in an orderly manner. “And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order , strengthening all the disciples” (Acts 18:23).
- The assembly is to be characterized by godly orderliness. “Let all things be done decently and in order ” (1 Cor 14:40). “Let the prophets speak two or three , and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace” (1 Cor 14:29-30).

“Order” is not an end of itself. However, when it is governed by faith, it provides an environment in which the Spirit works productively.

What About You?

What about your faith? Is it steadfast? Are you able to maintain your trust in God and joy in the atonement

when you are under duress? Do trials tend to bring you down, or cause doubts to arise in your heart? The psychologists will tell you that such responses are all right, and God will work with you through them. But they have not presented a proper picture. The person who vacillates and doubts is not even to think they will receive anything from the Lord. As it is written, “For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6-8).

In America, professing Christians have been left with the impression that faith can be seasonal, and effort to please the Lord sporadic. But this is a wholly inaccurate assessment of the case. In fact, it is a dangerously disarming mind-set that will eventually lead to an overthrow of the faith. There is no attitude or accomplishment that can compensate for a lack of steadfast faith. No amount of religious activity can make up for such a deficiency. There is a void where steadfastness is not found.

“ 6a As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord . . . ” Other versions read, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord,” NIV “As, then, you took Christ Jesus the Lord,” BBE “And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord.” NLT

The significance of this expression is seen in the fact that it is used as a basis for sound spiritual thought and determination. We will be urged to do something upon the basis of this experience.

The expression “received Him” refers to our beginning – when we were experientially “delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom” of God’s “dear Son” (Col 1:13). There are a number of ways our beginning in Christ is described. Each of them emphasize a particular facet of that entrance. None of them are optional. They are not different ways of entering into Christ, but different aspects of the precious gate of “pearl” that brings us into the “city of the living God” (Rev 21:21; Heb 12:22).

Our Beginning Described

In Prophecy

- The circumcision of the heart to love the Lord (Deut 30:6).
- Creation of a clean heart (Psa 51:10).
- The renewing of the eyes, ears, and heart (Isa 32:3-4; 35:5).
- Given a heart to know the Lord (Jer 24:7).
- Receiving a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 36:26).

- God putting His Spirit within us (Ezek 36:27).

In Apostolic Doctrine

- Receiving the kingdom as a little child (Mark 10:15).
- Born of the water and the Spirit (John 3:5).
- Born of the Spirit (John 3:6).
- Drinking of the water that Jesus gives (John 4:14).
- Entering through the Door, which is Christ Himself (John 10:9).
- Gladly receiving the Word and being baptized (Acts 2:41).
- Added to the church (Acts 2:47).
- God granted repentance unto life (Acts 11:18).
- The door of faith opened (Acts 14:27).
- When we were illuminated (Heb 10:22).
- The heart being purified by faith (Acts 15:9).
- Turning from darkness to light (Acts 26:18a).
- Turning from the power of Satan unto God (Acts 26:18b).
- Receiving the forgiveness of sins (Acts 26:18c).
- Receiving an inheritance among those who are sanctified (Acts 26:18d).
- Baptized into His death (Rom 6:3).
- Buried with Christ by baptism (Rom 6:4).
- Rising to walk in the newness of life (Rom 6:4).
- Becoming dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God (Rom 6:11).

- Obeying from the heart the form of doctrine delivered (Rom 6:17).
- Being made free from sin (Rom 6:18,22).
- Delivered from the Law (Rom 7:4).
- Being made free from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2).
- Receiving the Spirit of adoption (Rom 8:15).
- Called into the fellowship of God's Son (1 Cor 1:9).
- Put into Christ by God Himself (1 Cor 1:30).
- Baptized by the Spirit into one body (1 Cor 12:13).
- Sealed and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts (2 Cor 1:22).
- God shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus (2 Cor 4:6).
- Being made a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).
- Beginning in the Spirit (Gal 3:3).
- Baptized into Christ (Gal 3:27).
- We were quickened (Eph 2:1,5; Col 2:12).
- First trusted in Christ (Eph 1:12).
- Raised up and made to sit in heavenly places (Eph 2:6).
- Created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Eph 2:10).
- God beginning a good work in you (Phil 1:9).
- Circumcised by Christ, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh (Col 2:11).
- Turned to God (1 Thess 1:9).
- The washing of regeneration (Tit 3:5).
- God begetting us through the word of truth (James 1:18).

- Begotten again to a living hope (1 Pet 1:3).
- Purified your souls in obeying the truth, unto unfeigned love of the brethren (1 Pet 1:22).
- Being born again by the Word of God (1 Pet 1:23).
- Born of God (1 John 3:9; 5:1,4).
- Passed from death unto life (1 John 3:24).
- Enlightened (Heb 6:4a).
- Tasted of the heavenly gift (Heb 6:4b).
- Made partakers of the Holy Spirit (Heb 6:4c).
- Tasted of the good word of God (Heb 6:4d).
- Tasted of the powers of the world to come (Heb 6:4e).

This is by no means an exhaustive list of the references to our beginning in Christ Jesus. Yet, I have shown no less than fifty-one Apostolic references to the time when our life began in the Son. These are not fifty-one different ways of new life being initiated. Rather, they are expressions that look at that single beginning from differing and complementary views.

The phrase “received Christ Jesus the Lord” gathers all of these facets into a single expression, for all of them are received when Christ is “received.”

It is with some element of shame and embarrassment that I must acknowledge my background was not one in which this language was used. The idea of receiving Christ was not at all common. Some of my peers were even of the opinion that the language itself reflected a denominational persuasion. However, this is spiritual language, or “words” that the Holy Spirit has taught (1 Cor 2:13).

John equates believing on Christ’s name and our new birth with receiving Christ. “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not . But as many as received Him , to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:11-13).

Jesus spoke of those who received Him. “He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me” (Matt 10:40; John 13:20).

Receiving Christ is being made a “partaker” of Him (Heb 3:14). This takes place when the conditions specified by Jesus are met. That is, Jesus is received on HIS terms, not ours. When it is written that His own (the Jews) “received Him not,” it means they did not accept Him as He represented Himself. The people would gladly have received Him as the Provider of their bread (John 6:26). But they refused to receive Him as one who reigned over them (Lk 19:14).

The idea is that abiding in Christ is by the same principle as receiving Him. There is no point in the life of faith where we begin to operate by a new principle, through new power, or through a different kind of faith. The very fundamentals that were instrumental in beginning new life in Christ are the means by which that life is maintained. This is stated in a number of ways by the Spirit.

- **THE GOSPEL.** “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain” (1 Cor 15:1-2).
- **BEING PERFECTED.** “This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh ?” (Gal 3:2-3).
- **REMAINING FREE.** “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free , and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage?” (Gal 5:1).
- **FAITH AND THE GOSPEL.** “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ : that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel ” (Phil 1:27).
- **OBEDIENCE.** “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed , not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12).
- **A PLEASING LIFE.** “Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more” (1 Thess 4:1).
- **BEING TAUGHT.** “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught , whether by word, or our epistle” (2 Thess 2:15).
- **CONFIDENCE AND REJOICING.** “But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (Heb 3:6).
- **THE PROFESSION OF FAITH.** “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)” (Heb 10:23).
- **ABIDING.** “If ye abide in Me , and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7).
- **CONFIDENCE.** “For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end” (Heb 3:14).

There was a certain spirit, or frame of mind, that characterized us when we received the “Christ Jesus the Lord.” There was an awareness that He was “Lord of all,” and therefore we unhesitatingly submitted to Him. We did not seek

convenient ways to come to Him, but the way that was sanctioned by God. We wanted to know what He desired from us. Our hearts were tender, and our wills were yielded. Sin was repulsive to us, and forgiveness was precious. We wanted what He offered, and would go to any length to obtain it.

These attitudes were the result of faith – our belief of the Gospel, the record God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11). All of that is involved in “as ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord.” That time was characterized by a certain frame of mind, and a certain spirit. There were resolves, intentions, and determinations that accompanied that beginning. We were intent upon obeying the Lord, doing His bidding, and entering into life. Our view of sin had been radically changed. Our perception of God, His will, and His purpose was fresh. We were determined to run the race, finish the course, and be pleasing to the Lord. We had a strong appetite for the Word of God, and a disdain for the things of this world.

Now, our text calls upon us to consider that time – when we “received Christ Jesus the Lord” – and to bring that manner of life to bear upon our present situation. Our beginning was good – good by Divine intention. However, it will be of no use to us if we do not continue to walk in that newness of life. New life in Christ Jesus must be sustained. It must remain the focal point of our lives. The means of maintaining it must be held high.G

“6b . . . so walk ye in Him.” Other versions read, “continue to live in Him,” NIV “so live in Him,” NIV “so on in Him,” BBE and “now live your lives in Him.” NJB

3 When we consider our beginnings in Christ, the frame of mind we had at that time, and the resolves that dominated our hearts, it is as though the Lord speaks in our ears, “This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” (Isa 30:21). That is not only the way to “get saved,” as some are wont to say, it is the way to live!

THE MAIN THING

Those who imagine that the main thing is to get into Christ are too short-sighted. That is like saying the main thing for Adam and Eve was to get in the Garden, or for Israel it was to get out of Egypt. God has nowhere suggested that beginning is the fundamental thing. It is essential, to be sure. Abraham could not come to the place God was going to show him until he left Ur of the Chaldees (Gen 15:7). Israel had no hopes of getting into Canaan until they first left Egypt (Ex 33:1). In fact, with both Abraham and Israel, the purpose for coming out was that they might enter into another domain.

Even when Israel entered into the promised land, that entrance was itself not the fundamental thing. At the very threshold of the land, they were required to overthrow Jericho (Josh 6:1-21). God gave them power to do this, but they did have to overthrow the city. Even then, with this initial victory, Israel was required to possess the land, driving out its inhabitants. Long before they entered into the land, Moses solemnly told them, “But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell” (Num 33:55).

What would an insightful Israelite have said to a person suggesting the main thing was to get out of Egypt? How would they have responded to the proposition that the main thing was to get into the promised land? God has never affirmed or encouraged such a thought. It is pure imagination. Yet, throughout professing Christendom people are being told this very thing – that beginning is the main thing.

Not A Strange Way of Thinking

This kind of reasoning should not sound strange to us. Paul encapsulated the nature of spiritual life in the words, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14). If one imagines this attitude was unique to Paul, he, through the Spirit, adds, “Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you” NASB (Phil 3:15).

What Paul described in Philippians is the “walk” of Colossians 2:6. It is continuing to live with the same kind of determination and objective that characterized our beginning in Christ Jesus. The way we thought when we initially came to Christ is the only acceptable way to think.

WALK IN HIM

What does it mean to “walk ye in Him?” This is nothing less than walking “in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). It is the process whereby we “grow up into Him in all things” (Eph 4:15). This has to do with the process through which the Spirit changes us “from glory unto glory” (2 Cor 3:18), and in which we are being conformed to the image of God’s Son (Rom 8:29). Walking “in Him” emphasizes our personal participation in this process. The Spirit changes us, but it is within the framework of our willing involvement in the process. We are the ones who live by faith and walk in the Spirit. It is something that is deliberate and preferred.

The Continuance of Life

This has to do with the continuance of spiritual life. Life “more abundantly” does not continually automatically. Some, failing to see this, equate the expression “eternal life” with a sort of reflexive experience that continues independently of human activity. Thus believers in this world are thought to be eternally alive by a sort of Divine decree. If this were the case, Divine supplies would be superfluous and without meaning. If eternal life is maintained automatically, there can be no need for “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). In such a case, man really does not “live by every word of God” (Lk 4:4), but by Divine decree.

In this world, there can be no such thing as spiritual life without means. It is not possible to sustain a relationship to God in a hostile environment without determination. It is inconceivable that, while we remain in a cursed body (Phil 3:21), and hounded by “another” competing law within our members (Rom 7:24), life in Christ could continue without availing ourselves of Divine provisions. Those who declare the possibility of such a thing insult our intelligence and betray their own unbelief.

Walking in Christ is maintaining the life that was initiated when we were raised from our death with Jesus (Rom 6:4). It is continuing on “the way” that “leads to life” (Matt 7:14). It is finishing the course, or race, that we began when we were added to the church (2 Tim 4:7; Heb 12:2).

The point of our text is that spiritual life is continued the same way it way it was initiated – not by the same routine, but by the same principle .

A Proper View of Christ

Walking in Christ involves maintaining the proper view of Christ – the view that is reflected in “the record God has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10-11). When we “received Christ” there were two dominating considerations of Him that were received from the Gospel: “Lord and Savior” – and in that order. Four times Peter refers to Jesus in this way (2 Pet 1:11; 2:20; 3:2; 3:18). He also first declared Jesus to be “both Lord and Christ,” with “Christ” referring to His appointment as the Savior of the world (Acts 2:36).

A proper walk “in Him” involves maintaining those primary perspectives – “Lord and Savior.” It is never proper to view Christ in any other primary role – such as a resolver of problems and the likes. As soon as a person views Jesus as something other than what the Gospel has presented Him to be, the walk “in Him” comes to a grinding halt.

A significant part of contemporary Christianity has very little, if anything, to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. Within the framework of institutionalized religion it is too easy to forget about Christ. That is why so many forget they were purged from their old sins, and therefore fail to add to their lives essential graces (2 Pet 1:9). Let it be clear, it is not possible to sustain spiritual life without a due regard for and perception of Jesus Christ!

Staying Where God Put Us

Walking in Christ includes staying where God has placed us, and thus going on to perfection. When we “received” Christ, God “raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6). There, in those blessed realms, He provided “all spiritual blessings” (Eph 1:3). There is no provision for spiritual growth outside of those “heavenly places.” No person can be brought to maturity outside of them. Abundant life cannot be maintained independently of them. It simply cannot be done!

God is also said to have put us “in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). Newness of life cannot be maintained outside of that blessed surrounding. As soon as “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” begin to wane in perception and importance, death begins to gain dominance. To walk in Christ, we must remain in Him – where God has placed us. Jesus referred to this as abiding in Him, affirming it was essential to Divine acceptance and approval (John 15:4-7)

There is altogether too much speculation and philosophizing in the religious community about sustaining life in Christ. All manner of views are espoused, from some mystical form of automation to the discipline of a Sinaitic-type law. However, life in Christ is sustained the same way it was initiated, and blessed is the person who sees it.

THE APPOINTED MEANS OF PROTECTION

Our text is not a mere creedal statement. Rather, it is the declared means of protecting us against seducers and those who beguile. This army of deceivers operates under the auspices of the devil himself. It is said of our adversary and his cohorts, “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Cor 11:13-15).

How Can We Do It?

How are we to protect ourselves against this invasive army? For some, isolation within a sectarian environment is the solution. By taking such measures, the simple soul assumes the truth is being faithfully maintained by their group. This assumption is helped along by the use of phrases like the following: “We are the true New Testament church,” “Our church was established on the day of Pentecost,” “We know our position is right,” “our movement was pure in its origin,” and other similar statements.

While these hackneyed phrases may appear quite innocent, they are not. They remove the focus from Jesus, and do not make for spiritual growth. Concepts and statements that are not anchored in the Person of Christ consequently compete with Him and dull our perception of Him. That actually makes growth in Christ impossible, for they create a spiritually sterile environment.

When the eye of attention is not focused upon Jesus, abiding in Him and growth into Him are not possible. God will not allow spiritual stability or advancement to take place independently of personal involvement with His Son. There is no safety apart from abiding and walking in Jesus. There is no theological position or religious creed that can protect the soul from being beguiled or deceived. Human innovations cannot insulate the soul against Satanic initiatives.

Those who confront beguiling and deceiving teachers in the energy of such things will become like the seven sons of Sceva. When confronting souls dominated by evil spirits, they resorted to as traditional and sectarian approach. “We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth” (Acts 19:14). They soon found that approach was utterly impotent. It is written of them, “And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded” (Acts 19:15-16).

This may very well account for the devastating experiences that are being experienced within the Christian community. All manner of immortality is breaking out among those who say they are “New Testament Christians.” Leaders are falling, homes are disintegrating, a younger generation is being lost to pleasure, and all manner of covetousness and vile affections are showing themselves. Somewhere along the line, people must be brought to see they are confronting iniquity with the wrong weaponry. Satan is not overcome by stereotyped approaches, religious slogans, and a claim to spiritual uniqueness. Rather, it is personal faith (and there is no other kind) that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4-5), and faith must be kept, fought for, and maintained.

Our protection against Satan’s “devices” is found in a consistent walk, or manner of life, in Christ. This is precisely the point John makes in his First Epistle. “These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you . But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him ” (1 John 2:27). Now heed the admonition to “walk ye in Him.” It is your protection.

“ 7a Rooted and built up in Him . . . ”

The Spirit now elaborates on the phrase, “walk ye in Him.” He does not leave it to us to assign a meaning to what He has said. Here is what is involved in walking in Christ. This is the outcome of abiding in Christ, continuing in the faith, running the race set before us, and keeping the faith. If these things do not come to pass, it is because of a deficient walk and a weak faith – neither of which is acceptable in Christ Jesus.

ROOTED IN HIM

“Rooted . . .” Other versions read, “firmly rooted,” NASB and “let your roots grow down into Him.” NLT

The word “rooted” means “to strengthen with roots, to render firm, to fix, establish, cause a person or a thing to be thoroughly grounded.” THAYER The accent here is on stability, firmness, and immovability.

Notice, the text does not suggest that rooting is a goal – i.e., walking in Christ in order that we may become rooted. Rather it is something that is already accomplished: “rooted.” One version accents this meaning by reading, “HAVING BEEN firmly rooted.” NAU The meaning is that walking in Christ postulates spiritual stability. A consistent life in Christ Jesus is the result of being “rooted.” It is not the cause rooting.

The book of Ephesians affirms this very thing in other words. In it the Spirit states the purpose for all valid ministry is the edification, or rooting, of the people of God. That process will result in a stability that will not allow for beguilement and deception. Here is how this is stated in Ephesians. “And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ : till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ : that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive ; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things , which is the head, even Christ” (Eph 4:15).

The Spirit twice spoke through the Prophets concerning being rooted. The words particularly apply to the time of the New Covenant. “And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall yet again take root downward , and bear fruit upward” (2 Kgs 19:30; Isa 37:31).

Rooting Is Essential

In a religious culture that does not emphasize spiritual maturity, rooting is of little consequence. However, it is most important in the salvation of God. Jesus affirmed that a lack of rooting would result in falling away. “And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root , they withered away . . . Yet hath he not root in himself , but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended” (Matt 13:6,21). Luke stated the parable in this way: “They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root , which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away” (Luke 8:13).

It is possible to imagine a person can remain spiritually infantile and still survive the assaults of the sun of trial. But this is only a figment of human imagination. Jesus affirmed what happens to those who are not rooted. Our text declares rooting to be the means of avoiding being beguiled and deceived.

Rooting Must Be Proper

It is possible to be rooted in the wrong thing. Thus John the Baptist spoke of the ax being “laid unto the root of the tree” (Matt 3:10), and Jesus said “But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up” (Mat 15:13). The rooting must be “in Him,” else it will count for nothing. A person can be “rooted” in the knowledge of a movement or a creed, but that is of no value in the avoidance of deception.

BUILT UP IN HIM

“ . . . and built up . . . ” As rooting is to a plant, so “built up” is to a structure, or edifice. The word “edify” parallels “built up.” The beginning of spiritual life is like beginning to build a house. The beginning is not the point, but the full structure that has been determined. As a whole, the church is being built up for a “habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph 2:22). As individuals, believers are intended to be those in whom the Lord walks and dwells (2 Cor 6:16). It is Christ “IN” them that is the “hope of glory” (Col 1:27), and that indwelling is not to be taken for granted.

Knowing the nature of spiritual life, and moved along by the Holy Spirit, Paul addressed the matter of Jesus dwelling within believers. He did not take for granted that this indwelling would take place. “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ , which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God ” (Eph 3:17-19).

The gravity of the situation is seen by the results of Christ dwelling in our hearts. These are progressive accomplishments, and they are most remarkable.

- Rooting and grounding.
- Able to comprehend the magnitude of salvation.
- Knowing the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge.
- Being filled with all the fulness of God.

These cannot be accomplished independently of Jesus Christ, or apart from Him dwelling in our hearts by faith. That is the clear teaching of the text, and is beyond all controversy.

In spite of this remarkable clarity, you will be hard pressed to find a body of professing Christians who are actually affirming this. Notwithstanding that apparent circumstance these things must be declared, and supplications for their realization presented before the throne of all grace. I am driven to the following conclusions by both the spirit and content of this text.

- No person is justified in thinking salvation can be fully realized by a soul that is not rooted and grounded, though ample time has been given for such to have occurred.

- No individual can expect to dwell forever with the Lord who is not making some progress toward the comprehension of the scope of salvation.
- If a person has been granted the grace of a long life in Christ Jesus, yet remains fundamentally obtuse concerning the love of Christ, that person is standing on the precipice of eternal ruin.
- Being “filled with all the fulness of God” is the revealed objective of the gifts Christ has given to the church. If, to some measurable degree, this is not taking place, people cannot assume they are saved.

I do not suggest by these observations that we should behold others, or ourselves, with a condemning eye. What I am saying is that salvation is calculated to produce these things. If they are not happening, an abnormal spiritual condition exists – a sort of departure from the revealed objective of the salvation of God. This is precisely why believers are admonished, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?; unless indeed you are disqualified” NKJV (2 Cor 13:5). Our salvation is to be confirmed, not assumed! It is to be validated, not taken for granted.

“7b . . . and established in the faith . . .” Other versions read, “established in YOUR faith,” NASB “strengthened in the faith,” NIV “strong in the faith,” BBE “assured in the faith,” DARBY “confirmed in the faith,” DOUAY and “held firm by the faith.” NJB

What does it mean to be “established in the faith,” and why is such a thing even necessary. Those who have accepted the juvenile spiritual climate of our times, will find these words have a strange sound. They will seem irrelevant. Perhaps, at the very best, they may sound optional, as though intended for a choice few within the body of Christ. What informed soul is not aware of the relative rarity of people who are established in the faith?

PERILOUS TIMES

Such a condition confirms we are living in the “perilous times” mentioned in Second Timothy. Such times are not characterized by violence, as were the days of Noah (Gen 6:11,13). They are not the times of aggressive persecution as in the days of following the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1), and the time of Antipas, who was martyred for Jesus (Rev 2:13).

These are “perilous times” of another order. They are times of religious corruption, when professing Christians have not experienced a change of character – the new birth. The inspired description of these times is most arresting (2 Tim 3:1-5), causing great sobriety for those who live by faith. They will be marked by those who are

- Lovers of their own selves .
- Covetous, or “lovers of money.” NKJV
- Boasters .

- Proud .
- Blasphemers , “revilers,” NASB “abusive,” NIV or “scoffing at God.” NLT
- Disobedient to parents .
- Unthankful , or “ungrateful.” NASB
- Unholy .
- Without natural affection , “unloving,” NKJV “without love,” NASB “inhuman,” NRSV and “heartless and intractible.” NJB
- Trucebreakers , “unforgiving,” NKJV “irreconcilable,” NASB “implacable,” NRSV and “bitter haters.” BBE
- False accusers , “slanderers,” NKJV “malicious gossips,” NASB and “saying evil of others.” BBE
- Incontinent , “without self-control,” NKJV “profligates,” NRSV and “unsubdued passions.” DARBY
- Fierce , “brutal,” NKJV “brutes,” NRSV and “savage,” DARBY
- Despisers of those who are good , “haters of good,” NASB “not lovers of the good,” NIV and “hating all good.” BBE
- Traitors , “treacherous,” NASB and “false to their friends.” BBE .
- Heady , “headstrong,” NKJV “reckless,” NASB “rash,” NIV and “acting without thought.” BBE .
- Highminded , “haughty,” NKJV “conceited,” NASB “swollen with conceit,” NRSV “lifted up in mind,” BBE and “puffed up with pride.” NLT
- Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God , “preferring their own pleasure to God,” NJB .
- Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof , “holding a form of godliness, although they have denied its power,” NASB “holding the form of religion but denying the power of it,” NRSV “holding the outward form of godliness but denying its power,” RSV “They will keep up the outward appearance of religion but will have rejected the inner power of it,” NJB and “They will act as if they are religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly.” NLT

These are described as the traits of a religious society. They profess a love for God, but love pleasures more. They maintain the outward form of religion, yet are powerless within, for they have rejected the power of God.

These are the direct result of refusing to be “rooted and grounded.” Such conditions flow out from preferred spiritual infancy. The appointed means of avoiding such a condition is declared in the phrase “established in the faith.” NKJV

ESTABLISHED IN THE FAITH

Faith is the strong point of those established in it. This is the condition for which Abraham, the father of all who believe, was noted. As it is written, “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom 4:20). Such a faith surfaced when Abraham was faced with an impossible thing. When he was childless, impotent because of age, and his wife barren, God said he would be “the father of many nations.”

When hearing this, Abraham did not remonstrate, affirming this was not possible. His faith took hold of the promise, even though Satan tempted him. The promise, as great as it was, did not “stagger” Abraham. He did not take into consideration his own body, “already dead” as regarding begetting offspring. Neither did he dwell upon “the deadness of Sarah’s womb” (Rom 4:19). Instead, “contrary to hope,” in the hope of faith, “he believed” God, being “fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform” (Rom 4:21).

That is being “established in the faith.” It is being able to believe God when there is nothing in the realm of sense and time that supports what He has said. It is what enabled Noah to build the ark, and Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt. It is what empowered Joshua to lead Israel against Jericho, and David to face Goliath.

A person is “established in the faith” when he lives by faith (Rom 1:17), walks by faith (1 Cor 5:7), and stands by faith (2 Cor 1:24). Such faith is also revealed when a person is overcoming the world (1 John 5:4-5).

You can count on a person who is “established in the faith” to believe God when everything required seems impossible. Such precious souls “keep the faith” under great oppression and duress. They “fight the good fight of faith,” unwilling to allow anything to move them from their hope. They keep believing when human reasoning says it is vain to do so.

“7c . . . as ye have been taught . . .” Other versions read, “just as you were instructed,” NASB and “as also you have learned.” DOUAY

As will be confirmed in the next clause, the reference is not to a compilation of theological statements, but to the faith that comes by hearing the Gospel (Rom 10:17). The teaching of reference has to do with keeping the faith, not with a particular teaching that was believed. That is, the people had been taught the role of faith in the divine economy – that without it, it is “impossible to please God” (Heb 11:6). They were taught that “the just shall live by faith” (Heb 10:38), and that “by faith” we have “access into this grace wherein we stand” (Rom 5:2).

In the Epistles (Romans thru Jude), there are 197 references to “faith,” and 56 references to believing. Faith is always presented as being primary, and never secondary. The obtaining of righteousness, or justification, is “by faith” (Rom 3:28; 5:1). Access to grace is declared by “by faith” (Rom 5:2), and we “stand by faith” (Rom 11:20; 2 Cor 1:24). We “walk by faith” (2 Cor 5:7), “live by faith” (Gal 3:11), and “are children of God by faith” (Gal 3:26). Through the Spirit

we “wait for the hope of righteousness by faith” (Gal 5:5), and Christ “dwells in our hearts by faith” (Eph 3:17).

Christ has been made a propitiation “through faith in His blood” (Rom 3:25), we receive the “promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:14), and are saved “by grace through faith” (Eph 2:8). It is through “faith and patience” that we “inherit the promises” (Heb 6:12), and “by faith” that “we understand” (Heb 11:3). All of the children of God are “kept by the power of God through faith” (1 Pet 1:5), prayers are to be asked “in faith” (James 1:6), and God has chosen “the poor of this world, rich in faith” (James 2:5).

The “Apostles’ doctrine” speaks of “the law of faith” (Rom 3:27), “the righteousness of faith” (Rom 4:13), “the word of faith” (Rom 10:8), “the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:26), “the spirit of faith” (2 Cor 4:13), “the hearing of faith” (Gal 3:5), “the household of faith” (Gal 6:10), “the shield of faith” (Eph 6:16), “the joy of faith” (Phil 1:25), “the work of faith” (1 Thess 1:3), “the words of faith” (1 Tim 1:6), the “good fight of faith” (1 Tim 6:12), and “the prayer of faith” (James 5:15).

There are references to being “weak in faith” (Rom 4:19), “strong in faith” (Rom 4:20), abounding “in faith” (2 Cor 8:7), “godly edifying which is in faith” (1 Tim 1:4), continuing “in the faith” (1 Tim 2:15), being “sound in the faith” (Tit 2:2), dying “in the faith” (Heb 11:13), asking “in faith” (James 1:6), and being “rich in faith” (James 2:5).

God fills us “with all joy and peace in believing” (Rom 15:13), it is in believing that we “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet 1:8).

What makes more sense than to be “established in the faith?” Such establishment brings all of the benefits of faith to us – which are ALL of the benefits God gives to us. To be weak in faith is to be have, at the very best, a very frail hold on the blessings of God. Our adequacy is by faith, as well as our access to God and His grace.

This is woven throughout the Apostolic writings. The supremacy and necessity of faith is everywhere affirmed. When our faith is deficient, we are deficient. When our faith is strong, we are strong. It makes no sense at all for faith to be our weak point. In fact, in view of what is said of faith, it is a sin of staggering proportions to be weak in it. The aim is to be strong in faith, and everything about salvation provides for it

“7d . . . abounding therein with thanksgiving.” Other versions read, “abounding in IT with thanksgiving,” NKJV “overflowing with gratitude,” NASB “overflowing with thankfulness,” NIV and “giving praise to God at all times.” BBE

The abounding thanksgiving of reference is perceived as proceeding from a twofold source. Objectively, it is the result of being “rooted and built up IN HIM.” Subjectively , it proceeds from our faith – “stablished in the faith.” Where our commitment to Christ is not strong, thanksgiving will not be abundant. When our faith is weak, the well of thanksgiving becomes dry. Conversely, the more pronounced our perception of Christ is, the greater will be our thanksgiving. When our faith is strong and unwavering, the spring of gratefulness always erupts.

THANKSGIVING

God-glorifying thanksgiving is not found in meager and sporadic supplies. Like faith, which is the mother of it, thanksgiving is to “abound” in copious measures – and where strong faith is found, it will!

“Thanksgiving” proceeds from the heart, but is more than an attitude. It is an expressed attitude – gratefulness put into words. It is the “giving of thanks” (Eph 5:4; 1 Tim 2:1), or a “sacrifice of praise.” As it is written, “By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name ” (Heb 13:15).

The “giving of thanks” is to be “always for all things unto God” (Eph 5:20). “In everything” we “give thanks,” not allowing circumstance to dry up the well of praise (1 Thess 5:18). Thanksgiving is to accompany our requests to God (Phil 4:6), and in devoting ourselves to prayer, we are to “keep alert in it with an attitude of prayer” (Col 4:2). Solemnly we are exhorted, “be ye thankful” (Col 3:15). In fact, “giving thanks” IN everything “is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess 5:18).

The degree of our thanksgiving is directly proportionate to the degree to which we are rooted and grounded in Christ and established in the faith. No person who stands aloof from Jesus can abound in thanksgiving. Nor, indeed, can a person who is not established in the faith excel in the giving of thanks.

True thanksgiving abounds in direct relation to what God has made known concerning His Son – the “record God has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10-11), and to the benefits that accrue to us through Him. It is written, “ But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ ” (1 Cor 15:57). And again, “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ , and maketh manifest the savor of His knowledge by us in every place” (2 Cor 2:14).

When addressing the Corinthian brethren concerning their assemblies, Paul admonished them to seek to “excel” in “the edifying of the church” (1 Cor 14:12). One of the areas he addressed was that of “the giving of thanks, ” and of saying “Amen” during that occasion (1 Cor 14:16). He admonished the Ephesian brethren to avoid coarse and unprofitable speech, choosing rather to give thanks: “Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks ” (Eph 5:4).

It is good when faith is mingled with continual thanksgiving. Faith tends to produce thanksgiving, and thanksgiving tends to strengthen faith.

Assemblies of the righteous should make provision for expressions of thanksgiving, both individual and collective. The testimony of the Psalmist is still true: “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High” (Psa 92:1). Thanksgiving is to the assembly what the incense was within the holy place. It emits a sort of spiritual fragrance that is pleasing to both God and those who love Him, and are the called according to His purpose. It is prescribed as one of the activities among those who gather in Jesus’ name (1 Tim 2:1). There is no occasion or circumstance when giving thanks to God is out of order!

“ 8a Beware lest any man spoil you . . . ”

Now the Apostle begins to deal with certain dangers that were attempting to invade the Colossian assembly. He has carefully prepared the soil of their hearts for this word, for it is a most solemn warning. Those who take it seriously will find that it contradicts whole bodies of theological thought. The tone of this warning is anything but casual. It has a sound that affirms its seriousness.

BEWARE

“ Beware . . . ” Other versions read, “See to it,” NASB/NIV “Take heed,” ASV “Take care,” BBE “See that,” DARBY “Make sure,” NJB and “Don’t let anyone.” NLT

The word “beware” is like a trumpet of alert. From the etymological point of view it means “a sense of perception, to be able to see, be aware of.” THAYER Doctrinally, it is a word connoting the responsibility of Christ’s disciples – areas in which their protection and benefit will depend partly on their own activity. Some of the admonitions using this word are as follows.

- TAKE HEED not to despise one of these “little ones” (Matt 18:10).
- TAKE HEED “that no man deceive you” (Matt 24:4).
- TAKE HEED what you hear (Mk 4:24).
- TAKE HEED, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod (Mk 8:15).
- BEWARE of the scribes (Mk 12:38).
- TAKE HEED to yourselves (Mk 13:9).
- BEWARE lest that which is spoken of the prophets come upon you (Acts 13:40).
- Let him that thinks he stands TAKE HEED lest he fall (1 Cor 10:12).
- TAKE HEED that ye be not consumed of one another (Gal 5:15).
- BEWARE of dogs, BEWARE of evil workers, BEWARE of the concision (Phil 3:2).
- TAKE HEED unto the ministry thou hast received from the Lord (Col 4:17).

- TAKE HEED lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief (Heb 3:12).
- SEE THAT ye refuse not Him that speaketh (Heb 12:25).

In each of these cases personal perception is required . Bewaring, taking heed, or seeing to it, involves spiritual understanding. It is being able to see something. In this text, it is being able to recognize when intruders have entered in among the members of the body of Christ. This requires alertness, vigilance, and consistency. Those who are to “beware” cannot fall asleep. They cannot grow insensitive, or be distracted to lesser things.

The salvation of God brings understanding to those who receive it. This understanding is essential because our welfare, in part, depends upon it. This is not salvation by works, but salvation through participation, or being made “partakers” (Heb 3:14; 2 Pet 1:4).

WHEN MEN SPOIL YOU

“ . . . lest any man spoil you . . . ” Other versions read, “cheat you,” NKJV “takes you captive,” NASB “makes a prey of you,” NRSV “takes you away by force,” BBE “lead you away as a prey,” DARBY and “carrying you away as spoil.” YLT

Here the word “spoil” does not mean to cause to decay, like spoiled fruit. Rather, it refers to being taken away as “spoil” by an enemy. Here we are solemnly warned of the possibility of being captured by some man – taken away from the blessing we have been called to “inherit” (1 Pet 3:9). We are not told this is something that cannot happen, but that we are to see to it that it does not happen.

Of what are we to “beware?” In this case, it is not the devil, or demons, or circumstance, but “any man” – one of our peers. The matter we are charged with avoiding is being “spoiled,” or led away as booty, like Jesus “spoiled principalities and powers,” triumphing over them in the cross (Col 2:15). In such a case, rather than obtaining “the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14), we ourselves become a prize, taken away from the blessing of God by the stealth of wicked men. Later Paul says such spiritual robbers will “beguile you of your reward” (2:18).

“ 8b . . . through philosophy and vain deceit . . . ”

Now Paul declares the means by which believers are victimized and robbed of the blessing to which they have been called. What is employed appears harmless to those who trust in the wisdom of this world, which tends to make men feel competent of themselves. However, and make no mistake about this, we are speaking of serious matters. Anytime a person for whom Christ died becomes the spoil, booty, or plunder of another man, a condition is created that has eternal ramifications. We do well, therefore, to give “the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip” (Heb 2:1). In this case we would lose our hold upon them because we were taken captive by some man.

PHILOSOPHY

“. . . through philosophy. . .” Other versions read “through hollow an deceptive philosophy,” NIV “through man’s wisdom,” BBE “seductive philosophy,” NAB “the empty lure of a philosophy,” NJB and “empty philosophy.” NLT

The word “philosophy” means “love of wisdom, pursuit of wisdom” and is used of “skill in any art or science, any branch of knowledge.” In Scripture the word refers to human wisdom as compared to that which has been revealed by God. Within the earth, it may be a valid realm of knowledge – like physics, biology, geology, etymology, etc. However, in matters pertaining to life and godliness, such wisdom has no place. The container of “philosophy” is not only too small to carry the truth of God, it is not adapted to contain even the smallest jot or tittle of Divine wisdom.

Here “philosophy” is the competitor of being “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” – which comes from God (1:9). It is the attempt of the wisdom of this world to invade the sacred citadel of truth.

Philosophy is couched in “words that man’s wisdom teaches” (1 Cor 2:13). The philosopher intrudes “into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up with his fleshly mind” (Col 2:18). Such are described as men “Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1 Tim 1:7).

During the days of the Apostles such men were purported experts in the Law. Today the religious philosophers are not even up to that mark. We are now faced with experts in language, history, logic, and religious tradition. The scholastics are a dreadful horde that have invaded the church taking captive “the souls of men” with their futile philosophy (Rev 18:13).

It should not surprise you that all manner of doctrines are being sown among the saints that fall into the category of “philosophy.” They are not based upon what God has said, but, at the very best, on what men think He meant. Among the champions of such teaching were the Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, and Lawyers. They thought themselves wise, and took men captive with their teachings.

Error – particularly religious error – enslaves the soul, for when one becomes “spoil” he becomes the vassal of another. What disciple is there who is not acquainted with this spiritual phenomenon? Who has not experienced enslavement to some religious thought that had its origin with man, yet was presented as though it came from God? The perpetrator of the spoiling dogma may have woven it with selected Scriptures, and sprinkled it with affirmations that he believed this with all of his heart, and that God has shown it to him. Yet, when all was said and done, it was nothing more than a captivating philosophy that pillaged the church of God, leading men away captive whom Jesus had made free. It was the product of deception instead of revelation.

VAIN DECEIT

“. . . and vain deceit . . .” Other versions read, “empty deceit,” NKJV “empty deception,” NASB and “hollow and deceptive.” NIV

“Vain deceit” is something that is fruitless presented by an impressive but pretentious show. It sounds good, but it is actually corrupt. It offers freedom, but promotes bondage. It comes in the garb of intellectuality, but really promotes

spiritual ignorance and stupidity.

Peter says of such teachers, “These are wells without water , clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity , they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage” (2 Pet 2:17-19). That is a most vivid depiction of “vain deceit.”

Do not imagine that such men are very apparent, and easy to be detected. If that was the case, this warning would not have to be sounded. Beguiling souls can only be detected when we live by faith.

“ 8c . . . after the tradition of men . . . ” Other versions read, “according to the tradition of men,” NKJV “which depends upon human tradition,” NIV “going after the beliefs of men,” BBE “according to the teaching of men,” DARBY and “come from human thinking.” NLT

The Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Lawyers were perpetrators of tradition. Jesus referred to their teaching as “your tradition,” declaring that it “made the commandment of God of none effect” (Matt 15:3).

He further elaborated on the effects of their teaching.

- **BOUND HEAVY BURDENS.** “For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Mat 23:4).
- **TOOK AWAY THE KEY OF KNOWLEDGE.** “Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered” (Luke 11:52).
- **SHUT UP THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.** “ But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in” (Mat 23:13).
- **HINDERED THOSE WHO WERE ENTERING.** “Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered” (Luke 11:52).

All of this was accomplished through their tradition – teachings that originated with men, not God. Jesus said of such tradition:

- “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition ?” (Matt 15:3).
- “And honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition ” (Mat 15:6).
- “For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men , as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do” (Mark 7:8).
- “And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition ” (Mark 7:9).

Now, through the Spirit, Paul says that the “traditions of men” have a spoiling effect upon the saints. They capture them, making them slaves rather than free men. They move them away from “the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free” (Gal 5:1).

The “traditions of men” are founded upon human wisdom, not Divine affirmation. They are the result of uninspired reasoning, which gravitates to the lower realms. For doctrine to be valid, it must have a supernatural origin and be couched in “words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words ” NIV (1 Cor 2:13).

I feel compelled to note that a denominational perspective must, of necessity, be maintained with “the traditions of men.” Some present day bodies of religious thought that are nothing more than “the traditions of men” include the following.

- Premillennialism
- Post-millennialism
- A-millennialism
- Preterism
- Pre-tribulationism
- Post-tribulationism
- Mid-tribulationism
- Eternal security
- The free will of man
- Total depravity
- The great commission

- Unconditional love
- New Testament Christianity

Doctrines like these use Scripture like vanilla, attempting to flavor an otherwise unsavory teaching . However, such doctrines neither start nor end with Divine affirmation, and thus cannot glorify Him or promote spiritual growth. They are built with flawed blocks of imagination and supposition, and daubed with the untempered mortar of the wisdom of this world.

While these various doctrines may contain some truth, they are like jewels in a swine’s snout (Prov 11:22). They are all founded on the conclusions of men, not the statements of God. This is a good place to recall a solemn word delivered by Isaiah, who also confronted vain traditions. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa 8:20). The Word of God is both the foundation and building of truth.

“ 8d . . . after the rudiments of the world . . . ” Other versions read, “basic principles of the world,” NKJV “elementary principles of the world,” NASB “basic principles of this world,” NIV “elemental spirits of the universe,” NRSV “theories of the world,” BBE and “elemental powers of the world.” NAB

The word “rudiments” means “first things.” In language this would be the ABC’s. In speech, it would be sounds. In physics it would be the four basic elements (earth, air, fire, water). In geometry, the axioms. In philosophy, the givens, or things taken for granted. ROBERTSON In a nutshell, these are the beginnings of the wisdom that the world obtained independently of Divine revelation. They would fall into the category of the various sciences, all of which are the compilation and classification of human observations.

Actually, “rudiments” is the highest form or worldly wisdom. It is the very best the world has to offer. Such things are not “rudiments” in the world, but in matters pertaining to life and godliness. In the world they are of significant value, but they will also perish with the world. They are foundational in the world, but valueless in the Kingdom.

Unlike “philosophy,” “vain deceit,” and “the tradition of men,” the “rudiments of the world” contain some valid observations. However, they do not transfer over to the kingdom of God. They are of no value in deciphering the truth of God or understanding the mysteries of God. They give no advantage to faith, and cannot culture spiritual understanding. They cannot be used to open a text of Scripture, perceive a doctrinal error, or confirm the truth of God. They are “rudiments” when compared with “the wisdom of God.” They also tend to “spoil” or rob the saints rather than to nourish and encourage them.

When an individual attempts to clarify the truth of God with a principle or observation originated in this world,

he has only managed to obscure the truth. For example, it is possible to diagnose fallen man using psychological principles. An explanation for sinful human conduct may be provided using physiological principles, the diagnosis of certain aspects of the human anatomy, or perhaps some form of psychoanalysis.

Another may try and expound the concept of the stewardship of money by citing certain financial principles and economic laws. Still another may attempt to open the meaning of key Scriptural words and doctrines by appealing to “the original language,” using lexical aids much like a man of God uses the Word of God. A study of the brain and its various functions may be used as a basis for interpreting Scripture, while the physiological differences between men and women may be the basis for explaining certain texts of Scripture. All of these are “the rudiments of the world.” They may be fine for diagnosing certain illnesses, formulating a sound financial budget, fixing an automobile, or heating and cooling a building. But when it comes to the things of God, they are out of place, for they have no utility in eternal matters. They are principles of a cursed and decaying world, and cannot transfer into the world to come. Therefore, no place is made for them in the declaration of the truth of God.

It should not surprise you that a phenomenal amount of contemporary religion is, at its very best, “the rudiments of this world.” Such things detract from Jesus and enslave the soul. They minimize the great salvation of God and maximize life in “this present evil world.” When the church of God devotes itself to financial planning, mental and physical health, recreation, and the likes, it has moved off of the foundation, and is headed for the broad road that leads to destruction. If it has not already done so, a church engaged in such activities is on the verge of spoiling the saints – taking them away from Jesus to lesser things.

“8e . . . and not after Christ.” Other versions read, “not according to Christ,” NKJV “rather than on Christ,” NIV and “not from Christ.” NLT

The meaning of this expression is that the SOURCE of the flawed teaching is not Christ Himself – He did not give the teaching. It did not come from His mouth, or from those He designated to speak for Him. It is the source of false doctrine that makes it false. Anything represented as coming from God that has not been given by Christ is false and enslaving.

This is a matter of revelation. “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom he hath appointed Heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds” (Heb 1:2). When Jesus was transfigured on a “high mountain apart,” a voice came “from the excellent glory.” It was in response to Peter’s suggestion that they make three tabernacles: one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah – the two who appeared with Jesus “in glory.” The voice from the “excellent glory” left no doubt about who the appointed Spokesman was. “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: HEAR YE HIM” (Matt 17:1-5; 2 Pet 1:17).

The fanciful and enslaving teachings to which our text refers did not come from Jesus. They were not the result of hearing Him who is speaking from heaven (Heb 12:25).

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul dealt with some of the issues of flawed teaching. He declared that the purpose of God was that the church be edified and made suitable for the “work of ministry.” This involved growing up into Christ in all things, and coming away from spiritual childhood, which is fostered by the “rudiments of the world.” That childishness would cause them to be “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph 4:14). When faith does not grow, spiritual vulnerability does. Men are always at a disadvantage when they do not believe.

In confirmation of the purpose of God, and the appointed means of fulfilling that purpose, the Apostle reminded the people that they were not to walk “as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind.” Such people “have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness” (Eph 4:17-19).

And what was the antidote for such departures from the truth? Paul traced the answer back to the Lord Jesus, who is the appointed Teacher of the church. “But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus : That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:20-24).

When our text says “and not after Christ,” it means that the teaching against which the saints are warned did not come from Jesus . It came from man, and was anchored to this world. For that reason, it would turn people from Jesus and enslave them to the cursed order. Jesus is not central in such teaching, and thus His revealed purpose is pushed into the background. Novelty takes the place of spiritual staples, and fading things upstage eternal ones.

Now, let us hear the solemn warning once again. “ See to it that no-one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.”
NIB

One of the great dangers of our day is the vaunting of education and purported scholarship. This by no means puts a premium on ignorance or glorifies a lack of learning. The purpose for these warnings is to keep the saints from appealing to worldly wisdom in things pertaining to life and godliness.

Those who lack wisdom and spiritual understanding must not be put in places of leadership in the churches – regardless of their professed expertise. It is not possible to gain eternal advantages and benefits from a wisdom that has this world as its source and locus. No child of God can be advantaged before God by something the world has to offer. Truth cannot be buttressed with the “rudiments of this world.” It cannot be fortified or clarified by the wisdom of this world, which God has counted “foolishness.” Such things are difficult for some to accept, but until that acceptance comes, growth will not occur.

The word of caution is a premier one for our time: “Beware lest any man spoil you!”

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

Lesson # 12

Solemnly the Spirit has warned us to beware of the beguiling and subversive influences of men. Using philosophy and vain deceit, men can lure us from the safety zone, causing us to become vulnerable to the devices of the devil (2:4,8). The need for being rooted and grounded had caused Paul to have a “great conflict” for the Colossians, Laodiceans, and all who had not seen his face – which includes us (2:1). He was spiritually aware and cognizant of the absolute essentiality of the Lord Jesus Christ in every aspect of spiritual life.

Already he has underscored the indispensability of the Lord Jesus. Consider some of his expressions previous to our text.

- Paul was an Apostle “of Jesus Christ” (1:1).
- Saints and faithful brethren are “in Christ” (1:2).
- In salvation, God is primarily “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3).
- Our faith is “in Christ Jesus” (1:4).
- Faithful ministers are ministers “of Christ” (1:5).

- It pleased the Father that “all fulness” should well “in Him” (1:19).
- The “afflictions” in which believers participate are “the afflictions of Christ” (1:24).
- The “hope of glory” is Christ “in” us (1:27).
- The objective is to “present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (1:28).
- Our faith is to be “steadfast” “in Christ” (2:5).
- We have received “Christ Jesus the Lord” (2:6a).
- We walk “in Him” (2:6b).
- We are “rooted and built up in Him” (2:7a).
- Anything that is not “after Christ” will make “spoil” of us, causing us to be taken captive by mere men (2:8).

THE NEED FOR THIS EMPHASIS

Although it may appear as though there is no need to elaborate upon the centrality of Jesus Christ, and His complete adequacy, this is not at all the case. A proper perception of the Lord Jesus Christ is most difficult to obtain, and even more demanding to maintain. This is particularly true when society is in a state of deterioration, and the religious environment is fundamentally corrupt. In order for such a perception to be enjoyed initially, and subsequently sustained, the following are required.

- The preaching of the Gospel (1 Cor 15:1-3).
- The expounding of the Gospel (Rom 15:29).
- The regular ingestion of the Word of God (Lk 4:4).
- The influence of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13; Rom 8:11,13; 15:13; Gal 5:5; Eph 3:16; 1 Pet 1:22).
- The prayers of then saints (Eph 6:18; Eph 1:18-20; 3:15-20; Col 1:9-11).
- The hearty efforts of the saints themselves (2 Cor 7:1; Phil 2:12; 1 Tim 4:16; 6:12).

These things are required because we are not living in a moral vacuum. Adversarial and competitive influences are regularly brought to bear upon our intellect, emotion, and will.

- We are living in a condemned and passing world (1 John 2:15-17).
- We have this treasure in earthen vessels (2 Cor 4:7).
- We are hounded by a fierce and cunning adversary (1 Pet 5:8).
- There is a contrary law resident in our members (Rom 7:23).
- There remains a sense in which we are still “absent from the Lord” (2 Cor 5:6).

THE CURSE OF THE CASUAL

Wherever a casual spirit is found among professing believers, there is no grasp of these things. Life is thus lived with no compelling sense of a need for Jesus. Those in the grip of such delusion are actually in a state of spiritual decline. If they had a grasp of the truth, they are losing it. Satan is gaining more and more access to them. Their spiritual vision and strength are fading, and will continue to do so until their backward stance is arrested.

There are no exceptions to this rule. We are in a condemned world, and a body that cannot enter the kingdom of God. We have a competing law within our own persons, and an adversary attacking us from without. It simply is not possible to comprehend this situation and remain in a nonchalant posture.

THE CAUSE OF DEMISE

The failure to see this is the cause of all religious compromise and moral and spiritual decline. This is why the following conditions exist in the American church.

- The dominance of a professional clergy, and a consequent stress on education.
- An emphasis on entertainment and events with popular appeal.
- Sermonic shallowness and brevity, which tend to be joined together.
- Infrequency of general assemblies.
- An inordinate stress on appearance.
- A remarkable level of Scriptural illiteracy throughout the church.

I am going to wax bold and affirm, these conditions are the direct result of pushing Jesus into the background. There is nothing about Jesus, what He has accomplished, or what He is doing, that contributes to, or encourages, such things. The Gospel of Christ does not promote them in any degree or to any extent.

While the notion that Jesus Christ is not adequate is not actually affirmed among most believers, this impression is being produced. If men do not preach a message that affirms everything hinges upon Christ, men will tend to think this is not the case. If “the Lord’s Christ” is not the heart and core of both preaching and teaching, we should not be surprised if He is not the heart and core of living.

This is precisely why Paul now strikes down the idea that Jesus is in any sense peripheral in matters pertaining to life and godliness. He is not an adjunct to sound doctrine, but is the heart and soul of it. That is what is intended by the expression, “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10). One version reads, “For the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus.” NLT

HOW ADEQUATE IS JESUS?

How adequate is Jesus Christ? Is everything related to our salvation really found in Him, and in Him alone?

Jesus spoke directly of the indispensability of Himself, as well as his solitary uniqueness.

- THE Way, THE Truth, and THE Life. “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).
- THE true Vine. “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman” (John 15:1).
- THE Door. “I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:9).
- THE good Shepherd. “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).
- THE Bread of life. “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).
- THE light of the world. “I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).
- THE resurrection and the life. “Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25).

Jesus does not share these roles with anyone or anything else. His position in all of them is exclusive. That is why it was declared, and is written, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). That is “salvation” in all of its fulness. It is the salvation of which we heard when the Gospel came to us (Eph 1:13). It is the salvation we are currently working out with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). It is the salvation that is “ready to be revealed” in the day of the Lord (1 Pet 1:5).

In order for a professing Christian to fail to grow, remaining in spiritual infancy, or to draw back in retrogression, the following must take place. This is so because everything about salvation is calculated to produce maturity and an increasingly strong grasp and perception of the truth of God.

- God's great salvation must be neglected (Heb 2:3).
- The Spirit must be quenched (1 Thess 5:19).
- The Spirit must be grieved (Eph 4:30).
- The Spirit must be resisted (Acts 7:51).
- People must forget they were purged from their old sins (2 Pet 1:9).
- The Word of God must be neglected (Luke 4:4).
- The Son of God must be trodden under foot (Heb 10:29a).
- The blood of the covenant must be accounted an unholy thing (Heb 10:29b).
- An evil heart of unbelief must enter unto the person (Heb 3:12).
- The person must cease to look unto Jesus, the Author and the Finisher of our faith (Heb 12:2).
- A place must have been made for the devil (Eph 4:27).
- Satan was not resisted by steadfastness on the faith (1 Pet 5:9).
- The beginning of confidence was not held steadfastly (Heb 3:14).
- Salvation was not worked out with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12).
- The individual did not abide in Christ (John 15:4,7).
- Backsliders have ceased to take up their cross daily and follow Christ Jesus (Lk 9:23).

Backsliding is not possible if these things do not take place – and where they do take place, drawing back is inevitable. God will not allow any person to grow spiritually or remain stable who relegates Christ to the outskirts of life. Further, nothing in the Gospel encourages such a posture. A good conscience will not allow a person to consider Christ secondary. A pure heart is repulsed by such an attitude. The Holy Spirit will strive against such a notion. The word of Christ will not dwell richly in the person who does not keep Jesus in the foreground of thought

and purpose.

No person can allow the sophistry of contemporary religion to erode the persuasion that Jesus is, in fact, “highly exalted,” and has been given “a name which is above every name” (Phil 2:9). Wherever these pivotal realities have become obscure, competing influences have gained the upper hand. All profession of allegiance to Christ is thus negated, and He has “become of no effect” (Gal 5:4).

A REASON FOR THIS SECTION

This is one of strong reasons why the Lord Jesus must be properly expounded. No room must be left for the entrance of distracting thoughts that move a person to live with Christ in the background. God has put Him into the foreground, setting Him “forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood” (Rom 3:25). A “propitiation” is a merciful covering – like the “mercy seat” over the ark of the covenant. That covering, however, is realized through Divinely appointed means – “through faith in His blood.” Where Christ is not central, there can be no faith “in His blood.” And, where such a faith does not exist, Jesus is not a merciful covering! That does have some alarming ramifications!

Through the Holy Spirit, Paul will now expound the Person and accomplishments of Christ – two indispensable perceptions relating to salvation. His words will confirm that it is totally unreasonable for Jesus to occupy a secondary position in any facet of salvation, any aspect of spiritual life, or any view of the redemption that is in Him alone.

“ 2:9 For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”

Throughout church history, a variety of differing and competing views have been perpetrated and adopted in Christendom. Some have held that Jesus is not Divine – that His essential Person was created, and hence had a beginning. Others hold that the Godhead, or Deity, is comprised of a single personality, performing three different functions – each of which is related to time. There are a number of nuances in these, and other, theological opinions.

The presence of the text before us confirms that men are not at liberty to entertain a wrong view of Jesus Christ. Men can have different views of meats and days, but they cannot have differing views of Christ Jesus. God has provided a “record” of His Son (1 John 5:10-11). That record provides remarkable details concerning His Person, accomplishments, present activity, and what He will do in the future. The Epistles are an exposition of that Gospel, in which contradicting views are dashed to the ground with kingdom violence.

We simply cannot be wrong about the Son of God! That is precisely why this extended exposition has been

written. This is the real Jesus, not “another Jesus” concocted within the minds of finite men (2 Cor 11:4).

WHAT WILL BE ESTABLISHED

This passage will establish that, in matters pertaining to life and godliness, God has nothing to offer men that is not in Christ Jesus. God has invested everything in His Son, and nothing He gives can be obtained independently of Him. The case Paul makes will be unusually strong because of what is at stake. He will face us with eternal issues.

IN HIM DWELLETH

“For in Him dwelleth . . .” The phrase “in Him” has two sides – and both are essential.

- First, what is mentioned is resident in Jesus. It constitutes a part of His Person, and is indispensable to His present ministry. This text, therefore, clarifies who Jesus IS.
- Second, the advantages of these things can only be realized by those who are themselves “in Christ.” Therefore, this text also elucidates on that to which we HAVE ACCESS in Christ Jesus.

If we remove Jesus from the picture, we can entertain no adequate concept of what is said to be resident in Him. Also, without being in Christ, we have no access to what is in Him – i.e. it can bring no advantages to us.

If the language of the text seems lofty, we must not turn away from it, or imagine ourselves unequal to comprehending its meaning. This is written to all of the brethren, young and old, and is for our edification. It has to do with being rooted and grounded, and steadfast in the faith.

ALL THE FULNESS

“ . . . all the fulness of the Godhead . . .” Other versions read, “the fulness of Deity,” NASB “the fulness of the Deity,” NIV “the whole fulness of Deity,” NRSV “the wealth of God’s Being,” BBE “Deity in all of its fulness,” NJB “the fulness of God.” NLT

The word “fulness” denotes completeness – not mere abundance. That is, the “fulness” of something means it is all of it.

This is now the second time Paul has referred to the fulness resident in Christ Jesus. He first affirmed, “it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell” (Col 1:19). Not only does is this “fulness” pleasing to God, it is in strict accord with His eternal purpose.

This is to be understood within the context of the previous verse – although its meaning is not limited to that context. Believers stood in danger of being spoiled, or taken captive, by philosophy, vain deceit, and the traditions of men. All of those things are said to be “not of Christ.” That is, not a solitary one of them, or any

aspect thereof, is found in Christ. They are outside of Him, and are thus invalid in the things having to do with “life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). They are not part of what God has prepared for those who love Him.

The things concerning which Paul has warned the saints do not come from God . They are not Divinely given or distributed. They are rather of man, through man, and to man. Nor, indeed, is the Lord Jesus associated with any of them. They are, in every sense of the word, “not of Christ.”

Everything that makes God “God” is found in the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. These things are not simply found in Him, they belong in Him, or are at home in Him. He is the appointed repository for every Divine quality or characteristic . There is nothing that is exclusively resident in God, or comes uniquely from God, that is not found in Christ. Therefore, the fact that He is “the MAN Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5) puts these things within the reach of those who are in Him! This is the point that will be developed in the following verses, and it is powerful.

Faith is the means employed to take hold of these indispensable verities. Further, none of them are mere theological novelties, but are essential in the matter of our salvation. When we “put on the new man” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10) a hunger and thirst for righteousness is awakened, together with desires to do the will of the Lord and please Him. It is at that point that gratefulness rises in the heart for access to Diving qualities.

This makes this passage particularly precious. It confirms to our hearts that in the Lord Jesus, to whom we are “joined” (1 Cor 6:17) and “married” (Rom 7:4), everything required for life and godliness is resident.

BODILY

“ . . . bodily.” Other versions read, “living form,” BBE “corporeally,” DOUAY “bodily form,” NIB and “a human body.” NLT This is the only place in Scripture where this precise word is used – as an adverb. Elsewhere the English version contains the word “bodily” in an adjective form: “bodily shape like a dove” (Lk 3:22), “bodily presence” (2 Cor 10:10), and “bodily exercise” (1 Tim 4:8). The “fulness” of the Holy Spirit was not resident in the dove that rested upon Jesus. The fulness of Paul’s person was not contained in his “bodily presence.” The full ramifications of “exercise” are not found in “bodily exercise.” However, the “fulness of the Godhead” was incarnated, or enfleshed, in Christ Jesus, and continues to dwell within Him.

The word “bodily” points to the incarnation of the Word, when “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). When Jesus was called “Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matt 1:23), a mere token presence was not the point – such as the limited manifestation of God at Sinai. God, in all of His fulness, is resident in “the Man Christ Jesus” 1 Tim 2:5). That is why, in Christ, it is written that “God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim 3:16).

In the light of this declaration, several of Christ’s expressions can be more clearly understood.

- “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9).
- “He that believeth on Me, believeth not on Me, but on Him that sent Me ” (John12:44).

- “He that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me ” (Mat 10:40).
- “He that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me ” (Luke 10:16).
- “And he that seeth Me seeth Him that sent Me ” (John 12:45).
- “Then said they unto Him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know Me, nor My Father: if ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also ” (John 8:19).

Because “the fulness of the Godhead” dwells “bodily” in Christ, He is referred to as “the righteous” (1 John 2:1), “the holy One” (Mk 1:24), and “the great God and Savior” (Tit 2:13). This is why He was worshiped (Matt 2:11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 18:26; 28:9,17). This is why “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Phil 2:10). Eventually, His supremacy will be acknowledged by all.

In Christ Jesus, all of the Divine attributes meet together for the accomplishment of salvation. This is a fulfillment of the Davidic psalm, “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psa 85:10).

A Profound Statement

There can be no question about the profundity of this statement. He was, as some theological statements have affirmed, “fully man and fully God.” This, of course, is a “great mystery” to the flesh. Yet, it can be “acknowledged” by faith, bringing confidence, joy, and understanding to the believing heart (Col 2:2).

In Jesus, anything that appeared to contradict the Divine nature was a voluntary expression of His own will – not a manifestation of inherent inferiority or limitation. A few examples will serve to illustrate this point.

- Jesus increased in wisdom and stature (Lk 2:52a).
- Jesus grew in favor with God (Lk 2:52b).
- Jesus was tempted (Heb 2:18; 4:15).
- Jesus hungered (Matt 4:2).
- Jesus thirsted (John 19:28).
- Jesus was weary (John 4:6).

- Jesus prayed with strong crying and tears (Heb 5:7a).
- Jesus feared (Heb 5:7b).
- Jesus learned obedience (Heb 5:8).
- Jesus died (Rom 5:6,8).

Some have viewed these texts as evidence that Jesus was not Divine. However, these do not describe the essential nature of Christ Jesus. Rather, they are what He voluntarily took upon Himself (Heb 5:5-9). This was involved in Jesus “humbling Himself,” becoming “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:8). He divested Himself of the prerogatives of Deity, sheathing, as it were, the sword of Divinity. He submitted to the subduing of expression, yet remained “God,” just as the Father said (Heb 1:8).

The humility of Christ pertains to His tenure in this world – commencing with His birth, and concluding with His death. During that period, He did not appear to be God “manifest in the flesh” – yet He was, as His transfiguration confirmed (Matt 17:2; Mk 9:2-3). Now, the Lord Jesus is no more restricted by His manhood. His sword is no longer sheathed, and He is no more tempted.

“ 10a And ye are complete in Him . . . ” Other versions read, “In Him you have been made complete,” NASB “you have been given fullness in Christ,” NIV “you have come to fullness in Him,” NRSV “ye are made full,” ASV and “find your own fulfilment.” NJB

Only a Savior who is Himself complete, having “all the fulness of the Godhead,” can make a people complete.

Everything that God has reserved for you, or requires of you, is found in Christ Jesus. Nothing that you truly need can be obtained anywhere else. Christ is not merely one of many resources, He is our exclusive Resource. Satisfaction cannot be realized from anyone or anything else. There is not a single aspect of adequacy that can be realized apart from Him. What you need is found in Christ alone. What God requires of you is found only in Jesus. The satisfaction of heart and mind that men crave can only be realized in the Person of Jesus Christ.

There are no unfilled chasms in Christ Jesus, no voids, and no moral or spiritual deserts. Everything you need for both time and eternity are resident in Jesus, and are therefore dispensed by Him. All of this is involved in Christ’s statement concerning Himself, “For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself” (John 5:26).

It is ever true, “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5:12). That is life in all of its fulness – the fulness God intended in the creation, and particularly, the re-creation, of men.

If it is true that we are “complete in Him,” then there is no completeness independently of Him. No person who is not in fellowship with Christ, regardless of their purported advancement, has reached their potential. In fact, such people do not entertain the faintest notion about what and who they could be.

The impact that this knowledge – that we are “complete in Him” – is expressed wonderfully by the Apostle Paul. *“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* NASB (Phil 3:7-14).

We are “complete in Him!” All that we need is found in Him to whom we have been joined (1 Cor 6:17). If it is wisdom and knowledge, it is “in Him.” If it is “righteous, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit,” it is “in Him.” If it is strength, comfort, and peace, it is “in Him.” God has nothing to give us outside of Christ. There is no spiritual or eternal advantage that can come from any other source. There are no supplements to Jesus, nothing that can be added to Him to cause greater effectiveness or Kingdom utility. In every sense, we are “complete in Him.”

The point of this text is most sobering. In matters pertaining to life and godliness, whatever does not come from Christ, when received, removes us from Christ, making the graces resident in Him inaccessible to us. There is no neutrality in this issue. Everything required for salvation, both in this world and the one to come, is found in Christ alone.

No one can be made more spiritual in any sense by resources that are not ministered by the Lord Jesus. It is essential that this is seen. This is the case because God will not allow anything pertaining to salvation to be realized apart from Christ.

If the “fulness of the Godhead” dwells bodily in Christ, it should be readily apparent that none of that fulness can be appropriated apart from Him . It cannot be obtained from nature, government, or the wisdom of this world in any of its varied forms.

Through the Spirit, Paul will now proceed to expound this reality. He will show that there is no adversarial or beneficial power that is not under Him. IN regeneration, everything that we have been made or that we have experienced has been through Him. The total victory over the foes that had enslaved us was wrought by Christ, and Christ alone.

All true satisfaction comes from Jesus alone. That is why He said to the woman at the well, “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

All spiritual aptitude comes from Him alone. As it is written, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil 4:13). That is why it is also written, “But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him ” (1 Cor 8:6).

“ 10b . . . which is the Head of all principality and power . . . ”

Whether men wish to acknowledge it or not, there are superior powers with which they have to do. Some of them are adversarial, and some are friendly to those who are in Christ Jesus. Man is not sufficient of himself to subdue adversarial powers, or harness powers that bring eternal advantage. When it comes to the vast spiritual host all about us, we ourselves are vastly inferior to them in every way. They are of a higher order than mankind, who, in his pristine state, was “made a little lower than the angels” (Psa 8:4-5; Heb 2:6-7).

THE HEAD

“ . . . which is the Head . . . ” Another version read, “He is the Lord over.” NLT

The word “Head” means “supreme, chief, prominent,” THAYER “designating first, or superior in rank.” ROBERTSON

- First, Jesus is “Head” because He is “before all things” (Col 1:17) – that is, He Himself was not created, but is before all [created] things.
- Second, He is “Head” because everything that was made was created by Him: “All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3).
- Third, He is “Head” because all things that are created are held together by Him, thus serving one grand eternal purpose: “and by Him all things consist,” or “hold together” NIV (Col 1:17b). Again, it is written that He is “upholding all things by the word of His power” (Heb 1:3).

The Lord Jesus is not a figurehead, or one that is superior in name only. In the earth, there are individuals who are symbolically over others, yet can be effectively resisted by those under them – even assassinated by one of their subordinates. The Lord Jesus, however, is not one that OUGHT to be “Head,” He IS the “Head.” What He

does cannot be undone by another. What He command stands “fast,” and cannot be countermanded by the word or action of another (Psa 33:9).

The ultimate commands all come from Him. All other commands are, at the very best, temporary, and must eventually yield to His word.

Christ’s Headship is affirmed numerous places. In every case a sense of Divine pungency is perceived.

- “But I would have you know, that the HEAD of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor 11:3).
- “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the HEAD over all things to the church” (Eph 1:22)
- “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the HEAD , even Christ” (Eph 4:15).
- “And he is the HEAD of the body, the church : who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Col 1:18).
- “And not holding the HEAD , from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (Col 2:19).
- “Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the HEAD of the corner” (1 Pet 2:7).

When it comes to the execution of the “eternal purpose” of God , “the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5) is “the Head.” “All power in heaven and in earth” has been given to Him. It is not possible, therefore, for any needed resource to be obtained independently of Him. He is, in every sense of the word, “ over all , God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:5).

ALL PRINCIPALITY AND POWER

“ . . . of all principality and power.” Other versions read, “all rule and authority,” NASB “every power and authority,” NIV “every ruler and authority,” NRSV and “every sovereignty and ruling force.” NJB

The word “principality” emphasizes being first over a certain order or domain. It has to do with nature as well as rank. The word “power” underscores authority, showing that the personality involved possesses the ability to govern the area over which he presides – an ability that is delegated by the ultimate Head, who is Christ.

- The entire angelic order, sent to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation (Heb 12:13-14).
- An evil host of spiritual opponents against whom the saints “wrestle” (Eph 6:12).

- Michael, who stands for the people of Israel (Dan 10:21; 12:1).
- Angel over the waters (Rev 16:5).
- Angel over the fire (Rev 14:18).
- Angels having control of the four winds (Rev 7:1).
- Prince of Persia (Dan 10:20a).
- Prince of Grecia (Dan 10:20b).
- Satan, who is the prince of the power of the air (Eph 2:2).
- Angel who can open or close the bottomless pit (Rev 9:1-2; 20:1).
- Demons who perpetrate damnable doctrines (1 Tim 4:1).
- Wicked spirits to transform themselves into “ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor 11:14).

There is spiritual hierarchy of authority that is staggering for depth. It includes personalities “that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, [and] powers” (Col 1:16).

- On the holy side there are holy angels (Matt 25:31), archangels (1 Thess 4:16), principalities (Eph 3:10a), powers (Eph 3:2:10b), seraphim (Isa 6:2,6), cherubim (Gen 3:24; 2 Sam 22:11), and living creatures (Rev 4:6).
- On the evil side, there are principalities (Eph 6:12a), powers (Eph 6:12b), the rulers of the darkness of this world (Eph 6:12c), spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph 6:12d), demons (James 2:10), familiar spirits (Isa 19:3), unclean spirits (Acts 8:7), spirit of infirmity (Lk 13:11), dumb and deaf spirits (Mk 9:25), and Satan, who is “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2) and “the god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4). Jesus referred to this entire conglomeration of evil as “the power of darkness” (Lk 22:53). As the Head over all, Jesus has delivered us from this power (Col 1:13).

WE REQUIRE SUCH A HEAD

The salvation of fallen man requires a Savior who is “over all” (Rom 9:5). Men are not saved by a Divine fiat, the means by which the worlds were created (Heb 11:3). Through the exalted Christ, God is working salvation in the midst of the earth (Psa 74:12). He is working all things together for the good of those who love Him, and are the called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28). Such a large work requires a Sovereign, into whose hand all power and authority have been committed. Such a Savior must have “power over all flesh” (John 17:2), having triumphed over all opposing influences.

Let it be clear, it simply is not possible to safely navigate from earth to glory without the holy angels ministering to us. Furthermore, it is not possible to overcome the power of darkness without a Savior who reigns over that domain, as well as the holy angels.

Men – even redeemed men – have no ability to marshal the power of a single angel to work in their behalf, let alone “an innumerable company of angels” (Heb 12:22). What person is able to restrain the devil, or any of his horde of wicked spirits, by natural ability, or independently of the exalted Savior? Is there any form of education capable of this assignment?

If Jesus is not presently the “head of all principality and power,” salvation in any of its multifarious facets is simply impossible! We are, in every sense of the word, “complete in Him,” and totally and irremediably incomplete without Him!

There is no power that does not bow to Jesus when perceiving Him. That will be substantiated when the Lord Jesus appears in all of His glory. Then, publically and without exception, “at the name of Jesus every knee [will] bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Phil 2:10). If this was not the case, it would not be possible for anyone to be saved. The people of God need to hear the affirmation of Christ’s Headship frequently.

“ 11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.”

The Spirit now takes us to a point in time when we experienced deliverance from the power of darkness, and translation into the kingdom of God’s Son (Col 1:13). In this declaration, Christ’s Headship over all is being confirmed. The change in our status was wholly dependent upon the working of Jesus. Our obedience played a role, it is true – but that role was not the decisive one. It is what Jesus did that made the real difference. This does not minimize our obedience, or suggest that it was not necessary. That is such a rudimentary observation, it should not be necessary to elaborate further upon it. The fact that the Spirit takes us back to the point of our obedience confirms it was not incidental. However, the point He will make is what the Lord Jesus did at that time.

IN WHOM

“In whom also . . .” Other versions read, “In Him you were also.” NKJV/NASB/NIV

Here a most significant point is being made. First, in regard to our experience, this is something that took place “IN” Christ. Until we were in some way joined to Him, the benefit now declared did not take place.

Second, while the Lord Jesus is, indeed, the “Head of all principality and power,” the power and authority associated with that Headship must be employed in a personal work within us. That is the significance of the word “also.” That is, not only is Jesus the Sovereign over all power, He employed that power in accomplishing a specific work within us. That work involved the subduing of inimical powers, as well as the creation of a new condition within us.

Nothing of eternal significance can take place within a person until he is “in Christ” – until he is united with Him. This is a unity that can only be effected by the Lord. It is too challenging for created personalities to accomplish.

YE ARE CIRCUMCISED

“ . . . ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, . . . ” Other versions read, “circumcised with a circumcision made without hands,” NASB “not with a circumcision done by the hands of men,” NIV “circumcised with a spiritual circumcision,” NRSV “circumcised, but not by a physical procedure.” NLT

It is imperative that we regard this as a proclamation of something essential to our salvation, for Jesus does not do unnecessary things. What is here described is an aspect of being saved, and there is no one saved without this action taking place.

Circumcision of Old Time

The circumcision that is now expounded was introduced in type by a circumcision that was made with hands. That circumcision was first given to Abraham as a “token of the covenant” God made with him, to bless the world through his offspring (Gen 17:11). Like all types and shadows, that circumcision was not a precise depiction of what would be fulfilled in Christ Jesus. However, it did confirm that something would be severed from saved. It would be in a private and unseen part of their person, and it would result in a sensitivity that had been restrained by nature.

A Promise Under the Law

Before Israel entered the promised land, Moses told the people of their hard-heartedness, and of the necessity of inward modification. First, he challenged the people to change their own nature: “ Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart , and be no more stiffnecked” (Deu 10:16). Those who took the matter seriously soon found such a thing could not be accomplished in the flesh, or the energy of nature. That is precisely why, centuries later, David cried out, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psa 51:10). He knew if the Lord did not do this, it simply would not be done.

Moses did not leave the matter wholly in the hands of the people, but told them of a coming time when God Himself would circumcise their hearts. “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart , and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deu 30:6).

Notice the marvelous result of the circumcision of the heart. The people would then love the Lord with all their heart and soul. The Law demanded that such a love be yielded, yet gave no power for it to be accomplished. However, “what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh” (Rom 8:3), God Himself would accomplish through a spiritual circumcision.

A Promise through the Prophets

Moses was not the only one who spoke of the necessity of an inner, or spiritual, circumcision. The prophets also spoke of this requirement. Jeremiah cried out, “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings” (Jer 4:4). Ezekiel prophesied similarly: “Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezek 18:31).

The Prophets described the people as “uncircumcised in the heart” (Jer 9:26; Ezek 44:7,9). Stephen also charged his generation with being “uncircumcised in heart and ears” (Acts 7:51).

In these prophesies God was confirming He would not save men eternally while they remained in a state of rebellion. Unless men were intrinsically and essentially changed, they would not be saved. Thus the prophets followed Moses’ example, calling upon the people to change themselves. In both cases – with Moses and with the Prophets – God was confirming the impotence of nature, and the essentiality of a Divine working in salvation.

The prophets also heralded a time when the Living God would accomplish the renewal that was required in mankind. Ezekiel described the work in this way: “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Ezek 11:19-20). Again Ezekiel wrote, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Ezek 36:26-27).

Again, notice the result of this wonderful work. (1) They would walk in His statutes. (2) They would keep His ordinances and do them. (3) They would be God’s people. (4) God would be their God. In other words, the fundamental nature and character of the people would be changed. The people would no longer be rebellious, but would be “willing in the day of His power” (Psa 110:4).

Confirmed by the Apostles

Paul confirms the reality of this change in the essential nature of men. “But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Rom 2:29).

This “circumcision” is what constitutes those in Christ a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17).

THE BODY OF THE SINS OF THE FLESH

“... in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh...” Other versions read, “BY putting off...” NKJV “in the removal of the body of the flesh,” NASB “In the putting off of the sinful nature,” NIV “in despoiling of the body of the flesh,” DOUAY “by stripping off the carnal body,” NAB “the complete stripping of your natural self,” NJB and “the cutting away of your sinful nature.” NLT

A Precise Surgical Procedure

If circumcision in the flesh was an exacting procedure, much more is the circumcision in heart and spirit. Here the circumcision is the removal of something – called “the body of the sins of the flesh.” In the cases of Abraham, and under the Law, only a token amount of the flesh was removed. In Christ, the work is more thorough.

The “body” refers to the entirety of the fleshly, or carnal, nature. It is equivalent to the removal of the “stony heart” of Ezekiel (Ezek 36:26), and the taking away of “all thy tin (alloy)” of Isaiah (Isa 1:25). In the book of Romans, the same procedure is called the destroying of “the body of sin” (Rom 6:6).

Sin has caused a spiritual growth upon the heart that deadened men toward the Lord, rendering him spiritually insensitive. Scripture refers to this condition as being “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1), “dead in sins” (Eph 2:5), and “dead in your sins” (Col 2:13). This state was part of our essential makeup – it was really what we were. As such, we could have no real identity with the Lord. It was imperative that this corrupt nature be separated from our essential persons. That is precisely what this circumcision accomplished.

Not the Obliteration of the Flesh

Contrary to the thinking of some, this operation did not obliterate “the flesh,” so that it no longer existed. The “body of sin” was “destroyed” in the same sense Satan was destroyed by the death of Christ (Heb 2:14). It was rendered powerless in the domain of the Spirit, or the “heavenly places.” To put it another way, we are no longer obligated to the sinful nature, as we were prior to being in Christ. This is precisely what is affirmed by the words, “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh” (Rom 8:12).

At the point of this circumcision, we became a dual personality – “the old man” and “the new man” (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10). Although experientially, it seems as though “the old man” is actually part of our primary person, this is not the case at all. Having been cut away from us, “the old man,” or “body of the sins of the flesh,” is like an intruder, taking up residence in our bodies. He is like the impenitent thief upon the cross (Lk 23:39). He shouts and he makes demands, yet he is in the midst of death throes. He has been cut away from the person in Christ – “circumcised.”

The practical result of this blessed “circumcision” is that we no longer desire to sin, nor do we find pleasure in it. We are fundamentally Christ-centered instead of self-centered. The fleshly inclinations that we once nourished are now subdued in the power of the Spirit. That is why it is written, “And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24). Note, the Spirit does not say this is something those in Christ should do, but something they have done. It is not a goal, but a reality. This is what happens when we are “circumcised with the circumcision not made with hands.”

Not in the Flesh, but in the Spirit

The blessed transaction that is being described is not a mythical one, or one existing only in type. This is a very real circumcision – a very real removal of the sinful nature from our essential persons. The Spirit testifies to us of its reality, then calls upon us to shape our thinking around this fact. This is what is intended by the following admonition: “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11). Thus we are summoned to think in strict accord with what has actually taken place in Christ Jesus.

The Remnant of the Flesh Remains

At this point, many believers have become confused. The demands of the carnal nature are often so strong that the child of God imagines those demands are expressions of his real person. Here is where we must learn to reason as Paul did. After experiencing the expressions of the “old man,” or “flesh,” Paul found he was unable to stop these very expressions at the thought level. He found himself confronting thoughts he did not want to have, yet could not stop from entering his mind. Referring to these thoughts, or imaginations, here is what he said. “For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I . . . Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me . . . I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me . . . But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom 7:15,17,21,23).

Paul knew his heart had been circumcised, and yet the remnants of what was cut off remained within his body. That fleshly remnant could not be part of his renewed heart, but found residence in his “vile body” (Phil 3:21), which has not yet been renewed. As repulsive as the expressions were that erupted from the “old man,” Paul knew they were not really coming from his new heart and spirit. He therefore took delight in anticipating his coming deliverance from the body. When that deliverance came, he would have done with the expressions of the “old man.” Thus he said, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom 7:24-25).

The glory of this insight is that it confirmed Paul’s justification, for where sin is genuinely hated, and righteousness is really loved, justification has taken place. This is why Paul breaks forth in praise in the eighth chapter of Romans. “There is therefore [in view of the warfare between the flesh and the spirit] now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:1).

My Own Experience

I can testify that insight into this circumcision constituted one of the greatest deliverances of my life. Once I saw what Jesus had actually accomplished in my own regeneration, sin lost its power over me. When I perceived that there were really two personalities living in my body, and that one of them did not belong to me, I was finally able to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,” living “soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” (Tit 2:11-12). I was able to come with boldness to “throne of grace,” to “obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need” (Heb 4:16).

And when, due to my own weakness, I found that I had sinned, yielding to the part of my person that had been circumcised from me, I was able to confess my sins to God, and obtain the cleansing I craved (1 John 1:9). Then I was able to realize the power of First John 2:1: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous” (1 John 2:1).

THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST

“ . . . by the circumcision of Christ.” This is “the circumcision done by Christ” NIV Himself.

When this circumcision was accomplished, your stony heart was removed, and you were given a heart of

flesh (Ezek 36:26). This is when God put His Spirit within you (Ezek 36:27), sending Him into your heart, because you were His son (Gal 4:6). This is when God put His laws into your mind, and wrote them upon your heart (Heb 8:10). They were written upon your “new heart,” and put into your “new spirit” (Ezek 11:19).

This is the circumcision described in Romans 2:29 – one that is “of the heart, in the Spirit.” NKJV Everyone who is in Christ Jesus experiences this circumcision. Because of that circumstance, the saints are thus described: “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3). Those in Jesus are not people who OUGHT to worship, but those who DO worship Him. They are not people SHOULD rejoice in Christ Jesus, but those who DO rejoice in Him. They are not individuals who are under an obligation to not have confidence in the flesh, but those who have NO confidence in the flesh.

Those are the results of being circumcised with the circumcision made without hands.

Much of the professing church has not done well in presenting these realities. The result has been a general state of spiritual weakness among those who could be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Too, the church has every right to expect professing believers to be a “new creation,” not having the mark of the world upon them.

“ 12a Buried with Him in baptism . . . ”

How will the Spirit elaborate on this most blessed condition – being circumcised by Jesus, and having the whole body of the sins of the flesh cut away from the part of us that is born of God? When will He say this occurred? Is there some event – some point in time – to which He will point us?

The gravity of the event that has just been described must be emphasized. This is something that Jesus Christ Himself has accomplished - “the circumcision of Christ .” This is not something that was accomplished by man – it is a circumcision “made without hands.” It has not dealt with some sin, or some sinful expressions, but with “the removal of the body of the flesh.”

Is there a person of sound mind in all the world that will affirm this is something that is optional? Who will dare to declare that any person standing before the Lord of glory can do without this circumcision? Should such a person exist, we will simply stop our ears and refuse to listen to him. Such an individual is “subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself” (Tit 3:11).

Once the necessity of this circumcision is acknowledged, with what will it be associated? The Spirit will

now speak “expressly.” He does so because something of this magnitude will have no power if we are unable to relate to it.

BURIED WITH HIM

“Buried with Him . . .” Part of the Gospel is the burial of Christ: “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor 15:1-4).

The burial of Christ is to redemption what the scape goat was to the day of atonement (Lev 16:8-26). After the sins of the people were symbolically transferred to this goat (vs 21-22), it was led by a fit man into “a land not inhabited,” and there released. This foreshadowed Jesus, the “Lamb of God,” taking away the sins of the world, bearing them, as it was, into “the land of forgetfulness” (Psa 88:12).

Think of it this way: when Jesus was on the cross, He “His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:24). However, when He rose from the dead, those sins were not in His resurrection body. They had been effectively “taken away.” Christ’s burial, in which He was identified with “the wicked” (Isa 53:9), is also a point in which we become identified with Him. We are, it is affirmed, “buried with Him.”

Now the Spirit will identify when this burial took place. He does not leave it to men to conjecture when Jesus circumcised them, cutting away from their essential persons the whole sinful nature. This is too important for men to attempt to find it by groping about in theological darkness. Too much depends on the awareness of this for it to be vague and ambiguous.

IN BAPTISM

“. . . in baptism . . .” The preponderance of versions read “IN baptism.” A few versions read differently, but with the same sense: “through baptism,” GENEVA “by your baptism,” NJB “when you were baptized” NLT

Because this verse impinges upon some of the cherished traditions of men, it is very difficult for some to receive. However, the Scriptures are too clear on this matter to justify any confusion among believers concerning it.

This is the “one baptism” that is affirmed in Ephesians 4:5). It is the baptism Jesus referenced when He told His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mat 28:19). Concerning this baptism, He also promised, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).

Those who contend this refers to being baptized with the Spirit are simply wrong. That baptism is something Jesus Himself performs (Matt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; John 1:33). This is a baptism His people accomplish.

This baptism is also set forth in the history of Apostles as the point at which people became identified with Christ. Peter commanded the convicted sinners on the day of Pentecost to “be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Those who “gladly received the word were baptized” (Acts 2:41). When the people in Samaria believed Philip’s preaching “they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12). Upon his confession that he believed “Jesus Christ is the Son of God,” the Ethiopian eunuch was “baptized” (Acts 8:36-38). Upon beholding the repentance of Saul of Tarsus, Ananias told him, “arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 9:18; 22:16). Peter commanded the household of Cornelius to be baptized in water (Acts 10:47-48). Upon hearing the Gospel, and having her heart opened by the Lord, Lydia and her household were “baptized” (Acts 16:15). Upon hearing the Gospel, the Philippian jailor, “he and all his,” were straightway baptized “the same hour of the night” (Acts 16:33). Many of the Corinthians, hearing the Gospel “believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). Upon hearing that the Messiah had come, certain disciples of John “were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5).

“Buried”

Baptism is elsewhere called “the form of the doctrine” (Rom 6:17) – that is, it is outward depiction of the Gospel, which is “the doctrine.” Just as Jesus was buried “in the heart of the earth” (Matt 12:40), so those who are baptized are “buried” in the water. However, the point here is not the burial itself, but THE ONE with whom we are identified in that burial. This does not diminish the significance of the form, but even lends more weight to it. A “form” that does not precisely portray the truth of which it is the form, is meaningless.

Baptism is only valid when a person is “buried WITH Christ.” Note,. The text does not say “LIKE Christ,” but “WITH Christ.” In further instruction concerning our baptism, the book of Romans also makes a point of this. “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death” (Rom 6:4).

In this picture, there is a difference between our burial and that of our Lord. Jesus died, and was then buried. His death preceded His burial. But that is not the case when we are “buried with Him.” We are buried INTO death – “buried with Him by baptism INTO DEATH.” Therefore the powerful question is asked, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death ?” (Rom 6:3).

The “circumcision of Christ” occurred IN our baptism – when we were “buried WITH HIM.” That is when the spiritual surgery took place that brought a certain dichotomy to our persons, creating the “new man,” and leaving the “old man.” This is why the Spirit phrases the teaching so precisely. Speaking of our baptism, the text reads, “wherein,” or “in which.” NIV

What shall we say of those who denigrate baptism, leaving the impression that it is unimportant, having nothing whatsoever to do with salvation? Those who choose to affirm such things have only betrayed their ignorance. Such miserable teaching is suggesting the circumcision of Christ has nothing to do with salvation. They are saying being buried with Christ is unrelated to salvation. They are affirming that the putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh is not associated with salvation. These postulates are such absurdities, they deserve no other explanation.

BAPTISM ASSOCIATED WITH CHANGE

There are a number of things with which our baptism is associated.

Remission of Sin . Through it, the remission of sins is realized (Acts 2:38). That is, therein sins are “washed away” (Acts 22:16). Although this association is denied by great bodies of professing Christians, it is one that has been made by the Holy Spirit. It is therefore beyond all controversy.

The Gift of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is also related to receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 19:2-6).

Putting on Christ. Baptism is associated with putting on Christ, or being clothed with Christ (Gal 3:27).

A Change of Life. This particular text is emphasizing the connection of baptism with a change of life. Through it we passed from death to life. We moved from being in sin to walking in the newness of life. It is most unfortunate that many who emphasize baptism are not noted for proclaiming or demonstrating the reality of a changed life. Unchanged lives are unacceptable.

“ 12b . . . wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead.”

The Spirit continues to elaborate on our baptism – something that is held forth as common among all believers. It is a reference point for spiritual reasoning – reasoning that is essential to maintaining a sound mind.

WHEREIN

“ . . . wherein also . . . ” The subject is still that of our baptism “into Christ” (Gal 3:27). The circumcision of Christ is not the only thing that took place in that obedient act, when we “obeyed from the heart the form of the doctrine” (Rom 6:17). This was obedience filled with significance.

RISEN WITH HIM

“ . . . ye are risen with Him . . . ” Other versions read, “who were also raised with Him,” NKJV “and raised with Him,” NIV “by which you came to life again with Him,” BBE “you are risen again,” DOUAY “too, you have been raised up with Him,” NJB and “also ye rose with Him.” YLT

Thus, those in Christ have become identified with the essential aspects of the Gospel. We “died with Christ” NKJV (Rom 6:8), were “buried with Him” (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12), and “also were raised with Him.” NKJV (Col 2:12).

These realities are points from which spiritual reasoning proceeds. They are like pillars of sound spiritual thought upon which God-glorifying conclusions are suspended. Thus we read,

- “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).
- “Now if we be dead with Christ , we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Rom 6:8).
- “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances” (Col 2:20).
- “For ye are dead , and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3).

Paul powerfully elaborates on this in the sixth chapter of Romans. He reasons that in Christ, life necessarily follows death. If, in fact, a person has really died with Christ, they will surely be raised to walk in the newness of life. Faith reckons on this reality.

- “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life ” (Rom 6:4).
- “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection ” (Rom 6:5).
- “Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him ” (Rom 6:8).
- “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord ” (Rom 6:11).

It simply is not possible to die with Jesus, and not live together with Him. It is impossible to be buried into Christ’s death and not be raised to walk in the newness of life. To be identified with Jesus in His death and burial, and not receive newness of life would be equivalent to Jesus not being raised from the dead.

If, therefore, a person is not walking in newness of life, there are only two possible explanations for that failure – and neither one is acceptable. Either they were never buried with Christ into His death, or they have returned like a dog to its vomit, and a sow that was washed to its wallowing in the mire (2 Pet 2:2).

THROUGH THE FAITH

“ . . . through the faith of . . . ” Several versions read “of faith OF.”

DARBY/DOUAY/GENEVA/RWB/WEB/YLT Other versions read, “through faith in,” NKJV “through your faith in,” “you trusted the,” NLT and “by the faith of.” DOUAY

There are three possible views of this verse, and they are reflected in the two differing translations.

- First, the faith could be “in” what God does. In this case, the objective of the faith is the point – what it is “in.” This would be faith in the power, or ability, of God, to raise the baptized one to newness of life.
- Second, the faith itself is the evidence of God’s working. Here, the Source of the faith is the point – the faith “of,” or coming from, the operation of God. This would be faith resulting from the power of God; that is, the faith was produced by God.
- Third, the faith is the belief that the power of God raised Jesus from the dead, as though he said, “through the belief of this fact, that God raised up Jesus.” This would be faith founded upon the Gospel.

There is certainly a sense in which all of these are true. I will speak more directly to this issue in the next section.

THE OPERATION OF GOD

“ . . . the operation of God . . . ” Other versions read, “the working of God,” NKJV/NASB “in the power of God,” NIV “the powerful working of God,” ESV and “the might power of God.” NLT

The word “operation” is taken from, a word meaning “working or efficacy” STRONG’S – that is, effective working . This word always means supernatural power, and is never portrayed as originating with men.

Other Scriptural expressions of this power are as follows – all being translated from the same root word. The capitalized words are the ones translated from this root word – “operation.”

- “The WORKING of His mighty power” (Eph 1:19).
- “EFFECTUAL WORKING of His power” (Eph 3:7).
- “The EFFECTUAL WORKING in the measure of every part” (Eph 4:16).
- “According to the WORKING whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself” (Phil 3:21).
- “According to His WORKING which WORKETH in me mightily” (Col 1:29).
- “God shall; send them STRONG delusion” (2 Thess 2:11).

The phrase, “the operation of God,” refers generally to the effective working of God’s power – what it accomplishes, versus its potential. This being the case, is faith ever represented as being IN what God is able to do – i.e., the effective working of His power? Or, is faith said to be in the God who does the working? It is my persuasion that the latter is true. Perhaps the sense of this verse is best stated in the Spirit’s affirmation of Abraham’s faith. “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform ” (Rom 4:20-21).

While faith is itself the evidence of Divine beneficence and power (Eph 6:23; 2 Pet 1:1; Rom 10:17; 1 Tim 1:14), the point here is not how the faith is obtained, but in its confidence in the God who gave it. The idea is that God had power to raise Jesus from the dead, and He has power to cause us to walk in the newness of life. The faith that accompanies our baptism takes a firm hold on both of these realities. He believes what God has done in Christ, and it is confident of what He will do in us.

WHO HATH RAISED HIM

“ . . . who hath raised Him from the dead.” The premier working of Divine power was not raising us to walk in the newness of life, but in raising Jesus from the dead. That is the greatest display of Divine power, the awareness of which fuels our own faith. The Spirit speaks in this manner concerning “the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe:” “And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named , not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:19-23).

Notice the accomplishments of this effective and “mighty power” – the operation of God.

- It raised Jesus from the dead.
- It set Christ at God’s right hand in the heavenly places.
- It set Christ far above all principality, power, might, dominion, and every name that is named.
- It put all things under His feet.
- It gave Jesus to the church in the capacity of Head over all things.

This power to which the Spirit refers is not theoretic power. It is not mere potential power. This is effective and efficient power. It is power that accomplishes the purpose of God, doing so unquestionably and thoroughly

“Faith in the operation of God” persuades the heart that God is also able to remove our sins as far from us as the East is from the West (Psa 103:12), and raise us from death with Jesus to walk in the newness of life. That faith is the means through which this triumphant walk is accomplished. It is the appointed way through which God works in us.

“ 13a And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh . . . ”

The greatness of our salvation is not only seen in what we have become, but in the marvelous deliverance from what we were. Therefore, the Spirit briefly shines the spotlight of inspiration on our past lives. In doing this He is placing the bright jewel of redemption upon the black canvas of our former lives. This will cause it to shine all the brighter.

BEING DEAD IN YOUR SINS

“And you, being dead in your sin.” Other versions read, “being dead in your trespasses,” NKJV “dead in your transgressions,” NASB “dead through your sins,” BBE “being dead in offences,” DARBY and “dead because you were sinners.” NJB

The “newness of life” becomes all the more precious when we perceive that sin had slain us. Speaking of the powerful administration of the Law, Paul said, “For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died ” (Rom 7:9). While it is true that “the wages of sin is death ” (Rom 6:23), it is the Law that passes the judgment upon men, stopping every mouth and causing all the world to “become guilty before God” (Rom 3:19).

The death of reference is toward God; that is, we were separated from Him, and insensitive to Him. We were like Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones (Ezek 37). This was a condition passed upon the entire human race because of Adam’s sin. As it is written, “through the offence of one many be dead ” (Rom 5:15). And again, “by one man’s offense death reigned by one” (Rom 5:17). Again, it is written, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men , for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12). However, that death was not a mere formality, or legal description. It was a very real death, involving a very real separation from the Living God.

The sphere of death in which we were held was that of “sin,” or “transgressions.” Thus we read, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins ” (Eph 2:1). And again, “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)” (Eph 2:5). It is said of sin, that is “reigns unto death,” which is its inevitable outcome (Rom 5:21). This is why it is also written, “the sting of death is sin” (1 Cor 15:56) – sin is the poison that induces death toward God.

This is the state from which the mighty power of God raised us when we were “buried with Christ.”

THE UNCIRCUMCISION OF YOUR FLESH

“. . . and the uncircumcision of your flesh . . .” We were not only “dead in our sins” – which were our personal transgressions – but in the “uncircumcision” of our flesh.

The “uncircumcision” of reference does not primarily refer to the covenant of circumcision given to Abraham. It is true that, being Gentiles, in itself, rendered us without any hope. As it is written, “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). However, our text goes deeper than this, focusing more on the result of sin than on the result of the lack of a covenant with God.

The phrase “uncircumcision of your flesh” has more immediate reference to what is circumcised by Jesus – “the body of the sins of the flesh” (2:11). Not only were we “dead” because of what we did, we were also “dead” because of what we were – “by nature children of wrath” (Eph 2:1-2). Death passed upon all men by virtue of their identity with Adam, as well as the fact that “all have sinned.” When Adam died, the whole race died – a condition only God could correct!

TRANSFORMATION, NOT REFORMATION

The condition of humanity could not be resolved by reformation. No amount of information, direction, or tutelage can resolve death. Dead people cannot be activated by a law – even a law that is good, holy, just, and spiritual (Rom 7:12,14). If God’s Law cannot change men, human law cannot! The required change can only be accomplished by transformation, regeneration, a new birth, and resurrection.

Although men have attempted reformation throughout history, it has never been successful. It is the nature of fallen man that is defective not merely his words and deeds. He needs a “new heart” and a “new spirit” (Ezek 36:26). He needs “newness of life,” not a restructuring of habits, or a fresh way of doing things. He needs a new mind, new affections, and a new will.

Sin has blasted the entirety of man’s person, rendering him dead toward God. As difficult as it is for some to receive it, only God can do something about this condition. It cannot be resolved with the wisdom of Egypt, the glory of Babylon, or the strength of Rome. The wise men of this world cannot do it.

THE POINT OF IT ALL

The point of all of this is to establish that we are “complete” in Christ Jesus. In Him we have everything. Without Him we have nothing. That is what the Spirit is bringing home to our hearts. At the point our lives connect with Jesus, we begin to experience sufficiency and adequacy.

However, if men choose to dwell at a distance from Him, it will surely bring inevitable inadequacy, insufficiency, and eventual death and condemnation. These are results that will take place – they result from neglecting Jesus. That is what is being expounded in this text.

“ 13b . . . hath He quickened together with Him . . .” Other versions read, “He has made alive together with Him,” NKJV “God made you alive with Christ,” NIV “to you, I say, He gave life together with Him,” BBE “He brought you to life along with Him,” NAB and “He has brought you to life with Him.” NJB

The text is still speaking about what occurred when we were buried with Christ in baptism. Those doctrines that speak of baptism as though it obtained no real importance must account for the remarkable associations the Spirit makes with it. None of them are without eternal significance. None of them are optional. All of them are directly related to our association with Christ Jesus.

There are three things to see in this particular phrase.

- First, it is God who has made us alive. To be “quickened” is to be raised from the dead, and it is “God, who quickeneth [or gives life to] the dead” (Rom 4:17).
- Second, He made us alive with Christ . He gave us life through our identity with the resurrected Christ.
- Third, it is those who were once “dead” that He has made “alive.” The death that gripped us was not metaphorical. We were really dead in sin, and consequently dead toward God in both principle and practice.

QUICKENED

Only one who is “dead” can be “quickened.” Death is the state from which God “quickened us,” or made us alive – alive to Him (Eph 2:1,5; Col 2:13).

The real issue before God is LIFE. Jesus came that we might “have life” (John 5:40; 10:10; 20:31). Life has to do with reciprocity – with being responsive to God. It includes being aware of Him, having ears to hear Him, and knowing and understanding Him (John 17:3). Where these qualities do not exist, the individual is “dead” in sins, and must be made alive, or “quickened.”

Only God Can Quicken

Only God can raise the dead. Godly people have always known this. They have realized that any failure to be pleasing to God was owing to a state of death. Thus the Psalmist prayed, “quicken us, and we will call upon Thy name” (Psa 80:18). When the Psalmist felt himself being laid low in the dust of this world he cried out, “My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken Thou me according to Thy word” (Psa 119:25).

QUICKENED WITH CHRIST

From beginning to end, every aspect of salvation is “with Christ.” No part of redemption is accomplished independently of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is precisely at the point where we become associated with Him that true life begins and is sustained.

Ephesian Elaboration

A parallel passage in the book of Ephesians further opens the glory of this text. There the emphasis is placed on the exaltation of the Lord Jesus, after which the Spirit brings the quickening of the saints into view. This is nothing less than a declaration of the power that is toward the saints – the power that has made them alive, and keeps them alive. The passage is majestic and worthy of the most profound consideration.

“And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all. AND YOU were dead in your trespasses and sins”
NASB (Eph 1:19 - 2:1).

The sense of the passage is more clearly seen when we consider verses 21-23 as a parenthetical statement – an elaboration of the resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus. The second chapter begins with a continuation of the thought expressed in 1:20: “which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:20). The idea is that we too were raised and seated in heavenly places, which is categorically stated in Ephesians 2:6: “And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6).

This was accomplished provisionally when Jesus was raised from the dead, and made to sit at God’s right hand in the heavenly places. So far as the foundational work, or the basis, of our empowerment is concerned, it was all accomplished when Jesus conquered death and passed triumphantly through the heavens, being seated at God’s right hand. It was realized experientially when we were baptized into Christ Jesus. At that point, working through our faith, we were connected with the resurrected and enthroned Christ, and made partakers of “the power of His resurrection” (Phil 3:10).

The Reasoning

Having died, been buried, raised from the dead, and enthroned at the right hand of the “majesty in the heavens” (Heb 8:1), Jesus was given “all power in heaven and in earth” (Matt 28:18). Now He is “gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him” (1 Pet 3:22). There is nothing that He is lacking. He has no weakness, no deficiency, no inadequacy. There is no power that is not subordinate to Him, the Father Himself being the solitary exception (1 Cor 15:27). He is in every sense of the word “complete,” thorough, adequate, and sufficient. He is fully able to bring to completion the “eternal purpose” of God. He can bring the sons to glory (Heb 2:10), lacking nothing that is required for that challenging work.

Now, we were quickened together “with Him” – made alive together with Him. Provisionally and legally that association was made when Jesus was exalted. The realization, or actualization of that experience took place when we buried with Christ, and raised from the baptismal waters by the “glory of the Father” (Rom 6:4).

If, in fact, there is no inadequacy in Jesus, then we are “complete in Him.” If He lacks nothing in the work of bringing us to God, then it is not possible for us to lack anything in Him. If everything has been given to Him, then in Him everything is accessible to us. In confirmation of this it is written, “Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours ; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's” (1 Cor 3:23).

Who is the person who will, in any sense or to any degree, attempt to seek adequacy outside of Christ? Where is the professing Christian who will dare to suggest there are needed resources outside of the risen Christ? All such efforts are futile. We are “complete in Him” – in every possible sense of the word! That is all involved in God quickening us from the dead.

“ 13c . . . having forgiven you all trespasses . . . ” Other versions read, “having forgiven us all our transgressions,” NASB “He forgave all your sins,” NIV “WHEN He forgave us all our trespasses,” NRSV and “having forgiven us all the offences.” DARBY

The only thing that separated men from God was sin. As it is written, “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God , and your sins have hid His face from you , that He will not hear” (Isa 59:2). Hear the Lord as He testifies to Israel: “ Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you” (Jer 5:25). The instant sin entered into the world, a separation formed between God and man, “for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor 6:14).

Unless the dilemma of sin is resolved, there is no hope of mankind being recovered. The sinner possesses no recovering power. Sin removes the capacity to recover, regain, or start over. In order to be recovered, man must be acted upon. He must be delivered (Rom 7:6), raised (Eph 2:6), saved (Eph 2:5,8), lifted (James 4:10), quickened (Eph 2:5), justified (Rom 8:30), and sanctified (1 Cor 6:11). This is all accomplished in the “quickenings” of reference.

ALL TRESPASSES

The glorious announcement is that we have been forgiven “ALL trespasses” – and that means precisely what it affirms. Christ gave Himself to “redeem us from ALL iniquity” (Tit 2:14). Therefore “by Him [Christ] all

that believe are justified from ALL THINGS , from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39).

Forgiveness cannot be partial. Either all sin is forgiven or none is forgiven. The nature of sin, together with its repulsiveness to the holy God, will not allow for any remnant of it to remain. Therefore, the redemption that is in Christ Jesus thoroughly removes the presence and guilt of sin. The complete debt incurred by transgression was satisfied by Christ. He did, in fact, “make an end of sins” (Dan 9:24), “put away sin” (Heb 9:26), and take away “the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Everything that God required as a just basis for remission was accomplished by Jesus. That is why forgiveness is total – “all trespasses.” Where sin is not thoroughly remitted, the conscience cannot be cleansed or purged. However, when forgiveness is extensive and absolute, the conscience can be purged “from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb 9:14).

THE POINT

The point of this text is not the forgiveness itself, but what occurred when we were forgiven of “all trespasses.” It was at the point of forgiveness that we were raised with Christ – made one with Him. When we were forgiven, we were “joined to the Lord,” becoming one spirit with Him (1 Cor 6:17). It is then that we were “quickened,” being ushered into the realm of spiritual fullness.

When our sins were remitted, our feet were set in “a large room” (Psa 31:8), filled with all things pertaining to life and godliness. In Christ we were given access to “all things,” being made “complete in Him.” This was true in every genuine conversion, with no exceptions.

Because of grossly deficient teaching, many of us did not become aware of this condition for many years. We stumbled through life focused upon our own miserable inadequacy, blinded to the spiritual abundance that dripped like abundant honey dropping all around us as it did in the “wood” of Jonathan’s day (1 Sam 14:26).

When men seek resources outside of Christ it is only because they do not know they are “complete in Him.” They do not see what has been accomplished in their quickening – when God gave them life even though they were dead in sin. It is the business of the church to declare these things, not allowing believers to live in the ignorance of what is theirs in Christ Jesus. Surely you know in yourself what a handicap it is to be unenlightened concerning these things.

In every sense of the word, we are “complete in Him.” This is not to be questioned or probed with intellectual curiosity, but is to be heartily embraced.

“ 14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it

out of the way, nailing it to His cross . . . ”

The Spirit continues to confirm our completeness in Christ Jesus – a completeness that was made accessible to us at the very moment we were forgiven “all trespasses.” He now elaborates on the forgiveness of all trespasses, a matter that was not as easily accomplished as some are prone to believe. This verse is a continuation of the thought commenced in verse thirteen. It is not a new thought, but an extension of what has been stated in the previous verse.

BLOTTING OUT

“Blotting out . . . ” Other versions read, “having wiped out,” NKJV “having cancelled,” NASB “erasing the record,” NRSV “having put an end,” BBE “having effaced,” DARBY “by cancelling,” ESV and “obliterating.” NAB

This begins the explanation of WHY our transgressions were forgiven. That forgiveness is undergirded by a necessary and impeccably righteous transaction. That is, the forgiveness is based upon the transaction that is now described.

Whatever previously prohibited the forgiveness of “all trespasses” has not been expunged, cancelled, and wiped out. The basis for condemnation no longer exists, and a reason for remission is now provided.

Isaiah used this word in speaking of the coming redemption: “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins : return unto me; for I have redeemed thee” (Isa 44:22). Our text, however, is more precise, as we should expect it to be in the greater light of the Gospel.

THE HANDWRITING OF ORDINANCES

“ . . . the handwriting of ordinances . . . ” Other versions read, “the handwriting of requirements ,” NKJV “the certificate of debt ,” NASB “the written code , with its regulations” NIV “the record . . . with its legal demands,” NRSV “the bond . . . with its legal demands ,” RSV “handwriting of the law ,” BBE “handwriting of the decree ,” DOUAY “the record of debt,” ESV “the record of our debt to the law ,” NJB and “the record that contained the charges .” NLT

The book of Ephesians refers to the same work, also choosing very deliberate language to describe it. “Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances ; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace” (Eph 2:15).

It is apparent from the translations that men often struggle in their attempt to harmonize Scripture with human opinions of Scripture.

This is the Spirit’s explanation for the justness of our forgiveness. Justification is a reality that can stand the test of the strictest scrutiny. In the salvation of sinners, God is not only the “Justifier,” but remains “just” as

well, being inscrutably righteous in absolving sinners of guilt (Rom 3:26).

Handwriting

The word “handwriting” does not merely mean script. In Scripture, the word itself means “a legal document or bond.” STRONG’S Etymologically, the word signifies “ specifically, a note of hand, or writing in which one acknowledges that money has either been deposited with him or lent to him by another, to be returned at an appointed time.” THAYER

Some have supposed that “the handwriting” refers to the Law itself. However, although the Law is said to have been “written and engraven in stones” (2 Cor 3:7), it is never referred to as handwriting. Neither, indeed, whether in promise or by Apostolic doctrine, is it ever clearly said to have been blotted out, expunged, or rendered null and void.

We might liken this record to “the books” out of which men will be judged (Rev 20:12) – the record of what men have done. It is like the “bill” to which Jesus referred in His parable of the unjust steward. “So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore ” (Luke 16:6-7). In Christ’s parable, the bill was reduced. In our text, it was “blotted out.”

Not the Ten Commandments

Our text does not refer to the Law itself, but to a record of the infractions of the Law. Years after Jesus had been exalted, Paul affirmed that “the work of the Law” was written into Gentile hearts, their conscience “also bearing witness” (Rom 2:15). As well, the Apostle affirmed that by the Law “is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). It also continues along with the Prophets to bear witness of the righteousness that is realized through Christ Jesus (Rom 3:21). The Law also remains “for the lawless” (1 Tim 1:9). It has not, then, been “blotted out.” It has been ended ONLY as the means to righteousness. As it is written, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Rom 10:4).

This passage has to do with the reason for our forgiveness. Should one choose to believe that the ground for forgiveness is based upon the blotting out of the Law, he is cast upon the horns of a dilemma. How is it that God could be just in blotting out a Law that He Himself has given. It seems to me that for God to be “just and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus” (Rom 3:26), the presence of the Law is presumed. The Law does not condemn those in Christ because it has been blotted out, but because it CANNOT condemn them . In Christ Jesus the righteous demands of the Law have been satisfactorily and justly met.

Ordinances

The ordinances of question are not the Ten Commandments themselves, but the ceremonial ordinances that surrounded them. These were the practical means of fulfilling the Law. They were also the means by which men were measured, and their response to the Law assessed. God did not leave to men to interpret what He meant by the commandments. Rather, He spelled out the meaning inculcating certain procedures into the details of life. They covered all manner of things from eating food to plowing in the fields – from where and when to

observe feasts, to how to deal with childbirth and the posting of landmarks.

The Means of Assessment

These ordinances were the measure of a persons purported righteousness. A person could not simply say they loved God, or that they were mindful of their neighbor. Profession was not enough.

The Babylonian captivity is an example of punishment incurred for failing to keep the ordinances. The particular ordinance that brought on this captivity was the land Sabbaths. Every seventh year, the land was to rest. For four hundred and ninety years, Judah failed to honor this ordinance. Thus the Lord took all seventy land-sabbaths at one time, during the Babylonian captivity (2 Chron 36:24). That was only one ordinance, and the debt was a single one. Compound that by all of the ordinances, and all of the people, and you have a debt of unspeakable magnitude.

The Meaning

The Colossians were being pressured to return to a ceremonial religion – a procedure that could only incur a debt men could not pay (Col 2:16-17). If a person chooses to live by Law, there can be no mercy, for Law excludes mercy (Heb 10:28). 0

Paul boldly announces that the forgiveness of their sins was based upon the obliteration of a debt-based religion. Empty ceremony and lifeless routine have no place in the newness of life.

We Are the Ones Who Died

Rather than the Law itself being removed, or blotted out, we died with Christ, and the law has no power over the dead. This is marvelously declared in Scripture. “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom 7:4).

This death was accomplished in our baptism. We were “baptized into His death” (Rom 6:3), “buried with Him by baptism into death” (Rom 6:4), and “planted together in the likeness of His death” (Rom 6:5). Now we are “dead with Christ” (Rom 6:8; Col 2:20; 2 Tim 2:11). That death has moved us beyond the reach of the condemning Law, and thus the debt for breaking it has been cancelled.

AGAINST US AND CONTRARY TO US

“ . . . that was against us, which was contrary to us . . . ” Other versions read, “ against us, and which was hostile to us, ” NASB “against us, and that stood opposed to us,” NIV and “stood against us with its legal demands.” NRSV

This refers to the ordinances that enforced the Law of God itself. They were “against us” and “contrary to us” in that they contradicted fallen human nature. They required what men were not willing to give, and pressed

them to live consciously unto God rather than for self. Such requirements proved to be a thorn in the side of the people. Under the administration of that law the people became noted for being rebellious. As it is written, “ye have been rebellious against the Lord” (Deut 9:7), “a stubborn and rebellious generation” (Psa 78:8), and “this is a rebellious people” (Isa 30:9). The Lord Himself testified, “All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Rom 10:21).

Why Is this the Case?

The novice might question why this is so. Why does a holy law incite unholy actions among men? Paul bore witness to this condition when speaking of his former life. “But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence . For without the law sin was dead” (Rom 7:8). In fact, he said “the strength of sin is the law” (1 Cor 15:56).

Before Christ, men did not have a new nature. They were not regenerated, and the Holy Spirit had not yet been given to them (John 7:38-39). They had no capacity to live consistently before the Lord, or to rid themselves of a single sin. The Law did not overlook that condition, but pressed upon them the holy demands of God. It addressed the flesh, demanding that it render rigorous and consistent service to God, requiring men to invariably consider God first, and their neighbors second.

The whole arrangement was “against us” and “contrary to us,” even though the demands were right. The result was that sin was stirred up the more, and our debt became even more massive.

TOOK IT OUT OF THE WAY

“ . . . and took it out of the way.” Other versions read, “has taken it out of the way,” NKJV “took it away,” NIV and “set this aside.” NRSV

It was not the Law that was taken out of the way, for it was not in the way. Sin stood in the way, not Divine law. To be more precise, the guilt of sin stood in the way, or the record of our transgressions. That record, which amounted to a massive unpaid bill is what was taken out of the way. This freed God to justly remit the sins of humanity, and righteously receive them unto Himself. Allow me to once again emphasize that this was accomplished by our death with Jesus . Debts are not required of dead people, and thus when they die, the debt is liquidated.

NAILING IT TO HIS CROSS

“ . . . nailing it to His cross . . . ” Actually, it was Jesus Himself who was “nailed” to the cross (John 20:25). To be more precise, it was His body that was nailed to “His cross.” Yet, in His body, the Lord Himself “bare our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:24). There is a sense in which His body was like a bill of indebtedness. Whatever happened to His body occurred also to the bill of indebtedness we owed to the Living God.

Isaiah’s Prophecy

Isaiah painted a most vivid picture of what occurred on the cross – Christ’s cross. “And I will fasten Him as a nail in a sure place; and He shall be for a glorious throne to His father's house. And they shall hang upon Him all the glory of His father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons. In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall the nail that is fastened in the sure

place be removed, and be cut down, and fall; and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off : for the LORD hath spoken it” (Isa 22:23-25).

The “burden” that was upon the “Nail” was the “iniquity of us all.” When that “burden” was “cut off” the “handwriting” that was against us was “blotted out.” We were “redeemed,” and the debt was fully paid. Because we died with Christ, the Law had no more demands over us.

In addition, because of our identity with Christ, the record of our past was expunged – blotted out. Now the Law cannot condemn us because of two incontestable facts. First, we have become “dead to the Law through the body of Christ.” Second, there is no longer a record of our sins !

Thus it is again affirmed with great power, “Ye are complete in Him.” Every need and spiritual desire is fully met in Him.

“ 15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”

Having settled the issue of personal deficiency – our sin – the Spirit now draws our attention to the hostile forces that are aligned against us. Is this condition addressed by the Lord Jesus? Are we “complete in Him” in this matter?

SPOILED PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS

“And having spoiled principalities and powers . . .” Other versions read, “having disarmed principalities and powers,” NKJV “when He had disarmed rulers and authorities,” NASB “despoiled the principalities and the powers,” ASV “Having made Himself free from the rule of authorities and powers,” BBE and “He has stripped the sovereignties and the ruling forces.” NJB

The Power of Darkness

On the eve of Christ’s betrayal, the forces of darkness gathered against Him. Of that occasion Jesus Himself said, “this is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53). It was the time when “darkness reigns” NIV – “the authority of dark power.” BBE Methinks the legions of hell converged on Jerusalem, determined to rid themselves once and for all of the restraining power of Jesus.

That night the “power of darkness” was able to do things they could not do before. Jesus was betrayed, bound, led away captive, and tried. He was mocked, beaten, nailed to a tree, and hoisted between heaven and earth. For the first time He was derided, spit upon, and mocked. No demon pled for consideration that night, as they did when Jesus strode upon the shores of the “country of the Gadarenes” (Mk 5:1-13). Satan did not leave the Son of God as He did after the wilderness temptation (Matt 4:11). Jesus did not expel demons with “the finger of God” that night (Lk 11:20).

It was an hour given to the diabolical forces of darkness, and they exploited it to the fullest extent allowed.

However, in Christ’s death a great victory was wrought over these wicked powers. He dealt a devastating blow to them in His weakest moment, for He was “crucified through weakness” (2 Cor 13:4). Our text states that He “spoiled principalities and powers.” These forces were to him like the Philistines were to Samson (Judges 16:9,12,14). They were like the Syrian armies that surrounded Elisha in Dothan (2 Kgs 6:15).

But Jesus shook them all off in His death as Eleazar repulsed the Philistines singlehandedly (2 Sam 23:9-10), and Shammah fought off the Philistines in an open field (2 Sam 23:11-12). Rather than bringing Him down in triumph, He brought them down, entering triumphantly into “paradise” with a trophy snatched from the fire (Lk 23:43; Zech 3:2).

In Christ’s death He “destroyed the devil” (Heb 2:14), rendering him impotent in the heavenly realms. That destruction applied to all of the personalities aligned with the devil, as well as the old serpent himself.

MADE A SHOW OF THEM OPENLY

“ . . . He made a show of them openly, . . . ” Other versions read, “made a public spectacle of them,” NKJV “made a public display of them,” NASB “made a public example of them,” NRSV “He put them openly to shame,” BBE and “paraded them publically by His victory.” NJB

In the book of Ephesians this is described as Jesus leading “captivity captive,” or leading “captive a host of captives” NASB (Eph 4:8).

In what sense was this open and public? It certainly did not appear this way to men. The openness, however, was not to men in the world, but to the heavenly hosts – an enumerable company of angels, and no doubt the “spirits of just men made perfect” as well (Heb 12:23).

Expressed in the Psalms

This glorious triumph was prophesied in the twenty-fourth Psalm. Behold the jubilant entourage as it approaches the gates glory. “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle ” (Psa 24:7-8). This was Jesus returning from His triumphant mission.

Expressed in the Revelation

What praise must have been sounded in the glory during this occasion! There is a depiction of it in Revelation. There the picture is of Satan and his angels being cast out of heaven. As soon as that triumph took place John heard “a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night” (Rev 12:10). Principalities and powers had been “spoiled.”

Now this victory is declared in the Gospel, and faith is given to behold its openness and apparentness. This is a victory that is evident to faith, which is fully capable of obtaining the glorious benefits coming from it.

TRIUMPHING OVER THEM

“ . . . triumphing over them in it.” The means of triumph was the cross – “HIS cross.” The sign of ignominy, shame, and the curse (Gal 3:13) became the sign of unparalleled glory and triumph. Now those in Christ “glory” in the cross (Gal 6:14). The preaching of this cross is described as “the power of God” to us who are being saved (1 Cor 1:18). It marks the point where the accuser of the brethren was cast down, and all of his principalities and powers plundered and led away in shame and disgrace.

In Christ all of our foes become inferior, for they have all been defeated and plundered by Him! What is more, this was done through “the cross,” which was Christ’s lowest and weakest point. Reasoning on this wise, the Spirit says, “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son , much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life ” (Rom 5:10).

If so much was accomplished by Christ’s death, how much more is being accomplished by His kingly and intercessory life? If principalities and powers were plundered in His cross, what power can they have against us now that He is enthroned in glory?

Thus the Spirit has powerfully confirmed the thorough adequacy of the Lord’s Christ. We are, in every sense of the word, “complete in Him.” In His Person dwells “the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” Nothing is lacking. No Divine quality required by men is not fully accessible in Him. Further, because of His identity with us as “the Man Christ Jesus,” all of these resources are made accessible to us. We are complete in Him.

We are “complete in Him,” for He is the Sovereign Head over “all principality and power.” All of the holy angels are under Him, dispatched to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation. All of the unholy angels are subordinate to Him, being held in check by Him, and strictly controlled by Him. We are complete in Him.

In our union with Christ, we realized a sufficiency that cannot be controverted. He circumcised our hearts, separating from our essential natures the corruption of the flesh, rendering us sensitive to the Lord. He made our hearts a suitable place for the law to be written. When we were baptized, we were “buried with Him,” becoming

participants in the merits and benefits of His death. In Him, God raised us from death in trespasses and sins, to sit with Him in the heavenly places, having forgiven us “all trespasses.” We are complete in Him!

Through His vicarious death what we needed was supplied. The record of massive debt that was charged against us was taken out of the way when we died with Him. It was blotted out, so that the Law could no longer condemn us. It became right for God to forgive us and write our names in the Lamb’s book of life. In His death the Lord plundered principalities and powers, rendering them impotent in the heavenly places where God has seated us. We are complete in Him.

It is now the ultimate absurdity to turn to the weak and beggardly elements of this world for any kind of assistance Godward. We are to embrace the completeness that is found alone in Him!

UNPRODUCTIVE RELIGION

Lesson # 13

The Spirit is establishing the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ. Every believer in every sense, is complete in Christ. No area of life is not covered.

TO FULFILL THE LAW

In Christ Jesus, the righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in us. As it is written, “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us , who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:3-4). Salvation brings no glory to God if sinners are left the same way they were found. Men may imagine that such a condition is acceptable, but it is not.

Everything required to fulfill the summation of the Law is found in Christ Jesus: “Thou shalt

love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Mat 22:38-39).

TO APPROPRIATE AND MAINTAIN SALVATION

Everything that is required for the appropriation of salvation is found in Christ Jesus: faith, repentance, remission, reconciliation, justification, sanctification, peace, etc. Nothing is lacking. Every single resource required to come to Christ and obtain salvation is found in Him – and that even included being drawn to Him and given to Him (John 6:37,44). We are “complete in Him.”

THE MAINTENANCE OF SALVATION

Everything that is required for the maintenance of that salvation is found in Christ Jesus: the Holy Spirit, strength, confidence, joy, endurance, comfort, etc. The “spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” is given to us in Christ (2 Tim 1:7). Provision is made for being changed “from glory unto glory” (2 Cor 3:18), being “strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man” (Eph 3:17). Ponder the inclusion of Divine fellowship, God’s attentive ear and perceptive eye, and the power of prayer (1 Pet 3:12). There is “the whole armor of God” (Eph 6:11,13), the righteousness of God (Phil 3:9), and strength to “do all things” (Phil 4:13). We are “complete in Him!”

APPREHENDING THE TRUTH

It is one thing to hear the truth of God. It is quite another thing to “apprehend” it – that is, to perceive it with such clarity that it becomes our own. This is why Paul spoke of his energetic pursuit of the things for which Christ had taken hold of him: “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead” (Phil 3:12-13). Elsewhere this is called laying hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12).

As long as we are in this world, we are subjected to influences that suggest we are not complete in Christ. Some are more aggressive in this representation than others. Some scoff at the very notion of adequacy in Christ Jesus. Others acknowledge there is some sufficiency in Him, but that it must be combined with other factors to be effective. Some represent life in Christ as an adjunct to life – not even the main aspect of it.

In all of these approaches, Jesus Christ is not the fundamental Person, and eternal life is not the ultimate experience. Therefore, life in this world is erroneously set forth as primary, and temporal relationships and circumstances become the emphasis. Let it be clear, the Lord Jesus Christ does not sanctify such an arrangement. His indispensable ministry will not be realized in such an environment. The work of the Lord Jesus is effectual only when the revealed agenda of God has been embraced. Just as surely as Abraham could not be blessed until he ordered his life by the Divine agenda revealed to

him, so no professing believer can experience the blessing of Jesus until they have perceived and embraced that for which Jesus has apprehended them (Phil 3:12).

It should be evident to you that this has some startling ramifications. Much of what is paraded before us as Christianity and Christian ministries is nothing more than flesh in a religious garb. It is not acceptable.

This text will affirm that the greatest threat to apprehending Christ's all-sufficiency is found in religion itself – powerless and lifeless religion. It is the religion of procedure and routine, and it has no heart in it. There is neither power nor grace in it. It does not bring joy or peace, or relish the presence and fellowship of the Father and the Son. It offers a creed, a movement, a position, and a “way of life” – but it does not offer life itself, which is essential to any vital association with the Living God.

The Spirit will not approach this subject casually. You will immediately sense that the conditions described represent significant threats to the people of God. They are conditions the saints are not to allow, or “let,” happen. A solemn charge is thus delivered to them.

TWO APPROACHES TO RELIGION

There are two approaches to religion – to the development of a godly manner of life. “Religion” has to do with the external part of spiritual life. As it is written, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). The question is, “How is this to be accomplished.”

Regulating the Flesh

The first approach is to major on the regulation of the flesh. This is embodied in the Old Covenant. It was a system “imposed” upon basically recalcitrant people (Heb 9:10). This approach deals with people as being alienated from God – without a heart for Him or His will. It basically keeps the flesh in check through a system of procedures and threats. Scripture refers to the effects of such a system in these words: “who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb 2:15).

This was the approach of the Old Covenant, for men had not yet been reconciled to God. Sin had not been removed, the devil had not been destroyed, and sin had not been effectively condemned in the flesh (Rom 8:3). Thus rules and regulations were imposed upon the hard-hearted to keep them from committing transgression. The witness of Moses, the Prophets, John the Baptist, and Jesus testify to the ineffectiveness of this approach. Rather than eliminating sin, it discovered it, for “by the Law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). The whole arrangement proved to be “the ministration of death” and “the ministration of condemnation” (2 Cor 3:7,9). The law, with its “meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances (regulations for the body)” (Heb 9:10) wrought no change within men. It brought no strength, or means of recovery. Rather, it only heaped up guilt, defiled the conscience, and confirmed

the utter helplessness and defilement of humanity. Through it “every mouth” was “stopped,” and “all the world” became “guilty” before God (Rom 3:19).

Living in the Spirit

There is another way of controlling the flesh – and it is effective. Once a basis was established through which men could actually be changed, an effective means of subduing the sinful nature was opened to those in Christ Jesus. First, the individuals themselves were changed – fundamentally changed within. They were given a “new heart” and a “new spirit” (Ezek 36:26). Rather than Divine laws remaining on tables of stone, they were written by God upon the hearts of the redeemed, and put into their minds (Heb 8:10; 10:16). Instead of God being “a God afar off” (Jer 23:23), He took up His abode within His people (Zech 2:10; 2 Cor 6:16).

Now men were strengthened within so they could bring their bodies into subjection (1 Cor 9:27). Rather than attempting to subdue sinful inclinations procedurally the glad announcement is made: “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh ” (Gal 5:16). The faithful are admonished, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof” (Rom 6:12). Joyfully they are told “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:13). Rather than being given a procedure or cunningly devised regimen they are told, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world ” (Titus 2:11-12). This effectively addresses living.

Now those in Christ are not told to control their lusts, but to mortify them, putting them to death in the energy of Divine power. “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col 3:5).

What is a procedure compared to these marvelous provisions? What are the laws and ordinances of mere men compared to the effectiveness of Divine power within? In redemption men are qualified for the presence of the Holy Spirit, the tutelage of grace, and the intercession of the King of glory. They have access to things that simply cannot be accomplished by a law – any law.

The issue the Spirit will now put before us regards believers returning to a regimented form of spiritual life. It is a way that has the appearance of wisdom, yet it is utterly powerless to implement the will of God. If people choose to return to such a system, sin will gain dominance over them again. We must ever remember that “the strength of sin is the Law” (1 Cor 15:56). This is because Law, when employed as a means to righteousness, awakens the principle of sin. Thus it is written, “when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (Rom 7:9).

This brief introduction should prepare us to receive the stern tones that follow. The Spirit is not dealing with a small and inconsequential matter. The survival of the saints is at issue. Whether sin is subdued or not is the matter at hand.

If men do not choose the New Covenant way, there is no hope for them to stand approved before God.

“ 2:16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days: 17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.”

The words that follow will make no sense to the flesh. Their very tone will arouse all manner of fleshly expressions and explanations. The Spirit, who surely knows how to speak “expressly” (1 Tim 4:1) speaks with exacting precision. He says precisely what needs to be said, and in most definitive language. He will set a Divine mandate before us. This is something we are not to allow to happen. All of the resources required to fulfill this word are available to faith, and designed for those who live by that faith.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE JUDGED

“ Let no man therefore judge you . . . ” Other versions read, “Let no one act as your judge,” NASB “Do not let anyone condemn you in matters,” NRSV “let no one pass judgment on you,” RSV and “never let anyone criticize you for.” NJB

The word “judge” involves human evaluation and assessment. It includes the ideas of condemning, criticizing, and holding one accountable for crime, or an infraction of Divine law. The one who judges binds something on a person that God has not bound, condemning the individual who refuses to subscribe to their opinion. In this case, something from which Jesus has freed us is once again bound upon the people. They may employ Scripture, but they do not “rightly divide” it (2 Tim 2:15), “understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1 Tim 1:7).

Notwithstanding the current trend of “accountability,” we do not answer to men, but to God. With great power we are told that it is God “with whom we have to do,” or “to whom we must give account” NKJV (Heb 4:13). In the end, and let there be no doubt about this, “every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom 14:12). If you imagine that while we are in this world we culture giving account of our lives to men, you will not adequately prepare for inevitably giving an account to God.

When subjected to the human evaluation of the Corinthians, Paul said, “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but He that judgeth me is the Lord ” (1 Cor 4:4). Paul followed the same course as David, allowing the Lord Himself to judge him. “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts” (Psa 139:23). Let it be clear, no person will become the worse for doing this!

A NOTE OF WARNING

This text is not championing the expression of personal opinion, or suggesting every person may do what is “right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6), or that my way is as good as your way. Rather, it is alerting us to the fact that there are religious men who make demands of us that God has not made. They go further than the Lord has gone, and are demanding in doing so.

Right here we must see there is liability in being a novice. These law-and-procedure purveyors are cunning in their presentation. They use Scripture, and present, what appears to be, powerful arguments. If a person is not learned in the ways of the Lord, they can be turned aside by such people. Therefore, the maturity of believers is said to have this objective: “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine , by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph 4:14).

Part of not allowing any man to judge you is personally growing up into Christ “in all things” (Eph 4:15). If you do not do this, you are vulnerable to such men. It is imperative that the people of God separate themselves from all forms of religion that allow people to remain “babes in Christ” (1 Cor 3:1). Whether it is preaching, teaching, music, entertainment, games, etc. – if it promotes spiritual juvenility it weakens spiritual defenses.

Make it your business to “ be men in understanding” – something God requires of you (1 Cor 14:20). See confidence and assurance as essential to your survival, as it expressly taught by the Spirit (Col 2:2' Heb 3:6,14; 6:11; 10:22, 35). This will enable you to resist the judgment of men, against which this text warns us.

MEAT OR DRINK

“ . . . in meat, or in drink . . . ” Other versions read “in food or drink,” NKJV “by what you eat or drink,” NIV “in questions of food and drink,” NRSV and “on matters of food and drink.” NAB

Under the Ceremonial Law

This doubtless has primary reference to the distinction of foods that were inherent in the ceremonial law. There were two sets of guidelines concerning foods. First, the general ceremonial law

specified clean and unclean meats, prohibiting the ingestion of unclean ones (Lev 11:2-47).

- Clean beasts had to have cloven hoofs and chew the cud (11:3-8).
- Clean fish had to have both fins and scales (11:9-12).
- Unclean fowls were identified as the eagle, ossifrage (vulture), osprey (buzzard), vulture (red kite), kite (black kite), raven, owl, night hawk, cuckoo, hawk, little owl, cormorant (similar to pelican), great owl, swan, pelican, gier eagle (kind of vulture), stork, heron, lapwing, bat, fowls that creep, going upon all four (11:13-20).
- Clean flying things had to have legs above their feet so they could leap off the earth (locust, bald locust, beetle, grasshopper – 11:21).
- Whatever went upon four paws were unclean (11:27).
- Things that creep upon the earth were unclean (weasel, mouse, tortoise, ferret, chameleon, lizard, snail, mole – 11:29-31).
- What crawled upon the belly, crawled on all four feet, or had “many feet” was unclean (11:41).

The Law of the Nazarite

Second, there was the law of the Nazarite.

- The Nazarite had to separate himself from all strong drink : vinegar of wine, vinegar of strong drink, or liquor grapes (Num 6:3a).
- He could not eat moist or dried grapes (Num 6:3b).
- All the days of his separation he could not eat anything coming from a grape vine, from the seeds to the skins (Num 6:4).

Several years after Pentecost, these laws were still honored by the sensitive of heart – such as Peter (Acts 10:14-28). Following that, there were some who were aggressive in promoting such laws. Paul even identified a coming departure of the faith by those who “commanded to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth” (1 Tim 4:3).

Until the conversion of the household of Cornelius there had been no specific Apostolic doctrine affirming these laws were no longer binding. A seemingly solid case could be built for them being honored – at least in the eyes of the novices and unlearned.

Jesus Clarifies the Matter

Although the meaning of His words had apparently escaped many, Jesus had affirmed defilement does not come from what is eaten. “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man . . . Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?” (Mat 15:11,17). Again, “There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man” (Mark 7:15).

Now, such encroachments were entering among the Colossians, and Paul deals directly with the matter. The brethren are not to allow any person to approve or condemn them because of what they ate or drank. Such rules have no place among the saints, even though it is not unusual to find dietary laws taught as though they directly related to Divine approval.

The Kingdom of God and Meat and Drink

First, the kingdom of God does not consist of meat and drink. That is, it does not deal with dietary practices. As it is written, “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17).

Food Does Not Commend Us to God

Foods do not recommend us to God, or cause us to be more pleasing to Him. As it is written, “But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse” (1 Cor 8:8).

Ceremonial law did not deal with what was inherently right or wrong, such as was iterated in the Ten Commandments. As it is written, “I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself : but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean” (Rom 14:14).

Those who affirm that pork, etc are inferior and contaminating foods have taken too much upon themselves. However practical such teaching may appear to be, it is not supported by Jesus and the Apostles.

It is our business to give diligence in this matter, not allowing any man to judge or condemn us

because of what we eat or do not eat. While there is certainly room for private persuasions on such things, they cannot be bound upon others by the ones possessing them.

AN HOLY DAY

“ . . . or in respect of an holy day.” Other versions read, “a festival,” NKJV “a religious festival,” NIV and “annual festivals.” NJB

The word “holy day” is more literally translated “feast” or “festival,” as several translations confirm. This distinction of days also reflected Jewish priorities commanded in the ceremonial law. The three great Jewish feasts were (1) The Feast of the Passover, (2) The Feast of Tabernacles, and (3) The Feast of Pentecost. These were the three annual feasts that all Jewish males had to attend (Ex 23:17; 34:23; Deut 16:16). The blessing of the Lord was contingent upon the faithful observance of these feasts. As it is written, “For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, WHEN thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year ” (Ex 34:24).

In Christ Jesus, no such stipulations exist. With hearts being changed, and a fundamental love for God possessed, the test of ones commitment to God is not found in the observance of festivals. The Old Covenant requirements bound religious seasons and cycles upon people because they were not regenerated. It forced a remembrance of epochs such as the deliverance from Israel (the feast of the Passover), the celebration of the ingathering of the fruit and the harvest (the feast of Tabernacles), and the celebration of the final harvest, fifty days after the Passover (the feast of Pentecost). Without these feasts, the people would soon have forgotten their deliverance from Egypt. They would not have associated the ingathering of the harvest with the work of the Lord. Nor, indeed, would the latter harvest, brought on by the latter rain, have been a source of thanksgiving to God. These holy days were the appointed means of enforcing thanksgiving among an unregenerate people.

With the “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17), the necessity of observing these holy days was removed. Now the law was written upon the heart of the people, and put into their minds. In Christ, the people serve God with “one consent” (Zeph 3:9). They are not the better for observing special holy days, nor are they the worse for not doing so.

As in the matter of meats and drinks, there is room for personal persuasion in the observance of days, or special holy days. However, that view cannot be bound on another person, and we are to allow no man to do it. As it is written, “One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it” (Rom 14:5-6).

THE NEW MOON

“ . . . or of the new moon . . . ”

The “new moon” was the beginning of the month. For Israel the “beginnings” of their months was a solemn occasion. A burnt offering was presented to the Lord of two bullocks, one ram, and seven lambs of the first year without spot. Each bullock offered was to be accompanied with an ephah (about six quarts) of fine flour mixed with oil. Each ram offered was to be accompanied with a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah (1 1/5 quarts) of fine flour mixed with oil. The offering of each lamb was to be accompanied with a grain offering of one tenth of an ephah (a little over one pint) of fine flour mixed with oil (Num 28:11-15). The reference to “the beginnings of your months” reads differently in later versions, emphasizing that it refers to the new moon: “on the first days of your months,” NASB “New Moon festivals,” NIV “your new moons,” JPS, TNK and “at the new moons.” Septuagint

Again, if an individual chooses to honor the Lord on the new moon, there is no word condemning him (of course, neither is there any word commending him). However, no believer is to allow another to judge him for honoring the new moon. God has not bound this practice upon those in the Son, and thus men cannot do it.

THE SABBATH DAYS

“ . . . or of the Sabbath days . . . ” Other versions read “sabbaths,” NKJV “a Sabbath day,” NASB “a Sabbath,” NRSV “The sabbaths,” DOUAY and “Sabbath.” NAB

There were a number of Sabbaths bound upon Israel, beginning with the seventh day of the week. This Sabbath existed before the giving of the Law (Ex 16:26,29). It was also a part of the Law, being the fourth commandment (Ex 20:9-11). Other sabbaths included the land Sabbath every seventh year (Lev 25:2-4), the tenth day of the seventh month (Lev 16:29-31), the ninth of the seventh month (Lev 23:32), together with sundry others. All of them were to be kept (Ex 31:13; Lev 19:3,30).

Here again, the Lord ordained a day on which no servile work was to be done. It was a time to be devoted to holy thought and activity. However, since the people did not have new hearts and new spirits, it was approached as a day in which normal activity could not take place . “But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work , thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates” (Ex 20:10). “Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest : that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed ” (Ex 23:12). Even during harvest times, they were to refrain from working on this day: “Six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest: in earing time and in harvest thou shalt rest ” (Ex 34:21).

Although all manner of arguments have been presented concerning the necessity of honoring the Sabbath day, the Spirit admonishes the people of God not to allow any man to bind it upon them. However plausible the arguments may be, no man can condemn you for not keeping the Sabbath days,

or commend you for keeping them! With Israel, this was a matter of being accepted by God. Acceptance in Christ is on a higher and more effectual basis.

At the conclusion of this section, I will provide a brief commentary on the Sabbath day, and how it is to be viewed by those in Christ Jesus.

AS SHADOW OF THINGS TO COME

“Which are a shadow of things to come . . .” Other versions read, “which are a mere shadow of what is to come,” NASB “only a shadow of what is to come,” NRSV and “an image of the things which are to come.” BBE

A “shadow” is “an image cast by an object and representing the form of that object.” It can also mean “a sketch or an outline.” THAYER In this text, “a shadow” was a ceremonial depiction of various aspects of life in Christ. It was the Lord’s way of introducing His ancient people to the marvelous benefits that would be realized in the new and better covenant to be mediated by the Lord Jesus. What was accomplished ceremonially under the Law would be fulfilled in the persons of the elect. They would do by nature what the Jews did through ceremonial observance.

These shadows are better understood by those who are in the Son that they were by the Israelites. They serve to clarify the apparition of new covenant benefits. As the light of the Gospel shines upon them, they become clear. It also becomes clear that they were like shadows that are dispelled at the rising of the sun.

THE BODY IS OF CHRIST

“ . . . but the body is of Christ.” Other versions read, “the substance is of Christ,” NKJV “the substance belongs to Christ,” NASB “the reality, however, is found in Christ,” NIV “the reality belongs to Christ,” NAB and “the real thing, Christ Himself.” NLT

Remember, the postulate being affirmed is that we are “complete” in Christ. Now the Spirit establishes that new life is not Christ plus the shadowy ceremonies of the Law. It is not Jesus plus routines, diets, feasts, or days. All such things are only ancient apparitions of the realities experienced in Christ Jesus.

All reality, blessing, benefit, and spiritual substance is traced directly to the Lord Jesus Christ. He who has the Son possesses everything of which shadows testify. True life cannot be poured into a routine. Divine approval cannot be obtained by going through a mere procedure. “The substance is of Christ,” and only of Christ. We are “complete in Him” – that is “complete” in every possible sense of the word.

This same truth is stated yet another way in Second Corinthians. “For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us” (2 Cor 1:20). The NASB reads, “For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.”

When real life is possessed, it is folly to ascribe redemptive value to a routine. While there are certain God-ordained routines (like baptism, the Lord’s table, and assembling together), they obtain their value by the identity of Christ with them. Were it not for His vivifying presence, they would be nothing more than lifeless shadows, like those bound upon the Jews.

FULFILLING OBLIGATIONS

There remains in men this inveterate notion that there is a point at which their obligation toward God is fulfilled. This is the mentality of the Law, and the emulation of shadows. Some feel they have done enough when they have attended an official service, paid their tithe, or taken the Lord’s Supper. For them, that is adequate. Thus they withhold their hearts and minds from the Lord, living purely for themselves. They imagine that a few religious peaks will make up for their practical alienation from God.

Such an approach was partially true under the Law, even though the people did not even keep the routines faithfully. In Christ, our obligation is not in doing so much as it is in receiving. True advancement comes in the appropriation of enlightenment (Eph 1:15-20), inner strength (Eph 3:16-18), the atonement (Rom 5:11), and the grace of God (Tit 2:11-13). Without such things as peace, mercy, the love of the truth, the Spirit of adoption, and the spirit of power and love and a sound mind, it makes little difference what is done. The emphasis in Christ is receiving what God has provided in Christ Jesus. Once that is done, God will work in us “both to will and to do of His own good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). He will then work in us that which is “well pleasing in His sight” (Heb 13:20-21).

SPECIAL CONSIDERATION OF THE SEVENTH DAY SABBATH

As for the Sabbath day, Israel, who received the commandment, never really entered into God’s rest, or Sabbath. That is a matter of record (Heb 4:1-9).

There is a greater rest that was typified by the Law’s Sabbath day, but never fulfilled by it. That is the rest of faith, and is discussed at length in the fourth chapter of Hebrews. A parallel is made between the fourth commandment Sabbath and the “rest” of faith.

The Sabbath day was bound upon Israel because their hearts were hard. They would have forgotten God altogether if He did not demand they remember Him on that day, dedicating it

exclusively to Him. In Christ, however, our nature is changed, so that we actually know, and delight in knowing, the Lord. Now every day becomes a Sabbath so far as sanctifying the Lord in our memory.

This does not mean keeping the Sabbath is wrong. Nor, indeed, does it mean we are to demand that everyone keep it. Our text forbids us to judge one another on this matter. The recollection of God as the Creator of the universe is wonderful. Intimate fellowship with Him by faith is more wonderful. That is why Scripture affirms, "We which believe do enter into rest" (Heb 4:3), even though Israel did not. The word used in that text is "sabbaton," or Sabbath. It is a higher and more extensive rest which overshadows, but does not obliterate, the former Sabbath.

The fourth chapter of Hebrews deals extensively with the Sabbath, showing it has been overshadowed by a greater Sabbath – one of spiritual rest. The passage is Hebrews 4:1-11, and speaks rather plainly. Under the Law, the Sabbath day was imposed upon the people because of their hard hearts. They would have forgotten God altogether if a day had not been commanded from which to rest from ordinary labors and concentrate upon the Lord. In Christ, we are simply told not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb 10:25) – we are not told not to work. There is something in the renewed heart that senses the need for focusing on a gathering of kindred spirits, and building one another up in the most holy faith. That is why an exhortation, or reminder, is given for them to do this, not a commandment like the Sabbath day commandment.

We also have records of early believers meeting on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). This was doubtless done because of our Lord's resurrection on the first day of the week (Mark 16:9), and His appearance to the disciples on a first day of the week (John 20:19). This is an area of sharp controversy among believers in Christ. However, the fact that neither Jesus nor the Apostles ever bound the Sabbath day upon people makes it wrong for others to do so. It is in the area of conscience. Jesus said of the Sabbath, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28).

You do not have to prove the Sabbath has passed. The Adventists have to prove Jesus has bound it upon us. It will do no good to infer that such a thing is binding. We must have a word from Jesus or his Apostles on the matter. It cannot be affirmed that every one knew the fourth commandment, and therefore it was not necessary to affirm it, for that was not the case with the Gentiles. The Gentiles did not keep the Sabbath day. Although God's law was written upon their conscience (Rom 2:15), yet no Gentile nation advocated the seventh day as the Sabbath. If it was not a key issue for them, it cannot be for us. To me, that is a more powerful argument than one based upon research and inference.

The first day of the week is held before us as a central time for believers.

- Jesus rose on the first day of the week (Mark 16:9).
- He appeared to Mary Magdalene on the first day of the week (Mk 16:9).
- Following His resurrection, He twice appeared to His disciples on the first day of the week (John

20:19,6).

- The day of Pentecost was on the first day of the week (50 days after the Passover Sabbath).
- The disciples at Troaz met on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).
- The Corinthians were instructed to lay aside their offerings on the first day of the week (1 Cor 16:2).

This is sufficient evidence to confirm the Sabbath day is not binding upon those in Christ Jesus. It has been overshadowed by a greater glory. There is a greater “rest” realized in Christ, and it fulfills the Sabbath commandment.

“ 18 Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind . . . ”

Aggressive Jewish teachers were not the only threats to the Colossian brethren. They were also being subjected to other distracting influences. If they were not resisted, they would drive a wedge between the people and God.

The warnings that follow deal with religious novelties. They are not as advanced as the procedures and ceremonies instituted under the Lord. However, they were representative of the kind of subtleties that turn men away from the Lord Jesus. The church of our day is being subjected to this kind of theological and religious corruption.

BEGUILED OF YOUR REWARD

“Let no man beguile you of your reward . . . ” Other versions read, “Let no one cheat you of your reward,” NKJV “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize,” NASB “disqualify you for the prize,” NIV “Do not let anyone disqualify you,” NRSV “Let no man rob you of your prize,” ASV and “Do not let anyone condemn you.” NLT

There Is A Prize to Be Obtained

In Christ, there is a prize to be obtained. Paul said he forgot the things that were behind, counted everything else but “dung,” and pressed “toward the mark for the prize ” (Phil 3:14). The Spirit admonishes us, “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize ? So run, that ye may obtain” (1 Cor 9:24). Elsewhere the prize is referred to as an “incorruptible” crown (1 Cor 9:25), a “crown of righteousness” (2 Tim 4:8), the “crown of life” (James 1:12), and the “crown of glory” (1 Pet 5:4). If this prize, or crown, is not obtained, there has been absolutely no point to being a “Christian.” Life has been lived in vain, and the end of the person’s life will be no different than if he had never “known the way of righteousness.” For such people, like Judas, “it had been good if that man had not been born” (Matt 26:24).

A perusal of the average church would never leave one with the impression that such a danger existed – that a man could take your prize, rob you of the prize, or disqualify you from the race. Some have even adopted a theology that affirms such a thing is not possible. However, this is a very real warning, and is to be heeded with all sobriety and diligence.

Losing the Reward

To be draw away from Christ is to be drawn away from all that He brings – every single aspect of salvation. A person can have nothing that grace gives if he turns away from the One who gives it. Thus, those who are “beguiled of their reward” have it taken away from them by being deluded into a form of religion in which Jesus is not primary.

This is equivalent to running “in vain” (Gal 2:2; Phil 2:16), beating the air (1 Cor 9:26), or becoming a “castaway” (1 Cor 9:27). In this case, a “reward” is not speaking of an aspect of salvation, but of its culmination. Elsewhere it is called “the reward of the inheritance” (Col 3:24). It is the outcome of confidence, referred to in Hebrews: “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward ” (Heb 10:35). It was the consideration of the “reward” that moved Moses to “esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt” (Heb 11:26).

The thought that a “man” could so bewitch us that we would lose this “reward” is a most sobering consideration. Even though some choose to affirm such a thing is not possible, yet we are solemnly admonished to see to it this does not happen. Among other things, this obligates the people of God to evaluate what they hear – to “try the spirits” (1 John 4:1). Because a preacher or teacher is from the supposedly right church does not mean he may be heard with our guards down. Because he is not overbearing does not mean he is right. Because he sees certain things the way you do does not mean everything he says can be received.

One of the serious deficiencies of denominationalism is that it leads people to accept teaching because it is associated with a particular group. Know that all teaching, regardless of its proponent, is linked with either Jesus or Satan, light or darkness, salvation or damnation. If it is not linked with Jesus, it necessarily competes with Him. The acceptance of such teaching will involve the sure forfeiture of “the reward of the inheritance.” That is the gravity of the text before us.

VOLUNTARY HUMILITY

“ . . . in a voluntary humility . . . ” Other versions read, “taking delight in false humility,” NKJV “delighting in self-abasement,” NASB “consciously making little of himself,” BBE and “delighting in humble-mindedness.” YLT

The idea here is that the teachers would present themselves in the cloak of modesty and humility. Jesus referred to such as coming “in sheep’s clothing,” while actually being “ravaging wolves” (Matt 7:15). Whether they are feigning humility, or are clothed with what they conceive to be real humility is not clear. In either case, it is not an acceptable humility, and it does not bring spiritual advantages to those possessing it or those taught by such people.

“Voluntary humility” proceeds from the flesh. Even though it may have the appearance of genuine humility, it has not come from an awareness of the truth as it is in Jesus. It is self-imposed rather than being produced by the cognition of the guilt of sin, the need of a Savior, and the raging war between the flesh and the Spirit.

The world has a humility of its own. It is more akin to culture than to spirituality. As the word “voluntary” indicates, there is a certain pleasure taken in this kind of humility – like being proud one is humble. “Voluntary humility” is considered to be a notable attainment by the one possessing it. It is a form of fleshly discipline rather than the result of seeing the truth about ones own self.

There is a vast difference between “voluntary humility” and “humility of mind” (Acts 20:19), or being “clothed with all humility” (1 Pet 5:5). The former is basically a self-disciplined appearance before men. The latter is a posture that is fundamentally before God, and secondarily before men. This is said of such humility, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord , and he shall lift you up” (James 4:10). And again, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God , that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Pet 5:6).

WORSHIPING OF ANGELS

“ . . . and worshiping of angels...”

In this case, an apparently humble teacher promotes inordinate attention to angels. Thereby, he is turning the heart away from the Lord Jesus, in whom we are “complete.” You may recall that John the Apostle twice fell before an angel in worship. He himself provides the account of these occasions.

- “And I fell at his feet to worship him . And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant,

and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10).

- “And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God” (Rev 22:8-9).

These accounts confirm the awesome appearance of angels. Truly, they are “greater in power and might” than men (2 Pet 2:11), excelling in strength (Psa 103:20) and wisdom (2 Sam 14:20). Yet, even though they are supernatural and immortal (Lk 20:36), they are not the proper objects of worship. They are not to be compared with the Lord Jesus, whom they themselves worship (Heb 1:6). All of the angels have been made subject to Christ (1 Pet 3:22). Yet, there were subtle teachers who led people into the worship of angels, doing so in a display of seeming humility. These men were robbers.

This “worship” doubtless took the form of prayer, as though angels were viewed as effective mediators between God and man. In this sense, the text represents false teachers coming in great humility, as though they were unable to go directly to God, and therefore approached Him through an angel. This practice is still found in Roman Catholicism. But it is altogether wrong, for “there is one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). Approaching God through an angel is not a sign of humility, but the confirmation of unbelief. It is wrong and sinful in every sense of the word.

While many of us do not contend with men who promote the worshiping of angels, it has not always been so among those professing allegiance to Christ. Early in the history of the church, the Platonists promoted this view among Christians. Infected with this error, Catholicism still urges prayer to angels, which is a form of worship. Various artifacts have been created of angels which, it is affirmed, brings protection to those who wear them. Roman Catholicism has long promoted bowing to images – which bowing is an act of worship, as John bowing before an angel.

Even though most of us have not contended with such misrepresentations, there are even lesser things that are promoted as objects of worship. There are other forms of unlawful adoration that are more common to us. There are those who give the glory and honor due to Jesus only, to movements, creeds, and theological views. This is a common practice, and is strictly forbidden by the sense of this text.

INTRUDING INTO THINGS NOT SEEN

“ . . . intruding into those things which he hath not seen . . . ” Other versions read, “taking his stand on visions he has seen,” NASB “goes into great detail about what he has seen,” NIV “dwelling on visions,” NRSV “having his thoughts fixed on things he has seen,” BBE “entering into things which he has not seen,” DARBY “walking in the things which he hath not seen,” DOUAY “going on in detail about visions,” ESV “advancing himself in those things which he never saw,” GENEVA “pinning every hope on visions received,” NJB and “even though they day they have received visions about this.” NLT

As you can see, the various versions present two seemingly contradictory ideas. First, that these false teachers are intruding into things they have NOT seen. Second, that they are intruding into things they HAVE seen. What is the meaning of this expression.

- First, these men profess to be dealing with things that are NOT visible to mortals – in particular, things that have to do with angels. Such a teacher barges into these areas, “intruding into things which he hath NOT seen” – things not visible.
- Second, their teaching is based upon private visions they profess to have experienced, without any regard for the Word of God or the Person of Christ – “taking his stand on visions HE has seen.” NASB
- Third, a spiritual assessment is given of these teachers. In it, Paul affirms they are trespassing in a forbidden area, and have really seen nothing at all – “intruding into things which he hath NOT seen.”

There is a sense in which all of these views are true. The particular emphasis of this text, however, is confirmed in the verse that follows. The point is that these men were pretentious. They had barged into forbidden areas, and were teaching things they had not perceived at all. There are areas of reality that are not meant to be traversed by men. As it is written, “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever . . . ” (Deu 29:29).

Further, God has “revealed” the matters intended for us to know, through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is through Christ that God has spoken in “these last days” (Heb 1:2). All the fulness of the Godhead dwells in Christ. All of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are “hid” in Christ alone. Anyone and everyone who teaches a message that does not have Jesus at its center, or has not come through Him and His appointed expositors, the Apostles, is the type of teacher mentioned in this text.

A contemporary example of such teaching is Mormonism – one of the fastest growing religious cults of our time. It is based upon a message Joseph Smith professed to receive from an angel. It involved the writing of additional Scripture, and the upstaging of Jesus by a purported prophet than came after Him. Those who embrace this teaching choose to be known as Christians, more precisely referred to as “latter day saints.” However, they have been turned away from Christ, not to Him. By their own confession, they are not complete in Christ. They have therefore been “beguiled” of their reward.

VAINLY PUFFED UP WITH HIS FLESHLY MIND

“ . . . vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind . . . ” Other versions read, “inflated without cause by

his fleshly mind,” NASB “his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions,” NIV “puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking,” NRSV “puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,” RSV “being foolishly lifted by his natural mind,” BBE and “their sinful minds have made them proud.” NLT

The idea is that there is no point to or benefit in such a person or his teaching. Whatever significance this kind of teacher appears to have is only a vain show – it is not real. The person makes a claim to being humble, but is really puffed up with pride. He is dominated by the fleshly mind that cannot possibly be humble. The carnal mind cannot traffic in the things of God, for it is “enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). The “natural man,” which is synonymous with the “fleshly mind,” does not receive “the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14).

Such a mind inflates a person’s opinion of himself – which is the opposite of humility. Let it be clear, when the “fleshly mind” dominates a person, it is not possible to avoid its effects. In this case, it will move a teacher to probe in forbidden areas, and imagine that he has done so under the direction of God. The teaching that such a person brings may appear humble, but it is not. The fact that Jesus is not prevalent in it means the teaching will take away the reward of those who receive it. The business of the saints is to see to it they are not beguiled by such men.

THE JEOPARDY OF THE TIMES

One of the jeopardies of our times is the exaltation and veneration of religious scholarship and educational attainments. While it is certainly not wrong to discipline our minds, and profit from exposure to the truly wise men of the ages, such attainments must be made subordinate to faith. The most precise as extensive training and discipline of the mind is accomplished by faith. When a person believes God and relies upon Him, the mind is made better, and thoughts more acceptable to God.

If this is not kept in mind, men will actually assign to the mind a value that causes the Lord Jesus to occupy a lesser role in personal life. In such a case, teaching will become corrupted, for a fleshly mind cannot contain or expound the truth of God. Where, therefore, such a mind is promoted, Jesus is necessarily excluded.

It requires an extraordinary amount of faith and vigilance to train the mind, yet maintain one’s faith. Many a soul has lost their faith in the name of education, and many a preacher has settled for powerless presentation by insisting on allowing the “fleshly mind” to assert itself in their preaching. The only answer to this jeopardy is to be Christ centered in our thinking.

In Jesus the word of Isaiah finds its ultimate fulfillment: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee : because he trusteth in Thee” (Isa 26:3). In the soil of “perfect peace” the fruits of righteousness will grow – fruits no regulation can produce.

“ 19a And not holding the Head. . . ” Other versions read, “not holding fast to the Head,” NKJV “He has lost connection with the Head,” NIV “ not joined to the Head,” BBE “not holding closely to the Head,” NAB “such a person has no connection to the Head,” NJB and “they are not connected to Christ.” NLT

This is speaking of the one beguiling the saints of their reward. He comes in a vain display of humility, and promotes obeisance to things and personalities who are created. The reason for the corruption of such an individual is that he is not “holding the Head,” or connected with Christ. Whatever comes to the saints must come through Christ, or it is an obstacle to the obtaining of glory. A resource that does not come from Jesus is not a resource at all. It may have an appearance of humility and wisdom, but we must not be deceived by it.

It must be remembered that there is only one Head – the Lord Jesus Christ. The Grecian empire was pictured as a leopard with four heads (Dan 7:6). Satan is depicted as a great red dragon with “seven heads” (Rev 12:3). The adversarial beast that rose out of the sea to oppose the church had “seven heads” (Rev 13:1). Spiritual Babylon, the apostate church, is set forth as a harlot carried by a beast with “seven heads” (Rev 17:3,7,9). But when it comes to the total picture, there is only one Head, and it is the Lord Jesus. He is in every sense of the word “the Head OVER ALL THINGS ” (Eph 1:22). He is “ THE Head, even Christ” (Eph 4:15). Not only is He “the Head of THE BODY , the church” (Col 1:18), He is also “the Head of ALL principality and power” (Col 2:10).

In redemption, a connection is made between the Lord Jesus and the church – the Head and the body. Whatever comes to the body is sent by Christ through the gifts He has given to the church (Eph 4:8-16). When it comes to messages, God has nothing to say to the church that does not come directly from Jesus. Thus it is written, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed Heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds” (Heb 1:1-2). The word of God to those who saw the glory of the Son on the holy mount was, “ Hear ye Him !” (Matt 17:5).

THE SOURCE OF ALL SPIRITUAL LIFE

The Headship of Christ does involve His authority over everything and every one. However, in this text, authority is not the subject. Here the distribution of resources and the maintenance of the life of the church are the point – as seen in the relationship of the head to the body. All spiritual life comes directly from Christ, who is “the Head of the body.” Absolutely no spiritual life results from a mere

procedure, a routine, a program, or a habit.

This flies directly in the face of much of contemporary Christianity. Religious “how to” merchants have appeared like a horde of ants upon the landscape of religious life. They come in the form of procedural experts, counselors, and educators. They offer ways for the people of God to be guaranteed Divine favor and success – but the ways are not centered in Christ, and do not require Christ. The secret of their methods is not faith but work. It is personal discipline, not a personal trust in the Lord. The heart and core of their religion is a sort of outline, and not a life-sustaining connection with the Lord of glory. They are like those who recommend standing in the glow of incandescent lights, when they could reside in the blazing glory of “the Sun of righteousness” (Mal 4:2). Beware of them!

NO RELATION TO CHRIST

Whatever is unrelated to Christ cannot be essential to the acquisition or maintenance of spiritual life. Furthermore, the teacher who is not in Christ, and to whom Jesus is not manifesting Himself (John 14:23), has no place among the people of God. Every valid spiritual resource is found with Christ, and is sent by Him to His people.

Whenever a preacher or a teacher brings something to the people that did NOT come from Jesus, it is because that person himself is not holding to the Head. That is why the Lord Jesus does not speak to Him, there is no connection with Him – the connection accomplished by faith.

Serious Charges

These are serious charges, but they are intended to be. Paul does not take for granted that Juidaizers promoting circumcision, holy days, new moons, and Sabbaths, are serious. He does not tell us they are sincere, devoted, and convinced they are right. He does not point to the teachers who promote a self-imposed humility and say they are just not clear on a few things. He does not commend them for having a high regard for heavenly beings, like angels.

The subversion of the faith of God’s elect is never traced back to an innocent teacher, a naive preacher, or a benign procedure. Rather, it has come from a person who himself is not holding fast to the Head. Such an one is not walking in the light as Jesus is in the light (1 John 1:7). Their doctrine is not the result of them being “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17). It is the absence of a real association with the Lord Jesus that has produced their doctrines – doctrines that will rob the saints of their reward and disqualify them from the prize.

I hardly see how anything could possibly be more serious, or have more far reaching implications. O, that more were given to see this!

“ 19b . . . from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.”

Now the Spirit will further establish the role of the Lord Jesus in regard to spiritual growth and advance. He does not take for granted that the people see this, for “many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Every single one of them have this in common: the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwells, is not at the heart of their teaching. They may boast that they have made a place for Him, but it is not the preeminent place. When the people were faced with the early believers, “they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus ” (Acts 4:13). Those believers were holding fast to the Head. However, the teachers of our text are not noted for being “with Jesus.” Rather, they are noted for their peculiar methods, techniques, and procedures.

The Spirit now reasons upon the indispensable role of Jesus. It is a principle of truth that it always stands up to the test of sound reason. Faith is not unreasonable, but has a logic of its own. What follows will make perfect sense, therefore, to those who believe.

ALL THE BODY

“ . . . from which all the body. . . ” Other versions read, “from WHOM all the body,” NKJV “from whom the entire body,” NASB and “from whom the whole body.” NIV

The means through which every single member of the body of Christ is nourished is Christ Himself. It is not possible to become truly better by keeping a routine or following a discipline. Some will vigorously contest this statement, but their objections will all fall to the ground like weightless notes. Either life comes from Jesus, or it does not come at all! If Jesus Himself does not sustain the individual, they will not be sustained, vigorous religious disciplines notwithstanding.

Note, the words that follow relate to “all the body” – not just the stronger believer. I understand that there is a stage during which we are “under tutors and governors” – guardians and managers. NASB However, that is not a time of real growth. Rather, it is the appointed way of keeping sin from breaking forth. As it is written, “Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world” (Gal 4:1-3).

However, this whole situation changes when the Lord Jesus is brought into the picture. “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ ” (Gal 4:7). This is true of “all the body.” Its maturity does not depend upon rules and regulations, but upon a vital connection with Jesus – a connection that is sustained by faith.

This puts the lie to the Joseph Smith’s (Mormonism), Mary Baker Eddy’s (Christian Science) and C. T. Russell (Jehovah’s Witnesses) of the world. In each of these cases, information was received that did not come from Jesus . This being the case, it is not possible for their doctrine to support the saints, for whatever Jesus does not give has no place in sustaining and maturing the people of God!

This is a point upon which we must be dogmatic. It is involved in our Lord’s affirmation, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me” (John 14:6). There is no point in the Christian experience where this ceases to be true.

The objective of every valid ministry is to enable the people to make the connection with Jesus! If this does not happen, nothing else matters. No discipline or procedure can compensate for not holding fast to the Head.

Remember, this is true for “all the body, ” not just for the leaders. The aim is assist all of the members to “grow up into Christ in all things.”

Confirmation in Ephesians

This same truth is again stated in the book of Ephesians. “the Head, even Christ: from whom the whole body . . . ” (Eph 4:16). The “whole body” is every single member of it. No one in Christ Jesus is afforded the luxury of remaining infantile and unlearned. No provision has been made for a member of Christ’s body to remain in a state of ignorance. Although the condition is quite common, a lack of spiritual growth is never right. It is wrong for a person living in the brightness of the day of salvation to remain in a state of spiritual infancy. Christ has been exalted, and is presently ministering spiritual sustenance to His people, bringing them from one stage of glory to another through the working of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). If this change is not taking place, it is because the connection with Jesus is not firm – and that is the most favorable view of the situation.

It is the responsibility of every prophet, preacher, teacher, elder, etc., to bring the people into a deeper and more productive fellowship with the Son of God. If this does not happen, the individuals will not be strengthened, and the professed leader has been unfaithful. They may adhere to a sectarian creed, and be good members in standing, but if they are not connected with Jesus, they will not grow.

JOINTS AND BANDS

“ . . . by joints and bands . . . ” Other versions read, “joints and ligaments,” NKJV “ligaments and sinews,” NIV and “joints and ligaments.” RSV

The word “joints” means bond, fastening or connection. “Bands” means that which binds together – the middle item that joins two or more things together: link, joint, bond. In the body, sinew, ligament, muscle . THAYER The meaning is that Jesus ministers to the whole body from the point at which they are connected to Him. The ministry itself is accomplished at the point where people are united with one another.

Two things, therefore, must take place before effective ministry can be realized. First , the one ministering must be connected to Jesus. Second , he must be connected with those to whom he is ministering. The godly teacher is connected with the Lord Jesus by means of spiritual sinews and muscles. The same is true of his connection with the people. The people themselves are also connected to Jesus by the same means. If these connections are in place, spiritual sustenance will flow from the Head to the teacher, and then to the people. If either connection is missing, edification is impossible!

The preeminent sinew is faith, which is always associated with hope and love . This “threefold cord” is not easily broken, and firmly holds the people together with Christ and with one another. However, if any of these are weak or missing, the sustaining flow of life is interrupted. It is not possible to overstate this fact.

NOURISHMENT MINISTERED

“ . . . having nourishment ministered . . . ” Other versions read, “nourished,” NKJV “being supplied,” NASB “supported,” NIV “being given strength,” BBE “ministered to,” DARBY “supplied with nourishment,” DOUAY “furnished,” GENEVA “given all that it needs,” NJB “get our nourishment and strength,” NLT and “gathering supply.” YLT

The ministration itself comes from the Lord Jesus Christ – the Head. It comes through the vital connection that is made with Him in salvation. It is realized at the point the lives of His people intersect with one another. That intersection is not in the flesh, but in the spirit. The life of one believer can connect with the life of another who has actually past from this world – like coming into the fellowship of “the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:23). Those separated by distance can also have a spiritual impact upon one another (Col 2:5). Jesus, for example, can still minister to people through Paul. He can minister to us through those remaining in this world, yet far from us. He can also minister to us through face to face fellowship. But He will only do so through the “joints and bands” – the spiritual points at which we intersect with Him and with one another.

In view of this circumstance, the current trend of infrequent gatherings and reduced exposure to things pertaining to life and godliness is exposed for what it really is. Through such trends the work of

God is being circumvented, spiritual growth inhibited, and connections with Jesus eroded. If these statements seem strong, let it be known that they are not nearly strong enough.

No person can survive in this world without spiritual nourishment. It simply is not possible. Furthermore, no person can receive that nourishment if it does not come from Jesus. It cannot be received if there is no connection with Jesus, nor can it be received if there is no connection with one another. That, of course, is the significance of the church being called “the body of Christ ” (1 Cor 12:27; Eph 1:23; 4:12; 5:30).

KNIT TOGETHER

“ . . . and knit together . . . ” Other versions read, “held together,” NASB “kept together,” BBE “united together,” DARBY “compacted,” DOUAY and “joined together.” NLT

The idea is that believers are knit, or held, together by what passes to them from Jesus. Speaking of the same marvelous process, the book of Ephesians states it this way: “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth , according to the effectual working in the measure of every part” (Eph 4:16). The NASB reads, “from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part ” (Eph 4:16).

Here is the true picture of unity, and it conflicts sharply with many views of unity. We are not held together by what we believe, but by what we supply and receive! It is not our name that unites us, or our religious heritage, but the nourishment sent from Jesus, that has been ministered to us through the various members of the body. Therefore, where unity does not exist, Jesus has not been nourishing the saints. Where that nourishment is lacking, there has not been a proper connection with the Head. Of course, this has some rather significant implications. It is not our prerogative to go about judging other people. Rather, our energies are to be expended in realizing the productive fellowship of the Lord Jesus, who Himself supplies nourishment to His body.

A spectating religion is one that is necessarily characterized by spiritual poverty. It is one where nourishment cannot be properly realized. A religion of specialists produces spiritual malnutrition – like a whole body which only has functioning little fingers, but is impotent everywhere else.

There are efforts being made to knit God’s people together independently of the nourishment that comes from Christ. They are all futile, for Jesus will not work through them. Whatever progress they may appear to make is superficial, and has no substance at all . Men are not united together by opening books, or joining in the same institutional cause, but by being connected with Jesus.

THE INCREASE OF GOD

“ . . . increaseth with the increase of God.” Other versions reads, “grows with the increase that is from God,” NKJV “grows with a growth which is from God,” NASB “grows as God causes it to grow,” NIV “has its growth with the increase of God,” BBE “growth into the increase of God,” DOUAY “achieves the growth that comes from God,” NAB “grows as God causes it to grow,” NIB “grows with the growth given by God,” NJB and “we victual as we get our nourishment and strength from God.” NLT

Note the enlargement of the thought. It has been stated that nourishment is ministered by the Head, Jesus Christ, through and to those who are connected to Him. Now it is stated that the actual increase, or growth, comes from God Himself. Elsewhere it is clearly said, “ God giveth the increase” (1 Cor 3:6-7). Ezekiel also spoke of God giving increase (Ezek 36:37).

All increase is not good. David spoke of those who troubled him being “increased” (Psa 3:1). There are those in the world of whom it is said, “the glory of his house is increased.” Yet, when that person dies, “he shall carry nothing away” (Psa 49:16-17). Even “backslidings” have been said to increase (Jer 5:6), as well as sins (Jer 30:14).

Only the increase that God gives is acceptable. Faith can be “increased” (2 Cor 10:15). Churches can be “increased” in number (Acts 16:5). The “fruits of righteousness” can also “increase” (2 Cor 9:10). There can even be an “increase” in love for one another (1 Thess 3:12), as well as in giving (1 Thess 4:10). This is the kind of increase that comes from God.

Yet, this increase is not automatic, but is realized through appointed means. God will not cause anything or anyone to grow that has not been nourished by Jesus. If the source of the life cannot be traced back to the direct ministration of Jesus, God will not cause it to grow – and all other growth is, at best, simulated. It is neither real nor acceptable.

The nourishment ministry is an aspect of Christ’s mediatorship. He is, after all, “the Mediator of the New Covenant” (Heb 9:15; 12:24). As such, He administers spiritual victuals to His people. This is accomplished through the union with Himself that is realized in the new birth.

Do you wonder why spiritual growth is so rare? There are poor souls who hear more about psychological principles (if there be such a thing) than the preaching of the Gospel. They are exposed to more speculation than Gospel affirmation. All manner of communication is taking place that is not the result of holding “fast to the Head.” It is not possible for such bantering to yield spiritual nutrition – which means it is impossible for God to grant increase under such conditions. These are weighty considerations, but they are surely true.

A RESTATEMENT OF THE CASE

What we have just considered is an explanation for the spiritual sterility of any message that does not have its genesis in Christ. If we are truly “complete in Him,” then we are thoroughly incomplete

without Him. The Lord Jesus nourishes His people through a vital association with Himself. Working with this indispensable nourishment, God brings about the increase that is essential to our salvation.

Where that increase is not being experienced, God is not at work. Where God is not at work, Jesus has not been sending out nourishment. Where Jesus is not sending our nourishment, there is no connection with Him.

“ 20a Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world . . . ”

The Apostle now begins to reason with us upon the basis of what he has affirmed.

- All the fulness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily.
- We are complete in Him.
- Jesus has circumcised us, “putting off the body of the sins of the flesh.”
- We have been raised from death in trespasses and sins.
- All of our trespasses have been forgiven.
- All nourishment comes from Christ, who is the exclusive “Head.”
- This nourishment is ministered through our vital connection with Him.

There are certain implications in all of these realities. By that I mean there are specific effects that are realized because of them. They are not mere statements, but are words containing both “spirit” and “life” (John 6:63). When they are comprehended, they make sin unreasonable and righteousness reasonable. They cause the wisdom of this world to be seen as “foolishness,” and the wisdom of God as powerful (1 Cor 3:19,24).

WHEREFORE

“Wherefore . . .” Other versions read “Therefore,” NKJV “Since,” NIV and “You have.” NLT

It is not enough to know the facts of a matter. We must also be able to reason upon them – to build sound thoughts and conclusions upon the foundation of truth. An unthinking people is invariably a people dominated by sin. A religion that does not promote godly thinking dries up the soul of the people. Any approach to serving God that relies more upon discipline and habit than upon thoughtfulness and insight is actually powerless.

The question that follows is based upon assumed acceptance of the affirmations that have been made. The absolute truthfulness of those affirmations compels the Apostle to reason in this manner.

Much of the preaching of our day is covered with the shroud of doubt. Speakers appear to be unsure of themselves, and they deliver words that have not been burned into their heart and conscience. Too often an atmosphere of uncertainty is the result, where no solid convictions are held, and no firm resolves are made toward the Lord. It is imperative that the people of God rid themselves of influences that contribute to such uncertainty.

IF YE BE DEAD

“ . . . if ye be dead with Christ . . .” Other versions read, “if you died with Christ,” NKJV “If you have died with Christ,” NASB “Since you died with Christ,” NIV “If with Christ you died,” ESV “If you have really died with Christ,” NJB and “If, then, ye did die with Christ.” YLT

He is referring to the death that was realized at the time of our baptism. This is not the death in trespasses and sins from which we were quickened (Eph 2:1,5; Col 1:13). Rather, this is the death into which we were inducted by our union with Christ. Thus he speaks of being “dead WITH Christ.” The sixth chapter of Romans refers to this death with Christ in these words, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death ?” (Rom 6:3). And again, “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death” (Rom 6:4). And again, “For he that is dead is freed from sin” (Rom 6:7). And again, “Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Rom 6:8).

The issue here is not whether or not we should die with Christ, but whether or not we are actually dead with Him. This casts a light upon baptism to which many are not accustomed. Too many of my former acquaintances have viewed baptism more as a requirement, than an ordinance in which marvelous things were actually accomplished. It was not enough that the Colossians were baptized. They were not to rest in that alone. Now they are brought to reason upon their baptism.

This is death TO sin, not death IN sin! Believers are reason upon the basis of this death. As it is written, “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin , but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11). We have also become “dead to the Law,” with its condemnation and ordinances (Rom 7:4). In Jesus we died to sin and to the world order. We are no longer under the dominion of sin and the world, and are therefore no longer obligated to them.

Paul refers to this death when speaking of his own crucifixion. “I am crucified with Christ : 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, and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Again he testifies, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world ” (Gal 6:14). He will now reason upon one aspect of this death.

THE RUDIMENTS OF THE WORLD

“ . . . from the rudiments of the world . . . ” Other versions read, “from the basic principles of the world,” NKJV “to the elementary principles of the world,” NASB “elemental spirits of the universe,” NRSV “the rules of the world,” BBE “ordinances of the world,” GENEVA and “elemental powers of the world.” NAB

The word “rudiments” means first things, or basics, like the alphabet is to grammar. Rudiments have more to do with controlling waywardness and acquainting one with duty. They are not intended for the mature, and do not contribute to maturity. At some point, the child of God must move from “rudiments” to “strong meat” (Heb 5:12,14).

Being “dead” to these rudiments means they are no longer the principles by which we live. The newness of life into which we were raised to walk (Rom 6:44) cannot be sustained by these principles. Those who maintain that everything should be presented so that a child can understand it, must deal with this fact. Juvenility is not a suitable environment for spiritual growth.

The Danger of Rudimentary Religion

When one is in bondage to the “rudiments of the world,” a corrupted sense of contentment is developed. The individual caught in such a snare begins to think he has made good advance just because he has refrained from the forbidden, and fulfilled obligations. While this may appear commendable before men, it is not praiseworthy before God. Speaking of this, Jesus said, “So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do ” (Luke 17:10).

New life cannot be poured into the old wineskin of routine or habit. That is the manner of Law, but it is not the manner of grace and the New Covenant! Being alive toward God involves fellowship with Him (1 John 1:3), receiving from Him (1 Cor 2:12), and working with Him (1 Cor 3:9).

“ 20b . . . why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances . . . ”

Some questions are rhetorical – that is, the answer to them is obvious. Here is a question that demands an answer.

Here is a line of reasoning that is strange in nominal Christendom. It is foreign because it does not fit into the institutional agenda. You cannot maintain a Babylonish form of religion with this kind of mind-set. Further, it conflicts sharply with legalism. However, this is dealing with the way of life – life toward God. This is language that faith can grasp, and in which hope delights.

AS THOUGH LIVING IN THE WORLD

“ . . . why, as though living in the world . . . ” Other versions read, “why, as if you were living in the world,” NASB “why, as though you still belonged to it [the world],” NIV “why do you live as if you still belonged to the world,” NRSV and “why, as if alive in the world.” DARBY

This question presumes that something very real happened when we were born again. Our baptism into Christ was not a mere formality. Jesus “gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father” (Gal 1:4), and that is precisely what happened. We have been crucified to the world, and the world has been crucified unto us (Gal 6:14). The heavenly mandate is, “ Be not conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2). Once we “walked according to the course of this world,” but now we have been delivered from that manner of life (Eph 2:2), and is unlawful to live according to the world any more.

Those in Christ have been raised together with Christ to “sit in heavenly places” (Eph 2:6). Jesus has chosen us “out of the world,” and our life-sustaining resources can no longer be found in it (John 15:19). Speaking of His disciples to the Father Himself, Jesus twice affirmed “they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14,16).

Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), and we have been translated into it (Col 1:13). It should therefore be obvious that we do not belong to “this present evil world.”

While we are presently “in the world,” we are not living as though we were. That is, we are not adapting to its manners, or conducting our lives as though it was the primary world. Our citizenship “is in heaven” (Phil 3:20-21), and those who live by faith live with that in mind. Our posture in this world is that of a stranger and pilgrim – someone that traveling through the world, a sojourner.

This circumstance raises a question that must be answered by those who insist on living by rules, regulations, and habits. Such a life does not harmonize with the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. There is a higher motivation that rules. There are greater incentives than regulations. There are more successful manners than mere habits. Now God’s people will be called into account for not availing themselves of these superior realities.

SUBJECT TO ORDINANCES

“ . . . are ye subject to ordinances.” Other versions read, “subject yourselves to regulations,” NKJV “submit yourselves to decrees,” NASB “submit to rules,” NIV “under the authority of orders,” BBE “burdened with traditions,” GENEVA “still let rules dictate to you,” NJB and “keep on following the rules of the world.” NLT

At this point, the Spirit embarks on an exposition of spiritual life that sharply conflicts with much that parades itself under the banner of “Christian.” If you were to remove the element of “rules” and “regulations” from the religious arena, there would not be much left. Whole “ministries” would suddenly become defunct. Understand, we are speaking of rules and regulations that men have imposed upon others, and by which believers in Christ are judged by men. These are not procedures that Jesus has imposed upon the church, but precepts of strictly human origin. They are set forth as a means to being godly, controlling the flesh, and acquiring spiritual growth.

Our text will dogmatically affirm that such “ordinances” are NOT the Divinely appointed means of subduing the flesh, growing in grace, or in any way acquiring spiritual maturity.

It at once becomes obvious that these “ordinances,” “regulations,” or “rules,” have to do with life in this world . They do not relate to being seated in heavenly places. They have nothing to do with fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9) or the “communion of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor 13:14). God does not work through them or honor them, and Satan is not neutralized by them. These are not means in which angelic ministers become active. God has not committed His grace and truth to work through these means.

This is precisely why the question is asked, “Why are ye subject to ordinances?” Death with Christ moves us beyond such regulations, for it immediately addresses the real issues relating to life and godliness. Submission to the rules and regulations of reference actually contradicts the newness of life. It is not the proper response of a person who is “ dead with Christ.” It does not fit in with the truth of the “circumcision of Christ.” That is what makes submission to such regulation such a serious matter.

The Spirit will now elaborate on this.

CLARIFICATION

Once again, let it be clear that our text is speaking about rules imposed upon the people of God. These regulations are represented as an appropriate means to reach Divinely appointed goals, or aims. People are affirmed to be the better for submitting to them, and the worse for not doing so. They are set forth as helping a person draw closer to God, and more effectively fulfill His Word.

“ 21 Touch not; taste not; handle not.” Other versions read, “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” NKJV “Which say there may be no touching, tasting, or taking in your hands,” BBE “Do not pick up this, do not eat that, do not touch the other.” NJB

The words are in a sort of ascendancy, becoming more stringent from word to word. They are doubtless referring to the rules regarding various foods and drinks by which some of the saints were being judged. It is as though they said, “Do not take it, do not even taste it, do not so much as touch it!”

CARE MUST BE TAKEN

Care must be taken in the handling of this passage. It is not a declaration of license, but the announcement that we are not bound to obey the rules men have trumped up. There are Divine prohibitions that are to be honored, from which we are not excluded. Here are a few of them.

- “That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well” (Acts 15:29).
- “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor 6:17).
- “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication” (1 Thess 4:3).
- “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thess 5:22).

- “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Pet 2:11).
- “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18).

There are things in this world that have a defiling effect – such as fornication and evil. There are also things that are prohibited to us because of their association with life – like the eating of blood. For those with no understanding, such as newly converted Gentiles, there are meats that, when eaten, can lead one to the worship of idols – such as meats offered to idols (1 Cor 8:7).

THE REAL POINT

The point here is that the essence of true religion is not found in what we do not do. Ours is not a religion of mere prohibition. Neither, indeed, are we commended to God upon the basis of such things as food. Thus it is written, “But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse” (1 Cor 8:8). The defilement comes from the impact such things have upon the conscience (1 Cor 8:7).

SOME EXAMPLES

An example of prohibitive religion is found in Paul’s description of a time of apostasy. “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (1 Tim 4:1-5). This type of prohibition was formalized by Roman Catholicism, and for many years has been bound upon their people. In recent years, they have relaxed their laws concerning meats.

Another example is the manner in which the Pharisees taught the people, binding upon them prohibitions that God had not given. Jesus said of them, “For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Mat 23:4).

There was also the “tradition of the elders,” vigorously maintained by Jewish zealots. “For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables” (Mark 7:3-4).

Under a system of Law, all of these things are ends of themselves. Honoring these rules was thought to produce some spiritual advantage, or put one in a more favorable posture before the Lord. All

of them could be done without the involvement of the heart. None of them required faith in God, or a love for God. Whatever may be said of them, they did not serve to strengthen man's spirit.

“ 22a Which all are to perish with the using . . . ” Other versions read, “which all concern things which perish with the using,” NKJV “which all refer to things destined to perish with the using,” NASB “These are all destined to perish with use,” NIV “All these regulations refer to things that perish with use,” NRSV “rules which are all to come to an end with their use,” BBE “and all about things which perish even while they are being used,” NJB and “Such rules are mere human teaching about things that are gone as soon as we use them.” NLT

You might call this the practical side of religion. If practical matters are reduced to how we deal with perishing things, then we are off on the wrong foot. Kingdom practicality is not found in handling or not handling perishing things. Rather, it is found in the acquisition of things that do not perish: the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), adding to our faith (2 Pet 1:5-8), seeking things that are above (Col 3:1-2), running with patience the race set before us (Heb 12:1-2), and laying hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12).

We have been called to obtain an “eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15). We cannot, therefore, become preoccupied with things that are destined to pass away. In particular, our religion must not find its culmination in things pertaining to this world.

We are dealing with spiritual perspective here. Let no one imagine for a moment that those in Christ are indifferent toward perishing things, living as though they did not even exist. How poignantly this is stated in First Corinthians: “And they that use this world, as not abusing it : for the fashion of this world passeth away” (1 Cor 7:31). Other versions read, “Those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them . For this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Cor 7:31). The idea is that we refuse to become absorbed into this present evil world, for it will pull us away from heaven. In Christ, we are being “changed from glory unto glory,” moving toward an eternal goal while possessing eternal life. In that posture, inordinate attachment to this world becomes lethal.

Attachment to this world does not always come by means of enslavement to sinful habits. It can also come by having a religion that deals primarily with what is in this world instead of what is in heaven. That is the chief weakness of the ordinances and regulations against which we are being warned. They make you more conscious of this world than the world to come. They demand that more attention be given to the body than to the soul. They require less of Jesus and more of fleshly effort.

If our way of thinking and our emphasis has no place in heaven, it is not appropriate for this world either. If the things to which we give our heart, soul, mind, and strength here, making them our emphasis, will have no place in glory, they cannot be an appropriate emphasis now.

Inherent in this reasoning is the fact that our spirits cannot be made better by attention to the things of this world – even if they are lawful. Worldly disciplines cannot bring you closer to God, or gain a greater degree of favor from Him. You cannot become more pleasing to God simply by refraining from this or that – even when it is necessary to do so. This is a perception that must register upon the conscience of us all.

“ 22b . . . after the commandments and doctrines of men?” Other versions read, “according to the commandments and doctrines of men,” NKJV “because they are based upon human commands and teachings,” NIV “they are simply human commands and teachings,” NRSV and “according to human precepts and doctrines.” RSV

It is the source of these rules and regulations that is their weakness. They have not come from God, but from men. Men may affirm they are based upon Scripture, yet it is their own thinking that has created their conclusions.

Even under the Law, the people of God were faced with the debilitating effects of doctrines taught by men. Isaiah wrote, “Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men ” (Isa 29:13). Other versions read, “And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote,” NASB “Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men ,” NIV and “their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote .” NRSV Referring to this passage, Jesus said of His generation, “But in vain they do worship Me , teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Mat 15:9). Again He said to the Pharisees, “ Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye” (Mark 7:13).

A religion of this type moves one to neglect the Word of God itself, finding refuge in the traditions, doctrines, and regulations of men. The individual thus becomes expert in a sectarian line of thinking, but miserably ignorant concerning the Word of God Himself.

Let no one imagine for single moment that such an approach is innocent and harmless. Jesus said it voided the worship dictated by those rules, and made the Word of God of none effect. That is, God neither occupies nor works within an environment created by the wisdom of men. The implications of this are staggering, but you do well to think upon it.

Remember, it has been affirmed that we are “complete” in Christ. Nothing can be added to Him to make our lives more spiritually productive or acceptable! There is no rule, discipline, or procedure conceived by men – regardless of their seeming spirituality – that can give you the advantage in the good fight of faith and the appropriation of eternal life.

I will concede that there are some disciplines that may assist a person in keeping sin from erupting. However, the subduing of the flesh is in order to the appropriation of the blessing of God. If that appropriation does not take place, the forceful subduement of the external expressions of sin are worthless. I will say more about this matter in the following verses.

TRUE PRACTICALITY

There is, indeed, a practical side to “true religion.” That aspect of spiritual life, however is NOT placed into the hands of men. God has not licensed experts in this world to solve the problems of humanity. I am going to be dogmatic on this point because of its importance. The religious book stores of this country are filled with books that provide purported secrets to a successful life. They use Scripture, yet the Scriptures do not say what they affirm. There are also all manner of religious professionals who are quite willing to offer you a solution to any dilemma in your life. Of course, all of these experts charge for their services.

The Word of God unveils to us heaven's provision for the practical side of spiritual life – the “how-to” of it, if you please. A very succinct statement of this is found in the epistle of First John. After affirming that those in Christ have received an “Unction,” or anointing (1 John 2:20), we are told that this is the appointed means of instructing us in areas not placed under man's control . That is, even though men are employed in the matter of bringing men to Christ and building them up in the faith (1 Cor 3:5), there is an area of life in which men are not the key contributors. This is, in fact, what men would call the “how-to” aspect of life. As unconventional as it may seem to say this, men are not the appointed interpreters of “how-to” live acceptable lives.

Here is affirmation of the Spirit: “But the Anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same Anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as It hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him” (1 John 2:27). Notice the powerful assertions of this text.

. The Anointing abides in you. It is understood that

this Anointing is the Holy Spirit, given to every child of God (Gal 4:6). The point is not merely to receive the Spirit, but for Him to abide, or remain, in you.

- No need for man to teach you. This is not a prohibition of teachers, for God has placed them in the church – and nothing He puts in it is unnecessary (1 Cor 12:28). Rather, this affirms that there is an area in which human teachers have not been given the key ministry.
- The Anointing teaches you. The Spirit Himself teaches the individual “of all things,” “concerning all things,” NKJV or “about all things.” NASB That is, He takes the things God has affirmed and opens them to the individual. This is the “how to” of spiritual life. It is how the Spirit “leads” us in the subduing of the flesh (Rom 8:13).
- What the Anointing teaches you is the truth, and not a lie. What the Spirit teaches is flawless, and perfectly adapted to the nature of spiritual life. He accents the Word, points to Christ, and awakens desires to please Him. He gives a proper perception of Christ, self, and the world.

- As you learn from Him, you abide in Christ. Here is the objective that is to be achieved in the “how-to” of spiritual life. It is to “abide in Him” – that is, in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is something that must be done if we are to be saved (John 15:1-8).

The point of our text is that no rule or regulation made by men can enable you to “abide” in Christ. Such rules are ineffectual in the “heavenly places” where we were placed in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6). They do not reach deep enough in man, where the “thoughts and intents of the heart” are found (Heb 4:12).

The Lord has reserved the personal direction of His people as His own ministry. That is involved in Christ being the “Good Shepherd” (John 10:11) and the “Captain of our salvation” (Heb 2:10). No rule, however wise it may appear, can do what Jesus has been assigned to do through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Blessed is the person who learns this! Once grasped, genuine growth will be realized.

“ 23a Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body . . . ”

The matter before us is of such consequence that the Spirit labors, as it was, to bring it home to our hearts. This is something that we must see! It will be difficult for some, for it flies in the face of nearly all contemporary Christianity. However, as you test this teaching, and search the Scriptures to see if it is so, it will be confirmed to your heart.

A SHOW OF WISDOM

“Which things have indeed a show of wisdom . . .” Other versions read, “indeed have an appearance of wisdom,” NKJV “which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom,” NASB “seem to have a sort of wisdom,” BBE “they have a semblance of wisdom,” NAB and “In these rules you can indeed find what seems to make good sense.” NJB

The rules and regulations of reference are not stupid or foolish in their appearance. It seems that these regulations promote godliness and a high regard for the will of God. They make a lot of sense, and no flaw is apparent in them. They have the appearance of being wise suggestions and good rules. However, the “appearance of wisdom” is not real wisdom! It just looks like wisdom. That is, it is not wise in regards to the purpose of God. In matters pertaining to life and godliness, they are not really wise. They are not recognized in heaven as appropriate guidelines for those who live by faith.

We will find that their wisdom is on the wrong level. That level is of the earth, not of heaven. It has too much man in it, and too little God. These are not rules the Holy Spirit works with. They are not guidelines for which the intercession of Jesus is made. They do not fit into the “whole armor of God,” and are not a part of “the fruit of the Spirit.” They will not enable a person to “abide in Christ.”

Rules and regulations created by men and their traditions are like a network of entanglements that snare the soul. They become an end of themselves, and therefore prohibit growth into Christ in all things.

WILL WORSHIP

“ . . . in will worship . . . ” Other versions read, “self imposed religion,” NKJV “self-made religion,” NASB “self-imposed worship,” NIV “sel-imposed piety,” NRSV “self-ordered worship,” BBE and “superstition.” DOUAY

“Will worship” is self-invented worship – a way of serving God that has proceeded from the human will rather than from God Himself. The word translated “worship” is **evqelogrhskei,a** (eth-elo-thraok-ei-a), and is used only here in Scripture. It does not mean “worship” in the conventional sense of the word, but “piety” – or a life that is offered to God. Several versions use the word “religion,” which is proper, for it refers to the external or outward form of spiritual life.

The point is that the rules men have created and bound upon others, move men to express themselves in a stereotyped manner, according to set routines and procedures. On the one hand, the elaborate liturgies of Catholicism and Orthodox churches are examples of such things. On the other extreme, the modern praise movement offers an excellent example self-imposed routines. Much of it is nothing more than an empty routine.

Keep in mind, these are rules that are being bound upon others. Our text does not remove the liberty of approaching the Lord in heartfelt ways that may not have been specifically outlined in Scripture. When such routines, however, are taught to others, supposing that they will bring the person closer to the Lord, or make them more pious before Him, an unlawful thing has been done.

Also, these are matters that are primarily external. They are not primarily matters of the heart, but of the body.

HUMILITY

“ . . . and humility . . . ” Other versions read “false humility,” NKJV “self-abasement,” NASB and “making little of oneself.” BBE

This is not true humility. It is not a humility that results from the awareness of Lord, the persuasion of faith, and the perception of God’s grace. While real humility is found on the inside, the humility of this verse starts on the outside, with the delusion that it can somehow work itself into the inside. The truth of the matter is that there is no outward procedure, however impressive, that can touch, strengthen, and encourage the heart. If humility is not a basic part of man’s nature, anything that appears humble on the outside is only feigned. It is not real before God.

NEGLECTING OF THE BODY

“ . . . and neglecting of the body...” Other versions read, “severe treatment of the body,” NASB “harsh treatment of the body,” NIV “being cruel to the body,” BBE and “not sparing the body.” DOUAY

This approach is practiced within monastic approaches to religion. The monks of old often flagellated, or beat, their bodies, thinking this would subdue its sinful inclinations. Others fasted for long periods of time, imagining that the harsh treatment of the body would lessen its desires, thus making the person more godly. Of course, no such teaching is found in the Word of God, although many have thought such things are suggested.

This approach to living for the Lord is not what Paul was referring to when he said, “I buffet [“beat” NIV] my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified [“a castaway” KJV] ” NASB (1 Cor 9:27). The idea is that Paul made his body serve him, rather than him serving his body. That is the intent of the older translation “keep under my body.” While the word translated “keep under” etymologically means “strike beneath the eye, to give a black eye,” THAYER it’s use here denotes strict control, not outward punishment. It refers more to the mortification of the flesh, or “body of sin,” than to pounding on the body.

Should an individual, because of acquaintance with his own devices, choose to deprive the body of things that tends to awakens sinful desires, that would not be wrong – in fact, for him it would be right. However, to pass that along to others as the way to be holy would be wrong. Further, to assume that such conduct makes the individual more holy would also be entirely out of order. At best they subdue the outbreak of sin.

“ 23b . . . not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh.” Other versions read, “but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh,” NKJV “but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence,” NIV “but they are of no value in checking self-indulgence,” NRSV “but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh,” ESV “they are of no value against gratification of the flesh,” NAB and “But they have no effect when it comes to conquering a person's evil thoughts and desires.” NLT

NOT IN ANY HONOR

The phrase “not in any honor” means ineffective , or not yielding any truly honorable results. We would say “not of any value.” That is, there is a Divinely appointed objective that cannot be met in this manner. This is not the way to achieve what must be done.

This is another way of referring to religion without power. This is a religion that can be embraced by unregenerate people, who are not reconciled to God, and in whom the Holy Spirit does not reside. Paul said of this kind of religion, “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof,” or “They will act as if they are religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly” NLT (2 Tim 3:5).

In our time, the church world has been inundated with ineffective religion. With more Christian “how-to” books than the world has ever seen, and more religious specialists than scarcely thought conceivable, churches have more self-help and recovery ministries than they have ever had before. There are more Christian educational institutes, more workshops and more experts in human relationships. Yet, it has not stemmed the tide of sin or the appetites of “sinful flesh.” Paul would say of the whole conglomeration of religious tips and procedures, “they are without honor!”

TO THE SATISFYING OF THE FLESH

The Spirit does not leave us guessing as to WHY the rules-and-regulations approach to religion is ineffective. It cannot restrain the flesh, or subdue its inclinations. In fact, it has a way of making them all the worse. If God’s holy and just law could not subdue sin within, who is the fool who will imagine the laws of men can do so. Sin gains its strength from law. As it is written, “the strength of sin is the law” (1 Cor 15:56). Paul said of the Law, “ But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead” (Rom 7:8). Again he said of the Law, “when the commandment came sin revived” (Rom 7:9).

Here is the unvarnished truth of the matter: sin cannot be subdued by Law! It cannot be controlled by rules, ordinances, and regulations. If this was possible, the Law would not have been ended as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4).

THE NECESSITY OF CHANGE

Here is a matter that those who promote procedures have not acknowledged. First, a fundamental change must take place within man. Those who “have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23) cannot be made acceptable by a man-made rule or procedure. They must be born again (John 3:3-8). They must become a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17).

Second, in the power of the new creation, sin must be subdued. How frequently this is stated.

- “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body , ye shall live” (Rom 8:13).
- “That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man , which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Eph 4:22-23).
- “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you , with all malice” (Eph 4:31)
- “ Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth ; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col 3:5).

- “But now ye also put off all these ; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth” (Col 3:8).
- “Wherefore laying aside all malice , and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings” (1 Pet 2:1).

Our text is saying that these requirements cannot be met by means of a man-made rule or procedure. There is no fleshly discipline than can satisfy these necessities. It makes no difference how wise it may appear, and what kind of justification is offered in support of it, it cannot do what God has demanded of you!

The ordinances of men do not promote godliness. They do not make men holy. They do not resolve the problem of sin. They cannot crucify the flesh or mortify the deeds of the body. They cannot make you acceptable to God, or draw you closer to Christ. They cannot make sin distasteful or heaven attractive.

If religious exercises do not help a person subdue sin, they have no value!

JESUS CAN

After all is said and done, God has provided a redemption that can accomplish all of these things. **This is because it is being administered by the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily.** Through Christ, all of the requirements of God can be fulfilled – and happily and satisfyingly so. The flesh can be subdued, the inner man can be strengthened, and the inheritance can be obtained. **However, without Him, no matter how rigorous the procedures embraced, such things will not and cannot be realized.**

It is time for the Lord Jesus to be preached as all-sufficient – the One in whom we are “*complete.*” Nothing is lacking in Him. Everything we need is obtained from Him, and we are personally sustained by Him. Believe it!

The passage we have just reviewed confirms that anything originating from man, regardless of its seemingly wise appearance, can contribute nothing of eternal value to the child of God. **While all manner of objections may be raised against this conclusion, and weighty defenses of human abilities be presented, the fact remains that those who have fallen cannot themselves present a suitable remedy for that fall.** If men want to come to God, they must be brought by Jesus, for He is “*the Way.*” If any message is adopted whereby the mind is illuminated and the heart stabilized, it must come through Jesus Christ, who is “*the Truth.*” If anything is received that makes for response to God, the ability to hear Him, and grow up into Christ, it must be received from the hand of Jesus, who is “*the Life.*”

God will not allow anything that does not come from Jesus to be instrumental causing us to be accepted by Him, or dwell forever in the house of the Lord. The *“fulness of the Godhead”* dwells in Christ, and in Christ alone. If we are going to receive of His fulness, we must receive it from Him. No procedure will do. There is no liturgy that can confer life. There is no life discipline of human origin that can make one better in the eyes of God – no rule or regulation conceived by man that can measure whether or not we are approved of God.

At the point the heart is not involved, or the conscience is not aware of the eye of the Lord as well as the need for His grace, mere religious routine is being expressed. It is imperative that the people of God see this. Religious routine does not bring an awareness of the need for Christ, and where that awareness is not found, Jesus will not minister. In fact, as illustrated in Israel, the Lord is actually repulsed by heartless routine (Isa 1:11-15; Jer 6:20; Amos 5:21-23).

Spiritual Babylon could not exist without lifeless routine. It is essential to the maintenance of its walls and the promulgation of its existence.

Were the professed church to suddenly tap into the Divine provisions that are in Christ Jesus, countless religious professionals would be put out of business. Whole professed ministries would come crashing down to the ground, for they depend upon the people being lifeless, helpless, and in a state of misery and need. If you can see it, a considerable percentage of modern Christian professions and ministries rely on the people being morally weak and spiritually ignorant.

In such a framework, rules and regulations appear quite valuable. However where the life of the Spirit is evident they, at the very best, are a sort of beginning beyond which every soul must pass.

It is time for the people of God to take a stand on the all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ, refusing to allow the wisdom of men to direct how they live. Salvation makes full provision for those who obtain it through faith. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is lacking in Christ.

THINGS THAT ARE ABOVE

Lesson # 14

When the people of God are threatened with erroneous teaching, what practical approaches are to be taken? How do the children of God protect themselves? How can they avoid deception and diversion from the Son of God? The solution is now set before us. It will not come in the form of rules and regulations, for the Spirit has already established that is not the manner of the kingdom. Man's way is to set up procedures, disciplines, and routines. The way of the Kingdom higher. It is not a manner that is according to this world, or driven by the wisdom of men.

The reasoning that follows is founded upon the very real changes that have been wrought within us in salvation. It is who we are IN CHRIST that is the secret to fulfilling the requirements of spiritual

life. Ponder how this has been emphasized in Colossians to this point. The Spirit has laid a solid groundwork for the teaching and admonition contained in chapters two and three.

- The Gospel has born fruit in them, “as it has in all the world” (1:5).
- The Father “hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (1:12).
- “ God has “delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son ” (1:13).
- In Christ we “have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins” (1:14).
- God has reconciled we “who sometime were alienated and enemies in our mind by wicked works” (1:21).
- Christ “in you is the hope of glory” (1:27).
- “Ye are complete in Him ” (2:10).
- We have been “circumcised with the circumcision of Christ . . . in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh” (2:11-12).
- God has “quickenened us together with Him , having forgiven you all trespasses” (2:13).
- The “handwriting of ordinances that was against us,” has been blotted out, being nailed to Christ’s cross (2:14).
- Principalities and powers that once held us captive have been “spoiled” by Christ , as He triumphed over them in His cross (2:15).

In view of these realities, and the completeness effected in Christ Jesus, we have solemnly been exhorted to do the following:

- Do not allow any man to judge you in respect to food and drink, feasts, new moons, or sabbaths (2:16-17), which are shadows of things to come. The real substance is found in Christ alone.
- Do not allow any man to rob you of your reward by drawing you into self-imposed humility, and the worshiping of beings that are under Christ (2:18).

In drawing our attention to the thorough indispensability and adequacy of the Lord Jesus, the Spirit accents the essentiality of a connection with Him.

- Those who deliver unprofitable messages do so because they are not connected to the Head (2:19a).
- Nourishment is ministered by Jesus to the various members of the body at the point of their connection with Him , and with one another (2:19b).
- If we are dead with Christ , it is folly to be subject to ordinances originated by men (2:20-22).
- Fleshly regimens have a show of wisdom, emphasizing routine and severe discipline of the body. Yet, they cannot take away the desire to sin, nor produce a hatred of it (2:23).

WHOLLY RELIANT UPON JESUS

In coming to God, appropriating and maintaining spiritual life, and growth, we are wholly reliant upon Jesus. By that I mean there must be a vital connection with Jesus through which Divine resources are ministered to us. That is why we are dead “ with Christ” (Rom 6:8), were “buried with Him” (Rom 6:4), and are “risen with Christ” (Col 3:1). It is why we are “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17), have “fellowship” with Him (1 Cor 1:9), and He is “in” is (Col 1:27).

This indispensable identity is not a mere formality. It is a practical necessity. Triumph over the flesh and the appropriation of Divine benefits cannot be realized independently of intimacy with the Lord Jesus. An empty profession cannot compensate for a lack of fellowship with Christ. Disciplines, routines, and procedures, however rigorous, cannot bring spiritual life to us. They cannot improve spiritual life, or promote spiritual growth. If that is what they appear to be doing, the appearance is only a simulation of life, and is not life itself. There is no life apart fro, Jesus, who IS the life.

The Spirit will now reason with us on these matters, showing us where our focus must be. Our attention must not be riveted upon WAYS to accomplish the will of God, but on the will of God itself. Our hearts must not be turned to METHODS devised by men, but to the Way ordained by God – the Lord Jesus Christ.

“ 3:1a If ye then be risen with Christ . . . ” Other versions read, “If then you were raised with Christ,” NKJV “If then you have been raised with Christ,” NASB “ Since, then , you have been raised with Christ,” NIV “ So if you have been raised with Christ,” NRSV and “If you have a new life with Christ.” BBE

The Spirit reasons with us upon the basis of our association with the Lord Jesus Christ. If we are “complete in Him,” then there is no area of spiritual life that is not addressed in Him. There is no aspect of our identity with the Living God that is not satisfied in Jesus – not a single one.

IF YE THEN

“If ye then . . . ” From the standpoint of language, the word “if” is a “particle of conditionality” – a point upon which another statement is conditioned.

Some versions translate the word “since, then,” rather than “if.” The point, however, remains the same. The fulfillment of the exhortation depends upon whether the condition that follows exists. If it does, what is required can be done. If it does not exist, it cannot be done – not through any form of human effort, however rigorous it may be.

In Christ Jesus, there are spiritual causes and effects. The desired effects cannot be realized without the Divinely ordained causes. Profitable results are contingent upon the presence of certain realities and factors. Some affirmations of this principle will serve to underscore its importance.

- “. . . if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body , ye shall live” (Rom 8:13).
- “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain” (1 Cor 15:1-2).
- “And if ye be Christ's , then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:29).
- “But if ye be led of the Spirit , ye are not under the law” (Gal 5:18).
- “In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight: if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled , and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel . . . ” (Col 1:22-23).

- “For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord” (1 Thess 3:8).
- “ If ye endure chastening , God dealeth with you as with sons . . . ” (Heb 12:7).
- “And if ye call on the Father , who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (1 Pet 1:17).
- “ If ye be reproached for the name of Christ , happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified” (1 Pet 4:14).
- “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things , ye shall never fall” (2 Pet 1:10).

The point that follows, therefore, is something that must be discerned as applicable to us. It is not something to be taken for granted or assumed. The fulfillment of the exhortation that follows will depend upon “if-factor” here stated.

BE RISEN WITH CHRIST

“ . . . be risen with Christ . . . ”

The point from which the reasoning begins relates to our identity with Christ Jesus. The emphasis will be placed upon what the Lord Himself has done, with a particular reference to WHEN that action took place. There is a precision in this language that lends itself to sound spiritual thought. It forbids us to think of being in Christ only in terms of what we ourselves have done.

The word “risen” does not refer to something we did, but to the working of the Lord Himself. Although it is associated with our baptism, “ wherein also ye were risen with Him” (Col 2:12), the accent is not upon our baptism, but upon what God did at that time.

God Himself Raised Us

God is the One who raised us. This is not something we accomplished. It is God who “ raised us up together [with Christ] , and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6). Again it is written, “ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God , who hath raised Him from the dead” (Col 2:12). This resurrection is said to be “in the likeness of His resurrection” (Rom 6:5).

Being “risen” is the same as being “quickenened.” As it is written, “And you hath He quickened , who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). And again, “But God, who is rich in mercy, for His

great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ , (by grace ye are saved)” (Eph 2:5). And again, “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col 2:13).

Those who have been “raised,” or “quickened” by God are said to now be “alive.” They are “alive unto God” (Rom 6:11), and “alive from the dead” (Rom 6:13).

The issue before us is simply this: Has God raised us? Has He quickened us? Have we been made alive? At the point the individual is interested enough to pursue the answer to that question, it will be found. If God has, in fact, raised us, then we will be able to do what is now required of us. If we have been quickened by God, what is now enjoined upon us will be doable. If we have been made alive, the word of Christ can dwell richly in us, and be joyously fulfilled by us. We are thus able to do the will of God.

God Raised Us With Christ

Just as surely as the dead man thrown into Elisha’s grave was raised to life when he touched the prophet’s bones (2 Kgs 13:21), so the person who is joined to Christ becomes alive unto God. From the standpoint of Divine purpose, God did not raise Jesus alone, but raised His spiritual body, the church, with Him. From the standpoint of human experience, when we were “baptized into Christ,” the result was spiritual life. Paul referred to this result when he said, “Christ liveth in me” (Gal 2:20).

Some people would be satisfied to say, “If , then, you are baptized.” However, the Spirit says, “If ye then be risen with Christ.” This does not demean baptism. Rather, it gets to the heart of what occurs in real baptism. It addresses the matter of the faith that was expressed in baptism – “faith in the operation of God” (Col 2:12). The Apostles recognize no act as being valid that did not result in the individual being joined to the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor, indeed, did they represent being joined to the Lord independently of obedience to His Word.

Within the Christian community there is far too much assumption when it comes to being “saved,” being part of the comes to the body of Christ, or being acceptable to God. Sound doctrine presents the truth in such a manner as promotes introspection, or self examination. It is only as we “judge ourselves” that godly conclusions can be reached, and the judgment of God avoided (1 Cor 11:31). The exhortation that follows assumes this action is being taken.

“ 3:1b . . . seek those things which are above . . . ”

Completeness in Christ (Col 2:10) does not assume that completeness has been appropriated. Nor, indeed, does it suggest there is nothing more to be done once a person is in Christ Jesus. What God has provided must be obtained and maintained, else it will bring no advantage. I do not believe this is perceived by the average “church member.” A lot of what I see taking place in the religious world appears to presume the people are united to the Lord, accepted by Him, and in good standing with Him. There is little being said that promotes a healthy examination of oneself – an examination in which grace is prominent and faith is essential.

There is altogether too little talk about eternal things, things in heavenly places, and realities located where Christ is seated at the right hand of the majesty in the heavens. Whatever explanation may be offered for this circumstance, it is not acceptable. Our text brings us to consider the real situation of those who are in Christ Jesus. Because of this, it does not fit into an institutional setting. Men will not be able to capitalize upon it, so that a religious empire can be built upon it, or an individual can obtain fame before the people of this world. What is now set before us has to do with life in Christ Jesus. It relates to salvation, redemption, reconciliation, and acceptance with God. It pertains to a preparation to stand before the Lord, and give an account for the deeds done in the body (2 Cor 5:10). This directly impacts upon living acceptably to God in this present world.

SEEK THOSE THINGS

“ . . . seek those things . . . ” Other versions read, “ keep seeking the things,” NASB “set your hearts on,” NIV “ give your attention to,” BBE “you must look for,” NJB and “set your sights on.” NLT From these various translations, which reflect the diverse nuances of the word used, we gain the following perspectives.

- This is not a one-time action, but is something that is to be done continually – “keep seeking.” NASB
- This is an inward matter, involving the expression of the real person – “ set your heart.” NIV
- It requires focus, and is not something that may be done casually – “give your attention to.” BBE
- This is something that is imperative. It is not an option – “you must look for.” NJB
- There is an ultimate objective involved, and the individual is intent upon realizing it – “set your sights on.” NLT

First, let it be clear that this is something that is expected of those risen with Christ. It is something for which new life is adapted, and whereby it is sustained. If the professing believer chooses

to ignore this summons, it will be at eternal peril.

Second, when a person comes into Christ, he is not delivered a neat spiritual package that contains every required resource. Initially, the one who is born again is reconciled to God (Col 1:20), receives remission (Acts 10:43), has his name written in heaven (Heb 12:23), receives the Holy Spirit (Gal 4:6), and possesses peace with God (Rom 5:1). Not only are these NOT the whole of the matter, each of them must be sustained in a hostile, condemned, and passing world. Moreover, resources outside of self and nature are required to maintain them.

Right here, the professed church has failed miserably. Its message has produced great masses of people who have little idea about the words of this text. For the most part, particularly in the Western world, the approach of the common church to the Scriptures, assemblies, preaching, teaching, fellowship, prayer, and holiness betray a near-total absence of interest in the “things of the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:14).

Where there are tender and sensitive hearts, this kind of environment is like “pricks” in their eyes, and “thorns” in their sides (Num 33:55). Whether they choose to accept it or not, such an environment is altogether unsuitable for the culturing of spiritual life, preparation for the judgment, and getting ready to be forever with the Lord – and those are all things that MUST be done! The truth of the matter is that many professed “churches” are nothing more than community clubs, where friend meets friend, and congenial, but earthly, associations are nurtured. Such surroundings do not require God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, or the Holy Spirit. They are not a realm in which holy angels minister, or a consciousness of heavenly realities is promoted.

The Role of Spiritual Appetite

The text with which we are confronted reveals the necessity of a spiritual appetite. Where this is lacking, a fundamental deficiency exists. This lack is of such magnitude, that it will play a significant role in the determination of one’s eternal destiny. The Lord will deal with such a deficiency when He comes. As it is written: “And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming : even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved ” (2 Thess 2:8-10). Men WILL perish if they do not “receive” the love of the truth.

The above text continues by revealing what God does in response to men’s failure to receive the love of the truth. “And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion , that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess 2:12). Whatever a person may think about human volition, without receiving the love of the truth, volition has no capacity to embrace the truth of God.

Seeking presumes interest, preference, an appetite, and a compelling desire to obtain what is sought for. If these are lacking, seeking is simply not possible – and where there is no seeking, there can be no obtaining!

WHICH ARE ABOVE

“ . . . which are above . . . ” Other versions read, “the things of heaven,” BBE “what is above,” NAB and “the realities of heaven.” NLT

Speaking of natural resources that sustain life in this world, it is said of Joseph, “Blessed of the Lord be his land, for the precious things of heaven , for the dew . . . ” (Deut 33:13). There are also “the things of the flesh ” (Rom 8:5), “the things of a man ” (1 Cor 2:11), “the things of the temple ” (1 Cor 9:13), and “ the things of others ” (Phil 2:4). In each of these descriptions, reference is made to a body of “things” that belong to a specific order. The “things of the flesh” are matters pertaining to man’s temporal and fallen nature, as differentiated from what belongs to the “new creation.” “The things of a man” are things pertaining to men, as distinguished from angels and the beasts of the earth. “The things of the temple” related to the affairs of the temple, together with the sacrifices and service that were carried out there, as distinguished from the mundane affairs of life. “The things of others” are matters pertaining to other people, as distinguished from personal and selfish matters.

“ Things that are above” are heavenly realities. “Above” refers to the domain of Divine power and government – heaven. When dwelling among men, Jesus said He came “from above” (John 3:34; 8:23). He said all power came “from above ” (John 19:11). There is a “Jerusalem” that is “from above” (Gal 4:26). James affirmed that “every good and perfect gift is from above ” (James 1:17). There is also a wisdom that is “from above ” (James 3:17).

These “things” are not of this world, and have to do with living toward the Lord and walking in His favor and blessing. They are eternal, and do not fade away like “the things” associated with this world. They are “above” the world – outside of the domain of flesh and blood. “Above” involves superiority or preeminence as well as being separate from this “present evil world.”

“Things that are above” are not things that can be seen with the natural eye, or perceived with any other natural sense or ability. Yet they can be perceived with the eye of faith. It is said of those who have obtained an interest in these things, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal ” (2 Cor 4:17-18).

“Things that are above” are not theories, ideas, suppositions, or philosophies. They are not religious sayings, theological positions, or human interpretations. These are realities that associated with the Lord Jesus Christ, and are therefore very real “substance.” They sustain the soul, satisfy the

heart, and strengthen our hands. They are required to keep the faith, run the race, finish the course, and receive God's "Well done!" No child of God can do without "the things that are above."

"1c . . . where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."

The Spirit does not leave us to speculation in identifying the location of the "things that are above." He is not calling us to some form of subliminal activity, below the threshold of consciousness and apart from cognition. This is not a call to grope about in the dark, like the Eastern mystics, seeking for some soothing feeling or euphoria. This is not referring to some mystical experience in which the heart and mind are not involved. Rather, this is an exhortation to consciously and perceptibly appropriate very real things located in a very real place.

WHERE CHRIST SITTETH

". . . where Christ sitteth . . ." Other versions read, "where Christ is , sitting," NKJV and "where Christ is seated." NIV

The "things" we are to seek are to be found where Jesus is – where He is presently sitting . To obtain them, we must become Christ-conscious. Our hearts and minds must be preoccupied with where HE is, NOT where we are! If this preoccupation is not realized, we will not be able to safely navigate through this world. That is the reason for this word.

If we are "complete" in Christ, then everything essential to obtaining and maintaining God's great salvation is to be found in Him – and Him alone . Therefore, where Christ "IS" becomes of critical importance. That is the place where needed resources can be found. Our awareness of these resources, as well as our access to them, will be directly proportionate to our perception of Christ's present position.

The reference to Christ sitting is not one concerning an idle Savior. This is a reference to His kingship, for He is seated on a throne . This is a reigning position. Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, there are repeated references to kings being seated on the throne (1 Kgs 1:13,17,20,24,,27,30,35,48; 3:6; 8:20,25; 2 Kgs 10:30; 15:12; 1 Chron 28:5; 2 Chron 6:16; Jer 13:13).

Daniel was given a vision of the "Ancient of days" sitting upon a throne (Dan 7:9). Zechariah prophesied of the Messiah as one who would "sit and rule upon His throne," even being a "priest upon

His throne” (Zech 6:13).

On the day of Pentecost Peter declared that God had fulfilled His promise to David, to raise up Christ to “sit on His throne” (Acts 2:30-31). In a stirring message to the seven churches in Asia, Jesus declared He had overcome, and was now sitting “with My Father in His throne” (Rev 3:21).

The words “where Christ sitteth” are equivalent to “where Christ is reigning.” It is where He is presently interceding and mediating the New Covenant (Heb 7:25; 8:6). It is the place from which He is feeding and directing His sheep.

ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD

“ . . . on the right hand of God.”

The “right hand of God” has great significance. Through Moses and the Prophets, the Lord taught us how to think of His “right hand.” It is a phrase that denotes His Sovereignty, His activity, and His will. Moses said, “from His right hand went a fiery law for them” (Deut 33:2). The Psalmist referred to the “saving strength” of God’s “right hand” (Psa 20:6). He also referred to the promised land as “this mountain, which His right hand had purchased ” (Psa 78:54). When referring to the triumph of the Lord, the Psalmist affirmed, “His right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory ” (Psa 98:1). When speaking of Divine intervention in the affairs of men, Isaiah said, “The LORD hath sworn by His right hand, and by the arm of his strength, Surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies; and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou hast labored” (Isa 62:8). When the Lord slew His enemies, He is said to have done it with His “right hand” (Lam 2:3-4).

This is the place from which the world is governed, saints are sustained, and enemies are subdued – the right hand of God. It is also where Jesus has been exalted – the place from which He is now governing all things. This is frequently declared.

- **FROM THAT POSITION HE SENT FORTH THE SPIRIT ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST.**
“Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God , and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but He says Himself: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand , Till I make Your enemies Your footstool’” (Acts 2:33-35).
- **REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS COME FROM THIS POSITION.** “Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).
- **IT RELATES TO SALVATION AND FREEDOM FROM CONDEMNATION.** “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand

of God , who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom 8:34).

- **IT IS FAR ABOVE EVERY OTHER FORM OF POWER.** “Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet, and gave him to be the \Head over all things to the church” (Eph 1:21-22).
- **JESUS’ ENTHRONEMENT FOLLOWED THE PURGING OF OUR SINS.** “Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high ” (Heb 1:3).
- **IT IS RELATED TO HIS HIGH PRIESTHOOD.** “Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens ; a Minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Heb 8:1-2).
- **IT IS RELATED TO THE SUBDUING OF HIS ENEMIES.** “But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God ; from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool” (Heb 10:12-13).
- **IT IS RELATED TO FINISHING OUR FAITH.** “Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God ” (Heb 12:2).
- **IT IS RELATED TO ALL OTHER POWERS BEING SUBJECT TO HIM.** “Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God ; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him” (1 Pet 3:22).

The Place of Divine Working

The right hand of God is the place of Divine working – effectual working . It is the place from which Jesus is presently mediating the New Covenant. This mediatorship is of critical importance, and we cannot be saved without it. The death of Christ was necessary for our salvation. The resurrection of Christ was essential for our salvation. The present ministry of Jesus – His mediatorship and intercession – is also required for our salvation. Thus it is written, “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather , that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God , who also maketh intercession for us ” (Rom 8:34).

My Personal Experience

With the single exception of the teaching of my good father, now with the Lord, I was a devoted follower of Christ for many years before I ever heard a minister expound the mediatorship and

intercession of Christ. Even then, there have been exceedingly few whom I recall developing this matter. When traveling among a great number of churches from 1992 through 1997, I asked over 160 different congregations if they recalled hearing sermons or teaching on several key subjects. One of those was the present ministry of Jesus . Of all of those congregations, I received not one single acknowledgment of any one of them ever having heard the subject expounded.

Where Christ Is Sitting

Our text is admonishing us to seek the things that are resident where Jesus is at this present time . He does not ask us to seek what was at the cross, or what occurred at the tomb, but what is resident where Jesus presently is seated in glory.

Christ's Mediatorship

Our Lord's present ministry is encompassed in the word "Mediator." Part of the mediation involves His faithful intercession, which is in order that we might be saved. As it is written, "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25).

The mediation of the Lord Jesus is the objective of His present reign. While the enemies of Jesus will openly and apparently be made subject to Him, that is not the purpose of His reign. His present objective is to bring all of the sons of God safely and triumphantly to glory (Heb 2:10). This is the focus of His present activity, with all other involvements being made subordinate to that aim – to "bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18), presenting us "faultless before the presence of His glory" with exceeding joy (Jude 1:24).

It is imperative that we have some understanding of Christ Jesus "the Mediator."

- **ONLY ONE MEDIATOR.** "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men , the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5). Jesus is the "Daysman" for which Job longed – someone who could stand between God and man, putting His hand upon both. No such person existed in Job's day, yet he sensed the absolute need for such an one. "Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both" (Job 9:33). There is only one such Person, and it is the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **A MINISTERING MEDIATOR.** "But now hath He obtained a more excellent ministry , by how much also He is the Mediator of a better covenant , which was established upon better promises" (Heb 8:6). Jesus has embarked upon a "ministry" that is more excellent than the One He fulfilled when upon earth – when He "went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38). As glorious as that earthly ministry was, the one in which He is presently engaged is more glorious.

- **IN ORDER TO AN ETERNAL INHERITANCE.** “And for this cause He is the Mediator of the new testament , that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance ” (Heb 9:15). The promise of an “eternal inheritance” cannot be realized without the present mediation of the Lord Jesus.
- **THE SPEAKING BLOOD.** “And to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant , and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb 12:24). The “blood of His cross” (Col 1:20) did not obtain its power on the cross. It is what it testifies after the cross – now that Jesus is enthroned in glory – that is the issue. The blood of Cain cried out “condemnation,” testifying against Cain. That is why the Lord said to Cain, “What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground” (Gen 4:10). Christ’s blood, however, cries out salvation, reconciliation, peace, forgiveness, and redemption. And it is speaking from the right hand of God.

A Different Kind of Mediator

Jesus is not a mediator like Moses. The Law was “ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator,” who was Moses (Gal 3:19). Initially, Moses conveyed the words and terms of the covenant, reading it “in the audience of the people” (Ex 24:7). One of his primary mediatorial functions was keeping the wrath of God from the people. He stood in their behalf, pleading that the Lord NOT destroy them (Ex 32:10-14; Num 14:11-20; 16:20-22; 21:7; Deut 9:18-19). In the case of Moses, he stood between a gracious God and a recalcitrant and disobedient people.

However, Jesus is not that kind of Mediator and Intercessor. He is not merely keeping the wrath from the people. Rather, He is bringing the benefits of the covenant to the people, who themselves have been reconciled to God. His mediation and intercession are primarily in order to confer blessing and benefit upon those who are His brethren .

Things That Are Above

Therefore, things that are above are “things” Jesus is presently mediating.

The New Covenant Itself

In the case of the New Covenant itself, we are apprised of several of its key factors.

- God’s laws are put into the mind (Heb 8:10a).
- God’s laws are written in the heart (Heb 8:10b).

- All of the covenantal people know the Lord (Heb 8:11).
- God is merciful to their unrighteousnesses (Heb 8:12a).
- God remembers their sins and iniquities no more (Heb 8:12b).

Jesus is presently ministering these realities. Through His Holy Spirit He is writing God's laws upon the hearts of His people, and putting them into their minds. That is, He is making them of one accord with those laws, so that they can see the sense of them, love them, and fulfill "the righteousness of the Law" (Rom 8:4). He is expounding the Father to us – showing Him to us. One of His fundamental ministries is giving us "an understanding, that we may know Him that is true" (1 John 5:20). Through His own blood, He is also cleansing our conscience, convincing us that God is no longer holding our sins against us, but has rather extended His mercy to us. In His present ministry, Jesus is persuading us that God no longer remembers our sins and iniquities. He is mediating the New Covenant gloriously and effectively.

Some of the "Things"

The "things" to be sought are very real and very necessary. While time and space do not allow for an exhaustive listing of these "things," a sampling of them will confirm their value and indispensability.

- The purging of the conscience (Heb 9:14).
- Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17).
- Wisdom (James 3:17).
- An abounding hope (Rom 15:13; Heb 6:19).
- Christ's own peace (John 14:27).
- Christ's own joy (John 15:11).
- Grace and peace (Rom 1:7)
- The love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:39).
- Peace and love with faith (Eph 6:23).
- Grace, mercy, and peace (1 Tim 1:2).

- An understanding of God (1 John 5:20).
- Understanding in all things (2 Tim 2:7).
- Times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19)
- The spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God (Eph 1:17).
- Your reward which is in heaven (Matt 5:12).
- Our “house which is from heaven” – our resurrection body (2 Cor 5:2).
- The hope laid up for us in heaven (Col 1:5).
- A better and an enduring substance (Heb 10:34).
- In inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, that does not fade away (1 Pet 1:4).

The “things above” are very real, but they are not tangible. They are spiritual realities, belonging to the spiritual order. They include justification (Rom 4:25), sanctification (1 Cor 1:30), redemption (Eph 1:7), atonement (Rom 5:11), and reconciliation (2 Cor 5:12-19). There is “peace with God” (Rom 5:1), “the law of the Spirit of life” (Rom 8:2), and “the love of Christ which passeth all knowledge” (Eph 3:19). They include the “breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of this great salvation, which is to be comprehended (Eph 3:18). The marvelous heavenly storehouse includes “whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report,” as well as things of “virtue” and “praise” – all of which are to be thought upon (Phil 4:8). There is also “the kingdom of God and His righteousness” which are to be at the forefront of the things that we “seek” (Matt 6:33). Those who seek such things are very rare.

Note, the Spirit does not say to seek the things that are on the earth, but the things that are “above,” where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Our inheritance is not in this world, and therefore this world is not to be the center of our quest. Jesus spoke in strict harmony with this text when He said, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matt 6:19-20). We do not lay up treasures for ourselves in heaven by sending possessions from here to there. That is a very foolish notion, even though many speak as though that is what Jesus meant.

Our Father is “in heaven” (Matt 6:9), Jesus is “in heaven” (Acts 1:11; 7:55), the Spirit has come down to us “from heaven” (1 Pet 1:12), and our inheritance is “in heaven” (1 Pet 1:4). It makes perfect

sense, therefore, to seek the things that are “above” – in heaven, where Jesus is seated at the Father’s right hand.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SEEK THE THINGS THAT ARE ABOVE?

To seek the things that are above involves at least two things. Seeking these things is like a two-sided coin. Both sides are required for heavenly commerce.

- First, to seek to appropriate heavenly resources that are provided for those who live by faith, and do it now. The redemption that is in Christ Jesus includes Divine provisions for the journey to glory – like the manna and water Israel enjoyed en route to Canaan.
- Second, to seek to finally obtain the things God has “prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor 2:9-10). Ultimately, the present heavens and earth will pass away (2 Pet 3:10-12). It is the aim of faith to be able to obtain what survives that fiery conclusion.

“ 2a Set your affection on things above . . . ”

Living “godly in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:12) requires deliberation and resolve. It is imperative that a certain unquenchable appetite be developed for “the things above.” Although this is an exceedingly rare thing in the nominal church, there is no hope of salvation without it. I am deeply concerned about the state of any person or congregation that lacks an appetite for what is found where Jesus is presently enthroned. If men do not want what Jesus is presently distributing, they simply will not receive it. If they do not want what God has reserved in heaven for those who love Him, there is not the slightest chance that they will obtain those things. I acknowledge that this does have some startling ramifications. Nevertheless, it is the truth, and men must become acclimated to it if they are to forever dwell with the Lord.

In this world, men may go where they really do not want to go. But that is not the case when it comes to going to heaven, to dwell forever in the house of the Lord. It is said of Jesus, “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). That joy included being in the presence of His Father in heaven. Thus He was “received up into heaven” (Matt 16:19). Before leaving, He told His disciples that He would return and receive them to Himself, “that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3). The words that followed presumed a longing among the elect for this to be experienced. If that longing is not present, this

exhortation will not be viewed as being important.

SET YOUR AFFECTION

“Set your affection . . .” Other versions read, “Set your mind,” NKJV/NASB “set your minds,” NIV/NRSV “Mind the things,” DOUAY “Think of,” NAB and “Let your thoughts.” NJB

The word translated “affection” has more to do with intention and preference than actual activity. It is translated from the Greek word **fronei/te** (fron-ni-ta) , which means “have in mind, to have one’s mind controlled by, care for, be concerned about, think highly of.” BARCLAY-NEWMAN It includes the idea of “pondering upon, being intent upon, keep thinking about, having a certain attitude or frame of mind, and having a high regard, honor, and respect for.” THAYER The sense of the word, as used here, is that of continually dwelling upon what we prefer .

The three words “set your affection” are a translation of the single Greek word cited above. I prefer the word “affection” to “mind,” for it is a larger word – more closely related to “heart.” There is such a thing as unwanted thoughts or imaginations – “fiery darts” that are hurled at us by the wicked one (Eph 6:16). This text speaks of thoughts that are focused because of one’s high regard for things “that are above.” That regard drives the will to earnestly seek for those realities.

The point of this text is that we are responsible for developing and culturing an appetite for “the things that are above.” We are to nurture a preference for them, making room in our hearts and minds so that both may be occupied by the consideration of these things. This postulates our exposure to “the things that are above” – i.e., hearing of them, considering them, and pondering them. No one will be able to set their affection on things above if they are not exposed to them. If one does not hear of these things, he can no more set his affection upon them than a person can believe who has never heard the Gospel (Rom 10:14).

The average fare that is being served up in the churches of our land does not whet the spiritual appetite. It does not confront people with the spiritual realities for which they are commissioned to develop an affection and preference. Messages that do not assist people in placing their affection “on things above” are actually competing with the Lord Jesus, and obscuring His great salvation. Many people must struggle to forget what they hear spouted from the pulpits of the land. Much of what is being said by religious professionals is actually taking away the key of knowledge (Lk 11:52).

The Modern Praise Movement

One of the great deficiencies of the modern praise movement is that it is not awakening a hunger and thirst for righteousness. It has not spawned an aggressive appetite for the things that are above. In fact, it has largely become an end of itself, even taking the place of the preaching and teaching of God’s Word. It is too earthy – too close to the temporal zone from which faith seeks to escape. There are too

many spiritual pygmies driving this movement. It is not producing spiritually minded people, or compelling anyone to earnestly want to be spiritually minded.

Spiritual Mindedness

The Holy Spirit informs us of the following: “to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom 8:6). Such a mind-set is the result of setting one’s affection on “things above.” Once that takes place, both heart and mind are reshaped. New holy preferences are developed, and an effort extended to satisfy them.

Not A Law Approach

Note how this approach differs from that of the Law. The emphasis is not on doing, but on appetite, desires, and aspirations. Rather than emphasizing a rule or a procedure, the Spirit calls us to a desire, an affection, and a heavenly objective. He summons us to seek after something that is not a part of the worldly order. This is not the manner of Law!

In the four books pertaining to the Law (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), the word “seek,” in all of its varied forms, is mentioned nine times (Lev 13:36; 19:31; Num 15:39; 16:10; 24:1; Deut 12:5; 22:2; 23:6). Only one of them has to do with seeking God or the things of God: “But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find Him, if thou seek Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul” (Deut 4:29). Even that verse was not dealing with the normal thrust of life. It was a promise relating to the time when they would be carried away captive into a strange land. In that strange land the Lord said, “ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell” (Deut 4:28). If, while in that condition, they would seek the Lord wholeheartedly, He would be found of them.

The Old Covenant was vastly inferior to the New, not only in what it emphasized, but in what it promised. It was not a Covenant that promoted trafficking in heavenly places, because it enabled no one to be seated there. Under that introductory covenant things from heaven were said to be bread (manna), the verbal utterance of the Law itself (Ex 20:22), and rain (Deut 28:24). The peace they received was an earthly peace, where they were given rest from their enemies (Deut 12:10). That economy has now been replaced with a “better covenant, which is established upon better promises” (Heb 8:6).

Now there are unseen realities that are to occupy our attention. Under this covenant, it is a transgression NOT to seek for the things that Christ’s redemption has procured for us.

ON THINGS ABOVE

“ . . . on things above . . . ” In holy emphasis, the Spirit again mentions “things above.” These are the things to be sought. They are realities for which a hunger and affection are to be developed and maintained.

These are eternal things – things that cannot be shaken. When “this present evil world” has passed away, and there is “no more seas” – when time has rolled its last cycle, and we are consciously ushered into the eternal realm, into the presence of the Lord – these are the things that will remain. As it is written, “And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain ” (Heb 12:27).

These are the things we are to seek now , doing do without delay. They are the things upon which our affection, deliberate thoughts, and holy preferences, are to be placed. Let it be clear in your mind, an “eternal inheritance” is reserved for a people ready to receive it. That readiness includes developing a longing appetite for it now.

“ 2b . . . not on things on the earth.”

Because the flesh insists on emphasizing this world, and neglecting the world to come, an additional exhortation is given. We are in the domain where Belial competes against Christ. Darkness contends with light, and unrighteousness asserts itself against righteousness. There is no accord whatsoever between what comes from heaven and what comes from earth. As it is written, “for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (2 Cor 6:14-16). If an affection for the things of God is to be developed and maintained, there must be a corresponding forfeiture of a preference for the things of this world. This is not an option. Any person who maintains an emphasis on this world, by that very emphasis, forfeits the things that come from heaven. We are, then, dealing with a matter of great sobriety.

NOT ON THINGS

“ . . . not on things . . . ”

There are two orders of “things,” or realities. Things above are eternal. Things in the world are temporal. Things above are pure. Things of the world are defiled. A similar attitude cannot be

maintained toward both of these realms simultaneously. Our “affection” cannot be placed upon both domains at the same time. Our thoughts cannot be centered on both realms concurrently. Those who say we can have the best of this world, and the best of the world to come, need to rethink what they are saying. In a sense, there is no such thing as “the best of this world.” The world, everything in it, and the lusts that attach men to it are all going to pass away (1 John 2:17).

Solomon’s Example

God has carved out a piece of earthly history in which this is confirmed. It is found in Solomon, a man unexcelled in wisdom “under the sun.” He had, what men would call, the “best of this world.” He himself testified, “And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor: and this was my portion of all my labor” (Eccl 2:10).

Technically, the things Solomon received were given to him by God Almighty. When the Lord asked Solomon what he wanted, he asked for wisdom to guide the people: “Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great?” (2 Chron 1:10). The saying so pleased the Lord that He responded, “And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honor, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king: wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honor, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like” (2 Chron 1:12). Note, Solomon had not set his heart on these things, and that is why God gave them to him. Yet, they gave him no advantage whatsoever in acquiring or keeping wisdom from the Lord. In fact, he realized no ultimate satisfaction in the abundance of worldly goods that he possessed. Hear his own words. “Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun” (Eccl 2:11).

Who is the person, then, who will set his affection on things on the earth. Not only has God told him NOT to do it, we have the testimony of one who lacked nothing the world has to offer. He said it was vain. Thus the truth of the matter is established by two witnesses. There should be no doubt about the matter.

Mark it well: there are “things” for which you are not to develop an appetite. These are things for which you are not to culture a preference or a longing. Such yearnings cannot be dignified or sanctified. God is not in any way honored by a mind that is focused upon this world.

Wherever there is a mind that is drawn toward the earth, there is a forfeiture of heavenly things. I have noticed that when men aspire to some earthly position, it is always the things of God that are forfeited. It is as though the world will not allow a person to maintain godly perspective while having a fundamental desire for something it has to offer.

ON THE EARTH

“ . . . on the earth.”

The very idea of refusing to set our affection upon the things of this world presumes there is nothing of lasting value in it. Whatever you obtain from it must at last be forfeited. Therefore your heart cannot be set upon it.

Hold loosely what you possess in this world. Be a good steward of it, but reconcile yourself to the fact that you will have to let it go. Nothing from this world can make the transition into the world to come. The fashion of this world is “passing away.” Therefore, you must “use the things of this world, as if not engrossed with them” NIV (1 Cor 7:31).

Lest we miss the subtlety of becoming attached to the things of this world, remember the setting of this text. It is that we are not to allow any person to judge us in matters regarding food, drink, or days. We are to forbid any person to rob us of our reward by imposing upon us self-developed humility and religious bodily disciplines (2:16-23). All of those things are of this world, and cannot survive its demise. Therefore, they simply cannot be our focus.

After all is said and done, our religion must not have a worldly emphasis. The thrust of it cannot be worldly relationships and responsibilities, although they are all sanctified by our faith. However, faith will not allow a person to linger upon the consideration of things pertaining to this world. The longer our vision rests upon temporal things, the more vague heavenly things will appear. When we are focused on this world, there is no longer any place in our hearts and minds for the consideration of, and quest for, the things belonging to the heavenly order. This result cannot be avoided.

“ 3a For ye are dead . . . ”

The Spirit now begins to reason with us concerning this exhortation. Once we see the real circumstance of those who are in Christ Jesus, it will all make perfect sense. What we have been asked to do is perfectly reasonable – namely, seek the things that are above, and set our affection upon them. Now the Spirit will focus upon our own circumstance in Christ Jesus. Once our real condition is perceived, we will be about seeking the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. When we truly comprehend what happened when we were joined to Christ, we will at once take up the occupation of developing a strong spiritual appetite, setting our affection on things above, and not

on things on the earth.

FOR YOU . . .

“ . . . For ye . . .” This is a word to all of the church. It is not addressed only to the leaders, or to women, or to men, or to the young, the single, or the elderly. Men may develop extended messages for unique groups of believers, but the mass of Scripture is addressed all who are in Christ Jesus. No category of people within the body of Christ is exempt from this word. If the word seems too profound, then it is the business of the individual to come away from influences that cause it to be obscure. The mind of every believer is to be set on understanding what this means, for it will provide the incentive to obey the word of the Lord.

ARE DEAD

“ . . . are dead . . .” Other versions read, “you died,” NKJV “you have died,” NASB “you life on earth is done,” BBE and “for ye did die.” YLT

This is a reference to the change that occurred when we were baptized into Christ. We were “buried with” Christ “in baptism” (Col 2:12). The book of Romans affirms that we were “baptized INTO His death” – “buried with Him by baptism INTO death” (Rom 6:3-4). Again the Spirit affirms, “Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him” (Rom 6:8).

Earlier in Colossians it was reasoned, “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world , why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?” (Col 2:20). This is not a goal for Christians, but a very real condition that takes place when we are in Christ Jesus. It is conceivable that some who are actually dead to sin and the world do not yet realize that fact – at least not cognitively. That is why the text speaks as it does: “For ye ARE dead!”

No one is “alive unto God” that is not “dead to sin” and “dead to the rudiments of this world” – NO ONE! A person cannot be in “the kingdom of God’s dear Son” without being “translated out of the kingdom of darkness” (Col 1:13).

All Are Dead

There is a most arresting declaration made in Second Corinthians – one that is conducive to much contemplation: “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead” (2 Cor 5:14). Other versions read, “then all died,” NKJV “therefore all died,” NASB/NIV “therefore all have died,” NRSV “then all have undergone death,” BBE and “we have all died to the old life we used to live.” NLT

The expression “then were all dead,” does not refer to our former state of being “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). This text is speaking of our identity with Christ, for it is the prelude to

godly expressions of life. “And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves , but unto Him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more” (2 Cor 5:15-16). In order to live toward the One who died for us, we must first die to self-centeredness and worldly-mindedness.

That is precisely what happened when we were circumcised with “the circumcision of Christ.” From one point of view, the whole body of the sins of the flesh was separated from us – the essential “us.” From another point of view, we were separated from the sinful nature, thereby becoming “dead” to it.

The idea here is that we died to ourselves, to sin, and to the world. That is, we lost a primary interest in ourselves, a fundamental appetite for sin, and a prevailing interest in this world. We became “dead indeed unto sin,” and are now to reckon, or reason, upon the basis of that fact. As it is written, “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11).

The experience of this text is confessed by Paul. He explains what it means to “be dead,” in order that we might live toward Christ. “I AM crucified with Christ: 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, and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

I want to emphasize that the death of reference is not a goal. It is something that actually occurred when we were baptized into Christ. At that point the “old man” was “crucified with Christ.” As it is written, “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him , that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom 6:6). The “new man” which is to be “put on” (Eph 4:24) is not on the cross! He is “made free” (John 8:32,36), and has been seated in the vast and unhindered realm of “the heavenly places” (Eph 2:6).

When our text says, “ye are dead,” it is referring to the part of us that has been crucified , which experience constitutes being “dead to the Law by the body of Christ” (Rom 7:4). Rules and regulations are, at the best, an appeal to the “old man.”

The Law Is Not for the Righteous

The Law was addressed to men in the flesh, and was tailored for the ungodly and unrighteous. As it is written, “Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient , for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God , which was committed to my

trust” (1 Tim 1:9-11).

This is not the manner of the New Covenant. In Christ Jesus, LIFE has changed our whole situation. We are not motivated by Law, but by the love of Christ, which is the constraining factor (2 Cor 5:14). When the love of Christ is truly perceived, it moves us to gladly do what the Lord requires of us. Those under the Law ask, “What is it that I cannot do?” Those influenced by Divine love ask, “Lord, what do You want me to do?”

THE CHURCH AND SIN

In view of these things, how can any person with an honest and good heart be tolerant of sin within the church? When sin is present among the people of God it is because someone is not “dead with Christ.” Sin is committed when men are alive to it, thereby contradicting the statement of our text: “ye are dead.”

It is our connection with Christ that has induced death to sin and the world. We can no longer tolerate a religion that nails our heads to the earth like Jael nailed Sisera’s head to the floor of her tent (Judges 4:21-22). For those who have died with Christ, sin is unreasonable. They know that fleshly regimens cannot take away the appetite for sin. Therefore they have no real value in the kingdom, even though they appear to be wise. In Jesus there is a higher law that compels us.

THE PRINCIPLE OF AFFIRMATION

Do not miss the power of this text. The Spirit has made an affirmation: “ye ARE dead.” He does not say that we ought to be dead, but that we are dead. He does not declare that we can be dead, but that we are dead. This is a statement upon which faith can lay hold – and “the just shall live by faith” (Heb 10:38).

It is principle in the New Covenant that men are primarily motivated by the truth, for it is the truth that “makes” us free (John 8:32). Power comes to us on the wings of a message, not on the tablets of a law. The Gospel is essentially a message, not a system. It is an affirmation, not a procedural outline. Paul knows the Spirit will empower this word: “ye are dead.” He knows that when we realize the truth, it will move us.

“ 3b . . . and your life is hid with Christ in God.”

In Christ, death is in order to life. We enter into a special kind of death in order that we might experience a special kind of life. As it is written, “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection” (Rom 6:5). “Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him ” (Rom 6:8). “It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him ” (2 Tim 2:11). If there is not corresponding life with Christ – no sensitivity and commitment toward Him – then the person is not “dead with Christ.” God raises the dead – those who are “dead with Christ. ” It simply is not possible to be buried into Christ’s death and not be raised by the glory of the Father.

It was impossible for death to keep its hold upon Jesus. This is a matter of Gospel affirmation. “Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24). Just so, it is not possible for those who have died with Jesus to remain dead. God raises them that they may “walk in newness of life ” (Rom 6:4). That is why a sinning Christian is a walking contradiction. Such a person is blasphemy being lived out, for they are suggesting that God does not, in fact, raise the dead.

YOUR LIFE

“ . . . and your life . . . ” Other versions read, “you have a secret life,” BBE “the live you have,” NJB and “your real life.” NLT

This is “your life,” but it has been given to you . As Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life , and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). God has given the Son to “have life in Himself” (John 5:26). That is, He can confer life. This is the life of which our text speaks. God the Father gives it (Rom 4:17), but He gives it through Christ Jesus. That is why it is said of the Son of God, “that we might live through Him ” (1 John 4:9).

This is also the life that is “unto God.” As it is written, “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11). It is also “eternal life,” which Jesus Himself gives (John 10:28; 17:2).

“Your life,” “life more abundantly,” “eternal life ” – they are all the same thing. This is the only life that God recognizes. Everything else is death. Of this life Paul said, “I am crucified with Christ: 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, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). This is not, therefore, self life, but Divinely conferred life. Now, what may be said of this life.

IS HID WITH CHRIST

“ . . . is hid with Christ . . . ” Other versions read, “is hidden with Christ,” NKJV/NASB “now

hidden with Christ,” NIV and “a secret life with Christ.” BBE

In Christ we are dead to one order, but alive to another. Because these orders are incompatible, newness of life cannot be seen while within the environment from which we are delivered.

“Your life” is not apparent to the flesh. It cannot be seen with the natural eye, or observed by those who are not of God. Others may see the fruit of the life, but they cannot see the life itself, for it is not of the natural order, and consequently does not belong to this world.

In recent years it has become quite fashionable in the United States to speak of “life more abundant” as a life characterized by many earthly possessions, abundant financial resources, and a life free from hardship and disease. The devil is the author of this teaching. Such prosperity is not the indication of Divine blessing, even though a few of the godly through the ages have been in such a condition (ex: Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Job).

Asaph’s Testimony

Asaph was once envious of the “prosperity of the wicked.” They appeared to have no struggles, and their “bodies were healthy and strong.” They were “free from the burdens common to man,” and were “not plagued by human ills.” Such prosperity moved them to wear “pride like a necklace,” and “clothe themselves with violence.” Their hearts were “calloused,” “evil conceits” were in their minds, and they “scoffed” and spoke “with malice.” They were “always carefree, and increased “in wealth.” By comparison, Asaph appeared to have kept his heart pure and washed his hands of iniquity in vain. He said he was “plagued all day long.” The whole matter was “oppressive” to him when he tried to understand it. However, his entire perspective changed when he “went into the sanctuary of God.” Then he understood “the final destiny” of the prospering ones he had envied. They were really not living the good life at all. Instead, God had positioned them in “slippery places,” setting them up for destruction (Psa 73:3-19).

According to the doctrine of some theological sophists of our day, the people of whom Asaph was envious had abundant life. But this was not the case at all. The abundance that characterizes spiritual life does not pertain to this world. It is life of another order, and it does not blend with “this present evil world.”

A Hidden Life

The life given to those who are dead with Christ is hidden from the world. It is a secret life, and is sustained in the secret place of the wilderness, as portrayed in the book of the Revelation (Rev 12:6,14).

The life – “your life” – is “hid with Christ.” Wherever Christ is, that is where your life is. It is “hidden” there, inaccessible to the enemy of your soul. It cannot be touched by your peers who breathe out threatening against you. The principalities and powers against which you wrestle cannot touch this life. That is why it is written, “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not ” (1 John 5:18). This could not be true if your life was not “hidden in Christ.”

Your new life is as safe as Jesus is, for it is “hidden” in Him. There is no power that can take that life from Christ, where it is “hidden.” This is such a great mystery to some, that they imagine themselves never to be in danger. However, a person must “walk” in the “newness of life” to take advantage of it (Rom 6:4). Jesus gave us life, and He sustains our life. It is with Him – in His hand, so to speak.

IN GOD

“ . . . in God.”

This is a glorious technicality that is declared for our comfort and assurance. Our life is hid in Christ, and Christ is “in God.” Speaking of this arrangement, Jesus said He was sitting in His Father’s throne. “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne” (Rev 3:21).

This means that Jesus is reigning to sustain the life that He has given, which is hidden in Him. Who, then, is able to harm that life? Where is the person capable of wresting us out of Christ, who is in God?

The Affirmation of Jesus

This circumstance is what Jesus referred to when He said, “And I give them eternal life , and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand . My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand ” (John 10:28-29).

Many professing Christians object to the use of these words of our Lord. The fundamental point of their theology is that we can fall away. Of course, that is, indeed, the truth. However, falling away is not the subject of these words of our Lord. These words are spoken concerning His sheep, whom, He affirms, hear His voice and follow Him. Furthermore, He knows them in a personal and effective way (John 10:27). These are people who follow Jesus, abide in Him, trust Him, and are being sustained by Him. All such souls are refreshed to hear this word, and will not allow any man to take it from them. Jesus said of them, “And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers” (John 10:5).

See, the lives of the sheep are in Christ's hand – “hid with Christ.” And Christ is in His Father's throne – “in God.” What adversary has access to Jesus? NONE! What enemy of the saints has access to God the Father? NONE! There is safety, security, nourishment, and tender care “in Christ” and “in God” – and that is where our lives are hidden!

We will not allow any man to take these things from us, binding us to laws about meats, drinks, feast days, new moons, and sabbaths. We will not submit to a series of humanly devised “touch not,” “taste not,” and “handle not's.” We will not subject ourselves to those who encourage self-imposed humility, and trying to subdue the flesh by rules. God has made us alive, and we will not return to the environs of death.

This is precisely why Paul said of such men, “And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (Gal 2:5).

“ 4a When Christ, who is our life . . . ”

When a person being moved along by the Holy Spirit speaks of life, he immediately brings Christ into the picture. This is not a parable or a hyperbole. What is here affirmed is exactly the case, and is precisely stated. Our spiritual life is not the result of our works, but of Christ's indwelling presence. Our works, on the other hand, are the result of the life, for God has created us “UNTO good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

CHRIST

“When Christ . . . ”

“Jesus” is Christ's human name, emphasizing His humanity, as well as His mission to “save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). There are 983 mentionings of “Jesus” in Matthew through Revelation.

The appellation “Christ” refers to His office – the One charged with bringing many sons to glory, and all that is involved in that great work.

In Matthew through Revelation, the word “Christ” is used 555 times! Sixty of those times are found in the Gospels, eleven in Revelation, and thirty-one in the book of Acts. The remaining 453 times it is used in the Epistles (Romans through Jude).

- Romans – 67 times.
- First Corinthians – 65 times.
- Second Corinthians – 43 times
- Galatians – 39 times
- Ephesians – 45 times
- Philippians – 37 times
- Colossians – 26 times
- First Thessalonians – 14 times
- Second Thessalonians – 13 times
- First Timothy – 16 times
- Second Timothy – 15 times
- Titus – 4 times
- Philemon – 7 times
- Hebrews – 13 times
- James – 2 times
- First Peter – 20 times
- Second Peter – 8 times
- First John – 10 times
- Second John – 4 times
- Third John – none
- Jude – 5 times

The technical meaning of the word “Christ” is “THE Anointed One.” While Jesus of Nazareth was anointed “with the Holy Spirit and power” (Acts 10:38), this is not the heart of the meaning of “Christ.” Doctrinally, “Christ” signifies that He is the solitary Person sent by God to accomplish His great salvation. He is the one charged with taking away the sins of the world (John 1:29), reconciling the world to God (2 Cor 5:18), and making peace (Col 1:20). He alone was given the commission to lay down His life and take it up again (John 10:17-18). By Himself He purged our sins (Heb 1:3), destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14), and plundered hostile principalities and powers (Col 2:15). In all of these things, He operated alone, without any aid from any man. God sustained Him (Isa 42:1). Angels ministered to Him (Mark 1:13). But when it came to the Divinely appointed mission He did it “by Himself.” The sins of the world were laid on Him alone (Isa 53:6). Only His body bore our sins (1 Pet 2:24). He alone “tasted death for every man” (Heb 2:9).

He alone was exalted to the right hand of God (Eph 1:20). He alone was given a name that is above every name (Phil 2:9). He alone received all power in heaven and earth (Matt 28:18). He is the

solitary Head over all principality and power (Col 2:10). He is the only Head of the church (Eph 1:22). He is the “one Mediator between God and man” (1 Tim 2:5). There is “none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Nothing can be added to Jesus to make Him more powerful. Nothing can be combined with Him to make Him more effective. He stands absolutely by Himself above all things, the Father Himself being the only exception (1 Cor 15:27).

Let me state this as clearly as I know how. Those who would teach us to live according to Law have only revealed they do not see Jesus as all sufficient. Their miserable doctrines have contradicted the affirmation that we are “complete in Him” (2:10). For them it is Christ AND something – some law, some regulation, some procedure – something that men do.

This is the “Christ” of reference – the one in whom our life is “hid.” Presently, the only thing we know about Him is what we have been told by God, in “the record He has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10-11). He is the one Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms foretold (Luke 24:44).

WHO IS OUR LIFE

“ . . . who is our life . . . ”

This is another most unique statement. Christ IS “our life.” That is, without Him that is no life, as God counts life. Only death exists outside of Christ. That is why it is written, “He that hath the Son hath life ; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life ” (1 John 5:12). Only the person who is in Christ, and in whom Christ dwells, is “alive unto God. ” Only such an one can hear the Lord, perceive Him, obey Him, and respond to Him. All others are dead – dead in sin, and thus alienated from God.

Jesus is the only one who can “give” eternal life, and that is something you must have before you leave this world! Christ said, “And I give unto them eternal life” (John 10:28). And how does He give this life? It is by dwelling within the individual. As He Himself said, “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him ” (John 14:23). Again, He called out to a dead church, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him , and will sup with him, and he with Me” (Rev 3:20). That is the way He confers life, by Himself becoming our life. Thus we may say with Paul, “I am crucified with Christ: 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, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

As for our own life, we “are dead.” Those in Christ do not consider their own lives the hub of the universe. Their will is not their own, but is submitted to the One who loved them and gave Himself for

them. That is the manner of the kingdom, and there are no exceptions.

“ 4b . . . shall appear . . . ”

Presently our lives are hidden in Christ, who Himself is also hidden from the world. Before He returned to glory on a cloud, He said to His disciples, “Yet a little while, and the world seeth Me no more ; but ye see Me: because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:19). To this day, those who are of the world have never again seen Jesus. When He rose from the dead, taking back His life, He appeared only to those who were chosen. As Peter declared, “Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly; not to all the people , but unto witnesses chosen before of God , even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead” (Acts 10:40-41).

Thus, God withdrew the testimony, leaving a message that declared Him – the Gospel, which is God’s “power unto salvation” (Rom 1:16). Doubters and skeptics question Christ’s reality, and particularly what He has accomplished and who He is. But their day is coming to an end, and the Christ will be revealed to an assembled universe.

SHALL APPEAR

“ . . . shall appear . . . ” Other versions read “is revealed,” NASB “shall be manifested,” ASV “the coming of Christ,” BBE and “is revealed to the whole world.” NLT

God has determined a day – a precise day – when He is going to unveil His Son to the entire world. He will show Him for what He really is, and will hold nothing back. Jesus will not be obscured like He was when He walked among men. The revelation will be so thorough that there will not be a single personality who will know who Jesus is. Every mouth will be abruptly stopped. All questions will cease, and every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is, indeed, Lord (Phil 2:10-11).

The Scriptures speak precisely about this manifestation. “That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: which in His times He shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen” (1 Tim 6:16).

Every aspect of Christ that will be revealed in that day presently characterizes Jesus. Right now He is “the blessed and ONLY Potentate,” or Sovereign with all power. Now, at this present time He is the “King of kings.” He governs them all, turning their hearts like the rivers of water wherever He wills (Prov 21:1). He is now the “Lord of lords.” There is no power that is not subservient to Him. The devil has to ask permission to sift you, and even then, he cannot go further than you are able to bear (1 Cor 10:13). At this time, Jesus is the ONLY one in whom immortality is inherent, and who can give it to others. He is presently dwelling in celestial glory that cannot be accessed by any man, nor can any human eye behold Him, for He is glorified. All honor and power everlasting belong to Him, and that is to be recognized and confessed by all. Men can believe it now, and then be advantaged by His showing. But every one will see that showing, whether they want to or not. And, they will bow their knee to Him and confess Him, without any regard to their supposed free will.

“The appearing” – the scheduled appearing, is when Christ will no more be hidden. Holy men are charged and commissioned with this “appearing” in mind. “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom” (2 Tim 4:1). Those who are living by faith and walking in the Spirit “love His appearing,” and will thus experience the consummate blessing at that time (2 Tim 4:8).

When Christ is “our life” here and now, grace teaches us “that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11-13). It is then that tested and tried faith will “be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:7).

Jesus will appear in ALL of His glory, and therefore it will be impossible for Him not to be seen and acknowledged. Thus it is written, “He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:26). He will come in His own glory, the glory of the Father, and the glory of the holy angels! That is a lot of glory! The heavens and the earth will not be able to survive that magnificent display. As it is written, “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them” (Rev 20:11).

Now the Spirit summons us to consider that time – when the Son of God is unveiled, and seen in all of His resplendent glory. It is a glory that He presently has, but is hidden to men by the natural order.

“ 4c . . . then shall ye also appear with Him in glory”

There is a certain burden associated with being in this world. When Jesus was here, He spoke of His death, referring to it as a baptism of suffering. He acknowledged that until His appointed death was accomplished He was straitened, or in a state of restriction. “But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luke 12:50). Other versions read, “But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!” (Luke 12:50). “how am I kept back till it is complete!,” BBE “How great is My distress until it is accomplished,” ESV “how I am grieved until it be ended,” GENEVA “how great is my anguish until it is accomplished,” NAB “and what constraint I am under until it is completed,” NJB and “I am under a heavy burden until it is accomplished.” NLT

The Divine nature has a desire to be seen and known. Jesus wanted to be seen as He really is, yet had to operate in a state of restriction and amidst a sea of ignorance. However, when He appears, He will find joy in the admiration of those who have patiently waited for Him (2 Thess 1:10). Now the Spirit brings us into the picture, confirming that we will also experience great joy in that day.

THEN

“ . . . then . . . ”

“Then” is when Jesus “shall appear.” The point of reference is not the mythical rapture, so aggressively taught in many circles. It is not when things are turned around for us in the flesh. The “then” relates to Jesus primarily.

There is such a thing as the “then” mentality. “Then,” when Jesus comes, every faithful steward will receive praise from God (1 Cor 4:5). “Then,” that which is in part “will be done away” (1 Cor 13:10), and we will see the Lord “face to face” with no more obscurity (1 Cor 13:11). “Then” will be brought to pass the saying, “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:54). “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up gether to meet the Lord,” being “changed” (1 Thess 4:17; 1 Cor 15:51-52).

But that is not all that will happen “then” – when the Lord “appears.” There will be a revelation of the sons as well.

SHALL YE ALSO APPEAR

“ . . . shall ye also appear . . . ” Other versions read, “then you also will be revealed,” NASB “then ye also . . . be manifested,” ASV and “you will be seen.” BBE

What a blessed contemplation! NO more obscurity! Presently we are kings incognito. Many of

Christ's brethren are viewed as the "offscouring of all things" (1 Cor 4:13). Presently, the world does not know or recognize us, for they do not know the Lord. As it is written, "the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not" (1 John 3:1).

There is a certain of frustration that attends this condition. It is certainly bearable, but we are still straitened by it, just as Jesus was when He dwelt among us. We are cast in the same situation as young David. He was anointed king by Samuel, and the Holy Spirit came upon him (1 Sam 16:1,13). Yet he did not occupy the throne for at least five years (2 Sam 2:11). We are also in the same situation as Joseph before his exaltation. God send him down into Egypt, yet he did not sit upon the throne for thirteen years (from seventeen – Gen 37:2 until thirty – Gen 41:46). But both men were finally revealed.

We will be fully known when Jesus appears. As long as He is obscured to this world, we will be also. However, at the very instant He is made known, we will be made known also. Praise the Lord!

WITH HIM

" . . . with Him . . ." It is our association with Jesus that will cause us to be seen as we really are. In fact, it is His glory that will transform us, like the glory of Sinai changed the skin of Moses' face (2 Cor 3:13). As it is written, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as He is" (1 John 3:2). Our text is saying the very same thing.

It is our identity with Jesus in this world that assures our identity with Him when He returns. That is when the saints will appear as they really are. Simultaneously, all of the wicked will appear as they really are as well. Thus it is written, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power; WHEN He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day" (2 Thess 1:7-10).

IN GLORY

" . . . in glory"

The glory that causes the heavens and earth to pass away (Rev 20:11) will be the means by which we are revealed. The very same glory that causes the ungodly to call out for rocks and mountains to cover them (Rev 6:16) will be occasion of our greatest joy and confidence.

This revelation will be the ultimate fulfillment of God's predetermined purpose – a purpose that

has been revealed. “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified ” (Rom 8:29-30). That glorification will be fulfilled when at last we “appear with Him in glory.”

Those two verses constrain eleven references to Deity, thereby confirming the real nature of salvation. GOD is the one who foreknew. HE is the one who predestinated that the people be conformed to the image of HIS SON. He determined HIS SON would be the FIRSTBORN among many brethren. GOD called us. GOD justified us. And GOD will yet glorify us at Christ’s appearing.

The glory will be HIS glory, but it will change us, conforming us to Christ’s own image. Thus we will be “like Him.” That is why we will dwell forever with the Lord. That is why we will be fully qualified to be “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17).

God has hinged the totality of salvation upon His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything has been invested in Him, and Him alone . All of God’s fulness dwells in Him alone . The greatest commission was delivered to Him alone . The greatest work was done by Him alone, which work He finished in the fulness of time. The most profound and effective death was wrought by Him alone . The greatest and most effective resurrection was executed by Him alone , when He took back the life that He voluntarily laid down. The surpassing victory was accomplished by Him alone in defeating death, triumphing over the grave, destroying the devil, and plundering principalities and powers. The most significant accomplishments were wrought by Him alone in making peace, reconciling the world, taking away the sins of the world, and opening up the way to heaven. He is the only one living in this world who did not sin, nor was guile found in His mouth. He is the only Mediator between God and man. He is the only one who ever lives to make intercession for those who come to God through Him. He is the only one who has all power in heaven and in earth.

No mortal man has any part in any of the things just mentioned. Jesus did them all alone . Now, what would lead any person to imagine that he is not “complete” in Christ Jesus? Who is the one who envisions the world can contribute anything at all to make a person more acceptable to God, more qualified to serve Him, or more able to stand in His presence with joy? What institution can take His place, give what He gives, or bring us to God? Where can a religious system be found that can do for the soul what Jesus has been appointed to do, and is fully capable of doing? Let all men withdraw their presence and resources from those who compete with Jesus, representing Him as part of the solution to the human dilemma.

THINGS THAT ARE TO BE PUT OFF

Lesson # 15

The Spirit has summoned us to seek the things that are above, where Christ is presently seated at the right hand of God (3:1). They are to be our quest, our ambition, and the driving objective of our lives. The Lord has urged us to place our affection on those things, developing an insatiable appetite for them.

The hearts and minds of the people of God are to be focused – singularly devoted to the things that are above. No work, routine, or religious accomplishment can compensate for the absence of this

commitment.

I do not believe this requirement is common knowledge among professed “Christians.” All manner of religious activity is prevalent in the Western world that does not necessitate a singular devotion to the Lord, even though “the first and great commandment” is “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with ALL thy heart, and with ALL thy soul, and with ALL thy mind, and with ALL thy strength: this is the first commandment” (Mark 12:30).

The Lord requires our “whole” heart and mind. The very nature of spiritual life demands that our hearts and minds be “single” – devoted to one pursuit. This requirement is portrayed in the words of our blessed Lord: “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Mat 6:22-23). If we focus on “one thing,” it will impact upon everything we think, say, and do. Our whole persons will be affected, like the whole body being “full of light.” If the object of our attention is fundamentally evil, and destined for ultimate destruction, the defiling effects of that object flood the whole person with the deluge of darkness – spiritual ignorance and obtuseness.

If the focus of a person’s attention is “evil,” yet thought to be right, the moral and spiritual darkness that is produced will be of great magnitude. Because it is considered right, it will be readily accepted, with no question about its validity. Thus we see that focus is not only necessary, it must be centered on what is right, else it will be the means of our spiritual demise. That is why we are admonished to seek the things that “are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” Once those things become obvious to us, we are to set our affection upon them.

There is no substitute for this focus – no form of religion that will make a person acceptable who lacks the proper concentration of both heart and mind.

This singularity of devotion is expressed elsewhere in Scripture.

- “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple” (Psa 27:4).
- “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee” (Psa 73:25).
- “But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42).

- “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before” (Phil 3:13).
- “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart ” (Acts 2:46).
- “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart , as unto Christ” (Eph 6:5).
- “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God ” (1 Cor 10:31).
- “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus , giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col 3:17).
- “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord , and not unto men” (Col 3:23).

DIVIDED AFFECTION

Those who divide their affection are attempting the impossible. Such are described as having a “double heart” (1 Psa 12:2). They are attempting to “serve two masters,” which cannot be done (Matt 6:24). Such are “double minded,” and consequently are “unstable” in all of their “ways” (James 1:8).

A significant proportion of contemporary religion caters to this kind of mind-set. They offer a little of the world, and a little of what they think is spiritual. This is generally done by presenting something from the Bible in a carnal wrapping. In doing this, they imagine their presentation will not be offensive to those not publicly aligned with the Lord. What these poor souls overlook is that such attempts are an abomination to the Lord. He will not bless such efforts, for His design is to separate people from this present evil world, not allow them to remain in harmony with it (John 15:19; Acts 1 5:14; Tit 2:14).

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

The exhortation that follows postulates the priority of the things of God. It assumes the people are seeking the things above, and have set their affection upon them. If this has not taken place, the task now before us will simply not be possible.

Spiritual work requires spiritual power. It is not possible to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12) while we are in a weakened condition – and a divided heart makes one weak

and inadequate. Further, the appropriation of the treasures that are hidden in Christ Jesus (Col 2:3) requires the deliberate abandonment of a quest for the things belonging to this world. This requirement is an absolute must, and is at the threshold of this text. It is imperative that we see salvation makes no provision for the disinterested and indifferent. There is no place for a divided heart, a love for this world, or an appetite for the transitory. Where these unacceptable qualities exist, there will be a corresponding forfeiture of God's Presence and blessing.

“ 3:5a Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth...”

Spiritual life is, by its very nature, focused and controlled. It also requires certain versatility, or spiritual dexterity. There are things that must be done , as well as things that must not be done. There are graces to appropriate, and vices to reject. There are things to be nurtured, and things to be put to death. The grace of God, which brings salvation, instructs us to do these things. That instruction is not academic, but is inward. The Scriptures put it this way: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:11-14). Notice the remarkable scope of spiritual life, or God's great salvation.

- Denying ungodliness. Ungodlike conduct is to be refused. That is, when we are tempted to be ungodly, grace teaches us to say “NO!”
- Denying worldly lusts. When we confront worldly passions and unlawful desires – fiery darts hurled at us by the wicked one – grace teaches us to say “ NO!”
- Living soberly. Living soberly is living with a sound mind, moderately, and in a state of constant alertness. Grace teaches us to do this.,
- Living righteously. Grace teaches us to live in an upright manner, so there is no conflict between our lives and the Divine nature.
- Living godly. Godly lives are pious, devout, and God-fearing lives.

- Looking for appearing of Jesus. Grace so instructs us that we come to anticipate the return of our Lord, and to make the appropriate preparations for it.
- Being zealous of good works. Law cannot make a person want to do good works. Grace can assist a person in being zealous for them.

The natural man cannot adapt to this requirement. This is because it involves faith, commitment, and perseverance.

Although we are focused, there are differing responsibilities that require uncommon wisdom and strength. This text will deal with some of them.

THEREFORE

“ . . . therefore . . . ” This admonition is given in view of the preceding verses: “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory” (Col 3:3-4). Because we are “dead,” therefore . . . Because our lives are “hid with Christ in God,” therefore . . . Because Christ is “our life,” therefore . . . Because we will “appear with Him in glory,” therefore . . .

Those who are “dead” to sin and this world will be able to respond to this word. Those whose lives are hid with Christ in God will have a heart to fulfill this word. Those who have Christ as their life will be empowered to do what is required of them. Those who anticipate appearing with Christ in glory have reason to obey this word.

The word “therefore” confirms the reasonableness of the exhortation that follows. It is the only acceptable thing to do, and it is totally unreasonable not to respond in this manner.

MORTIFY

“Mortify . . . ” Other versions read, “put to death,” NKJV/NIV “consider . . . as dead to immorality,” NASB and “kill.” NJB

The word “mortify” comes from the Greek word **Nekrwsate** (nek-ro-sa-tee), which means “to make dead, to put to death, slay.” STRONG’S Etymologically, it means to put to death a part of the body that is no longer useful, but harmful – as in cutting away a cancerous or malignant growth.

This passage parallels a statement made in the Epistle to the Romans. There, the Spirit

admonishes us to have a spiritual mind – one that is in harmony with what occurred when we were baptized into Christ. “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin , but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11). Our text is detailing HOW to reckon, or consider, ourselves to be “dead indeed unto sin.” In Romans, the picture is one of the “old man” being “crucified with” Jesus Christ (Rom 6:6). The third chapter of Colossians sees the “old man” crucified, yet alive, much like the impenitent thief who was crucified at the side of the Lord Jesus (Lk 23:39). Doctrinally, the word “mortify” means to put to death by keeping the “old man” on the cross, not allowing him to continually express himself. We are not to allow him to come off of the cross, thereby becoming more free to express himself.

Here is an facet of the spiritual warfare into which we have been called. When we enroll as a disciple of Christ, we are also provided with “the whole armor of God” (Eph 6:11), and are made soldiers (2 Tim 2:3-4).

The “sword of the Spirit” (Eph 6:17) must be employed against internal enemies, as well as those that are external to our persons. In this text these are our “members that are upon the earth.”

YOUR MEMBERS

“ . . . your members . . . ” Other versions read, “members of,” NASB “whatever belongs,” NIV “whatever in you,” NRSV “your bodies,” BBE “the parts of you,” NAB and “everything in you.” NJB

“Your members” refer to the part of us that has been “circumcised” by Christ (2:11-12). Although separated from us, this part remains with us as long as we are “in the body” (Heb 13:3). As seasoned veterans in the faith know, these members have a certain vigor in us that can surprise those who senses are not trained to discern good and evil – particularly the evil that is resident in us.

What is earlier called “the body of the sins of the flesh” is here viewed in all of its wretched detail – “your members.” This is “the old man” that “IS crucified with Him” (Rom 6:6) – except he is here seen in all of his varied and wicked capacities – “your members.” Just as the “Divine nature” (of which we have become “partakers”), or participants (2 Pet 1:4) is complex, so our “old man,” is complex in his capacities. Because this nature is resident in our bodies, its divers abilities of expression are referred to as “your members.” We are to treat them as under our authority.

The Spirit is going to give us a magnified perception of “the flesh.” He will show us the details of a principle that is resident with us, yet is not part of our real persons. The seventh chapter of Romans speaks of the animating law that drives “our members that are upon the earth.”

- In our flesh “dwelleth no good thing” (Rom 7:18).

- This is “sin that dwelleth in me” (7:20).
- “Evil is present with me” (7:21).
- There is “another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind” (7:23).

In the eighth chapter of Romans, the emphasis is on the spiritual impotence of “the flesh,” as well as the unacceptability of those who follow its dictates. The teaching is straightforward and to the point.

- They that are “after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh” (Rom 8:5).
- To be “carnally minded is death” (8:6).
- The “carnal mind is enmity against God” (8:7a).
- The carnal mind “is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (8:7b).
- They that “are in the flesh cannot please God” (8:8).

There is an unacceptable part of our persons, therefore, that is not yet dead – a part that must be treated harshly, being put to death, or mortified.

UPON THE EARTH

“ . . . which are upon the earth.” Other versions read, “your earthly body,” NASB “to your earthly nature,” NIV “is earthly,” NRSV “which are of the earth,” BBE “that is earthly.” NJB

The expression “on the earth” affirms that this world is the locus in which these “members” operate. They are driven by earthly appetites. These “members” are the part of us that is confined to “this present evil world.” There is no other place in which these “members” can express themselves. There is no other realm in which there are things that can gratify these “members.”

There is nothing in the heavenly places, into which we have been raised (Eph 2:6), that can gratify these “members.” Further, once we pass through the veil of death, they will never again be able to be satisfied. Those who are cast into the “lake of fire” (Rev 20:15), will still have these “members,” yet will never be able to gratify them. Like a gnawing worm, these appetites will cry out for satisfaction, but there will be nothing in all eternity that will be able to gratify them.

It is with this in mind that mortifying them here and now makes perfect sense. If we approach this text from the standpoint of law, we will all too soon forget what it says, for law cannot provoke spiritual mindedness or maintain a remembrance of truth . But when we consider this exhortation with eternity in mind, we will find ourselves shouting the “Amen” to what is said. Our hearts will not only acquiesce to these words, but will call out to us to enter aggressively into the work of mortification that us required.

A WORD ABOUT A WORLDLY CHURCH

One of the marks of spiritual Babylon is its worldly-mindedness. It is preoccupied with temporal things, and feels at home in the realm of sense and time. In strict accord with his crafty nature, the devil has exaggerated human relationships, making them the focus of much religious activity. While spiritual life does address these relationships, it never treats them as primary. If it has to do with this world, it is secondary – even if it is loving your neighbor as yourself (Lev 19:18; Matt 22:39). The Lord provides no way or circumstance that allows this world to become primary.

If men make secondary things primary, they awaken the “old man” – the “members that are upon the earth.”

Putting those members to death involves treating every legitimate earthly relationship as secondary. That is the starting point. If that is not done, the commission becomes impossible.

“ 3:5b . . .fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

It is imperative we see that this admonition regards very real propensities that are within us. These are a part of our fleshly constitution, and are therefore called OUR “members.” The fact that they may not have erupted in all of their reprehensible wickedness, by no means suggests they are not in us. They are part of “the flesh,” our “bodies,” and “the old man.” As long as we are “in the body,” we will have to contend with them. The ONLY proper way to do that is to put them to death: “mortify” them! That is an aggressive work, and requires the most extensive effort!

FORNICATION

“ . . .fornication . . .” Other versions read, “immorality,” NASB “sexual immorality,” NIV “wrong

use of the flesh,” BBE “sexual vice,” NJB “sexual sin,” NLT “lewdness,” WEBSTER and “whoredom.” YLT

This is a word with a wide meaning, dealing with bodily immorality. The word from which it is translated is **pornei,an** (porn-ei-an), from which we get the word “porno,” or pornography. Although I do so with great caution, I am providing the academic definition of this word. These are the kinds of words upon which I do not wish to dwell. “1) Illicit sexual intercourse; 1a) adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals etc.; 1b) sexual intercourse with close relatives; Lev 18; 1c) sexual intercourse with a divorced man or woman; Mk 10:11,12.” STRONG’S The lexical definition is more subdued: “Generally, of every kind of extramarital, unlawful, or unnatural sexual intercourse fornication, sexual immorality, prostitution” BARCLAY-NEWMAN

The word “fornication” was never used in the Law. It’s first mentioning is found in Second Chronicles, when referring to the sin of Jehoram: “Moreover he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication , and compelled Judah thereto” (2 Chron 21:11).

The Law spelled out the details of fleshly immorality, showing the evil diversity of this kind of iniquity. The sins are stated with modesty, as is characteristic of the Spirit. Yet, the scope of this sin is clearly delineated to assist men in avoiding such things.

- Uncovering the nakedness of one who is near of kin (Lev 18:6).
- Uncovering the nakedness of one’s father or mother (Lev 18:7).
- Uncovering the nakedness of the wife of one’s father (Lev 18:8).
- Uncovering the nakedness of one’s sister (Lev 18:9).
- Uncovering the nakedness of the daughter of one’s son (Lev 18:10).
- Uncovering the daughter of one’s father’s wife (Lev 18:11).
- Uncovering the nakedness of one’s father’s sister (Lev 18:12).
- Uncovering the nakedness of one’s mother’s sister (Lev 18:13).
- Uncovering the nakedness of one’s father’s brother (Lev 18:14a).

- Approaching the wife of one's father's brother (Lev 18:14b).
- Uncovering the nakedness of one's daughter in law (Lev 18:15).
- Uncovering the nakedness of one's brother's wife (Lev 18:16).
- Uncovering the nakedness of a woman and her daughter (Lev 18:17a).
- Uncovering the nakedness her son's daughter, or her daughter's daughter (Lev 18:17b).
- Uncovering the nakedness of a wife's sister (Lev 18:18).
- Uncovering the nakedness of a woman when she is unclean (Lev 18:19).
- Lying carnally with the wife of one's neighbor (Lev 18:20).
- Lying with mankind as with womankind (Lev 18:22).
- Lying with any beast (Lev 18:23a).
- A woman standing before a beast to lie with it (Lev 18:23b).

A single word that covered all of these sins is found in the seventh commandment: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex 20:14). The general word encompassing all of these sins that is often used in the Apostolic writings is "fornication" (Acts 15:20; Rom 1:29; 1 Cor 5:1; 1 Cor 6:13,18; 1 Cor 10:8; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:3; Jude 1:7). It is also used in reference to immorality occurring outside of the marriage bond (1 Cor 7:2).

We are living in a day when the consciousness of this sin has been nearly obliterated. Society now speaks of "alternate life-styles," "live-in," "sleeping together," "Pornography," "sexual addiction," "sexual preference," "single parent," "teen-pregnancy," etc. Terminology is employed that diminishes the reprehensible nature of immorality, giving it some legitimacy in society : i.e. "Homosexual" and "lesbian." All of this has caused a sort of spiritual stupor to descend like a fog upon men's hearts. It is the direct result of allowing the psychologists and sociologists to market their wares within the church. Although there is not a syllable of tolerance or sympathy for such transgressions in Scripture, people have been led to believe those involved in such things are actually victims instead of transgressors. This attitude, as reprehensible as it is, has even crept into the church.

Let us be clear about how the Lord speaks about this sin – "fornication." These words are to be

taken seriously. Those who do not do so will eventually be judged by them (John 12:48).

- “Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body” (1 Cor 6:18).
- “Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand” (1 Cor 10:8).
- “I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:21).
- “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints” (Eph 5:3).
- “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication” (1 Thess 4:3).
- “Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 1:7).

The Divine Reasoning

There is a pattern of Divine reasoning on this matter – and it relates to the death of Jesus Christ.

- First, our bodies were not given to us for fornication – that is not an acceptable use of the body, whether society condones it or not. “Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body” (1 Cor 6:13).
- Second, it is God’s will to refrain from all fornication. “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication” (1 Thess 4:3).
- Third, this is a sin that is in a category by itself. It is viewed as extraordinarily wicked. “Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body” (1 Cor 6:18).
- Fourth, our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, thus making fornication a sin against Him. “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God . . .” (1 Cor 6:19a).
- Fifth, our bodies do not belong to us. They have been bought with a price, and are to be used for God’s

glory. “. . . and you are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Cor 6:19b-20).

Jesus taught us this type of sin can also be committed in the mind, without the outward deed taking place. He said, “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt 5:27-28).

Our text informs us that this sin is one of our “members” – that is, by nature we do have the capacity to commit it. We should not be surprised, therefore, if Satan hurls flaming arrows at us to excite this sin. Our unwavering response is to “mortify,” or put to death, “fornication.”

UNCLEANNES

“. . . uncleanness . . .” Other versions read, “impurity,” NASB and “unclean things.” BBE

The word “uncleanness” involves both physical and moral impurity, including profligate (extravagant and luxurious) living and impure motives. STRONG'S Literally, it means “worthless material,” and includes indecency. ROBERTSON

Under the Law

The concept of “uncleanness” was taught under the Law. There were approximately seventy things listed that caused the individual to become unclean (Lev 11-15). These things were not to be touched (ex: Lev 5:2-3; 7:19-21). The priests were also charged with making a clear distinction between the clean and the unclean, so there was no doubt in the minds of the people. “And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean” (Lev 10:10).

These various laws were intended to train the senses of the people concerning life in this world. There are competing influences all about us. Some of them are defiling, and others have wholesome and godly effects. In the case of Israel, the Lord instituted various ceremonial laws to convey the principle of “unclean” and “defilement” – that men can be contaminated by what they handle, and those they choose to be their companions.

In delineating the matter of uncleanness, the Spirit later affirmed there was nothing inherently “unclean” about things God created. “I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean” (Rom 14:14). Under the New Covenant, meats and drinks become unclean by perception, as well as what they are used for – not because of their nature. There remain, however, some things that are, in fact, “unclean” and defiling.

In Christ Jesus

In Christ, there are also references to uncleanness. The concept of “unclean” was introduced under the Old Covenant, but did not pass away when it was superceded by a better covenant that is established upon better promises.

- Unclean spirits. “For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed” (Acts 8:7; (Matt 10:1; 12:43; Acts 5:16).
- Unclean demon. “And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God” (Lk 4:33-34).
- Before we were in Christ, we yielded ourselves to “uncleanness.” “I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (Rom 6:19; Eph 4:19).
- We are admonished to “touch not the unclean thing.” “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.” (2 Cor 6:17).
- There is such a thing as repenting of uncleanness. “And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.” (2 Cor 12:21).
- Uncleanness is a work of the flesh. “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness . . .” (Gal 5:19).
- Uncleanness is not once to be named among saints. “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints.” (Eph 5:3).
- Uncleanness excludes one from the Kingdom of God. “For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” (Eph 5:5).
- Uncleanness is the opposite of holiness. “For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.” (1 Thess 4:7).
- There remains such a thing as the “lust of uncleanness” – a driving desire for defiling things. “But

chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.” (2 Pet 2:10).

The Seriousness of Uncleanness

The seriousness of uncleanness is seen in several Apostolic affirmations. Concerning the body of Christ it is written, “ If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy ; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Cor 3:17). Solemnly the people of God are warned, “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled ” (Heb12:15). Finally, it is said of the glorified church, “ And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth , neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life” (Rev 21:27).

“Uncleanness” is anything that causes the defilement that will not enter into the presence of the Lord.

Unspotted from the World

“Pure religion and undefiled before God” includes the matter of keeping oneself “unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). The “spot” of the world causes uncleanness, which in turn excludes one from the Kingdom of God. If the intent of salvation is to “deliver us from this present evil world” (Gal 1:4), we can ill afford to become spotted by it, thereby being rendered unclean.

Worldly manners are not to be found in any part of our persons. If the intention of God is to sanctify us wholly, “spirit, soul and body” (1 Thess 5:23), there can be no uncleanness in any of those parts of our being.

Hating the Spotted Garment

Even in our quest to turn people from darkness to light, we are admonished to maintain a certain attitude toward the ungodly. We are not to imagine that we cannot be ill effected by our contact with them. Therefore it is written, “Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh ” (Jude 1:21-23). The “fear” is to be found in the one pulling sinners from the fire. Thus some of the other versions read, “on some have mercy with fear ,” NASB “show mercy, mixed with fear ,” NIV “have mercy on still others with fear ,” NRSV “have mercy in fear,” DOUAY “show mercy with fear ,” ESV and “you must be compassionate but wary .” NJB

This same thought is expressed in the Epistle to the Galatians. There the focus is on restoring a man who has been overtaken in a fault. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted ”

(Gal 6:1). Other versions read, “But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted,” NIV “Take care that you yourselves are not tempted,” NRSV and “be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.” NLT

How can a person maintain this attitude: keeping unspotted from the world, pulling men out of the fire of transgression fearfully, and rescuing those who have been overcome, while taking care that we ourselves are not overtaken in their sin? One of the chief means is simply this: “hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.” Other versions read, “hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh,” NIV “hating even the tunic defiled by their bodies,” NRSV and “hating even the clothing which is made unclean by the flesh.” BBE

The idea is that everything surrounding sin is contaminated by it. It is said of the “defiled and unbelieving” that nothing they do is pure, “but even their mind and conscience is defiled” (Tit 1:15). James even takes the matter to clothing. To some this might sound similar to raw superstition, but it is not. This kind of reasoning is virtually unknown in the modern church. Where all manner of worldly influence is seen even in popular clothing. What sensitive soul has not become aware of this contamination? It is the business of the people of God to develop such a hatred for sin and uncleanness, that even the garment that is affected by worldly manners is despised.

Defiling Influences

There are people, thoughts, deeds, sights, and sounds that defile and corrupt. These are things that tend to retard spiritual progress and knit one to the cursed and passing order. They soil the mind, bring a blight upon the affection, and erode spiritual qualities. They bring Divine displeasure, the approbation of the world, and push the door of the heart open for the entrance of the wicked one. These are things that change the spiritual quality of a person, like a cancerous growth changes the appearance and function of the body.

We live in a society that has no conception of “uncleanness.” There exists a moral and spiritual filth that has changed the way people think, how they dress, how they groom themselves, and where they go. It has changed what they watch, how they select their closest friends, and how they choose to spend their time. There is something in “the flesh” that is attracted to such things. Our unwavering response is to “mortify,” or put to death, “uncleanness.”

INORDINATE AFFECTION

“ . . . inordinate affection . . . ” Other versions read, “passion,” NKJV “lust,” NIV “vile passions,” DARBY and “uncontrolled passion.” NJB

The words “inordinate affection” are translated from a single Greek word: **pa,qoj** (pa-thos), from which we get the English word “pathos,” which refers to a mental anguish or suffering. Here the words

refer to all the allurements of unhallowed desires: thus the words “inordinate affection” – lusts that are not lawful.

The word “lust,” as used in several translations (NIV, DOUAY, NIB, NLT) is too shallow, and, in my judgment, is not a good translation. The word “passion” comes closer to the meaning, because it emphasizes the fiery and demanding nature of these desires (NKJV, ASV, NASB, NRSV, BBE, ESV, NAB, NAU, YLT). Several versions emphasize the unusual corruptness of “passion” that is intended by this expression: “vile passions,” DARBY and “uncontrolled passion.” NJB These are lusts that are awakened by some external object or person, being distinguished from imaginations, which are often contrivances of the mind. They tend to have the nature of a raging fire.

This word is used two other times in the Apostolic writings. Each one of them emphasizes the driving force of these desires.

- “For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections : for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature” (Rom 1:26). These were depraved and corrupting desires that shouted out for attention. They pulled men into deeper sins, consuming them like an inward fire. The Romans text affirms they erupted in exchanging natural relations for unnatural ones. Today men refer to the sins that are mentioned as lesbianism and homosexuality. These sins did not spring from nature, or the way men were born, as such sinners affirm, but from unlawful desires – “inordinate affection.” Sodomy is part of the fruit produced by these desires.
- “Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God” (1 Thess 4:5).
“Concupiscence” is mentioned later in our text, at which time I will deal with that particular sin. This Thessalonian text is relevant to the Colossian text because of its use of the word “lust.” The “lust” of First Thessalonians 4:5 is the “inordinate affection” of Colossians 3:5. It is the burning desire that produces “concupiscence.”

“Inordinate affections” are unlawful desires – i.e., the desire for things and experiences that are not right. It is the driving inner compulsion to do what the Lord forbids. Our unwavering response is to “mortify,” or put to death, “inordinate affection.”

EVIL CONCUPISCENCE

“ . . . evil concupiscence . . . ” Other versions read, “evil desire,” NKJV /NASB/NIV “unbridled desire,” DARBY and “shameful desires.” NLT

The word “concupiscence” is used two other places in Scripture, and means “a desire, craving, and longing for what is forbidden.” STRONG’S It is a “strong impulse and unrestrained desire for something that is forbidden.” THAYER These are driving lusts in the heart that erupt in the degrading of the body among people. The Epistle to the Romans refers to this sin in these words, “Wherefore God also gave them up

to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts , to dishonor their own bodies between themselves” (Rom 1:24).

While the expression “inordinate affection” refers to the fiery condition of a sensual appetite, the words “evil concupiscence” speak of a specific gratification of the appetite. This is accompanied by a dominating determination to satisfy that desire. An example would be David seeing Bathsheba, then determining to take her to himself . Another would be Achan seeing the Babylonish garment, the wedge of gold, and the pieces of silver, then determining to take them for himself . Our unwavering response is to “mortify,” or put to death, “evil concupiscence.”

A Downward Progression Seen

There is a progression downward seen in these “members” that are to be mortified. Uncleanness speaks of becoming defiled by association with corrupt people and things. Inordinate affection speaks of the compelling desires for unlawful things that are awakened by uncleanness. Evil concupiscence speaks of the determination to gratify those base desires.

If these “members,” relating to desire, are not ALL mortified, the ones that are allowed to remain will awaken other passions, thus causing a fall to occur. If the individual insists on culturing unclean associations, “inordinate affections” will be stirred up. When that happens, a certain resolution will develop within the heart and mind that causes the person to seek means whereby those affections will be gratified.

There is a lot of loose thought in the Christian community on these matters. The spiritual froth that is regularly ladled out to professing Christians brings no power to “mortify” their “members that are upon the earth.” In addition, convenient explanations for transgression are being offered, together with a variety of supposed “recovery” ministries, thereby obscuring what has really taken place when people tumble into transgression.

Those who indulge the flesh have jumped into a downward moral spiral. They have not fallen accidentally. Rather than walking in the light (1 John 1:7), they have been around unclean influences. Those influences have stirred up unlawful appetites. The unlawful appetites have awakened resolves that have driven the individual to seek the gratification of them. That is why they fell. The Divine solution is to “mortify your members that are upon the earth.” Until this is done, there can be no genuine recovery. What appears to be recovery is only a delusion until fleshly appetites are put to death.

COVETOUSNESS, WHICH IS IDOLATRY

“ . . . and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Other versions read, “greed, which amounts to idolatry,” NIV “greed which is idolatry,” NRSV “envy, which is the worship of strange gods,” BBE “unbridled desire, which is idolatry,” DARBY “covetousness, which is the service of idols,” DOUAY

“especially greed, which is the same thing as worshiping a false god,” NJB and “Don’t be greedy for the good things of this life, for that is idolatry.” NLT

“Covetousness” is the “greedy desire to have more – avarice.” THAYER Lexically, it is defined as “bad behavior, a disposition to have more than one’s share.” It even includes the idea of giving “grudgingly,” or out of a sense of obligation, rather than willingly (2 Cor 9:7) – wanting to hold on to what one has, as well as desiring for more than is appropriate. BARCLAY-NEWMAN

Under the Law, rulers were to be men void of covetousness. It is written, “Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness ; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens” (Ex 18:21).

David contrasted covetousness with having a heart for the Lord’s testimonies: “Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness ” (Psa 119:36).

Through Isaiah, the Lord revealed how He is effected by the covetousness of men: “For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart” (Isa 57:17).

One of the signs of the spiritual decadence of Israel was its propensity to covetousness: “For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely” (Jer 6:13).

Ezekiel spoke to people who appeared to listen to him, but their heart was really going after covetousness: “And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness” (Ezek 33:31).

Jesus declared that covetousness erupted from within – and that is where it has to be mortified: “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness . . . ” (Mark 7:21-22). Solemnly He told His disciples, “And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness : for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15).

This is one of the sins for which the Gentile world was condemned (Rom 1:29).

It is also a sin that is not to be named among the people of God – not even once: “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you , as becometh saints” (Eph 5:3).

The Spirit admonishes us to let our lives be totally without this vice: “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5).

We live in a time when covetousness has been dignified. The grasping spirit and a heart discontent with what one possesses is held forth as being noble – having good ambitions. But this is not the case at all. The quest to have more and better things may appear quite innocent on the surface, but it has the mark of Satan upon it.

The tendency to want more than is our share is found within the flesh. You dare not nourish and culture it. It is to be put to death – suffocated, as it was, by setting your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth. Achan fell because he coveted (Josh 7:21). The Spirit affirms that “the love of money is the root of all evil,” going on to say, “which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith , and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim 6:10). Do not imagine that you are exempt from this warning! Many a professing believer has lost their spiritual edge because of this “member.”

As soon as covetousness is embraced the soul begins to die. The heart begins to grow hard, the ears are stopped, and the eyes begin to grow dim. Our unwavering response is to “mortify,” or put to death, “covetousness, which is idolatry.”

HOW CAN WE MORTIFY THESE MEMBERS?

And what is to be our attitude toward these sins. How are we to respond when these “members” are awakened and demand our attention? We are to “mortify” them – put them to death, or kill them. How is that to be done? Is there a simple routine or discipline that will assure us of subduing this fleshly characteristic? Indeed, the Spirit has already told us that such approaches “lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence” NIV (Col 2:23).

When our blessed Lord spoke of committing adultery in the heart, He quickly provided a remedy for the proclivity to lust. “And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out , and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell . And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off , and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell ” (Matt 5:29-30). The casual disciple (if there be such a thing) may not be inclined to consider lust as pushing one toward hell – but Jesus affirmed it does. That lust must be mortified. That is, the individual must take measures to rid himself of areas of weakness. He must exercise himself to stay away from things

that awaken sinful tendencies, whether it is people, events, sights, or sounds.

Speaking of this principle, Solomon said these words. “For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life: to keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids. For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?” (Prov 6:23-28).

Many a deluded soul has imagined they can play with these wretched “members,” giving them a little here and a little there, as though to pacify them. However, these “members” cannot be assuaged by occasional attention. They are like the two daughters of the horseleach who cry out “GIVE! GIVE!” (Prov 30:15). They cannot be satisfied, which is why they must be put to death. If you try to control them, you will find they are uncontrollable. They have to be put to death. If you attempt to ignore them, pretending they do not exist, you will find they will not be ignored. They must be put to death.

Those who attempt to assign a secondary place to them will soon find they will not accept a subordinate position. They must be put to death. What is more, we ourselves must be the executioner.

“ 6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.”

Is anyone inclined to think a lot of time is graciously allotted to them for the mortification of our members that are upon the earth? Is there some naive soul who imagines they have time to sow their wild oats, and enjoy the professed good things of this world?

The Spirit will now shout us awake, affirming that we are, indeed, on holy ground. If the mandate to mortify our members that are upon the earth has seemed too harsh, the word that follows will help us to gain a proper perspective.

FOR WHICH THING’S SAKE

“For which things' sake . . .” Other versions read, “Because of THESE things,” NKJV “For it is

on account of these things,” NASB “Because of these,” NIV and “it is precisely these things which draw.” NJB

After all of the arguments have been introduced for God loving men no matter what they do, the Spirit stops the mouths of the foolish. He does not say the Lord will love those who do such things. He does not affirm they have no consequence, or that God is lovingly tolerant of them. The Spirit does not suggest that we have a lot of time to rid ourselves of these inclinations.

Rather, we are now told what reaction they will summon from the God of heaven. However men may react to the word about these sins – Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness – we will now be told how God WILL respond to them. There is not the slightest possibility that this response will be avoided if we do not put these vices to death – denominational dogmas notwithstanding.

The Spirit is very precise on this matter. It is BECAUSE OF these sins that the Divine reaction now declared is expressed. Because men DO these things, the Lord will have this unequivocal response. He will not show love. He will not show longsuffering. He will not speak kindly. He will not turn His eyes so as not to see these things. He will not lead the person in paths of righteousness anyway. He will not ignore the person who had ignored this warning. Away with meager and flawed representations of God, and India rubber theology that bends this way and that way so men can be comfortable in their sin! Here is the word of the Lord.

THE WRATH OF GOD

“. . . the wrath of God cometh. . .” Other versions read, “the wrath of God IS coming,” NKJV “the wrath of God WILL come,” NASB and “God’s terrible anger WILL come.” NLT

If those who are neglectful of their spiritual lives knew their real situation, they would enter into a state of fear and trembling! Jesus described those who were not believing on Him (or “living by faith”) as those whom God’s wrath is situated. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him ” (John 3:36). Do not equate believing on the Son with a mere profession of faith. Those who are in Christ are living “by faith in the Son of God,” who loved them and gave Himself for them (Gal 2:20). Those who are not living in this manner are not believing the Son, regardless of their empty profession.

In addition to the wrath of God hovering over them like a foreboding cloud, such people are those in whom Satan is at work. Our text affirms that the wrath of God will come upon “the children of disobedience.” These are the very people in whom Satan freely works, with little or no inhibition. He is “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that NOW worketh in the children of disobedience ” (Eph 2:3). Such souls may boast of their free will and ability to recover themselves, but they are only deluded.

To have the wrath of God positioned over you, and the devil working in you, is anything but an enviable state. Yet, if professing believers do not choose to “mortify” their members that “are upon the earth,” they at once move toward this position.

The Day of Wrath

There is an appointed “day of wrath” upon the horizon of time (Rom 2:5). It is a time when the Lord will vent the anger that is presently awaiting that day – presently giving men “space to repent.” This day is referred to as the time of “the wrath of the Lamb,” and “the great day of His wrath” in which not a single one who refused Him will be able to stand (Rev 6:16-17). That “wrath” will be “revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom 1:18). It will not be subdued, or mixed with mercy, as in Isaiah 54:8; 60:10; and Habakkuk 3:2. It will be the “fierceness of His wrath” (Rev 16:19; 19:15). Those who do not “obey the truth” are told they will experience the “indignation and wrath” of God (Rom 2:8).

Prior to being in Christ, when the vices mentioned in our text ruled us, we were appropriately described as “children of wrath” (Eph 2:3). The wrath of God is like a heat-seeking missile, seeking out those in whom the fire of sin is burning!

Ah, but we have professional religious men who would rather not say these things. They would rather work with people to resolve their problems, rather than admonish them to put their earthly members to death. Such men speak to sinners too softly – like lisping a soft and melodious song to a drowning man, instead of throwing him a life preserver! Solemnly the Spirit speaks to us elsewhere, corroborating the message of our text. He itemizes a similar list of sins: fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, jesting, whoremonger, unclean person, covetous person, and idolater. He tells us such people have no “inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” Then He breaks through cloud of delusion, fairly shouting to us: “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (Eph 5:6).

Some may choose to believe the wrath of God comes upon men only because of what they did NOT do. Our text tells us it will also come upon men for that they DID do. If these “members” are not mortified, God’s wrath will come upon the individual. Your “members that are upon the earth” WILL break forth if they are not put to death! They will not repose in sweet sleep if you let them live.

What person of sound mind will therefore reason that this is not an important work, or that the mortification can be delayed with impunity? Few church people are hearing these words – or receiving the solemn charge to put to death their fleshly appetites. With all of its counseling, work shops, and user-friendly devices, the church has done nothing more than make it easier for these “members” to live – these members that are to be put to death by crucifixion.

Focused Wrath

Once more, let me point out that this wrath is focused. There are certain people toward whom it is directed – people who did not mortify their members that are upon the earth. When I ponder the prevalence of these sins in the modern church, this word becomes bitter in my belly just as it did in the bellies of Ezekiel and John (Ezek 3:1-14; Rev 10:9-10).

If this text is true – and it is impossible that is it NOT true – the churches of our land are filled with people who are actually destined for the wrath of God. While they are nurturing their vices, they are actually treasuring up wrath against themselves for the day of wrath (Rom 2:5).

THE CHILDREN OF DISOBEDIENCE

“ . . . on the children of disobedience.” Other versions read, “sons of disobedience,” NKJV “those who are disobedient,” NRSV “those who go against His orders,” BBE “children of unbelief,” DOUAY “those who resist,” NJB and “those who do such things.” NLT

Notice how the Spirit refers to those who do NOT mortify their members that are upon the earth, therefore allowing them to break forth in all of their fleshly fury. They are “children of disobedience.” Disobedience has, as it was, birthed them. Their attitudes and condition are the result of disobedience!

Elsewhere we are told these are the people in whom Satan freely works. “Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience ” (Eph 2:2). Therefore, where disobedience is found, Satan is at work! Disobedience is his footprint in human lives.

If you do not mortify these members, you will obey them. It is therefore clear that sin is to be exterminated, not merely subdued.

ONE FINAL WORD

Because of the rarity of such proclamations within the nominal church, it is necessary to say one further thing about putting to death our members that are upon the earth. Lest there are any who have been lulled to sleep by the Babylonish religion of our day, we have a word from God on this subject. It assists us to identify the real people of God. “And they that are Christ's HAVE crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24).

Every conventional translation reads precisely the same: “HAVE crucified” (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, NIV, NRSV, RSV, DARBY, DOUAY, ESV, GENEVA, NAB, NAU, NIB, NJB, WEBSTER, RWB) . The exceptions still carry the same idea: “HAVE put to death,” BBE “HAVE nailed,” NLT and “DID

crucify.” YLT Grammatically, the word “crucified” is in the past tense. It refers to something that has already been done.

Newness of life began with “the old man” being crucified by the Lord Himself. As it is written, “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom 6:6). The intent of this crucifixion was the destruction of “the body of sin,” or the whole sinful nature. The means of that destruction is death upon the cross. When, therefore, those who are in Christ are said to have crucified the flesh, together with its affections and lusts, the meaning is that they have acquiesced with where the flesh was placed when they were baptized into Christ. They keep the flesh on the cross, refusing to answer its plaintive pleas do remove it from that cross.

Those, therefore, who are not mortifying their members that are upon the earth, or crucifying the flesh, have no immediate evidence of being children of God. God’s children begin newness of life with the flesh crucified, and continue to keep it crucified.

It is certainly not our purpose to sit in final judgment upon such people. It is in order, however, to remind all who are in this category that they are catering to what God condemns. They have become associated with disobedience, and are individuals in whom Satan is working.

The thing for which they are noted – disobedience – is something about which not one single word of goodness is found. Not one solitary promise for good is addressed to the disobedient, and God nowhere aligns Himself with them. The word, then, with which we have just dealt, is one of very great significance.

“ 7 In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.”

IN WHICH

“In the which . . .” Other versions read, “in them,” NASB “these ways,” NIV and “these are the ways.” NRSV

Some have conjectured that the word “them” refers to the “children of disobedience.” That would mean our former habitat was the society of the disobedient. While there is a sense in which this is true, that is not the meaning of this verses. This refers to the spiritual vices that are to be mortified. Our past lives were spent “in” them, or under their rule, or dominion. That period of time – when we were ruled by sin – is mentioned in the Epistle of First Peter. “For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries” (1 Pet 4:3).

The Epistle to the Romans refers to that time as one of shame: “What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death” (Rom 6:21).

The fact that some of the baser sins have been mentioned (revellings, banquetings, abominable idolatries, etc.), may lead some to believe their past lives were really not so bad. Perhaps they were raised in a home that forbade such indulgences, and thus they never found outward expression in their lives. However, base moral conduct is a glance at the bottom of the pit from which we were digged, and not the whole pit itself. There were other people caught in the mesh of sin who were like the Pharisees, impeccably holy on the outside (Matt 23:37). They were not sloshing around in the depths of the pit, but were nevertheless in it. In fact, their condition tended to be even worse, because they did not view themselves as needing a Savior.

YE ALSO WALKED

“ . . . ye also walked some time.” By saying we “walked” in these ways, the Spirit means we were on the broad road that leads to destruction (Matt 7:13). Even though some of these vices may not have been committed outwardly, our lives were pointed in the direction of self-will. We were not dominated by the will of God. Those in such a condition are on the same path as the most depraved among men. They are moved by a will that puts themselves at the center. That is what makes such a way so dishonorable.

YE LIVED IN THEM

“ . . . when ye lived in them.” Other versions read , “you were living in them” NASB and “when you were living that life.” NRSV

Prior to life in Christ, we all lived in the realm where moral debauchery thrived – even though we might not have been guilty of those baser things. Notwithstanding, we were living according to our own will, which is the root of all sin. We may have expressed our will in more refined manners – ways that were readily acceptable to a worldly society. But we did not live for God, walk in the Spirit, or conduct our lives in fellowship with Christ. That is precisely why we have to be born again.

Our former lives were in the darkness, not in the light. If all manner of immorality did not break

out in us, it is not because we were good, or because we had the will of the Lord in mind. Rather than taking credit for keeping ourselves from deeper sins, we must thank God we were not guilty of them. Perhaps this is involved in a most unique expression used by Jude, a brother of our Lord: “preserved in Jesus Christ, and called” (Jude 1:1). Some other versions accentuate the staggering implications of this phrase: “kept for Jesus Christ,” ASV/NASB and “kept safe for Jesus.” NRSV This is the sort of word we dare not corrupt. However, it does remove any reason for boasting. We all have much for which to be thankful, and a past of which to be ashamed.

“ 8 But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.”

BUT NOW

“ But now . . . ” These words are used in contrast to, “In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.” Then, when we were “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1), we lived our lives in the domain of self, and under the power of the devil. “Now,” however, we have been delivered from that realm, and made to sit together with Christ in heavenly places (Col 1:13; Eph 2:6). “Now,” our lives are lived for a different reason, and are governed by different principles. The admonition that follows is an aspect of living by faith (Heb 10:38), and walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16). This is an expression of “newness of life” (Rom 6:4), and is what occurs when we “walk in the light” (1 John 1:7).

PUT OFF ALL THESE

“ . . . ye also put off all these . . . ” Other versions read, “But now you yourselves are to put off all these,” NKJV “Put them all aside,” NASB “you must rid yourselves of all such things,” NIV “But now you must put them all away,” ESV/NAB and “but not you must give up all these things.” NJB

This is a word that calls for spiritual aggression. It cannot be fulfilled casually or in fits and starts. Nor, indeed, can it happen inadvertently, or without some spiritual focus. The Spirit does not suggest we may not have these vices within us. They are, after all, part and parcel of “the flesh.” It may presently appear as though these are not actually resident in you. However, given the proper environment, they will erupt in all of their fury. We are to rid ourselves of these “members.” It is something that “must” be done. Spiritual life will be maintained only to the degree these sins are thrust from us.

ANGER

“ . . . anger . . . ” Most versions read “anger.” Some read “wrath” BBE/ESV “Anger,” in my judgment, is the preferable word.

The novice may ask, “Why, on the one hand, does the Spirit admonish us ‘be ye angry’ (Eph 4:26), while here we are admonished to put off anger.” The “anger” that is to be put off is part of our “members that are upon the earth.” The “anger” of Ephesians 4:26 is the expression of the new man, and is focused against things that originate with the devil, and are thus opposed to God.

Jesus also spoke of being “angry without a cause” (Matt 5:22). One of the traits of an elder is that he is not to be “soon angry” (Tit 1:7). The “anger” of our text is anger “without a cause,” and anger that bursts forth “soon” with no restraint.

Paul also exhorted the Ephesians about the necessity of expelling anger from our lives. “Let all . . . anger . . . be put away from you” (Eph 4:31). This is all outbursts of the flesh – all flashes of carnal indignation.

Some examples of anger include the following:

- Balaam’s anger against his donkey (Num 22:27-29).
- Balak’s anger toward Balaam (Num 24:10-11).
- Saul’s anger toward his son Jonathan because of his friendship with David (1 Sam 20:30-34).
- Naaman’s attitude toward Elisha when he told him to wash in the Jordan River (2 Kgs 5:12).

WRATH

“wrath . . . ” Wrath is anger exploding with greater fierceness and indignation. Some versions translate the word “rage,” NIV “passion.” BBE and “indignation.” DOUAY While anger will express itself in words, wrath will break forth in other more hurtful actions. Of this kind of wrath – the kind that moves a person to do something about what angers him – the Spirit says, “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath : for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God ” (James 1:19-20).

Anger and wrath are the extreme opposites of certain characteristics that are found in the

wisdom that is “from above.” Of that wisdom it is written, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated , full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace ” (James 3:18).

Some examples of wrath include the following:

- Cain killing Abel (Gen 4:5-8).
- Herod when the wise men mocked him by not returning to him from seeing the infant King (Matt 2:16).
- The people in Jesus’ home town when they heard His words in their synagogue (Luke 4:28-29).

MALICE

“ . . . malice . . . ”

This is a very heavy word, carrying the idea of “depravity, malignity, and wickedness.” STRONG’S It includes the meaning of “ill-will, hatefulness, a desire to injure, and not being ashamed to break laws.” THAYER The Epistle to the Ephesians exhorts us to put away from ourselves “ALL malice” (Eph 4:31). Peter also says to “lay aside ALL malice” (1 Pet 2:1).

“Malice” has to do with evil intentions – purposefully seeking to do harm to someone. This is not confined to physical harm, but includes seeking to soil someone’s character, or take certain rightful advantages from them. The focus of such an intention is generally one of revenge, or retaliation. It is an “I’ll-get-you-back” frame of mind, in which a person purposely determines to hurt the one who has hurt them.

Some examples of malice as follows:

- Joseph’s brethren against him when he told them his dreams (Gen 37:1-36).
- Simeon and Levi revenging their sister’s abuse (Gen 49:5-7).
- Potipher’s wife toward Joseph when he did not submit to her enticements (Gen 39:14-20).

- Jeremiah’s enemies when they heard his words (Jer 26:8-11).
- Masters of the woman with the spirit of divination, when Paul had cast the spirit out of her (Acts 16:19-24).

BLASPHEMY

“ . . . blasphemy . . . ” Other versions read, “slander,” NASB/NIV “railing,” ASV “ curses ,” BBE “cursed speaking,” GENEVA and “abusive language.” NJB

“Blasphemy” is injurious speech, in which another’s good name is reproached. It involves speaking against someone’s reputation, or insulting a person. It is reviling, speaking evil of, and railing against someone. THAYER

Some examples of blasphemy include the following:

- The Israelites murmuring against the Lord (Num 21:5-6).
- Infidels speaking against God because of the sin of David with Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:14).
- Shimei’s cursing of David (2 Sam 16:5).
- Those who reviled Jesus upon the cross (Matt 27:40-44).

FILTHY COMMUNICATIONS OUT OF YOUR MOUTH

“ . . . filthy communication out of your mouth.” Other versions read , “filthy language, ” NKJV “abusive speech,” NASB “foul talk,” RSV “shameful speaking,” ASV “unclean talk,” BBE “vile language,” DARBY “obscene talk,” ESV and “dirty talk.” NJB

This is speech with the taint of the world upon it. It is the kind of talk that awakens all manner of wicked thoughts, and has a strong appeal to man’s baser nature – “the old man.” This is language the world uses, but it is not to come out of the mouth of the saints of God. When the temptations comes to speak with vile and shameful speech, we must lay our hand upon our mouth, as Job did in the presence of the Lord (Job 40:4).

Lewd, indecent, immodest, and suggestive speech has no place in the speaking of the children of God. Such language not only defiles the person in whose mouth it is found, it defiles the area where it is

spoken. This is language that disarms the soul, and makes sin more easy to commit.

We live in a society that is filled with this kind of speech. Suggestive words and immoral innuendoes are even uttered from pulpits, and in religious classrooms. The music and entertainment media of the day is saturated with “filthy communication” – so much so that many professing Christians have become accustomed to it. All such speech is to be “put off,” thrust from us with spiritual aggression.

The Epistle to the Ephesians also addresses the matter of our speech. “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph 4:29). Not a single instance of it is to be heard among the people of God. “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks” (Eph 5:4).

The Manner of the Spirit

It is the manner of the Spirit, when speaking of sensitive moral matters, to speak of them with great modesty. A single example of this will suffice to confirm this point.

When speaking of sodomy, one of the most reprehensible of all moral sins, great reserve is shown. The following expressions show this to be true.

- “And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them” (Gen 19:5).
- “Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination” (Lev 18:22).
- “And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet” (Rom 1:27).
- “For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine” (1 Tim 1:10).
- “Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 1:7).

When speaking of immorality, rather than describing in detail what occurs, the Spirit develops a perspective that will assist us in abhorring sin. “Filthy communication” is speech that uses words that actually excite the very vices we are admonished to “put off.”

“ 9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.”

There is a certain responsibility that believers have toward one another. Faith in Christ does not make one self-centered. Being born again dethrones self, making the Lord the center of our whole being. As it is written, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28) – a circumstance that is recognized by the new man, and to which the redeemed fully acquiesce.

We are categorically told that Jesus died to deliver us from self-centeredness. “And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again ” (2 Cor 5:15). In his inspired synopsis of the reason for the Messiah, Zechariah said, “That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear ” (Luke 1:74). It is written, “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Cor 6:20).

The admonition in this passage is delivered with this in mind. The Spirit is not merely describing a new way of living – one with a different set of rules. He is calling upon us to live in harmony with the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Any other kind of life will ultimately produce a forfeiture of that redemption.

The religious culture in which we find ourselves (2004) is one that caters to the flesh and to self interests. There are special groups that allow for the dominance of interests peculiar to a certain class of people. Religious services are offered that allow one to maintain personal interests, while disdaining the interests of others. Of course, these manners have produced a whole host of religious careers. They have also opened the door for, what is called, “mega churches.” However, after all is said and done, these efforts have made too much allowance for the “flesh” and the “old man,” and too little for the working of the Lord.

It is a dangerous time in which to be living – “perilous times,” as the Spirit puts it (2 Tim 3:5). In this new religious culture the flesh and purely selfish interests are allowed to stay alive, with no threat

of being mortified.

However, the Holy Spirit will not allow such beggarly thinking to go unchallenged. He will call upon us to do what the flesh will hate. He will summon us to put to death sinful tendencies rather than treating them with tenderness and respect. Flesh and blood have been excluded from the Kingdom of God, with no possibility of ever entering into it. As it is written, “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption” (1 Cor 15:50). The words of our text are delivered to us with this reality in mind. This is a call mortify what cannot enter the Kingdom of God!

LIE NOT TO ONE ANOTHER

“Lie not one to another . . .” Other versions read, “Do not lie to one another,” NKJV/NASB/NIV “Do not make false statements to one another,” BBE and “Stop lying to one another.” NAB

To assist us in fulfilling this word, keep in mind the following words: “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Rev 21:8).

Although the Lord permits no lying of any sort, this is lying within a religious setting, which is the worst of all lying. This is speech that does not reflect an “honest and good heart” (Lk 8:15). It is speech that springs from the “old man,” and thus is not “seasoned with salt” (Col 4:6). It comes from a heart that is not “sincere and without offense” (Phil 1:10).

The Ephesian Epistle states it this way, “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another” (Eph 4:25). These (Ephesians and Colossians) are the only Epistles in which the saints are warned against lying to one another. The following texts confirm this is speaking about lying within a religious setting.

- James said that a boast of being aligned with the Lord among those who were characterized by envying and strife, constituted a lie against the truth. “But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth” (James 3:14).
- John said a person was lying if they said they had fellowship with the Lord, yet walked in darkness. “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1 John 1:6).
- The one who says he knows the Lord, yet does not keep His commandments is a liar. “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4).

- The person who denies that Jesus is the Christ is a liar. “Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22).
- The one who says he loves God, yet hates his brother, is a liar. “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar : for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1 John 4:20).

The people of God are to make no boasts of conditions and experiences they have never had. They are not to exaggerate their spiritual attainments, or speak of intimacy with the Lord when they are really lacking it. When testimonies are being given, no person is to feign an experience in order to appear more advanced than they really are.

In Scripture, we do have an example of brethren lying to one another. The reaction of God to this lie is also recorded. The incident involved a married couple who misrepresented what they had given for the ministry of the church. Their names were Ananias and Sapphira. We are told they “sold a possession.” However, privately they “kept back part of the price” for themselves, while representing themselves as giving the whole of the price to the Lord. Peter, given insight from the Lord, said they had lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). Although they had made the representation before men, Peter said to them, “thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God” (Acts 5:4). The Lord killed both of them for telling that lie (Acts 5:5-10). The knowledge of this event caused fear to come on all.

Let every child of God take this admonition seriously: “lie not one to another.” Do not misrepresent your spiritual attainments! Do not exaggerate your commitment to the Lord! Do not falsify your ministry! Do not affirm the Lord has done something in your life that He has not really done. Do not feign a commitment to the Lord. “Lie not one to another.” If you will do this, all other forms of lying will dry up as well.

YOU HAVE PUT OFF THE OLD MAN

“ . . . seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.” Other versions read, “since you have put off the old man with his deeds,” NKJV “since you laid aside the old self with the evil practices,” NASB “since you have taken off your old self with its practices,” NIV “seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices,” NRSV and “for you have stripped off your old evil nature and all its wicked deeds.” NLT

How is it that the very thing we are told to do in detail (“put off all these”) we are here said to have already done (“ye have put off the old man with his deeds ”)? The fourth chapter of Ephesians admonishes us to “put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts” (Eph 4:22). There, we are told that Jesus teaches us to do this: “But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off . . . ” (Eph 4:21).

The book of Romans also refers to what has taken place in us regarding the “old man.” “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him , that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom 6:6). This parallels a statement made earlier in Colossians: “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ” (Col 2:11).

The Sense of the Text

Here, then, is the sense of the text. When we were baptized into Christ, Jesus cut away the whole sinful nature, separating it from our essential persons (Colossians). From another point of view, our “old man” was at once crucified with Christ. This was in order that the whole body of sin might be destroyed, or finally be exterminated (Romans). From yet another point of view, in our baptism into Christ we put off our old nature like a set of soiled clothes, in order that we might put on the new nature (Ephesians).

However, the matter of regeneration did not end there, for we remain in a corrupt and vile body – one in which the sinful nature also remains. That nature was crucified with Christ, yet remains alive, like the impenitent thief upon the cross. It is like the multitudes who ultimately died in the flood, yet moved about for a short while until the water covered the highest mountains.

We crucify the flesh in an ongoing sense. The Lord crucified it with Christ when we were baptized into Him. We now put off the old man in the sense of refusing his requests, even though he was put off in order that we might put on Christ.

This kind of reasoning should not be strange to us. With out text in your mind, hear the same word declares earlier in Colossians: “ As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord , so walk ye in Him” (Col 2:6). Hear it again in the book of Romans: “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body , that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof” (Rom 6:11-12). Hear it once again from the book of Galatians: “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit ” (Gal 5:25).

This is the underside of walking “in newness of life.” As long as we are in the body, we are to conduct our lives upon the same principle we experienced when we were born again. We are to “put off” what is corrupt, denying it expression. Initially, God delivered us from the power of darkness (Col 1:13). We are to live in the power of that, refusing to let sin reign in our members.

A Modern Heresy

There is a view of these texts that is quite common in our time. It is that when we were baptized

into Christ, the “old man” was actually annihilated, or once and for all exterminated. This is based upon Romans 6:6: “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom 6:6). However, this is speaking of the ultimate destiny of the “old man,” not the immediate one. This ought to be apparent from the teaching that follows this affirmation.

- “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11).
- “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof” (Rom 6:12).
- “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:13).

The Spirit then affirms that “sin shall not have dominion over you.” The reason for this circumstance is not that the “old man” or “body of sin” no longer exists, for we are exhorted to not yield our “members” to sin, or allow sin to reign in our mortal bodies. The reason sin does not have dominion over us is that we are “not under law, but under grace” (Rom 6:14).

The teaching that says the body of sin is already non-existent is most foolish. It is based upon a faulty view of language, and an ignorance of Apostolic doctrine. It also denies the daily experience through which every believer goes. That doctrine is, in fact, something produced by the “old man.” It is something Satan would have us embrace, for it is a lie. What Romans says we are to not allow to reign, Colossians says we are to “put off.”

“10a And have put on the new man . . .” Other versions read, “have put on the new self,” NASB “clothed yourselves with the new self,” NRSV “have put on the new nature,” RSV and “you have clothed yourself with a brand new nature.” NLT

This again refers to our baptism into Christ Jesus, when we experienced the “circumcision of Christ” (Col 2:11-12). It is when we were “delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son” (Col 1:13). It is when we were turned “from darkness to light, and from the

power of Satan unto God” (Acts 26:18).

The is the “new creature” to which Second Corinthians refers: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature : old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor 5:17). It is what is “born of God” – the part that does not sin, knows God, loves the children of God, overcomes the world, and Satan cannot touch (1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18).

As long as we are “in the body,” we are a dichotomy – two persons in one body: an “old man” and a “new man.” Both are calling out for attention. Both demand to be heard! Both require all of our attention! Neither will volunteer for to be subordinate to the other. When we came into Christ, the “old man” did not lay down his arms, and agree to be subject to Christ. He had to be forcible taken and crucified. Furthermore, that crucifixion did not change the nature of the “old man, ” any more than crucifixion changed the nature of the thief that did not repent.

The point of this text is that sin in all of its expressions is totally unreasonable for those who are in Christ Jesus. “Newness of life” can only be lived when the “new man” is the prominent part of our being, and the “old man” is being “put off,” or put to death.

Our lives are to be lived in strict harmony with what occurred when we “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). The “newness of life” brings us no advantage if we do not “walk” in it. In fact, if we allow our former ways to again express themselves and thus come into prominence, we enter into a state that is worse than never being born again.

This is the reason for Peter’s remark, “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them” (2 Pet 2:21).

Notwithstanding the theologies of men, Jesus will bring no advantage to the person who chooses to allow the “old man” to live, or who refuses to “mortify their members that are upon the earth.” The “new man,” put on when we came into Christ, cannot live in that manner. It is simply impossible for him to do so.

The professing church should cease and desist from the promulgation of doctrines that lead men to believe they can ignore the “new man” and nurture the “old man.” Emphatically, salvation does not make provision for such things. The flesh must be moritified!

“ 10b . . . which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him . . . ”

The Spirit now provides us with a thumb-nail sketch of “the new man.” This is done to assure our hearts, and confirm that this is not mere philosophical language. Just as surely as the “old man” had defining traits, so also does the “new man.” Just as the “old man” produces a certain kind of life, so the “new man” reveals himself in specific ways. The new birth is not, as some suggest, a mere metaphor, with no real effects. While religious men may allow for profession without possession, such a thing is not possible in the heavenly kingdom. If a person does not possess godly traits, it is because he does not possess life from above.

RENEWED IN KNOWLEDGE

“ . . . which is renewed in knowledge . . . ” Other versions read, “IS being renewed to as true knowledge,” NASB “is BEING renewed in knowledge,” NIV/NRSV/RSV “HAS BECOME new in knowledge,” BBE “renewed in FULL knowledge,” DARBY “will PROGRESS TOWARDS true knowledge,” NJB and “that is CONTINUALLY being renewed as you learn more and more about Christ.” NLT

This is the characteristic of the “new man.” It is not what OUGHT to be found in him. It is not the goal toward which men are to aspire. This IS the “new man.” It is what he essentially is. There is not the slightest chance that a nature unlike this has come from God! The “new man” simply is not present where there is no renewal in knowledge. If this is not the case, then this verse has no meaning.

This is a renewal that takes place immediately (“has become” BBE), yet is not yet complete. It is an ongoing knowledge that moves forward to an appointed fulness. This is involved in growing up into Christ “in all things” (Eph 4:15). It is becoming more and more conversant with “the mind of Christ,” comprehending the “breadth, and length, and depth, and height,” and coming into a fuller knowledge of “the love of Christ which passes all knowledge,” in order that we might be “filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:18-19).

Here the word “renewed” refers to a “new creation,” not merely a sort of recharging of something that already exists. The book of Ephesians says of the “new man,” “And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created . . . ” (Eph 4:24). Other versions read, “which . . . has been created,” NASB “created . NIV

The creation is also described in the book of Second Corinthians. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of

God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6).

The “knowledge” that characterizes the “new man” is not academic knowledge. Rather, it is knowing God, being familiar with His ways, and being conformed to His image. Because it involves thinking LIKE God, instead of in contradiction of Him, the New Covenant includes the writing of His laws upon the heart and mind (Heb 8:10; 10:16). Thus, a harmony is created between God and man, where once there was a variance and hostility. With this “knowledge” the ways and words of God are not strange. They are rather found to be delightful, to be preferred, and are sought with great eagerness (Job 23:12; Psa 19:9-10; Jer 15:16).

It is the nature of “the new man” to grow and advance. Nothing about “newness of life” is static, or content to remain in a fixed state. That is precisely why the Holy Spirit is said to be changing us “from one degree of glory to another” NRSV (2 Cor 3:18).

The “new man” has an ear for the word of Jesus. It is, so to speak, tuned to the heavenly frequency. Speaking of this trait, and in a text that parallels the one we are reviewing, the book of Ephesians says, “But ye have not so learned Christ ; if so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him , as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24).

AFTER THE IMAGE

“ . . . after the image of Him that created him . . . ” Other versions read, “according to the image,” NKJV “in the image of its Creator.” NIV

The idea is that the “new man” is being made like the One who created him. This is a more exact image than the one reflected in the “first man,” Adam (Gen 1:26-27; 5:3; 9:6). This is an image more in keeping with the Person and character of Christ, who is described as the “express Image of His Person” (Heb 1:3). More of God is in Christ than was in Adam in his beginning. It pleased God that in Christ “all fulness” should dwell (Col 1:19; 2:9). That is the image to which we are presently being conformed.

Ephesians says of the nature of the “new man:” “in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24). Other versions read, “in the likeness of God . . . in righteousness and holiness of the truth,” NASB and “to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” NIV The “new man” is really righteous, not trying to become righteous. However, he has to be “put on” to express that righteousness in us. The flesh cannot be trained to act righteous. It is “sinful flesh” in every sense of the word (Rom 8:3).

Putting on the “new man” will result in becoming more and more like the God who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ. Putting him on is the opposite of quenching and grieving the Holy

Spirit. It is the reverse of making provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof (Rom 13:14).

When we “put on the new man,” the Holy Spirit goes to work, leading us in the subduing of the sinful nature (Rom 8:13). However, if people refuse to “put on the new man,” they are shut up to the dominion of sin that dwells in their members. They will not be able to conquer sin or gain God’s approval. This matter is that critical!

“ 11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.”

WHERE

“Where . . .” Other versions read, “A renewal in which,” NASB “Here,” NIV “IN that renewal,” NRSV “and in that image,” NJB and “In this new life.” NLT

The “where” is the Divine “image” to which we are being conformed. It is the ultimate and appointed likeness to be realized in the “new man.” In Ephesians this would be called “all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19). In Second Corinthians, it is the image that reflects “the glory of God” (2 Cor 3:18), and “a new creature” (2 Cor 5:17). In First John, it refers to being “like Him” (1 John 3:1-3). In Second Peter it is “the Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4). In Hebrews, it is the Christ of whom we have been made “partakers” (Heb 3:14).

THERE IS NEITHER

“. . . there is neither . . .” Other versions read, “in which there is no distinction,” NASB “there is no longer,” NRSV “there cannot be,” RSV “there is not,” DARBY “there is no room for distinction,” NJB and “it doesn’t matter if.” NLT

If there is no room for the distinctions that follow, there can be no differentiation in their roles, or different Divine assignments made upon the basis of such distinctions. The “new man” does not make provision for the distinctions unique to the flesh. Such divergence does exist in the flesh, but NOT in the “new creation,” or “new man.”

The book of Galatians also affirms the absence of fleshly distinctions, tracing is to the Lord Jesus

Christ who is “put on” in true baptism. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). Here the distinction of male and female is included. In Galatians 5:6, and Second Corinthians 7:19, only circumcision and uncircumcision are sited, which are also included in our text. Romans and First Corinthians limits the distinctions to Jew and Gentiles (Rom 1:16; 9:24; 10:12-15; 1 Cor 12:13). All of these distinctions exist in the flesh, and do not carry over into the Spirit. They are not a part of the new creation or newness of life.

GREEK NOR JEW

“ . . . Greek nor Jew . . . ” The word “Greek” is used in place of “Gentile” largely because of the hellenization of the world that began under Alexander the Great. The Greek language and culture became dominant, being also perpetuated by the Romans.

Culture, however dominate it may be, is not a key factor in Christ Jesus. That is why sound doctrine is never based upon culture. No person is commended before God for subscribing to culture. That simply is not the basis of Divine assessment. Jews like the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and lawyers (Matt 23:13; Luke 11:46; Matt 16:6) can be rejected, while Gentiles like the Centurion (Matt 8:5-10), the Syrophenecian woman (Mark 7:26-29), and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27-39) are accepted.

The only fleshly groups that have ever been created by God are Jews and Gentiles. That distinction, however, is done away in Christ. The Divinely imposed wall that stood between them has been “broken down” (Eph 2:14).

CIRCUMCISION NOR UNCIRCUMCISION

“ . . . circumcision nor uncircumcision . . . ” Here as a distinction based strictly upon an outward sign – the “sign and seal of circumcision” (Rom 4:11). Counting from the time of Abraham, this sign stood firm for twenty centuries. It was one of the means of identifying the people of God. Thus Goliath was perceived as a vulnerable enemy because he was “uncircumcised” (1 Sam 17:26,36).

In Christ, the distinguishing trait is not found in the flesh, but in the spirit. Thus it is written, “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Rom 2:28-29).

True religion is not confirmed in the flesh. Although much activity is being expended to make such things the sign of Divine approval, none of them are “in Christ,” or part of the “new man.”

BARBARIAN, SCYTHIAN, BOND NOR FREE

“ . . . Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free . . . ”

A “Barbarian” was a foreigner who was not a Greek. STRONG’S It was generally a person coming from a background in which speech was rude, rough, and harsh. It was a person who could not be understood because he was outside of the contemporary culture.

A “Sythian” came from the southern region of, what is now called, Russia. These were considered to be the wildest and most uncultured of barbarians.

“Bond” and “free” were terms very familiar to those of Paul’s time. “Bond” refers to slaves – men and women who were actually owned by others. While there were some slaves mentioned among believers, like Onesimus (Phile 1:10-11), certain believers in Corinth (1 Cor 7:21-23), and in Ephesus (Eph 6:5-8), that distinction did not transfer over to “newness of life.” Such divisions do not exist in Christ Jesus.

Parallels in our society would be uneducated and unlearned people, or those who, because of their identity with certain races, would be considered inferior.

CHRIST IS ALL IN ALL

“ . . . but Christ is all, and in all.” Other versions read, “but Christ is everything, and in all,” DARBY “There is only Christ: he is everything and he is in everything,” NJB and “Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.” NLT

Rather than honoring these fleshly distinctions, the Spirit affirms the cardinal principle of new life.

Christ Is All

In the Divine economy, Christ is everything! All the fulness of the Godhead dwells in Him (Col 1:19; 2:9). All authority in heaven and earth have been given to Him (Matt 28:18). He is the One who has pleased God (Matt 3:17; 17:5). It is His work with which God is satisfied (Isa 53:11). Everything will be gathered together in Him (Eph 1:10). He is the One to whom we are being conformed (Rom 8:29).

Wherever Christ is possessed, everything is possessed. Wherever Christ is not possessed, nothing is possessed. When God favors a person, it is upon the basis of whether or not Christ dwells in

that person. Divine benefits are not conferred upon people because they are Jews or Gentiles, educated or uneducated, bondmen or freeman, or men or women. “Christ is all!” God gives nothing outside of Him, and withholds nothing from those who are “in Him.”

If Christ sends Paul the Jew or Epaphroditus the Gentile, they are to be received as from Him. If He frees a Gadarene demoniac, he is to be heard. If He sends a young Timothy, he is to be heard. If He sends Mary Magdalene to the Apostles, she is to be heard. If He sends Onesimus the slave, he is to be heard. If He sends Phebe, she is to be assisted in her work for Him. “Christ is all!”

Christ Is In All

There is no such thing as a reconciled person who does not have Christ. He is “in all.” He dwells in the hearts of His people without regard to their fleshly or social status. He is “in all.”

The saints of God are to regard one another as God regards them – “in Christ,” and “Christ in them.” When this assessment is consciously made, there will be no divisions among them. A harmony will exist that brings glory to God, honor to Jesus, edifying to the body, and a shining testimony to the world.

We have been subjected to the manner of the Kingdom. We have seen the norm of spiritual life, and the reason for it. Everything that is an expression of the flesh, or fallen nature, is to be “put off.” We are not to delay in doing this, for the presence of such expressions defile the individual, contaminate the body of Christ, and send a distorted message to the world. We must settle it in our hearts that the lack of spiritual evidence indicates the lack of spiritual life. It is not necessary for us to become harping critics that look for flaws in people. That is not a comely occupation. However, neither we are to be overly impressed with the profession of people.

Our fundamental work is working out our own salvation “with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). We are to “examine” ourselves to see if we are “in the faith.” The assignment of our text, which is eliminating the unacceptable from our lives, will assist us greatly in self examination. Where those vices are “put off,” the individual has the confirmation of the presence of “newness of life.” This is a great source of comfort and encouragement to those who perceive it.

THINGS THAT ARE TO BE PUT ON

Lesson # 16

Throughout Scripture, and especially under the New Covenant, Divine prohibitions are not an end of themselves. That is, our Lord's fundamental objective is not merely to keep us from doing wrong. The primary aim is to bring us to the place of abundant Divine provision.

FLESH CANNOT SEE IT

From the beginning of God's dealings with men, this has proved to be very difficult for some to perceive. This is particularly true since the fall in Eden. Men have had a hard time comprehending the

Lord's intention to bless them. There is an inveterate tendency among them to see the Lord as restraining what they prefer to do, rather than giving them glorious benefits and advantages. This tendency was birthed when Eve succumbed to the temptation of the devil. Rather than beholding the rich abundance and diversity of the trees of the garden from which she could eat without restraint, she saw the forbidden tree as holding the primary advantage. "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat" (Gen 3:6). From that day until now, humanity naturally desires what is unlawful, while neglecting what is right.

IN ORDER TO APPROPRIATE

In the Divine economy – the Kingdom of God – prohibition is in order to appropriation. That is, the lawful and the unlawful cannot be indulged simultaneously. What is wrong and what is right cannot be enjoyed at the same time. Things that are by nature opposed to each other cannot be joined together. Therefore we read, ". . . what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (2 Cor 6:14-16). The truth of the matter is that God will NOT dwell where Satan and the things of the flesh are welcomed. For Him to do so would be a contradiction of His own character. This perception is fundamental to sound doctrine.

Once this is seen, the notion of a "carnal Christian" becomes absurd. The postulate that God will forever secure those who revert to the flesh is seen as nothing more than an imagination to be cast down (2 Cor 10:4-5). The "once-saved-always-saved" heresy fails to take this truth into account – even though it is made with unusual clarity.

Even more common than these erroneous perceptions is the notion that a person can continue to abide in Christ without appropriating the benefits that are available in Him. It is evident from the general state of the American church that this is not seen by the masses. One can scarcely find a professing "Christian" who is actually growing in the "grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18), putting "off the old man," and putting "on the new man" (Eph 4:23-24). Scriptural literacy has been exchanged for brotherhood cliches and religious folklore. The reason for this condition is that people have not seen the necessity of replacing vice with virtue, evil with good, and bane with blessing.

THE TEACHING OF JESUS

Jesus addressed this matter with some very poignant teaching. He confirmed that there is a certain godly condition that must replace a defiled one. Jesus had just announced that the generation to whom He had appeared would be judged in the last day by Nineveh and the Queen of the South (Matt 12:41-42). Although they were offered much less than the Jews who were exposed to the Lord's Christ, they left their former condition in order to take hold of what they perceived to be available to them. Once Nineveh saw their condition, they abandoned it in order to gain Divine favor (Jonah 3:6-9). Once the Queen of the South saw that someone in this world had more wisdom than was available to her in "the South," she quickly left her home, seeking out superior wisdom from the mouth of Solomon (1 Kgs

10:1-13).

Then Jesus spoke of the condition of people who were rescued from Satan's dominion, yet did not avail themselves of the benefits available to them. "Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order . Then it goes, and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself , and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first . That is the way it will also be with this evil generation" NASB (Mat 12:43-45).

I want to underscore the point our Lord is making, for it is obvious that it is not generally known. The person who has been delivered from sin and Satanic dominion, who does not fill his life with the things of God, will actually become worse than he was before. This condition is not necessarily made known in depraved outward conduct. However, the control of the devil over that person becomes more pronounced than before. Unless there is a resolve to come away from that condition, it will result in a falling away from which it will not be possible to repent (Heb 6:4-6). Admittedly, that is a most arresting consideration, but it is the truth, and we do well to seriously ponder it.

If your life is not characterized by a quest for glory, and the appropriation of "all spiritual blessings," you are in a state from which you may not recover – at least there isn't no guarantee of it. It is the purpose of this lesson to put pressure upon you to seek the Lord "while He may be found," and call "upon Him while He is near" (Isa 55:6). It is imperative that now , without delay, you "make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed" NKJV (Heb 12:13).

PUTTING OFF TO PUT ON

The only valid reason for Israel to leave Egypt, was in order to enter into Canaan. So it is with us. The reason to put away the works of the flesh, is to appropriate the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:19-23). This principle is frequently stated in "the Apostle's doctrine."

- **PUT OFF THE OLD MAN AND PUT ON THE NEW MAN.** "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph 4:24).
- **DENYING UNGODLINESS AND LIVING GODLY.** "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:11-12).
- **MORTIFYING THE DEEDS OF THE BODY THAT WE MAY LIVE.** "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many

as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom 8:14).

- **PURGING OUT THE OLD THAT WE MIGHT BE NEW.** “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor 5:7).
- **REFRAINING FROM MURMURING AND DISPUTING THAT WE MAY BE BLAMELESS AND HARMLESS.** “Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil 2:14-15).
- **CASTING OFF THE WORKS OF DARKNESS IN ORDER TO PUT ON THE ARMOR OF LIGHT.** “The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Rom 13:12).
- **COMING AWAY FROM UNCLEANNES IN ORDER TO BE HOLY.** “I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (Rom 6:19).

This is the principle that is being taught in our text. We have “put off” fleshly manners in order that we may adopt spiritual ones. We cease from walking in the darkness that we may walk in the light. We stop serving sin in order that we might serve God. We have become dead to sin in order that we might live toward God (Rom 6:11).

If there is no corresponding life toward God, there is no Divine recognition for ceasing an outwardly ungodly manner of life. Let it be clear in your mind, sin separates men from God. As it is written, “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa 59:2). This statement does not cease to be true after one comes into Christ. Where men continue to live in sin, they forfeit the good things of God. Also, if they do not take hold of the benefits that are in Christ Jesus, any imagined departure from iniquity has no real value. If we do not walk in the Spirit, whatever we imagine ourselves to NOT be doing, is wholly without any significance.

TWO REALMS

There are two spiritual realms, and we must have a proper association to them both. These are represented as “spirit” and “flesh” (Rom 8:4), “light” and “darkness” (1 Thess 5:5), and “righteousness” and “unrighteousness” (2 Cor 6:14). They are the domain of “Christ” and the domain of “Belial” (2 Cor 6:15), of the “Living God” and “idols” (2 Cor 6:16), and of “life” and “death” (Rom 8:2,6). One is “spiritual” and the other “natural” (1 Cor 2:14). One must be left, and the other entered. One must be mortified and the other nurtured. One must be denied and the other embraced. We cannot be neutral toward neither realm.

“ 3:12a Put on therefore. . . ” Other versions read, “Therefore,” NKJV “And so,” NASB “As,” NRSV “Put on then,” RSV and “Now therefore.” GENEVA

This is a statement of purpose. Having “put off the old man with his deeds” (3:9), this is the only proper thing to do. It is the only spiritually logical action that is to follow. Any other kind of life is wholly unreasonable – a sort of spiritual insanity.

Having been delivered “from this present evil world according to the will of God and our Father” (Gal 1:4), what possible reason can be adduced for once again majoring on the things that pertain “to this world?” If we are not to be conformed to this world (Rom 12:2), then God has called us to embrace things pertaining to another one – “the world to come.” Even now, those who live by faith are tasting of “the powers of the world to come” (Heb 6:5). The realm that has been contaminated by, and cursed because of, sin cannot be the focus of our lives. God has called us out of the world, to take out of it “a people for His name” (Acts 15:14). Jesus told His disciples He had chosen them “out of the world” (John 15:19). How, then, can anyone justify remaining a part of the world, thinking like it, and nurturing the desires that tie us to it?

Jesus said His kingdom, like Himself, “is not of this world” (John 8:23; 18:36). It is an absurdity of the greatest magnitude, therefore, to represent Him as majoring on this world. Whatever we may think of life in the flesh, and its varied and complex relationships, it is not where the burden or our attention is to be placed. This does not mean we are to live foolishly, abandoning good sense and forgetting that we are stewards of all that we possess. It DOES mean that we are to conduct our lives in anticipation of leaving this world – using it, but “not abusing it” (1 Cor 7:31).

We are to “put off” everything pertaining to “the old man” in anticipation of the passing away of this world. We are to put on things pertaining to “the new man” in anticipation of the new heavens and the new earth “wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet 3:13). We “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts” because they will disqualify us from the “eternal inheritance.” We live “soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world,” because we are looking for “the blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:12-13).

PUT ON

“ . . . Put on . . . ” Here is an action to be taken on our part. There is spiritual clothing that is to be put on by the saints – certain things that are to characterize our lives. These are not things that automatically display themselves when we are born again. They come from God, and proceed forth from a new heart and spirit. However, their manifestation requires the sanctified effort of those who are saved.

Several times believers are exhorted to put something on.

- “Put on the armor of light” (Rom 13:12).
- “Put on the new man” (Eph 4:24).
- “Put on the whole armor of God” (Eph 6:11).
- “Put on . . . bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering . . . ” (Col 3:12).
- “Put on charity” (Col 3:14).

There is an aspect of salvation that requires our effort. This type of arrangement was portrayed in several of Christ’s miracles.

- When turning water into wine, Jesus commanded the servants, “Fill the waterpots with water,” and “Draw not, now, and bear to the governor of the feast” (John 2:7-8).
- Prior to miraculous catch of fish, Jesus told Simon, “Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught” (Luke 5:4).
- Before feeding the five thousand men, besides women and children, with five loaves and two fishes, Jesus said of the small lunch, “Bring them hither to me” (Matt 14:18).
- When providing tax money for Himself and Peter, Jesus first told Peter, “go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee” (Mat 17:27).
- After anointing a blind man’s eyes with clay, Jesus told him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (John 9:7).
- A man with a withered hand was told, “stretch forth thy hand” (Matt 12:13).

- An impotent man was commanded, “Arise, take up thy bed, and go to thine house” (Matt 9:6).
- Another impotent man laying at the pool of Bethesda was told, “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk” (John 5:8).
- When lying dead in a sepulcher, Lazarus was commanded, “Come forth!” (John 11:43).

There is a sense in which Divine power and graces must be employed before becoming effective. This is the principle that is involved in this text. Further, it is the peculiar prerogative of faith to move those possessing it into such action. Those who are inclined to remain in a state of inactivity until they are impacted by unexpected Divine intervention are not conducting themselves in a wise manner. While they are not to launch out in their own strength, they are to engage themselves in doing the things that are admonished in this passage.

This is simply the manner of spiritual life. Every other kind of spiritual life, regardless of how it is represented by men, is vain and pointless. It makes no difference how men may justify a worldly religion and an earthly emphasis, neither is right, and both are soundly condemned by God. The only acceptable response of a person who has been delivered from sin is to consistently seek to appropriate what God has provided in Christ Jesus.

After over fifty years in the body of Christ, I can easily count the number of personal religious acquaintances I have had who were actually doing what our text admonishes. The reason for their failure to “put off” the old man and “put on” the new man was largely owing to the religious emphasis they had embraced. Because of what they had been taught, they concluded it was not necessary to be vigilant, resisting the devil. Nor, indeed, did they feel as though they should press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God which is in Christ Jesus. Let me be clear, that any religion that allows a person to come to such conclusions is potentially damning. In faith, it must be energetically shunned.

THEREFORE

“ . . . therefore . . . ”The word “therefore” is a particular word in the Greek text: **ou=n** (oon). The word means “accordingly,” STRONG’S or “something that follows from another necessarily.” THAYER That is, having “put off the old man with his deeds,” the only proper thing to do is fulfill the words that follow. This is the only kind of conduct that will be accepted by God.

“ 3:12b . . .as the elect of God...” Other versions read, “as those who have been chosen of God,” NASB “as God’s chosen people,” NIV “As God’s chosen ones,” NRSV “Since God chose you,” NLT and “as choice ones of God.” YLT

There is a certain mind-set that must accompany profitable spiritual activity. It cannot be accomplished by rote, or empty religious routine. What God requires of us cannot be achieved by habit, or thoughtless ritual. People are not “trained” to be godly through various external disciplines. That was the manner under the Law, necessitated because the people did not have new hearts and spirits. They were fundamentally unlike God in their thoughts and ways. The Lord said to the covenanted people of Israel, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:8-9). However, this is NOT the manner of the New Covenant. It is, in every sense of the word, “a better covenant, which was established upon better promises” (Heb 8:6). It is NOT the same kind of covenant as that which was established with Israel – a covenant comprised of rules, routines, and ceremonies: “ Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances” (Heb 9:10). That is why, when speaking of the New Covenant, the Lord promised, “a new covenant . . . not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt” (Jer 31:32).

The New Covenant is of a new and better order, or kind. The manner in which God speaks to those who participate in this covenant differs significantly from the way in which He spoke to those under the Old Covenant. He does not tell those in Christ that their thoughts and ways are not His. He does not address them as “rebellious against the Lord” (Deut 9:7), “a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Isa 65:2-3; Rom 10:21), and “a stiffnecked people” (Ex 32:9). These are a people who have been “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17), “delivered from the power of darkness,” and “translated into the kingdom” of God’s “dear Son” (Col 1:13). They are addressed as those who have new capacities, access to God, and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God.

The Spirit, therefore, speaks to those in Christ in strict accord with who they are in Christ Jesus. While they do possess an “old man,” that is not their fundamental part. The “new man” is the object of Divine attention. That is the part that has been called into the fellowship of God’s Son (1 Cor 1:9). It is the ONLY part that God accepts in the Beloved (Eph 1:6). That is the part of us that has been given an “ear” to “hear what the spirit saith to the churches” (Rev 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13, 22).

The words that follow will sound strange to those who are not acquainted with this manner of the kingdom. The effects of spiritual Babylon have nearly excluded this type of speaking within the professed “Christian” community. However, these are the words of the Holy Spirit – words “taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” NASB (1 Cor 2:13).

AS

The word “as” is translated from a single Greek word: **ὡς** (ose). Linguistically , or according to language structure, this is a verbal particle of comparison: “as, like as, in the same manner as.” THAYER Doctrinally , this word speaks of comporting ourselves in keeping with the “new man,” as distinguished from the “old man.” Because we actually do possess two natures, we can shape our lives in accord with either one – but not both. What we are now exhorted to do can only be done by the “new man.” Therefore, the Spirit will now emphasize some of the glorious aspects of that which is “born of God.”

There are some religious environments in which these words are never favorably spoken. Some are so spiritually obtuse that they suppose them to be “Calvinistic,” or the expression of some form of determinism. But these are the words of God, and they are precise, powerful, and conducive to life.

When the word “election” is used in church circles, it often causes a division among the people. However, God employs this term, and it is on the part of wisdom for us to receive what the Spirit says.

- God’s purpose is said to be “according to election .” To deliver us from the notion that this in any way refers to human choice, the Spirit speaks expressly. “For the children [Jacob and Esau] being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth” (Rom 9:11).
- The “remnant” of people among the Israelites are referred to as “the election” (Rom 11:5,7,28).
- In providing an explanation for his great delight in the spiritual status of the Thessalonians, Paul said: “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of [by NKJV] God ” (1 Thess 1:4).
- Peter admonishes us to “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Pet 1:10).

We are not, then, speaking of a traditional teaching, spawned in the hearts of men. However, because so very little is being said on this subject in church circles it is imperative that we establish the propriety and profitability of such language.

As Used in Our Text

The word used in our text is an adjective pronoun, from the Greek word **εὐκλεκτοί** . The emphasis is placed upon God – “elect OF GOD .” “The elect” are those whom God Himself has chosen.

This noun/pronoun form of the word – “the elect” – is used twenty times in the New Testament Scriptures. It is translated in different ways, each in the same sense as our text.

- “So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen .” – Matt 20:16
- “For many are called, but few are chosen .” – Matt 22:14
- “And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.” – Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20
- “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect .” – Matt 24:24; Mark 13:22
- “And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” – Matt 24:31; Mark 13:27
- “And shall not God avenge His own elect , which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them?” – Luke 18:7
- “And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.” – Luke 23:35
- “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect ? It is God that justifieth.” – Rom 8:33
- “Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.” – Rom 16:13
- “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.” – Col 3:12
- “I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.” – 1 Tim 5:21
- “Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” – 2 Tim 2:10
- “Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect , and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness.” – Tit 1:1
- “ Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.” – 1 Pet 1:2

- “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious.” – 1 Pet 2:4
- “Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.” – 1 Pet 2:6
- “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” – 1 Pet 2:9
- “The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth.” – 2 John 1:1
- “The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.” – 2 John 1:13
- “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful.” – Rev 17:14

Here is a noun term used twenty-three times in the Apostolic writings. By way of comparison, the noun “baptism” is mentioned twenty-two times. “Family” is mentioned one time, “husbands” thirteen times, “wives” fourteen times, “household” thirteen times, “marriage” seventeen times, and “money” twenty-three times. One would think that the mere frequency of its use in Scripture would compel preachers and teachers to speak about it.

There are several observations concerning the used of “elect” and “chosen” in Scripture.

- They are always attached to something of eternal significance.
- They are always associated with God Himself.
- They never relate to the choice of men.
- Jesus Himself is described as “elect” and “chosen.”
- The holy angels are called “elect.”
- Nineteen times, the children of God are referred to as “elect” or “chosen.” By way of comparison, they are referred to as “Christians” or “Christian” three times (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet 4:16).

Make no mistake about this, the people of God have been elected, or chosen, by God. Men may wrap all manner of strange doctrines around that fact, but their teachings cannot destroy the fact itself. Ultimately, salvation is traced back to God's choice.

CHOOSING

Very rarely does the Spirit mention the choosing of humanity. Jesus said of Mary, "Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken from her" (Lk 10:12). The Apostles and elders sent "chosen men" with Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:22,25). Titus was "chosen of the churches" to travel with Paul (2 Cor 8:19). Paul said he found it difficult whether to "choose" to remain in the flesh to minister, or depart to be with the Lord (Phil 1:22-23). All other Apostolic references to "choice" refer to something God has done.

- Jesus was God's chosen (Matt 12:18; 23:35)
- The saints are said to be chosen by God (Mk 13:20)
- Jesus chose the twelve (John 6:70; 13:18).
- Jesus told the disciples they did NOT choose Him, but HE chose them (John 15:16).
- Jesus chose His disciples out of the world (John 15:19).
- The Apostles were chosen (Acts 1:2).
- When filling Judas' vacated bishopric, the disciples asked God to show them whom, HE had chosen (Acts 1:24).
- Saul of Tarsus was described to Ananias as a "chosen vessel" unto God (Acts 9:15).
- Following His resurrection, Jesus appeared to "witnesses chosen before of God" (Acts 10:11).
- God "made choice" who would initially bring the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 15:7).
- God chose Saul of Tarsus, that he would "know His will, and see the Just One" (Acts 22:14).
- Those in Christ are described as "chosen" in Christ (Eph 1:4).
- Believers are portrayed as "beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thess 2:13).

- Those laboring for Christ are said to be chosen by God to be soldiers (2 Tim 2:4).
- God has “chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith” (James 2:5).
- The body of Christ is said to be a “chosen generation” (1 Pet 2:9).

One wonders why so much is said about men choosing, when the Holy Spirit speaks so clearly and frequently about what God chooses! Whether men satisfactorily see the significance of “the elect of God” or not, they are obliged to acknowledge it is an inspired expression, and enter into the work of believing it (John 6:29).

THE PLACE OF PONDERING

Our text reminds us that we are to fulfill the following exhortation “as the elect of God.” If we have no conception of “the elect of God,” the words will have no significance to us.

As we set out to do the “good and acceptable, and perfect will of God,” we are to remember that He has chosen us. That choice was made in Christ – but it was God’s choice. We are His elected ones, preferred above all others because of our identity with His Son. We could not have come to Jesus if God did not draw us (John 6:44,65). We could not have believed if He did not open our hearts (Acts 16:14). If He had not “given” us to believe, we could not have done so (Phil 1:29). Our faith was “obtained” from Him (2 Pet 1:1). We could not have seen who Jesus really was unless the Father had revealed it to us (Matt 16:17). If the kindness and love of God had not appeared unto us, we would forever have remained as we were – “foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Titus 3:3-4).

After the heavens and earth have passed away, and the assembled universe stands before the Lord of glory, those who have triumphed over the devil will publically account for their salvation. There will not be a syllable uttered that speaks of man’s will, ways, choices, or accomplishments. This is the word that will be shouted when everything is seen with clarity. “And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, ‘Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever’ ” (Rev 5:13). And again, “Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb ” (Rev 7:10). And again, “Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God ” (Rev 19:1).

Lofty spiritual personalities will respond with insight. They have witnessed the working of God among His people, and they know what has really happened. They will ascribe the totality of the cause to God and the Lamb. “Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen” (Rev 7:12).

Now, in this world, the people of God begin to lisp the “new song,” ascribing the glory for their salvation to the Lord. One way they sing the song is by clothing themselves with the blessed provisions found in the heavenly places. This is to be done within the awareness that God has chosen us in Christ. We are His chosen ones, and as such have been given access to the very things to be “put on.” That is the point of this text!

“ 3:12c . . . holy and beloved. . . ”

The Spirit continues to identify the mind-set that must accompany the putting on of spiritual manners. There must be an awareness of who we are in Christ Jesus, else the admonition will prove too challenging. In the previous expression, the choice of God was emphasized. Now the personal aspects of that choice are accented. Divine determination is not without heart, as some have suggested. The election of God has an impact upon the human spirit, resulting in a change of character, and a filial identity with the God who made the choice.

HOLY

“ . . . holy . . . ” Every version reads the same: “holy.”

The word “holy” is a broad word. On the one hand it means sacred and consecrated. On the other hand it means pure and blameless. This is the same word that is elsewhere translated “saints,” or holy ones.

It is most remarkable that the people of God are referred to as “holy.” Think of the associations made with that term: “HOLY Spirit” (Eph 1:13), the “HOLY One” who gave us the Spirit (1 John 2:20), Jesus “is HOLY” (Heb 7:26), “HOLY Scriptures” (Rom 1:2), “the Law is HOLY” (Rom 7:12), the church is growing into a “HOLY temple in the Lord” (Eph 2:21), “HOLY Apostles” (Eph 3:5), and called with a “HOLY calling” (2 Tim 1:9).

In Christ, we are placed in an environment that is holy – separated unto God and pure. The necessity of this environment was established in the tabernacle service of old. The tabernacle itself was

comprised of two compartments: “ the HOLY Place” and “the Most HOLY place” (Ex 26:33-34). That was the environment in which the Lord was served. It was also the environment in which the Lord was accessed. This environment was dedicated to the Lord. No extracurricular activities took place in these surroundings.

Those who served in these holy places had to be holy themselves: “. . . whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy ” (Ex 29:37); “. . . he shall be holy unto thee: for I the LORD, which sanctify you, am holy” (Lev 21:8). “. . . and it shall be that the man whom the LORD doth choose, he shall be holy : ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi” (Num 16:7).

The person serving the Lord had to be “holy” – separated to the Lord. It is written of the Levitical order, “Thus shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel: and the Levites shall be mine” (Num 8:14). Again it is written, “Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD ” (Isa 52:11).

The Objective in Salvation

Salvation includes the objective of producing a peopled who, at the appearing of the Lord, will be holy – separated and pure. There is no such thing as a saved person who is unholy. Such a condition contradicts both the concept and the reality of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.

- “According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be HOLY ...” (Eph 1:4).
- “That He might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be HOLY and without blemish” (Eph 5:27).
- “In the body of His flesh through death, to present you HOLY and unblameable and unreprouable in His sight” (Col 1:22).

There can, therefore, be no question about the necessity of being holy. That is the affirmed intention of God’s “great salvation” – a purpose that is realized in Christ Jesus.

Separated

The separation depicted in “holy” is declared several places. This is a separation accomplished by God through Jesus Christ. While we are admonished to “be separate,” refusing to mingle with the cursed order (2 Cor 6:17), our own activity in this separation is not the emphasis of this particular text.

- **TAKEN OUT.** “Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name ” (Acts 15:14).
- **PURIFIED UNTO HIMSELF .** “Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people , zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14).
- **CHOSEN TO BE PECULIARLY HIS.** “But ye are a chosen generation , a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people ; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

This separation was provisionally accomplished through the death of the Lord Jesus. As it is written, “Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate” (Heb 13:12). And again, “Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified , an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” (Heb 10:29).

Experientially, this separation took place when we were translated into Christ’s Kingdom. As it is written, “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification , and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). And again, “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified , but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).

Inherent in the word “holy” is the idea that we are not our own . We have been purchased with a price, and belong to God. Thus, it is written, “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price ” (1 Cor 6:19-20). In keeping with the thrust of our text, we are therefore to conduct ourselves in keeping with this Divine purchase: “therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.”

Pure

The word “holy” also includes the idea of purity – the absence of moral and spiritual defilement. This perspective is found in the words, “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation ; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet 1:15-16).

The exhortation that follows is to be fulfilled in a keen awareness that God has separated us to Himself, and that we have been called “unto holiness” (1 Thess 4:17). If we will consider these things, the exhortation will make perfect sense to us, and we will enter heartily into its fulfillment.

BELOVED

“ . . . and beloved . . . ” Other versions read, “dearly beloved,” NIV “dearly loved,” BBE and “the holy people whom He loves,” NJB/NLT

The word “beloved” indicates one that is especially loved , or very dear and close to the heart of the One who loves them. Grammatically, the word literally means “to place first in ones affection,” BARCLAY-NEWMAN and “regard highly.” THAYER As used in this text, “beloved” focuses on the intent for which we were elected by God, and separated for Himself. It was in order that we might be the objects of His love – a love that would lavish good things upon the chosen ones, and find delight in their fellowship and closeness to Himself.

This is the language of Divine purpose, and it is glorious! This type of love was introduced in the Lord’s choice of Israel above all peoples. As it is written, “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself , above all people that are upon the face of the earth” (Deut 7:6). The choice of the people was in order to something, and was not an end of itself. The favored status of Israel was in order that God might “instruct” them (Deut 4:36), “bring them into” the land of promise (Deut 6:23), and “preserve them alive” (Deut 6:24). It was in order that He might “make His mighty power” known through them (Psa 106:8), and be “glorified” in them (Isa 61:3). There was a Divine purpose that dictated their choice by God.

The same sort of reasoning is found in Christ’s choice of the twelve disciples, whom He called “Apostles” (Luke 6:13). There was a purpose for that choice, as declared in Mark 3:14: “And He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils ” (Mark 3:14-15). There was a Divine purpose that dictated their choice by Christ.

So it is with “the elect of God.” They have been chosen for Divine involvements, including participating in the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:14), being made partakers of Christ (Heb 3:14), and having fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9). These are the people in whom God will work, “both to will and to do of His own good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). They are the chosen exhibits of “the exceeding riches of His grace” (Eph 2:7), and are the appointed means of tutoring heavenly principalities and powers in the “manifold wisdom of God” (Eph 3:10).

Much of the contemporary teaching concerning God’s love greatly neutralizes this truth. The “God-loves-everyone-the-same” nonsense, together with the “conditional love” myth, obscure the Divine FOCUS of love. If God does, in fact, “set His love” upon someone (Deut 7:7; Psa 91:14), then it cannot be unconditional. If there is a special people who are appropriately described as ones “the Lord loveth” (Psa 146:8; Prov 3:12; Heb 12:6), then Divine love is specifically directed. That, of course, is the point of our text. There is a people who are “the elect of God” – uniquely chosen by Him. There are people who are uniquely “holy” – set apart for the Lord, and the Lord alone. There are a people who are, in a unique way, objects of Divine love – “beloved.” If this is not the case, then our text has no effective meaning. There could not be, in such a case, powerful personal reasoning that would compel one to fulfil the admonition.

Our lives are to be conducted as people who are the special objects of Divine love – “dear children” (Eph 5:1). Those in Christ are precious in God’s sight, and a source of delight to Him. As we ponder this status, the Spirit will assist us in fulfilling the following.

“ 3:12d . . . bowels of mercies . . .” Other versions read, “tender mercies,” NKJV “a heart of compassion,” NASB “clothe yourselves with compassion,” NIV “compassion,” RSV “let your behavior be marked by pity,” BBE “bowels of compassion,” DARBY “heartfelt compassion,” NAB and “tenderhearted mercy.” NLT

The tendency for translators to interpret a phrase rather than translate a word is evident in the varied translations of this expression. Often this kind of approach takes the edge off of the text, much like dulling the edge of a sharp knife. In my judgment, this is seen in the way various versions handle this text.

The word “bowels” is used in the Greek text: **spla,gcna** (spla-gkne). The word means “bowels, intestines (the heart, lungs, liver).” THAYER Here the word is used to parallel man’s spiritual condition with his physical one. Just as there are vital inward parts to our bodies, so there are deep inward parts in our spiritual constitution. That is, there is a part of the “spiritual man” that is not on the surface, but deep within. It is a part that is not merely reactionary or impulsive, but driven by purpose and insight. The various uses of this word will illustrate its profound meaning.

- “Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own BOWELS ” (2 Cor 6:12).
- “For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the BOWELS of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:8).
- “If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any BOWELS and mercies” (Phil 2:1).
- “For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the BOWELS of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother” (Phile 1:7)

- “Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own BOWELS ” (Phile 1:12).
- “Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my BOWELS in the Lord” (Phile 1:20).
- “But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his BOWELS of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:17).

The root Greek word **spla,gcnon** , employed in the above texts, is translated differently in other texts: “tender mercy” (Luke 1:78), and “inward affection” (2 Cor 7:15).

“Bowels of mercies” are a deep and intense capacity to show mercy – to be profoundly touched with the need of another, and be able to meet it – like the good Samaritan of whom Jesus spoke in Luke 10:33-34. Seeing a poor man stripped of his clothing, wounded, and lying half dead he was so moved that he “had compassion on him.” The word “compassion” is translated from the same Greek word used in our text. This was not a mere feeling. Rather, it proceeded from deep within the Samaritan, moving him to bind up the wounds of the victim, pouring oil and wine upon them. He placed the man on his own beast, brought him to an inn, and “took care of him.” The next day, before leaving, the Samaritan gave a sufficient amount of money to the host of the inn, saying, “Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.” That was an exhibit of “bowels of mercies.”

This capacity is resident in the new nature, or “new man.” That is why we are told to “put on” “bowels of mercies.” It is part of the “Divine nature,” of which we are made partakers. This is not a moral quality to be developed in the wisdom of men. It is not something that is taught by men, or appropriated by routine. It is not a disciplined habit, like brushing your teeth or combing your hair. Rather, it is the peculiar prerogative of faith to enable us to put this quality into action – to translate it into life.

One of the great deficiencies of institutionalized religion is that it does not go deep enough. It does not touch the “bowels,” or inward parts, of the “new man.” It is shallow, too frothy, and too much on the surface of life. It is too easy to do, and too easy to forget. It allows for too much variance, division, and all manner of fleshly manners. It does not curb selfishness.

“Bowels of mercies” is the kind of quality that enables us to view people with compassion because of their condition. It is said of Jesus, “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Matt 9:36). On another occasion Jesus “went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and He healed their sick” (Matt 14:14). It is written of yet another occasion, “Then Jesus called His disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude , because they continue with Me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting , lest they faint in the way” (Matt 15:32). This was the time when our Lord fed “four thousand men beside women and children” (15:38).

This virtue involves pity, consideration, and a mind to supply the need of the helpless and suffering. It is a Divine trait, for God's "compassions fail not" (Lam 3:22). Let a considerable measure of this Divine quality be found in you: "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old" (Isa 63:9). This is a trait for which God looks. He is represented as saying, "Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none" (Psa 69:20).

This characteristic is also resident in the "new man," and thus we are told to put it on. It will not be found on the surface of life, but must come from deep within the inner man. Those who are shallow will not be able to do this.

" 3:12e . . . kindness . . ." Other versions read, "kind feeling," BBE "benignity," DOUAY and "generosity." NJB

The word "kindness" encompasses the idea of moral goodness, integrity, benignity (graciousness), and gentleness. It involves doing what is right toward others, and doing so in a gentle and considerate manner.

The premier example of "kindness" is found in God Himself, whose nature we are given in salvation. It is said of His eternal purpose, "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:7). Again it is written, "But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7).

Kindness, then, is more than a mere attitude or feeling. It is something that is expressed in beneficial ways. The Scriptures especially speak of kindness toward the brethren: "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith . . . brotherly kindness" (2 Pet 1:5-7). And again, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph 4:32).

Again, this quality is found in the “new man,” which is “being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” NIV (Col 3:10). It is an expression of love, which “is kind” (1 Cor 13:4), and is one of the qualities by which the ministers of God are “approved” (2 Cor 6:6). This is a quality that makes brotherly involvements pleasant and profitable. When exhibited toward those of the world, it also makes life more tolerable.

The English word “kindness” is derived from the root word “kin,” denoting the considerate attitude that is expected among kinfolk. When used in reference to the saints of God, “kindness” speaks of a demeanor that springs from recognizing saints as part of the glorious family to which we belong. Because we are “members one of another,” kindness moves us to have “the same care one for another” (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:25).

Being “kind” involves a spiritual affection, or preference, for the saints – a spiritual posture that is resident in the “new man.” Therefore we read of being “kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love” (Rom 12:10). Also, one of the characteristics of true love is that it “is kind” (1 Cor 13:4).

When used toward the world, it depicts an attitude that comes from an awareness that we ourselves were once in that worldly state. It is something like the attitude God expected from the Israelites. “Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother: thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian; because thou wast a stranger in his land” (Deut 23:7). And again, “Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deut 10:19). And again, “Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Ex 22:21).

KINDNESS VS MERCIES

There is a difference between “kindness” and “bowels of mercies” – although they both spring from the same spiritual well. “Bowels of mercies” emphasize the inward constraint . “Kindness” underscores the outward expression . In Christ there is a glorious harmony in these two virtues. They are like twins in the womb of grace.

“ 3:12f . . . humbleness of mind . . . ” Other versions read, “humility,” NKJV “lowliness,” RSV “a low opinion of yourselves,” BBE and “humble-mindedness.” YLT

The expression “humbleness of mind” is translated from a single Greek word: **tapeinofrosu,nhn** (ta-pai-nof-ros-un-an). Grammatically this word means “a quality of voluntary submission and unselfishness – humility, or self effacement.” ROBERTSON Lexically is means “having a humble opinion of oneself, a deep sense of one’s moral littleness; modesty, humility, lowliness of mind.” THAYER Doctrinally , Philippians 2:3 states the case well: “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”

“Humbleness of mind,” involves more than simply having a lowly view of oneself. The idea is that this quality enables us to think MORE of others than of ourselves. This is not a description of a person who drags through life thinking he is nothing, but having no compensating regard for others.

This attitude is contrasted with the self-abasement mentioned in the second chapter: “Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility...” (Col 2:18). “Voluntary humility” has nothing to do with spiritual insight, and does not seek to advantage others. It is rather a fleshly means of seeking to obtain Divine approval, or of gaining the confidence of others for purposes of exploitation.

By way of contrast, “humbleness of mind” proceeds from an awareness of our natural worthlessness before God, and the absolute need of a Savior and Intercessor. It is the prelude to being used by God for the purpose of edifying the saints and properly representing the Gospel to those who are alienated from God.

“Humbleness of mind” erupts in a certain manner of conduct that is described several places in Scripture.

- “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another ” (Gal 5:13).
- “ Bear ye one another's burdens , and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2).
- “Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification ” (Rom 15:2).
- “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake ” (2 Cor 4:5).
- “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves ” (Phil 2:3).

- “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another” (Rom 12:10).

This is a spiritual quality that results from knowing we are not worthy of the least of God’s mercies (Gen 32:10). It springs from an awareness that we are what we are by the grace of God (1 Cor 15:10). When this virtue is “put on,” it is accompanied with a lively awareness that “if God be for us , who can be against us” (Rom 8:31). The all-sufficiency Christ is sensed, accenting the poverty of nature (Col 2:10).

This grace does not move a person to have, what the world calls, “low self esteem.” That is a purely psychological term that has no place in the body of Christ. The ones who have put on “humbleness of mind” have proper self esteem. Such know that without Christ they can do nothing (John 15:5), and with Him, they can do all things required of them (Phil 4:13). They are thus separated from those of whom it is said, “For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (2 Cor 10:12).

“ 3:12g . . . meekness . . .” Other versions read, “gentleness,” NASB “gentle ways,” BBE and “modesty.” DOUAY

The word “meekness” means “gentleness or mildness.” STRONG’S More technically it means “strength that accommodates itself to another’s weakness.” ROBERTSON Some have likened meekness to the strength of a horse being made submissive to the will of its master.

The supreme example of meekness is our blessed Lord. When urging those who were weary and heavy laden to come to Him, He said, “for I am meek and lowly in heart” (Mat 11:29). That is, His strength will be an advantage for us, and not the occasion of our destruction. “By grace through faith” makes Divine power an asset to the believer. Things that are otherwise impossible become possible. Thus Paul, “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ” pled with believers to think properly (2 Cor 10:1).

However, this Divine quality is to be “put on” by those who are in Christ Jesus – this quality of being strong, yet able to tenderly deal with the young and immature. We should not think it impossible to acquire such a grace, for “meekness” is part of “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:23).

An example of the profitable use of meekness is found in the sixth chapter of Galatians. There the stronger are admonished concerning restoring a brother who had been “overtaken in a fault.” Those who were “spiritual,” or more stable in the faith, were to “restore such an one in the spirit of meekness” (Gal 6:1). That is, they were to be gentle, so as not to destroy the person, for sin makes a person spiritually fragile. Speaking of this employment of meekness, Paul admonished Timothy concerning the recovery of those who “opposed themselves.” “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (2 Tim 2:24-26).

“Meekness” enables us to be “longsuffering, forbearing one another in love” (Eph 4:2). It does not condone sin, or treat lightly defections from the faith. However, “meekness” does handle with gentle care those who are making an effort to recover themselves from the devil. Like the Lord Jesus Himself, “meekness” will not “break” a bruised reed, or “quench” a smoking flax (Matt 12:20). It enables the individual to place a priority on the will of the Lord.

“Meekness” also has to do with the manner in which we receive the Word of God. It is written, “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21). The meek person humbly bows to the Word of God, receiving both commendation and chastening in a submissive spirit. Such an one is submissive to the word of the king, hungering and thirsting for it.

Meekness can easily mingle with other virtues, bringing a certain completeness to the child of God. There is “lowliness and meekness” (Eph 4:2), the “meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13), a “meek and a quiet spirit” (1 Pet 3:4), and “meekness and fear” (1 Pet 3:15). Put it on, child of God, put it on! Attain to the trait of being easily directed by God, and being gentle with the weak.

“ 3:12h . . . longsuffering . . .” Other versions read, “patience,” NASB and “the power of undergoing all things.” BBE

The word “longsuffering” involves “forbearance and fortitude, patience, endurance, constancy, steadfastness, perseverance, and slowness in avenging wrongs.” STRONG’S Grammatically, it refers to “A state of emotional quietness in the face of unfavorable circumstances, as patience under trial – endurance, steadfastness – as well as constraint exercised toward others.” ROBERTSON Lexically, longsuffering is “patience, endurance,

constancy, steadfastness, perseverance, especially in bearing troubles and ills.” THAYER

Doctrinally, “longsuffering” is being able to bear up under the pangs of suffering – to stand under assault, forge through stormy waves, and carry heavy burdens without falling. The duration (“long”) is as real as the hardship (“suffering”).

Suffering involves feeling something that is either painful or in some way offensive, or causes distress. Suffering is to the spirit what pain is to the body. Longsuffering is being able to endure such pain, offense, or distress, over an extended period: LONG suffering.

THE ULTIMATE DEMONSTRATION

As with all true virtues, the ultimate example of longsuffering is the Lord Himself. As used in Genesis through Malachi, “longsuffering” emphasizes God being “slow to anger.” STRONG’S It is used fifteen times in Moses and the Prophets. The Lord declared Himself to be “longsuffering” (Ex 34:6). Moses confessed that he perceived this to be a Divine trait (Num 14:18). The spiritual leaders of Nehemiah’s day also confessed this to be a quality found in the Lord (Neh 9:17). David also acknowledged this to be true (Psa 86:15; 103:8; ; 145:8). Jeremiah, Joel, Jonah, and Nahum confessed God was “longsuffering,” or “slow to anger” (Jer 15:15; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nah 1:3). Solomon spoke of this trait as found in godly men (Prov 14:29; 15:18; 16:32).

Romans 9:22 affirms that God has “much longsuffering.” Paul said Christ Jesus displayed “all longsuffering” in him, as a “pattern to them who would believe” (1 Tim 1:16). Peter said the “longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah while the ark was a preparing” (1 Pet 3:20). He also said the Lord was “longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all be brought to repentance” (1 Pet 3:9). The “longsuffering of our Lord” is even said to be “salvation” (2 Pet 3:15).

In all of these texts, God endured a certain abrasiveness – people and circumstances that were contrary to His nature. His wrath was not easily stirred up against wayward Israel, even though they eventually provoked His anger. Holy men consistently acknowledged that if God’s wrath easily broke forth, we all would have been consumed long ago. They did not speculate about God’s “longsuffering,” but concluded that the very fact they were not consumed confirmed this Divine trait was active.

God’s “longsuffering” does not constitute an approval of the condition He is forbearing. It by no means suggests that the circumstances that move Him to be “longsuffering” are inconsequential. Rather, the very fact that He is “longsuffering” confirms the seriousness of the person or condition He appears to be tolerating.

Putting on “longsuffering” does not suggest that we will become indifferent toward the wicked, or those who persecute us. The emphasis in “longsuffering” is not what we think of the source of trouble. Rather, it accents our response to that trouble. The person who is “longsuffering” has more of a regard for the outcome of the experience than of the experience itself. Such an one lives in the persuasion that all accounts will be finally settled by the Lord of glory. The anticipation of that settlement enables the person with faith to endure unjust treatment and very difficult circumstances.

PUT IT ON!

We are being admonished to “put on” part of the Divine nature! That means in Christ this attribute is accessible to us, and well within the reach of faith . While there is a sense in which it is resident in the new creation, the experience of it must be preceded by a conscious effort to appropriate it. This is done by faith. Putting on “longsuffering” is similar to Naaman being asked to wash in the Jordan River in the expectation of being healed of his leprosy (2 Kgs 5:10).

This is not an exhortation to try our best to endure hardship more gracefully. It is not an admonition to set a goal for ourselves to be more forbearing of those who tend to irritate us. All of that may be fine in its place, but that is not what this text is all about. This is, in fact, a call to BE longsuffering – for this quality to be found in, and expressed by, us.

A person cannot “put on longsuffering” without actually being longsuffering. In fact, the putting on is verified by one’s conduct. This is not a garment that is too large for us. Like Jesus’ “yoke,” it is custom fitted to us, and is consequently easy to be borne. Believers have every reason to believe they can, in fact, “put on longsuffering,” effectively and to God’s glory.

“ 13a Forbearing one another . . . ” Other versions read, “bearing with one another,” NKJV “being gentle to one another,” BBE and “make allowance for each other’s faults.” NLT

The word “forbear” is powerful, exhibiting a spiritual quality unknown to the world. The word itself means, “to hold oneself up against, put up with, bear with, endure, forbear, or suffer: to hold one’s self erect and firm, to sustain.” STRONG’S/THAYER Grammatically, it means to “exercise self restraint and tolerance, while accepting as valid; holding yourselves back from one another.” ROBERTSON Lexically it includes the idea of “being patient with, and giving patient attention to.” UBS LEXICON It is the opposite of lashing out at the slightest provocation, or aggressively seeking for faults.

The Spirit now provides us with an example of the expression of “bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and longsuffering.” This is an instance in which these marvelous qualities are exhibited. The virtues that have been mentioned thus far are not mere mental attitudes. As is the case with all true spiritual qualities these things work themselves out in human expression.

A REASON FOR FORBEARANCE

In a similar admonition, the Ephesians were told, “forbearing one another IN LOVE” (Eph 4:2). In that passage, forbearance is associated with “walking worthy of the calling with which you were called,” and “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3).

Our Calling

First, we have been called with a holy (2 Tim 1:9) and heavenly (Heb 3:1) calling. The calling has come from God, and is in order to the fulfillment of His purpose. Primarily, this call does not have to do with the satisfaction of our own personal desires, or the resolution of our spiritual, moral, and circumstantial difficulties. Within the context of contemporary religion, this is a revolutionary idea. Nevertheless, it is the truth, and we must adapt our thinking and our attitudes to this perspective.

Our lives are to be conducted in strict harmony with our calling. We are to walk, or live, “worthy of the vocation wherewith” we have been called. One of the ways this worthiness is expressed is in “forbearing one another in love.” We cannot be less forbearing with the people of God than He Himself is. Our attitude and conduct must be in harmony with the Lord’s purpose and view of His people. When their manners are not altogether acceptable, we cannot respond as though the kingdom of God revolved around us. It does not. If Jesus is ever living to intercede for His people, we must not allow personal interests and feelings to rise up between ourselves and others for whom He is interceding.

The Unity of the Spirit

There is also the matter of “the unity of the Spirit.” When we come into Christ, we become a part of this unity. Our responsibility is not to make the unity, but to keep it in “the bond of peace.” This “bond” is the “joints and bands” of Colossians 2:19. It is the means by which we are connected with one another, and the appointed means of receiving spiritual nourishment from one another (Eph 4:15-16).

A lack of forbearance will rupture the vital connection of believers to one another. It will interfere with the good work of ministering to one another. Such a lack promotes despising the brethren rather than loving them, and will become the occasion for the rise of offenses and roots of bitterness. There is enough weakness in all of us to require forbearance.

Putting on “forbearance” involves the ability to hold up when wrongs are committed against you, and to do so without a “root of bitterness” springing up within, and defiling many (Heb 12:15).

Forbearing involves bearing “the infirmities of the weak,” and not pleasing ourselves. As it is written, “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves” NASB (Rom 15:1). By so doing, “the unity of the Spirit” will be maintained. Furthermore, within the framework of that “unity” the deficiencies of the brethren will be addressed, and a means provided from heaven for them to be eliminated.

The weaknesses of brethren – and all of us have some – are not resolved on a one-to-one basis. That may be conducive to the development of a career, but it is not the manner of the Kingdom. The Lord has placed us in Christ’s “body” (1 Cor 12:18). When that body is brought to maturity, there is an intra-ministry within it that WILL address all genuine needs. As it is written, “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:15-16). Forbearing one another allows that marvelous process to continue.

REAPING WHAT WE SOW

Being forbearing with one another also involves the law of sowing and reaping. Those who are not forbearing will reap the results of others not being forbearing with them. Those who are forbearing will reap the results of others being forbearing with them. This is an aspect of sowing to the Spirit: “For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal 6:8). James spoke of this principle in these words, “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment” (James 2:13). We certainly have every reason to extend ourselves to be longsuffering!

CHRIST’S EXAMPLE

As is true with all genuine virtues, our ultimate example is the Lord Jesus Himself. Although His disciples often taxed His patience, yet He was forbearing with them.

- On one occasion, Jesus warned His disciples, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” The disciples completely misunderstood what He meant, supposing that He was rebuking them for not bringing bread. After some questioning, Jesus said to them, “O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (Mat 16:8-12). That was Divine forbearance!
- On another occasion, Jesus was with His disciples in a ship, during a great storm. The disciples

wakened Him from a sound sleep, asking, “Master carest thou not that we perish.” Jesus promptly arose, commanded the sea saying, “Peace, be still,” and then said to them, “And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?” (Mark 4:40). That was Divine forbearance!

- Following His transfiguration, Jesus returned with Peter James, and John to the arena of trouble. He found frustrated father who had asked the other nine disciples to cast a demon out of his son. He told Jesus, “I brought him to Thy disciples, and they could not cure him.” Jesus responded to His disciples, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me” (Mat 17:17). After healing the boy, the disciples asked Jesus why they could not do it – after all, they had healed people before. Jesus answered, “And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Mat 17:20-21). That was Divine forbearance!

There are also the examples of God’s forbearance with Israel, and Jesus’ forbearance with five of the seven churches in Asia (Rev 2-3). You yourself should be able to see how the Lord has been forbearing with all of us.

No child of God will ever be put to a disadvantage by being forbearing. As we will see in the following verses, forbearance is not an end of itself. Rather, it is a virtue that God uses to allow for His own effectual working. While we are forbearing, God Himself is working, the Holy Spirit is working, and Jesus is interceding. Forbearance brings a spiritual environment in which the Lord effectively works, both to will and to do of His own good pleasure. This opens the door to edification and maturity.

“ 13b . . . and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any . . . ”

The Spirit continues to elaborate on the evidence of putting on “bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering” (Col 3:12). This is also what will result from “forbearing one another,” not expecting more from one another than we want the Lord to expect from us.

FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER

“ . . . and forgiving one another. . . ” Other versions read, “forgive,” NIV “forgive each other,”

NRSV and “having forgiveness for one another.” BBE

The word “forgiving” is pregnant with meaning. It carries the idea of doing something that is pleasant or agreeable – both to the one that is forgiving, and to the one that is being forgiven. It is something that is gracious and kind – something that is done freely and without having to be coerced to do so. In this case it means to pardon. If it is a debt, it is cancelled. If it is a trespass, it is no longer remembered or held against the individual.

Forgiveness presumes repentance and remorse in the one that is being forgiven. When questioned about how often men are obliged to forgive, Jesus said, “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him” (Luke 17:3-4). This should not confound us, for God forgives in precisely that way. Forgiveness is of such a nature that it cannot be extended unless there is contrition of heart in the one that is being forgiven.

Notwithstanding, the heart of the Lord’s people, like the heart of God Himself, must be “ready to forgive” (Psa 86:5). If there is no forgiveness, it must not be because the offended party refuses to do so. At some point, “bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering” will display themselves in a readiness to forgive – however grievous the sin. This readiness is revealed in the words of Jesus concerning those who crucified Him: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). It is also exhibited in the response of Stephen, while he was being stoned to death by His own people: “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (Acts 7:60).

The opposite of forgiveness is “anger, wrath,” and “malice,” which are to be “put off.” These expressions are not to find a place in our hearts or minds. No person is justified in letting the sun go down on their wrath (Eph 4:26).

A QUARREL AGAINST ANY

“ . . . if any man have a quarrel against any . . . ” Other versions read, “whatever grievances you may have against one another,” NIV “if anyone has a complaint against another,” NRSV “if anyone has done wrong to his brother” BBE

It would be good if there were never any offenses within the church – but that situation will not exist as long as we are in this world. The Scriptures record some instances of this kind of forgiveness.

- When Job’s “friends” spoke against him, false charging that he must have committed some grievous sin. The Word tells us, “And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before” (Job 42:10).

- On one occasion, Aaron and Miriam, Moses' brother and sister, spoke against him saying, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses?" The Lord heard their words, and Moses, being exceedingly meek, did not respond to them in a defense of himself. Instead, the Lord spoke to them, and His anger was kindled against them. Miriam became "leprous." Immediately, Aaron spoke with contrition of heart. "And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned. Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb" (Num 12:11-12). Confirming he was "ready to forgive," Moses prayed, "Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee" (Num 12:13).
- Joseph's brothers sinned against him, throwing him into a pit, selling him to a band of Ishmaelites, and lying to his father about his disappearance. Over thirteen years later, when confronting Joseph after he had been made the second ruler over all Egypt, Joseph exhibited the forgiveness of our text. "Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them " (Gen 50:19-21).

Those in Christ Jesus should rise to even greater heights than Job, Moses, and Joseph. This is because they have received more in Christ Jesus, and thus are capable of more.

This is not something that is optional. Jesus said, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt 6:14-15). He taught us to pray, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt 6:12). He also said, "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:25).

There is telling example of the nature of forgiveness in the books of First and Second Corinthians. We have a grievous wrong committed, a judgment that was taken, accompanied by a readiness to forgive, and a call to aggressively receive the forgiven one. The offender was a fornicator, who was living with his father's wife (1 Cor 5:1). At first, the Corinthians were indifferent about the matter. Paul commanded them to put the person out of their fellowship, delivering such an one "to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor 5:4-5). That judgment did take place (2 Cor 2:6). The man did repent, and thus the church was admonished to "forgive him" and "comfort him," lest he be "swallowed up with overmuch sorrow." They were then asked to "confirm" their love toward him (2 Cor 2:7-8).

THE MANNER OF THE KINGDOM

This is the manner of the kingdom. No other kind of conduct is acceptable or appropriate. There is no other virtue, ability, or attainment that can compensate for not forgiving.

There are several things that accompany the forgiveness taught in this passage. They are all expressions of the "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17), and Divine power is available for their expression.

- When a genuine wrong has been committed against us, we are not to harbor hatred, or be moved to despise the individual.
- We are to be ready to forgive – willing to show graciousness.
- There is to be a declaration that forgiveness when it is requested.
- The kind treatment of the offender must follow forgiveness, just as though the offense had not taken place.

Spiritual life has certain characteristics. Where these are not found, there is a lack of faith. Where they are found, there is fellowship with Jesus.

“ 13c . . . even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” Other versions read, “just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you” NASB (Col 3:13), “Forgive as the Lord forgave you,” NIV “even as the Lord had forgiveness for you,” BBE and “ The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same,” NJB

Christ’s forgiveness is both the example and the motive for our forgiveness of others. Notice, the appeal is not to law, but to grace. We are not told that we are obligated to forgive those against whom we have a “quarrel” – although, if we want to the Lord to forgive us, we must forgive others. However, because we “not under the Law, but under grace” (Rom 6:14), we have a higher motive to forgive one another . It is that we ourselves have been forgiven by Christ Jesus. This can refer to our initial forgiveness (Col 3:13), or to times when we ourselves sinned against weaker brethren: “But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ ” (1 Cor 8:12).

CHRIST FORGAVE

Several versions read “the Lord,” rather than “Christ” (NASB/NIV/NRSV). These variant readings are based upon the different words used in various Greek texts. One set of texts uses **ο` Cristo.j** (the Christ), and the others use **ο` ku,rioj** (the Lord). There is no doctrinal conflict in these expressions. It is proper to say Christ forgave us, because it is He that “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb 9:26). If we prefer to view this as God forgiving us, it is declared that He did so “for Christ’s sake” (Eph 4:32).

In the book of Colossians, Jesus Christ is consistently referred to as “the Lord” (1:2,3; 2:6; 3:16,24). Here, forgiveness is viewed as having been accomplished in Christ Jesus, who is the Head of the body – the appointed means through which it is nourished and sustained (2:19).

In our salvation, the association between the Father and the Son is so close, that frequently what One is said to have done, is also attributed to the other One. Thus God “forgave us all trespasses” (Col 1:20), yet Christ did so as well (Col 3:13). God, in Christ, reconciled us unto Himself (2 Cor 5:19), yet Christ is said to have reconciled us “in the body of His flesh” (Col 1:21). We have been “sanctified by God” (Jude 1:1), yet Jesus is described as “He who sanctified” (Heb 2:11). We are “taught by God” (John 6:45), yet are said to have been “taught by” Christ as well (Eph 4:21). This text, therefore, should present no problems to us. It’s view of God and Christ are in perfect harmony with the rest of Scripture

THE KNOWLEDGE OF FORGIVENESS

This admonition assumes we know Christ has forgiven us. Where this is not known, the motive to forgive will not be sufficient to cause it to be fulfilled in us.

Because of grossly deficient teaching, there are many within the church who entertain doubts about their own forgiveness. The entrance of such doubts unnecessarily followed their new birth, for the knowledge of salvation accompanies the initial forgiveness of sin. This aspect of salvation was affirmed by Zacharias, father of John the Baptist. He prophesied the role of John the Baptist in this knowledge: “To give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins , through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:77-79).

The Apostles frequently confirmed the fact that those in Christ have been forgiven of all their trespasses. This was necessary because of the competing influences that tend to erode this knowledge. No man of God assumed that those in Christ Jesus were living in a lively awareness of the remission of their sins. Therefore, this truth was declared again and again, providing a Divine emphasis, as well as a human incentive. These words are delivered to those who are in Christ Jesus.

- “ Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24).
- “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Rom 3:25).
- “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1).
- “Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (Rom 5:9).

- “And such were some of you: but ye are washed , but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).
- “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you ” (Eph 4:32).
- “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses ” (Col 2:13).
- “That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7).
- “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake” (1 John 2:12).

Our present reconciliation is proclaimed (Col 1:21), together our acceptance (Eph 1:6), access into grace (Rom 5:2), and present status as the sons of God (1 John 3:1-2). As our forgiveness, justification, and acceptance by God is grasped by faith, forgiving one another makes perfect sense to us. We will therefore find it gratifying and enjoyable to heartily enter into the fulfillment of this text. It will not be a heavy burden.

“ 14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”

As is the manner of the Spirit, we will not be asked to do the bare minimum. Nor, indeed, will we be left with things conceived to require no sustained effort. The greatness of God’s salvation (Heb 2:3) requires extensive and consistent effort from those participating in it.

ABOVE ALL THESE THINGS

“And above all these things . . . ” Other versions read, “beyond all these things,” NASB “over all these virtues,” NIV “more than all,” BBE “to all of these,” DARBY “Over all these clothes,” NJB and “the most important piece of clothing.” NLT

The word translated “above all” relates to being clothed, thereby continuing the thought of

putting on. The idea is that of a final garment that is put on over all of the other apparel – like a coat or outer garment. The words of “beyond all these things,” as used in the New American Standard Bible project the sense of the text, but is not a strict translation. That concept might lead someone to believe that charity could be put on without first putting on “bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.” Or, that charity could be put on without forbearing one another and forgiving one another. In this case “above all,” or “going beyond” would be considered the ultimate thing to be required, whether the other mentioned virtues were present or not. Therefore, one would reason, even if you cannot fulfill all of the other requirements, putting on charity will compensate for any other deficiency . Such a thought is wholly erroneous.

This verse assumes all of the other virtues have been put on, and that the individuals are being forbearing of one another, and forgiving. This final admonition is the means of maintaining all of the other graces.

PUT ON CHARITY

“ . . . put on charity . . . ” Other versions read, “put on love,” NKJV “clothe yourselves with love,” NRSV “have love,” BBE “add love,” DARBY and “you must wear love.” NLT

This is the “charity,” or love, of the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. There is no question about what it does. “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails” NKJV (1 Cor 13:4-8). These are not the requirements of love, but the evidence of it. These are not goals to be attained, but expressions of a love that has been “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5).

The “charity,” or love, of reference has to do with the interrelationships of the body of Christ – our love for one another. The fact that we “put on” charity confirms that its source is outside of ourselves. It is not something that is resident in “the natural man” (1 Cor 2:14). This text is not speaking about the awakening of some virtue that naturally resides in us. Rather, it has to do with availing ourselves of a resource that accessible to us in Christ Jesus.

Technically, love – particularly “brotherly love” – is taught to us by God. This teaching is personal. It is not teaching through the Word, as ordinarily perceived. The Scriptures speak of the effective acquisition of this love in these words: “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another ” (1 Thess 4:9).

This is involved in the larger promise, “And they shall all be taught by God” (John 6:45). Isaiah prophesied, “He will teach us of His ways” (Isa 2:3), and “All your children shall be taught by the Lord” (Isa 54:13). Jeremiah put it this way, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their

hearts; and will be their God” (Jer 31:33). Micah also said, “He will teach us of His ways” (Mic 4:2).

Why, then, are we told to “put on charity,” if it is something that God Himself teaches us? This is an activity into which we must enter by faith. Putting on charity is primarily expressing it thoughtfully and intentionally. It is part of working out our own salvation with fear and trembling. In that “working out,” we will discover a reality expounded to the Philippians. “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13).

To “put on charity” involves ridding ourselves of everything that inhibits and competes with it. It involves allowing the Word of Christ to dwell in us richly (Col 3:16), not quenching or grieving the Spirit. This is all done with resolve and spiritual aggression.

THE BOND OF PERFECTNESS

“ . . . which is the bond of perfectness.” Other versions read, “which is the perfect bond of unity,” NASB “which binds them all together in perfect unity,” NIV “which binds everything together in perfect harmony,” NRSV “the only way in which you may be completely joined together,” BBE and “Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony.” NLT

There are two ways in which this text can be taken. First , that love binds all of the previously mentioned virtues together. Second , love binds the brethren themselves together. The latter is the meaning of this text. “Charity” is the appointed means of binding the saints together in order that they might be brought to their appointed maturity. The following is given in confirmation of this.

The word “bond” means “that which binds together – of ligaments by which members of the body are bound together.” STRONG’S This is not the idea of cement or glue, but of ligaments, which speak of something living. It refers to an aspect of life. The word “perfectness” means “completeness, wholeness, or maturity, full growth.” STRONG’S/THAYER

Presented in Ephesians

The picture presented in this text is also given in the book of Ephesians. “. . . Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth , according to the effectual working in the measure of every part , maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love ” (Eph 4:15-16).

“Charity,” or spiritual love, brings the people of God closer together – like a healthy ligament pulls the ball more perfectly into the joint. It makes the connection more secure, healthy, and stable.

Because of this, “charity” also causes the various members of the body of Christ to exude life – to express it by edifying the members with whom they are connected. This is the “edifying of itself in love,” mentioned in Ephesians 4:16. This edification is produced by the flow of spiritual life from one member to another – and “charity” is what enables that flow.

Where “charity” is not “put on,” edification is not possible. Unity also becomes impossible, for those who do not love each other cannot be united. Further, where there is no unity, God will not work. That is one of the primary reasons for “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” That unity produces an environment in which Divine workings are realized. That is why it is appropriately called “the bond of perfectness.”

Giving due attention to this admonition would resolve all church squabbles and dissensions. It would dissipate division, and bring an accord that would scatter forces of darkness. It would produce an environment in which Divine workings would be evident – a domain in which edification, exhortation, and comfort would be administered and spiritual; maturity would result.

It should be apparent that salvation involves significant participation on our part. What God supplies – and He has provided everything pertaining to life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3) – must be appropriated and expressed. No spiritual virtue functions independently of our involvement. If God teaches, we must listen., If God provides, we must put it on. If God sends, we must go. If God empowers, we must work.

The whole idea of a religion that leaves the adherent inactive is nothing more than a delusion from the wicked one. Although all manner of theology has been developed to justify inactive and transgressing people within the body of Christ, no such justification is possible. If a professing Christian says they cannot really do anything for the Lord, the Spirit affirms, “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18). There is no such thing as a useless member of Christ’s body!

In order to encourage our participation in the good work of the Lord, the Spirit has provided most excellent incentives.

- First, we have been chosen, or elected by God : “as the elect of God.” There is no such thing as a Divine

choice without a purpose or attending power.

- Second, we have been separated from the world by God – made a people who are peculiarly His: “holy.” Because of this situation, special resources have been provided for us.
- Third, God has a special regard for us , having set His love upon us. We are near and dear to Him: “beloved.” His eye is upon us, and His ear is open to our cry.

As long as you keep these things in mind, pondering them and seeking to know them more fully, what the Lord requires of you will be seen as doable. If, however, the fact that you are “the elect of God, holy and beloved,” ever gets away from you, the exhortations to which we have been submitted will appear to be more than you are able to do.

LET IT HAPPEN!

Lesson # 17

The New Covenant is one of intimacy and involvement – where the people know the Lord, and the Lord knows them. Of this covenant, the Lord says, “they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them” (Jer 31:34). Jesus said of the constituents of this new covenant, “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of Mine” (John 10:14). And again, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27). All of them are “taught by God” (John 6:45).

There are numerous terms that are unique to the New Covenant – expressions that denote a closeness to the Lord, and holy involvements with both the Father and the Son. Some of them “justification” (Rom 4:25), “reconciliation” (Heb 2:17), and “fellowship” (1 Cor 1:9). Ponder the glory of phrases like “laborers together with God” (1 Cor 3:9), “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17), and “joint heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). Those in Christ are referred to as “the temple of God” (1 Cor 3:16,17), “an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph 2:22), and “the body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:27). They are “dead to sin” and “alive unto God” (Rom 6:11), having been “delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son” (Col 1:13).

This is the language of participation, involvement, and engagement! It is no wonder that we are said to be “partakers of Christ” (Heb 3:14), “partakers of the Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4), and “partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb 3:1). The New Covenant is a covenant of participation. Those who are within it are described as having been “enlightened,” and having “tasted of the heavenly gift,” “made partakers of the Holy Spirit,” “tasted the good Word of God,” and “tasted of the powers of the world to come” (Heb 6:4-5).

NOT LIKE THE OLD COVENANT

This language confirms the nature of the New Covenant. Unlike the Old Covenant, it is not one of aloofness, where the people could not draw near. At Mount Sinai, when the Lord summoned Moses to the top of the mount, He said: “And Moses alone shall come near the LORD: but they shall not come nigh; neither shall the people go up with him ” (Ex 24:2). Of the people themselves it is written, “And the people stood afar off” (Ex 20:21). The nature of that covenant is epitomized in the solemn words concerning the people’s proximity to the place where God was being made known. “And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it : whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: there shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount” (Ex 19:12-13). That was the nature of the Old Covenant – a covenant of distance in which the people could not come to God.

When the children of Israel marched into the promised land, the ark of the covenant, carried by the Levites, went before the people. Yet, as the people followed, they were required to do so afar off – as minimum distance of one thousand yards – the length of ten football fields. “Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure : come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore” (Josh 3:4). That was the nature of the Old Covenant – a covenant of distance.

The New Covenant is not like the Old Covenant. The Lord said of it, “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt ; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD” (Jer 31:31-32; Heb 8:8-9). The New Covenant is of another order. It is not a covenant that centers in laws and commandments. A covenant that revolves around commandments assumes the alienation of those to whom, it is addressed. There are commandments associated with the New Covenant, but they also are of a different order.

The New Covenant is one of nearness, closeness, and intimacy. Ponder the many affirmations that accentuate this glorious reality.

- “By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom 5:2).
- “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13).
- “And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:17-18).
- “In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him” (Eph 3:12).
- “For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God” (Heb 7:19).
- “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:22).

- “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you” (James 4:8).

Such sacred privileges were not vouchsafed to those under the Old Covenant. Their nature prohibited them from coming close to the Lord, and the laws through which they were governed maintained that distance.

But is it not so for those who are in Christ Jesus. Having been cleansed from all unrighteousness and reconciled to God, we can now come with boldness into His presence.

ACCESS IS ESSENTIAL

Access to God is essential if we are to appropriate the benefits provided in Christ Jesus. None of them can be obtained at a distance from the Lord. It is written that God’s Divine power has given us “all things that pertain to life and godliness.” However they can only be appropriated “through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Pet 1:3). That is, they can only be obtained within the framework of Divine intimacy, and involvement with the One who has given them.

To put it another way, “all spiritual blessings” have been deposited, as it were, “in heavenly places.” That, of course, is precisely what the Spirit says: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ ” (Eph 1:3). They are not thrown to, or showered upon, us from these lofty realms. Rather, God has “raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6). It is from that position that we obtain the blessings – a posture of closeness and participation.

THE REASON FOR SAYING THIS

It is necessary to say these things because of the nature of the text before us. These admonitions are not delivered from Mount Sinai, but from Mount Zion. They assume a closeness to the Lord, and cannot possibly be fulfilled while remaining in spiritually distant places. It is said of those who choose to dwell at a distance from the Lord, “They also who dwell in the farthest parts are afraid of Your signs” NKJV (Psa 65:8). That is, the further a person is from the Lord, the more intimidating the marvelous provisions and works of God become. There is not the faintest notion of the blessings of God being accessible when one is found in such distant places. This explains much of the lack of interest concerning the things of God that is prevalent in the modern church. It is simply too far away from God to see any relevance in His Word, or accessibility in His promises.

However, our text assumes you are near to the Lord, for there is no other way the things it mentions can take place. If you are not close to the Lord, then set out now to get close. That is what salvation is all about. It is why Christ died, and it is the reason for His faithful intercession. The aim is to bring you to God, washed, sanctified, justified, and fully acceptable.

“ 3:15a And let the peace of God rule in your hearts . . . ”

This is a continuation of the exhortation to “put on the new man” (3:10). It is a requirement of spiritual life, which cannot be maintained without fulfilling this word. Men tend to minimize what God requires in Christ Jesus, so the Spirit presses the matter upon us. What has been provided for you in Christ Jesus **MUST** be obtained if we are to survive and advance in the faith!

LET

“And let . . .” Nearly all versions and paraphrases read the same. Only the New Jerusalem Bible reads, “And may.” Here the idea is that by putting off “the old man” and putting on “the new man,” an allowance will be made for the peace of God to rule in our hearts. The thought is not merely that we “let” in the sense of allowing it to happen, or consenting to this gracious provision. Rather, the desired result will be accomplished when we thrust from us inhibiting influences, and appropriate the resources provided for us in Christ Jesus.

The word “Let” describes a certain requirement in spiritual life. The things that are received from God must be allowed to work within us. God will not coerce us into living godly. This would bring no glory to Him, nor would it bring genuine profit to us.

Anything that obstructs that work must be removed, “put off,” or “cast away.” Think of its many expressions in the epistles.

- “Let God be true” (Rom 3:4).
- “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body” (Rom 6:12).
- “Let love be without dissimulation” (Rom 12:9).
- “Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness” (Rom 13:12a).
- “Let us put on the armor of light” (Rom 13:12b).
- “Let us walk honestly, as in the day” (Rom 13:13).
- “Let us not therefore judge one another any more” (Rom 14:13).
- “Let us therefore follow after the things that make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Rom 14:19).
- “Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification” (Rom 15:2).
- “Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth” (1 Cor 10:24).

- “Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into rest, any of you should seem to come short of it” (Heb 4:1).
- “Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest” (Heb 4:11).
- “Let us hold fast our profession” (Heb 4:14).
- “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of all grace” (Heb 4:16).
- “Let us go on to perfection” (Heb 6:1).
- “Let us draw near with a true heart, in the full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22).
- “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering” (Heb 10:23).

All of these exhortations, and many more, represent the manner of the Kingdom. This is how “newness of life” reacts in this world. The challenge to “let” them happen is a summons to rid ourselves of any and all competing and hindering influences in order that we may obtain what Jesus provides for us. In summary, if we will, in fact, “put off the old man” and “put on the new man,” we will “let” these things take place.

THE PEACE OF GOD

“ . . . the peace of God . . . ” Later versions of Scripture read “peace of Christ.” NASB/NIV/NRSV There is no conflict in the expressions, for God’s peace is given to us by Christ Jesus. It is God’s peace, originated by Him, and possessed in Himself. The Lord Jesus is the distributor of it, and He Himself possessed it while on earth as a Man. He is the official custodian of this peace, and therefore it is said to belong to Him. Of it Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

This is not a peace after the manner of this world. It is not induced by psychological principles or medication. It is not the result of ignoring realities, or pretending that they do not exist. It is not simply the cessation of trouble, such as a peaceful environment.

The “peace of God” is transcendent to all human understanding. It cannot be explained by human wisdom, or comprehended with the natural mind. Therefore we read, “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding ,” or “surpasses all comprehension” NASB (Phil 4:7). That is, it cannot be discovered by intellectual research or the professed logical reasonings of men.

“The peace of God” is an inward quietness or tranquility. It is a rational tranquility, where even thoughts cannot trouble the soul, for it is based upon the reasoning of faith. Although, being justified by faith, we “have peace with God” (Rom 5:1), that is not the emphasis of this peace. This is the experiential repose and calmness that results from that peace. This involves a sense of acceptance, safety, and adequacy, and the world cannot touch it.

This peace comes “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Eph 6:23; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; Phile 1:3; John 1:3). Every person who is justified receives this peace. However, the reception of it is not enough. There must be a faithful response to this gift of peace. We must permit it to do its marvelous work by putting off the old man, and putting on the new man.

Too often, professed believers leave the impression that the grace of God works automatically, independently of participation in the work. This is a wholly erroneous view that disarms the soul and gives the advantage to the devil.

RULE IN YOUR HEARTS

“. . . rule in your hearts . . .” Other versions read, “preside in your hearts,” DARBY “control your hearts,” NAB and “reign in your hearts.” NJB

The word “rule” means “1) to be an umpire 2) to decide, determine 3) to direct, control, rule.” THAYER “To be umpire in public games, hence preside, direct, control.” ROBERTSON This is not ruling in the sense of a dictator, but ruling in the sense of a judge in a court of law – determining what is best, and deciding the best course in multiple alternatives.

The idea is, “Let peace make the decision,” or “choose so that peace may continue to govern your heart.” It is possible to choose a course of action that causes confusion, hardship, and defeat. When we let the peace of God rule, we allow it to choose a path that does not disrupt Divine fellowship, or the unity of the Spirit. Follow the path that enables you to maintain accord with God and enjoy His favor.

The soul of man is subject to all manner of contradicting moods. Thus David addressed His soul: “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance” (Psa 42:5). Rather than being disquieted, the sweet Psalmist yearned for the quietness and confidence that comes when the peace of God rules the heart. As it is written, “For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not” (Isa 30:15).

There is no price too great to be paid in order to the realization of this ruling peace. As simple as it may appear, many a soul chooses a course of action or a way of life that makes no room for the peace of God. It is of no consequence to such people that they have no confidence toward God, or that they are constantly dismayed by their enemies and various circumstances. They have chosen to live with God in the background of their life. Our text urges us to zealously avoid such folly, and choose to walk in the light, in faith, and in the Spirit.

Letting the peace of God rule our hearts is another view of not quenching or grieving the Spirit (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19). It is another way of saying “refuse the evil and choose the good” (Isa 7:15-16), or abhorring what is evil, and cleaving to what is good (Rom 12:9).

This is “perfect peace” that cannot be troubled by circumstance. As it is written, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee” (Isa 26:3). It is a peace, or tranquility, that men cannot trouble: “When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?” (Job 34:29). Are you willing to let this peace rule in your hearts – to be a sort of arbiter of what you do? You will not regret letting it rule your heart.

SUMMATION OF PEACE

The peace that comes from God through Jesus Christ is to sit as an arbiter upon the throne of our hearts. It is to make the decision concerning the choices that we must make. Whatever disturbs our communion with the Lord must be told “NO!” Whatever promotes and maintains that marvelous communion must be told “YES!”

Spiritual life, which is another way of saying “peace with God,” must be maintained at all cost. Whatever makes us dull and insensitive to the Lord is lethal. Unless it is overcome, such influences will eventually result in us being expelled from the Divine presence.

There is a form of religion that is becoming increasingly popular in our nation that allows people to live at a distance from the Lord. Those who embrace this Satanic fabrication think little or nothing of living without a due regard for the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are too close to the world, and too sympathetic with its manners and judgments. For them, seen things are transcendent to things that are “not seen” (2 Cor 4:16-18). This is an error of the greatest magnitude, for we have been called to peace – to walk in harmony with the Lord Jesus. Where that harmony is lacking, nothing else is acceptable. There is no imagined virtue that can compensate for an aloofness from the Living God.

“ 15b . . . to the which also ye are called in one body . . . ”

The Holy Spirit now connects human duty with Divine purpose. Believers are never admonished to do something God has not intended for them to do. They are always told to conduct themselves in strict keeping with the purpose that authored their salvation.

TO THE WHICH ALSO YE ARE CALLED

“ . . . to the which also ye are called . . . ” Other versions read, “to which indeed you were called,” NASB “you were called to,” NIV “as it was the purpose of God for you,” BBE “to which also ye have been called,” DARBY “wherein also you are called,” DOUAY “the peace into which you were also called,” NAB “you were called to peace,” NIB and “you are called to live in peace.” NLT

In salvation we are not only called from something, but to something. Traditionally, the institutional church has not done well identifying what we have been called to . This is, however, a very critical aspect of our salvation. Unless it is comprehended to some measurable degree, the salvation of God will not be viewed with any genuine seriousness and commitment.

- We are “ called to be saints” (Rom 1:7).
- We are “ called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9).
- We have been “ called unto liberty” (Gal 5:13).

- We are “ called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9).
- We have been “ called ” “unto His kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 2:12).
- We are “ called ” “unto holiness” (1 Thess 4:7).
- God has “ called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus” (1 Pet 5:10).
- God has “ called us to glory and virtue” (2 Pet 1:3).
- We have been “ called ” to “lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim, 6:12).
- We are “ called in one hope of our calling” (Eph 4:4).

A calling that does not result in its intended objective is pointless – like being called, but not chosen (Matt 22:14). Those who are called, therefore, are expected to be “saints,” in fellowship with Christ, walking in “liberty,” and ultimately present at “the marriage supper of the Lamb.” They have been called to be in God’s kingdom and glory, to be holy, and to participate in His eternal glory. They are expected to lay hold on eternal life, and to live in the expectation of the hope to which they have been called. No other results are acceptable.

In this text, “peace” is the objective to which we have been called – a peace that rules in our hearts. We are expected to live with a mind to maintaining our fellowship with Christ. Our decisions are to be made in the interest of God’s glory, and with a mind to allow nothing to come between us and God. This is not a matter of heartless law, but of Divine intention. Peace is the environment in which God performs His work within us. It is the framework in which we grow up and mature in Jesus (Eph 4:15). If this is not happening, the profession of being of Christ is vain, and will not be honored by God.

This is not intended to wrap the truth in a mantel of fear. It is meant to show how serious the Lord is about His great salvation. It was procured at a great price, and is to be so regarded by all who profess to enjoy it.

We have been called to peace – to peace with God primarily, and with one another secondarily. Peace with God involves uninterrupted consistent and communion. We have not been called to come into the Lord’s presence seasonally, as the high priest of old, who appeared before the Lord “once a year” (Ex 30:10; Lev 16:34; Heb 9:7). Now that a reconciliation has been effected by the Lord Jesus, aloofness from the Living God no longer acceptable. We have been “called” into peace – peace that has resulted from the veil of separation being “torn in two from top to bottom” (Matt 27:54). To remain apart from the presence of the Lord will now exclude one from Divine favor.

IN ONE BODY

“ . . . in one body . . . ” Other versions read, “as members of one body,” NIV “for you to be one body,” BBE and “called together in one body.” NJB

Here the Spirit addresses the matter of the environment in which the peace to which we have been called is realized. While salvation is personal, it is not merely personal. Much is made of this in Scripture.

- “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Rom 12:5).
- “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many” (1 Cor 12:14).
- “But now are they many members, yet but one body” (1 Cor 12:20).
- “And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Eph 2:16).

Here, in the body of Christ, is where the peace to which we have been called is brought to fruition. The walk of faith is developed within the context of the fellowship of the saints. In fact, we have been “called in one body” for this unique purpose – that Christ might minister to us through that very body. This circumstance is in sharp variance with the view of “the church” that dominates the Western world. Spiritual Babylon has promoted a view of the church that makes the institution the fundamental thing, not the advantages of the people themselves. It is the same mind-set the world employs in corporations, businesses, and other financial considerations. It is the enrichment of the organization that is primary. Its name and impressiveness ranks very high, while the personal advancement of the individuals within it are of secondary concern.

Unique Intimacy

But this is not the manner of the Kingdom of God. Christ’s people are called “His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:23). The intimacy between Him and the “members of His body” is seen in these words: “For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones” (Eph 5:30). While later versions omit the last clause of this verse (“of His flesh, and of His bones”), there is a clear allusion to the words of Adam when he was presented with Eve: “And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen 2:23). However, the seemingly learned arguments about this expression being omitted from certain manuscripts falls to the ground with a frightful thud when we consider the words that follow the text: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh” (Eph 5:31).

In the Ephesians text, the Holy Spirit is reasoning with us concerning “the body of Christ” by pointing primarily to Adam and Eve. The Lord made Eve from a part of Adam – “one of his ribs” (Gen 2:21). The Scripture is very precise on this matter: “And the LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man” NASB (Gen 2:22). Knowing this, Adam confessed, “This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh.” It is as though he said, “Eve is part of me – we are ‘one flesh.’” Using this as a basis of reasoning, the Spirit says we are “of His flesh and of His bone.” That is, we are part of Him.

The Glory of Being Called

The experience of salvation is described in a variety of ways – each of them exposing us to a facet of salvation’s glory. Here is a sampling of them.

- OBEDIENCE. Obeyed the Gospel (Rom 10:16).
- ADDITION. Added to the church (Acts 2:47).

- DELIVERANCE. Delivered from the power of darkness (Col 1:13a).
- TRANSFERRED. Translated into the Kingdom of God's dear Son (Col 1:13b).
- BAPTISM. Baptized into Christ (Gal 3:27). “
- RAISED UP. Raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6).
- REPENTANCE. Granted repentance unto life (Acts 11:18).
- TURNING. Turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God (Acts 26:18). Turning to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven (1 Thess 1:9).
- BORN AGAIN. Being born again (John 3:3-5; 1 Pet 1:23; James 1:18).
- HEART OPENED. The opening of the heart in order to an acceptable response (Acts 16:14).
- DIVINE PLACEMENT. God put us into Christ (1 Cor 1:30), and set us in the body (1 Cor 12:18).
- DIVINE FELLOWSHIP. We were called into the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor 1:30).

The richness of these various views is often the subject of Apostolic exposition. The saints should hear of them frequently in order “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (Eph 1:6).

Our text declares yet another marvelous view of our salvation. We were “called in one body” for the experience of peace. We were not called for a strictly personal identity with God, but for an effective unity with Christ's body. We were called to participate in this marvelous arrangement.

“Body” is a term denoting life, functionality, and interdependence – many parts, yet a single entity. There is a reason for this arrangement. Christ does not pour His total person into any single individual – although no believer is capable of imagining how much of Christ they are capable of experiencing. The fulness of God dwelt in the person of Christ. However, the fulness of Christ does not dwell in a single person.

We are categorically told that Christ's body is “the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:23). That is, He shares His nature and His truth with individuals THROUGH His body. This is revealed in several texts of Scripture.

- Jesus the Head ministers through the “joints and bands” of His body: “. . . the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (Col 2:19).
- From Christ, the whole body is joined together by what every joint supplies. “. . . even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part

, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:15b-16).

- Spiritual gifts are designed to profit all of the body. “And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” (1 Cor 12:6-7).
- All things, including various ministers, belong to the members. “Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas , or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's” (1 Cor 3:21-23).

With these things in mind, how marvelous is the statement of our text: “the peace of Christ . . . to which indeed you were called in one body . . .” NASB (Col 3:15). Who is able to measure the glory of such a marvelous call – a call “in one body.” That is, we actually became “the called” (Rom 1:6; 8:28) when we were inducted into the body of Christ. As it is written, “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body , whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13).

“The called” are not simply the ones who are “called,” for “many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt 22:14). We become “ partakers of the heavenly calling” when we are placed in Christ’s body (Heb 3:1). This was a Divine placement. We did not walk into the body of Christ, but were baptized by the Spirit into it. It was not our initiative that accomplished this, although we were surely willing in the day of His power (Psa 110:3).

We were called by God into this body – drawn by Him to Jesus, then placed in Him by grace! We became “the called” commensurate with our placement in Christ’s body. It was at that point that we became a functional part of the kingdom of God, able to minister to other members of the body.

“ 15c . . . and be ye thankful.”

Because, while we are in this world, we occupy a hostile realm, being thankful is not taken for granted. The exhortation that follows does not suggest the Colossians lacked the required attitude. Rather, an exhortation is designed to bring forth from the individual the graces that are brought to us in salvation. This word is spoken to the “new man.”

BE YE

“ . . . and be ye . . .” Other versions read, “be thankful,” NKJV “give praise to God at all times,” BBE and “always be thankful.” NLT The latter two versions, in my judgment, completely miss the point of the text, as I will show.

The word “be” comes from an interesting Greek word: **gínesqe** (gen-es-the). It means “become, come into being, become something.” BARCLAY-NEWMAN “To become, i.e. to come into existence, receive being; absolutely.” THAYER This is a technical point, yet is fully supported by Apostolic doctrine, which is the ultimate affirmation, preferred over any etymological view.

The point here is NOT something that we DO – although doing will result from what is here admonished. Here the Spirit addresses something we are to BE ! The addition of the word “ye” is intended to connote that meaning, as though the text said, “see to it that this is what you are” – “BE YE.” Ponder some of the uses of this expression – things that we are to “BE.” It will assist you in seeing the significance of it.

- “ BE YE transformed” (Rom 12:2).
- “BE ye followers of me” (1 Cor 4:16).
- “In malice BE YE children” (1 Cor 14:20).
- “BE YE steadfast, unmoveable” (1 Cor 15:58).
- “BE YE reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20).
- “BE YE separate” (2 Cor 6:17).
- “BE YE kind” (Eph 4:32).
- “BE YE doers” (James 1:22).
- “BE YE also patient” (James 5:8).”
- “BE YE holy” (1 Pet 1:15).
- “BE YE of one mind” (1 Pet 3:8).
- “BE ye therefore sober” (1 Pet 4:7).

An Aspect of Character

These speak more of character than of deeds – and character is the mother of what people do. What follows, therefore, is a to become an aspect of our person. He is not exhorting us to do this or that, but to become the kind of person that salvation is intended to make us.

Although we have been made a “new creation” in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17), we come in as “newborn babes,” not as fully developed or mature persons. Unlike the natural realm, spiritual development does not occur without thoughtful involvement. A baby in the flesh can initially grow without any willful participation. Thought is not connected with its growth, nor is any specific endeavor. But it is not so with the “sons of God.” They play a significant role in what they become. That role involves taking hold of what God has provided, but they themselves are the ones who must take hold.

THANKFUL

“ . . . thankful.”

“BEING thankful” is NOT the same as “giving thanks” – something that is also enjoined upon the people of God (Eph 5:20; Col 3:17; Heb 13:15). The “thankful” person is discerning and grateful. What has been given to such an one is perceived, and the heart responds with this character-trait: “thankful.” Synonyms for “thankful” include appreciative, grateful, gratitude, mindful of, and agreeable to – all of which apply to the attitude of the individual – the manner in which they think. Only a “thankful” person can offer acceptable “thanksgiving.”

You may recall that the Gentile world was severely judged by God because it was not “thankful” (Rom 1:20). The Lord is not, and cannot be, kindly disposed to those who are not “thankful.”

For What Are We to be Thankful?

There is a particular focus in this expression. We are to grow up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15), thereby becoming “thankful” persons. Here, however, the stimulus to being thankful is the knowledge that we have been “called in one body.” We have, by the grace of God, become participants in the body of Christ, into which Christ’s “fulness” is being poured.

While there is a glorious sense in which we are “saved” as individuals, the thrust of the Spirit’s use of this word (“saved”) pertains to the BODY, not the individual. In fact, when speaking of a person being “saved,” the emphasis is often placed on the future: “ he that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Mat 10:22; 24:13; Mk 13:13; 16:16; John 10:9; Acts 2:21; 1 Cor 3:15). There is not perfect consistency in this use. There is, however, a certain perspective that must be seen in all of this.

“Saved” is most frequently used in relation to the whole of the body, as compared with the individual members of it (Rom 5:9,10; 8:24; 1 Cor 1:18; 15:2; Eph 2:5,8; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 3:5). Of course, the whole body cannot be saved without the individual members being saved – as individuals. However, the point of this text is that we have been “called” into a family through which Christ presently ministers. It is the nature of God to set “the solitary in families” (Psa 68:6), making them a part of a household that ministers to one another as the Head ministers to them.

How Is This Thankfulness Shown?

The words that follow confirm how our thankfulness is to be expressed. In this case, it is not in giving praise to God, or thanking Him for the many benefits that He daily loads upon us (Psa 68:19). That manner of giving of thanks to God is addressed elsewhere (Rom 14:6; 2 Cor 9:11; Eph 5:4,20; Phil 4:6; Col 1:12; 2:7; 4:2; 1 Thess 5:18; 1 Tim 2:1; Heb 13:15). There is no question about the necessity of such expressions.

Our text, however, approaches being thankful from another perspective. Our gratefulness for being called and placed into the body of Christ is to evidence itself in a proper attitude toward that body. We are to be appreciative that we have been added to the church, being made members of one another. Those who do not have a high regard for the people of God betray that they are not grateful for being placed in the body of Christ. Even though Jesus gives His full attention to His body, yet there are those who imagine they are part of that body, yet have no regard for it. Such things cannot be.

We will now see that our lives are to be so shaped as to bring advantages to the other members of the body of Christ. No member is excluded because of their age, gender, or social status. We will see that this is involved in “holding fast to the Head” NASB (2:19) – something that is essential for every member of the body of Christ. There is no saved person that is not part of Christ’s body.

“ 16a Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom . . .”

This is the second exhortation that begins “Let.” Once again, this reflects the manner of the Kingdom. It is, in fact, an aspect of putting on the new man. When we extend our efforts to fulfill this admonition, the grace of God will see to it that our efforts are not in vain. The “letting” is accomplished in the heart, where willingness and preference are resident. In a sense, the Holy Spirit is directing our attention to something in order that we might focus upon it, for it is in the focus that the required transformation takes place.

There is a compelling nature to spiritual realities, to which “the peace of God” and “the word of Christ” belong. As the “new man” considers these realities, he is drawn toward them, having a preference for them. These are the substance upon which the “new man” feeds. They are in the realm – the “heavenly places” – that is the native habitat of the “new creation.”

When we “put off the old man” and “put on the new man,” we become able to “let” these things take place within us.

THE WORD OF CHRIST

“Let the word of Christ . . .” This is the only place in Scripture where this phrase is used. This is a critical expression, and must be understood.

“The word of Christ” is the word concerning Christ – the Scriptures in general, which speak of Christ (John 5:39), and the Gospel in particular, which expounds Christ (Rom 1:16). While it is true that God has spoken to us in these last days through His Son (Heb 1:1-2), that we are personally taught by Christ (Eph 4:20), and that Christ has come to give us an understanding (1 John 5:20), that is not the stress of this text. That aspect of Christ’s indispensable ministry is unfolded in the next clause – “dwell in you richly.”

Here the Word that testifies about Christ is intended – the “doctrine of Christ,” as used in Second John 1:9. This speaks of a comprehension of the nature of the Scriptures, particularly the Gospel. I will go so far as to say the Word cannot dwell in you richly when it is viewed as mere law and Divine directives. In order to be profitable, Scripture must be seen as the introduction to, and exposition of, the Person of Jesus Christ – the Messiah.

- Jesus clearly affirmed that the Scriptures testified, or primarily spoke about, Him. “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me .” (John 5:39).

- The inner eyes of the two on the road to Emmaus were opened when Jesus “expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:47). During that illuminating dialog Jesus said, “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me ” (Luke 24:44).
- Peter declared that the essential message of the Prophets related to the Person and accomplishments of the Lord Jesus Christ. “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow ” (1 Pet 1:10-11).
- Paul affirmed that Christ Jesus was the fulfillment of Moses and the Prophets. “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles ” (Acts 26:22-23).
- When John confronted an impressive angel who was bringing him a message from Jesus, he was so overcome he fell at his feet to worship him. The angel immediately forbade the action, drawing his attention to Christ Himself. “And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus : worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy ” (Rev 19:10).

This is “the word of Christ” referred to in our text. It is the word found throughout the Scripture, but particularly in the Gospel, which declares Christ with greater clarity, shining light upon all of the previous Scriptures.

The exhortation that follows can be said of no other “word” – particularly since the Savior was sent into the world! It cannot be said of the commandments of God, which are certainly not to be neglected. It cannot be said of instruction concerning domestic affairs, which is most essential. Nor indeed, can it be said of various instructions concerning the organization and responsibilities of the church, which are also indispensable.

The matter that is now urged upon us will shed light upon the subjects just mentioned. It will bring the power and the will to fulfill them to the glory of God. However, and be sure of this, until the Lord Jesus is clearly seen in Scripture, God will not allow anything else to be seen with any degree of clarity. Christ has been given “preeminence” “in all things,” even in the Word of God itself. He alone is the priority of Scripture, its focus and its life.

DWELL IN YOU RICHLY

“ . . . dwell in you richly . . . ” Some other versions read, “be with you in all wealth,” BBE “dwell in you abundantly,” DOUAY “dwell in you plenteously,” GENEVA and “in all their richness, live in your hearts.” NLT

Dwell

Lexically, the word “dwell” means “to dwell in one and influence him for good,” THAYER “dwell in, live in, indwell,” FIEBERG and “to inhabit.” LIDDELL-SCOTT In order to “the word of Christ” to bring profit, it must be internalized, or become a part of us. We must, in the words of the Revelation, “eat” the book (Rev 10:9). It must become such a part of our being that our thoughts are saturated with it. The Psalmist spoke of such an ingestion in these words: “Thy Word have I hid in mine heart” (Psa 119:11). Again, he wrote of the blessed man, “ But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in His law doth he meditate day and night ” (Psa 1:2).

This activity was commanded under the Law, but the people could not satisfactorily fulfill it: “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart” (Deut 6:6). The Law therefore commanded that the people focus outwardly upon the Law, giving their attention to it: “And these words, which I command thee

this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates” (Deut 7:6-9). Alas, the people failed miserably in this matter, for the covenant under which the lived provided neither the grace nor the power to do this.

Richly

Lexically, “richly” means “copiously, abundantly,” STRONG’S “in an abundant way,” FRIEBERG “abundantly, richly,” THAYER “in full measure,” UBS “in large amount with the implication of it being valuable,” LOUW-NIDA

When “the word of Christ” dwells in us “richly,” our minds and hearts and wills are occupied with considerations of the Lord Jesus – considerations that have been spawned by our contemplation of Scripture. Allow me to give you an example of that word dwelling richly in a person. It is found in Paul’s accounting of what motivated his sacrificial life. “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord , for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ , and may be found in Him , not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him , and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings , being conformed to His death ; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead ” NASB (Phil 3:7-11). All of that was prompted by Paul’s consideration of the Scriptures in general, and the Gospel in particular. “The word of Christ” was dwelling in him richly.

Job also reflected the attitude that can more precisely be fulfilled by those who are in Christ Jesus. “Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food ” (Job 23:12). Jeremiah did the same. “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart : for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts” (Jer15:16).

Our Religious Culture

The religious culture of our world, particularly the Western world, is stricken with poverty in this area. First, within the professed church there is an abysmal ignorance of “the word of Christ.” As a consequence, it cannot dwell “richly” in the people – for a message cannot be found in abundance in those who remain unaware of it. Second, Jesus is not the concentration or focus of modern Christendom. He has been upstaged by everything from the Holy Spirit and the church itself, to organizationalism, and an emphasis on domestic responsibilities.

The professed church has not done well in fulfilling its ministry of being “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). Its constituents are too ignorant of the Word of God, and are too little acquainted with the Lord of glory. They do not speak with one another about the glorious realities to which they have been called, and are too occupied with trivia. Novices are given prominent roles in her assemblies, and too little time is being given to the reading and exposition of the Word of God. Men have been brought to believe that the most critical part of an assembly is what they offer to God, and seem oblivious of the fact that the Word of Christ concerns what God is offering to them.

It is not possible for “the word of Christ” to dwell “richly” in those who are comfortable in such a miserable environment. However, if ever a person is going to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, he must get around to letting the word of Christ dwell in him richly. If this does not take place, everything else becomes futile. I understand that this seems very strong. However, it is not nearly strong enough.

IN ALL WISDOM

“. . . in all wisdom . . .” Other versions read, “with all wisdom,” NASB “in all wealth of wisdom,” BBE and “and make you wise.” NLT

“All wisdom” involves every kind of wisdom, or a fulness of wisdom. The point is that when we ponder and meditate upon “the word of Christ,” we will become the wiser for it. This is because as that word dwells within us, it will be unfolded to us in all of its implications. From one point of view, this is Jesus giving us an understanding (1 John 5:20). From another view, it is God teaching us (John 6:45). From yet another vantage, it is the Holy Spirit teaching us all things (1 John 2:20,27).

“Wisdom” has primarily to do with knowing how to use the word, or handle it aright (2 Tim 2:15). It is knowing how to employ the Word in the execution of the will of God. This is a wisdom that comes down from above, and it is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17). There is no valid aspect of life that it does not address – no area of responsibility in which it will leave us deficient.

Spiritual knowhow does not come by means of worldly wisdom. No saint becomes more expert in living unto God by acquiring the wisdom of men. The wisdom that is required to live acceptably, handle the Word of God aright, and be profitable in the Kingdom, is directly related to one’s consideration of “the word of Christ.” When people allow their minds to be given to other considerations or priorities, they begin to become spiritually poor and foolish. It is only as the new man is put on, and the word of Christ dwells in us richly, that we are able to proceed in living in a God-pleasing manner.

A SIMILAR PASSAGE IN EPHESIANS

A similar passage is found in the book of Ephesians. It provides an additional perspective of this exhortation. “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit ; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph 5:19). Although I will focus on the eighteenth verse, I have also shown the nineteenth verse, confirming that the passage relates to the same things considered in our Colossian text.

What Colossians refers to as letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly, is called being “filled with the Spirit” in Ephesians. Most versions read exactly this way: “be filled with the Spirit.” Some other readings are, “be full of the Spirit,” BBE “be fulfilled with the Spirit,” GENEVA and “let the Holy Spirit fill and control you” NLT

As used in this text, being “filled with the Spirit” is not a event, as in Luke 1:41 and 67, Acts 2:4, 4:31, and 9:17. It is more of a condition, or continual state of being, as in Luke 1:15, 4:1 and 8, Acts 6:3 and 5, 7:55, 11:24, and 13:9 and 52. The text does not say “get filled,” but “be filled.” The former speaks of an occurrence. The latter is a state, status, or continual condition. This is not something that comes on you, but what dwells within you – and there is a vast difference. It speaks of consistency and continuance, which are aspects of life. This is not intended to deny the reality of epochal experiences. Rather, it is to say that is not the focus of this text.

Because the Holy Spirit uses the Word, being filled with the Spirit is paralleled with the Word of Christ dwelling in us richly. The Word of God, for example, is called “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph 6:17). Paul referred to his powerful preaching of the Gospel as “speech and preaching” that was “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor 2:4). It is after the Ephesians heard the “word of the truth of the Gospel,” that they were “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13). The communication of the truth is associated with the “words” of Scripture – “not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” (1 Cor 2:13).

There is an undeniable correlation between the effectual working of the Spirit and the Word of God – or, as our text states it, “the word of Christ.” It is unlikely, if not impossible, for a person in whom the word of Christ is not dwelling richly, to be full of the Spirit of God. It is possible that the two experiences are not synonymous, but they are mutually dependent, one upon the other. When, for example, Peter was filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, he provided a powerful exposition of the Word of God (Acts 2:14-36). That word had been dwelling in Him, occupying his mind and heart. The Holy Spirit then took that indwelling word, and enabled Peter to speak it wisely and productively.

Although the circumstances of our text are not identical to those of the second chapter of Acts, the principle is the same. The Spirit will enable those in whom the word of Christ is dwelling richly to speak profitably to their brethren. This will be done “in all wisdom,” yielding benefits that glorify God. Profitability is thus linked with “the word of Christ.”

“ 16b . . . teaching and admonishing one another . . . ”

The Spirit directs our attention to a result of the word of Christ dwelling in us richly in all wisdom. It has to do with the life of the body of Christ – the associations that we have with one another particularly in the assembly. This is a spiritual definition of wisdom. You will find that it represents a manner of thinking that is exceedingly rare among professed believers. The “one another” aspect of spiritual life can hardly be found in an institutional setting. Rarely are joint activities directed to one another, as this text exhorts. In fact, the modern church seems to be promoting more of a religion for spectators.

It is the solemn responsibility of every believer to adapt to the nature of the Kingdom. One aspect of that kingdom is now placed before us.

TEACHING

“. . . teaching . . . one another . . . ” Every version uses the same word: “teaching” or “teach.” Lexically, the word “teaching” means “to hold discourse with others in order to instruct them . . . impart instruction, instill doctrine into one, explain or expound a thing,” STRONG’S “to hold discourse with others in order to instruct them, deliver didactic discourses,” THAYER “teach, instruct,” FRIBERG “act of teaching, instruction,” UBS and “to provide instruction in a formal or informal setting.” LOUW-NIDA

This is teaching that yields edification, not merely the dissemination of lifeless information. Edification is everywhere declared to be the objective of the gathering together of believers.

- “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Rom 14:19).
- “Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification ” (Rom 15:2).

- “Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church” (1 Cor 14:12).
- “How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Cor 14:26).
- “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12).
- “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:16).
- “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph 4:29).
- “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do” (1 Thess 5:11).
- “Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do” (1 Tim 1:4).

When believers come together, it is to be “for the better,” not “for the worse” (1 Cor 11:17). They do not come together to be entertained, or to “have fun,” as some are wont to put it. Rather, their gatherings are for the purpose of making some progress in the kingdom, and increasing their grasp of the Word of God, by which they live (Lk 4:4). The things of God are to become clearer to us because we have met together.

“Teaching” yields sound spiritual perspectives, and a desire to please the Lord. It promotes the anticipation of the coming of the Lord, and firms up the resolve to keep oneself “unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

Too often, “teaching” is viewed as cold doctrine, addressed only to the intellect. However, this is a complete misrepresentation of the case. “Teaching” is addressed primarily to the heart, which in turn governs the mind. I have often heard people say, “we do not teach doctrine, but just teach Jesus.” Such statements are pure nonsense, and are themselves a teaching – a false teaching. The word “doctrine” means “teaching.” That is what doctrine is. When Jesus taught, the people were astonished at His “doctrine” (Mk 1:22). His teaching was, in fact, called “His doctrine” (Mk 4:2). Several times it is said of Jesus, “He taught them” (Matt 5:2; 7:29; 13:54; Mk 1:22; 2:13; 4:2; 10:1; Lk 4:31; John 8:2).

The wisdom that results from the word of Christ dwelling in us richly is to express itself in teaching “one another.” That is, instructing one another in the manner of the Kingdom, and assisting one another to be more conversant with the things of God. Therefore faith and hope are promoted through the indispensable ministry of edification.

ADMONISHING

“... and admonishing one another . . .” Other versions read “helping one another,” BBE “and advise each other,” NJB and “counsel each other.” NLT

Lexically, the word “admonishing” means, “warn, exhort,” STRONG’S “admonish, warn, instruct, as giving instructions in regard to belief and behavior,” FRIBERG and “to put in mind,” THAYER

Admonition moves people to do something with the truth, whether correcting their manners, or pressing more aggressively toward the goal. It relates to exhortation, by which brethren are constrained to be transformed by the renewing of their mind. The Lord does not leave us to simply consider the facts. He urges us to act upon the truth, not allowing it to remain amidst the thorns and thistles of worldly distractions.

Mature believers were told, “And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another ” (Rom 15:14). That is, able to stir one another up, provoking to love and good works. The record of Israel, we are told, has been “written for our admonition,” to move us to spiritual activity (1 Cor 10:11). Those who are appointed “over” the brethren are described as those who “labor” among the brethren and “admonish” them (1 Thess 5:2).

Here is an activity that is to be found within the body of Christ – “admonishing.” Our gatherings are to be noted for their compelling nature. They are to be so given to the truth of God that those who gather together are moved to look to Jesus, press toward the mark, and work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. If these things are not the result of meeting together, the meeting has served no acceptable purpose. This text is to be taken seriously.

“ 16c . . . in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs . . . ”

The Spirit now provides a context in which teaching and admonition can take place. I will tell you that what He says will not at all comport with the general ideas on this subject. However, this is the truth according to the Spirit, and we do well to take it in. It will expose some of the religious falseness that is becoming quite popular in our day.

Those with a penchant for music and praise will have a particular interest in this word. It will assist them in using music and singing properly, and free them from the juvenile notions of those unacquainted with the manner of the heavenly kingdom. Three different musical expressions are used, confirming the great variety that characterizes life in Christ Jesus.

I want to emphasize that these provide the context in which teaching and admonition take place. More precisely, they are vehicles through which the brethren can be instructed and motivated.

PSALMS

“ . . . in psalms . . . ” One version read, “songs of praise.” BBE

Lexically speaking, the word “psalms” means “a striking, twanging, of a striking the chords of a musical instrument, of a pious song, a psalm,” THAYER and “Old Testament psalm, as used among believers song of praise, sacred song.” FRIBERG

Although the Christian community is divided over the meaning of the word “psalms,” there is not so much as a syllable of contention over the word in Scripture. All such contention is by man, for man, and to man. Those without religious bias or prejudice agree the word associates singing with instrumental music. But whether we take their word for the matter or not, the Holy Scriptures do make this association.

- “Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery ” (Psa 81:2).
- “Sing unto the LORD with the harp ; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm” (Psa 98:5).
- “Praise the LORD with harp : sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings ” (Psa 33:2).
- “I will also praise thee with the psaltery, even thy truth, O my God: unto thee will I sing with the harp , O thou Holy One of Israel” (Psa 71:22).
- “Sing unto the LORD with the harp ; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm” (Psa 98:5).
- “Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God” (Psa 147:7).
- “Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp ” (Psa 149:3).

Those objecting to the use of musical instruments affirm these texts are from the Old Covenant, and are therefore not applicable to us. However, this is not the case, for the Psalms are not integral to the Old Covenant. The words that God wrote on two tables of stone were called “the words of the covenant” (Ex 34:28). There is no reference to musical instruments in those words. Further, singing and praise were not matters integral to the Old Covenant itself, nor were they a part of the ceremonial law.

David once spoke of elaborating on an otherwise “dark saying,” by playing on the harp. “I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp” (Psa 49:4). Another version reads, “with the harp I will expound my riddle.” NIV He also spoke of praising God “upon the harp” (Psa 43:4), and singing praise “upon the harp unto God” (Psa 147:7). Additionally, he said he would “show forth” God’s loving kindness “Upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the psaltery; upon the harp with a solemn sound” (Psa 92:2-3).

A “psalm” emphasizes the manner in which the music is presented – with a musical instrument. It can be as an accompaniment to the voice, or as a cunningly played instrumental song. In either case, the truth is clarified by the presentation, bringing edification to the listeners. Strictly speaking, a “psalm” is a song set to music.

Throughout history, the Psalms themselves have been sung among God's people. This is because they contain a wide range of spiritual expressions that precisely represent the thinking and experiences of the godly. You will be hard pressed to find a single valid spiritual experience, whether pleasant or sorrowful, that is not expressed in the Psalms. What a rich heritage of song is found in them.

HYMNS

“ . . . and hymns . . . ” One version reads, “holy words.” BBE

Lexically, the word “hymns” means, “a sacred song, song of praise to God, especially used to express thanksgiving,” FRIBERG “a sacred song, hymn,” THAYER “a song with religious content,” LOUW-NIDQ and “a festive song or ode, also of mournful songs.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

A “hymn” is generally understood to be a song of praise – particularly one of thanksgiving. It is interesting that on the night of our Lord's betrayal, when His soul was “sorrowful, even unto death” (Matt 26:38), Jesus and the disciples sang “a hymn” (Matt 26:30; Mk 14:26) – a song of praise and thanksgiving.

A hymn is a song of insight and understanding, for praise must be driven by perception, else it is not valid. Proper singing cannot be done mechanically, even though much of the Christian singing of our day appears to be robotic to the extreme.

SPIRITUAL SONGS

“ . . . and spiritual songs . . . ” Other versions read, “spiritual canticles,” DOUAY

Lexically, a “spiritual song” is a song or ode belonging to the spirit. That is, it is the expression of one who is filled with the Spirit, belonging to the higher part of the human nature – the “new man.” It is an inspired song that has resulted from a spiritual person being moved by the Holy Spirit. It is generally understood to be in a poetic form.

“Spiritual songs” are wide in their scope, containing not only praise and thanksgiving, but exhortations and admonitions as well. In order to emphasize the elimination of vanity and worldliness in our songs, the Spirit refers to “spiritual songs.” These are songs that reflect “the mind of the Spirit” (Rom 8:27), and speak to the “new man,” motivating, encouraging, and admonishing. These “songs” can also testify to the various aspects of spiritual life that are common to all believers. They can integrate human experience with the firm statements of the Word of God.

SOMETHING TO NOTE

The modern merchants of Christian song have capitalized on the word “praise.” However, it does not sound right in their mouth. They, like the Ephraimites of old, cannot “frame to pronounce it right” (Judges 12:6). They do not “teach and admonish” with their songs, and make no pretension to do so. Let the singing of the saints of God expound and clarify the truth! Let admonitions, warnings, and powerful testimonies of valid spiritual life be expressed in them. Let God be praised in such a manner as will edify the hearers.

DECLARING WAR

God's people need to declare war on matters of the assembly that do not teach and admonish. There is no place in the gathering of the righteous for things that do not make for edification. Nor, indeed, is there a place for the introduction of worldly fads and fashions. The music of our day is in a state of degeneracy, where more attention is given to sound than to the godly effects of the music. Our text has spoken plainly, and it is the business of every assembly to see to it that they fulfill it.

Let us have done with needless repetition. If we are going to repeat a phrase, let it be preceded by some affirmation that clarifies the repetition – like the 136 th Psalm. Some of us have grown exceedingly weary of carnal emotional hype supplanting godly teaching and admonition. Our text states the case with great clarity.

“ 16d singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

In order for teaching and admonition to take place in our music, the people themselves must be correctly motivated. It will do no good for a Cain or Balaam to sing to us. A proper frame of mind is to accompany our singing. That is what is here expounded.

SINGING WITH GRACE IN YOUR HEARTS

“ . . . singing with grace in your hearts . . .” Other versions read, “singing with thankfulness in your hearts,” NASB “with gratitude in your hearts,” NIV “with thankful hearts,” NLT and “in grace singing in your hearts to the Lord.” YLT

The latter translation is technically more accurate. That is, the verse is admonishing us to sing in our hearts while we are standing in the grace of God. There are actually two clauses in the Greek text – “in the grace,” and “singing in your hearts.” The singing is what is in the heart, which means it is to be done heartily, from the heart, with a perfect coordination between the heart and the mouth. There is to be no hypocrisy in our hearts!

The fact that singing is “in the heart” does not mean it does not come out of our mouths. We know this is the case, because we are teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. These songs are to reflect what is in our hearts, not mere fleshly feelings or preferences. It is to be done while we ourselves are “in grace,” with great appreciation for what it brings.

Effective singing – singing that teaches and admonishes – can only come from hearts that have been favorably impacted by the grace of God. In this sense, the text means that the grace of God is to be the cognitive environment in which our songs are sung. That is, we are to have a lively awareness of God's grace – an awareness that is birthed by the belief and contemplation of the Gospel of Christ.

There is a very wonderful perspective declared in this verse that I find few have actually perceived. We are being exhorted to sing with the knowledge that the smile and approval of God is upon us in Christ Jesus. There is to be an awareness that we are “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6), and have been “made meet to be

partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12). When we shake off the doldrums of the flesh, and sing with the perspective of the new man, such teaching and admonition will take place as cannot be realized in any other environment. Then, the singing is not an end of itself, but is the expression of a heart that has been “established with grace” (Heb 13:9).

In such singing, there is a sense of God’s favor upon us. The singing is more than an attempt to express of our love for Him. Our love has erupted from the perception of His love, for “we love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:10).

The expression of our love for Him has been driven by a comprehension of His love for us, and thus our singing takes the form of gratefulness.

The grace of God is not simply a kind of mantel that covers the uncomeliness of men. It is the refreshing air of the heavenly places into which we have been raised. We cannot sing profitably when we stand in the quicksand of law. But when we can see the smile of God, and are convinced of His gracious acceptance, our hearts drive acceptable and profitable words from our mouths. That is the kind of expression that teaches and admonishes our brothers and sisters.

TO THE LORD

“ . . . to the Lord.” Strictly speaking, our singing is to God. Generally speaking, it is a form of teaching and admonishing one another. The meaning here is not so much that we are singing the words exclusively for God, but that we are saying them in His presence, and with a sense of His approval. They are addressed to Him, but are for others as well. Holy angels are privy to them, as well as the family of God.

The very same words that teach and admonish the brethren are sung “to the Lord.” The Psalms are filled with such expressions – uttered to God, but profitable to the saints. Who has not subjected themselves to the songs of the sweet psalmist of Israel without being taught and admonished? Our assemblies can likewise be places of great spiritual benefit. Let us see to it that we contribute to such a wholesome environment by letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly.

“ 17a And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus . . . ”

This is a transitional verse, moving us from considerations pertaining to the assembly, to personal ones. These may appear to be two different subjects, but in a sense they are two parts of a single subject. The Spirit is going to affirm that there is no part of life that may be conducted independently of faith in, and commitment to, the Lord. No provision has been made for us to step out of the role of “the sons of God” in order to live unto ourselves. This verse will reach backward, covering everything that has already been said. It will also reach forward to everything that will be said. That is the significance of the word “and.” It is like a spiritual coupling that joins two lines of thought.

WHATSOEVER YE DO

“And whatsoever ye do . . .” Other versions read, “And whatever you do,” NKJV “And everything, whatever you may do.” DARBY

The word “whatsoever,” or “whatever,” means “every kind of; all, full, absolute, entire, whole,” STRONG’S “Any and every, of every kind, and all manner,” THAYER “every kind of, all sorts of,” FRIBERG “everything, always, and continually,” UBS “the totality of any subject,” LOUW-NIDA and “all, or the whole.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

In other words, in Christ all of life is dominated by a single objective. Life is not divided into the secular and the spiritual – with one part being lived for self, and the other for God. It is ever true, “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again ” (2 Cor 5:14-15). In Christ divisions come to an end. From the standpoint of personalities, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). From the standpoint of expression, it is “whatsoever ye do.”

This is fundamental to “newness of life.” Salvation is broad enough to cover whatever you do. The umbrella of grace is spread over the entirety of life. While this seems very apparent to me now, I recall with great joy when the truth of it began to dawn upon my spirit many years ago. It was revolutionary then, and remains so.

WORD OR DEED

“ . . . in word or deed . . . ”

This includes all modes of human expression toward others – what is spoken and what is done. It includes all means of communication between personalities. Everything that we utter is to be brought under one grand purpose. Every form of doing, work, or labor is gathered under a single objective. All forms of speech, every message, teaching, doctrine, or verbal communication is governed by one rule. Each and every business, employment, enterprise, undertaking, or accomplishment is to be brought under the following standard.

DO ALL IN THE NAME

“ . . . do all in the name of the Lord Jesus . . . ” Other versions read, “do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus,” NIV “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,” NRSV “let it be in the name of the Lord Jesus,” NJB and “let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus.” NLT

The world has very few, if any, approaches to life that are after this manner. Even in occupations that are most demanding, like that of a soldier, time is given for a furlough, when some relief is granted from that particular line of work. When an individual is found who does not take advantage of such periods, he is generally viewed as an eccentric person – unconventional and slightly strange. In the flesh, men seek to promote a well-rounded life, in which the monotony of a single objective is avoided.

However, this is not the manner of life in Christ Jesus. In redemption, the whole man is recovered. In salvation, deliverance is complete, touching every area. In justification, the whole scope of life is taken into consideration. Sanctification, or separation unto God, is not for one part of our lives, but for the whole of them. Whether it is domestic or social life, private or public, here is something that is always to be done.

DO IT IN THE NAME!

Looking at this from the standpoint of our intentions, “do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” – for His glory, and to please Him. From the standpoint of the result of the doing, it is “That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you” (2 Thess 1:12). No word or deed must be allowed to detract from Christ. We cannot leave Jesus in order to speak more freely, or do things that do not require His presence and blessing. Because Christ is “over all, God blessed for ever” (Rom 9:5), everything that we say or do must have His interests in mind.

Some have viewed the phrase “in His name” from Mount Sinai, as though the text meant, “Do it because Jesus said to do it” Or, “Do it by the authority of Christ” – that is, only do or say what Jesus told you to do or say. Some have thought this expression to be synonymous with, “Do everything according to the rules or guidelines that are spelled out in Scripture.” I do not understand this to be the meaning of the text.

Various forms of the phrase “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” are found several places in Scripture. They will assist us in understanding its meaning.

- When expelling a fornicator from their midst, the Corinthians were told to do so “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” as they were gathered together with Paul’s spirit, and “the power of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 5:4). This involved more than acting on the authority of Christ. It had more to do with acting in harmony with Christ’s person and character, and in fellowship with Him. In other words, their action was not to be a mere formality. Rather, in their doing, they were acting as representatives of the living Christ.
- The cleansing, sanctification, and justification of believers is said to be “in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). This too was not a mere formality. It was attended with both the presence of Jesus and the working of the Holy Spirit.
- When commanding the Thessalonians to withdraw themselves from “every brother that walketh disorderly,” Paul said to do it “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 3:6). While Christ’s authority was behind this, Paul was speaking as one who was a worker together with Christ, not as a mere spokesman.

To do everything “in the name of the Lord” is to do so in a state of involvement with Him. It is to consciously live and move and have our being in Him (Acts 17:28) . It is to be aware of Him, focused upon Him, and conducting ourselves in harmony with His revealed purpose. This is involved in presenting our bodies a living sacrifice to God (Rom 12:2). It is walking by faith (2 Cor 5:7) and living in the Spirit (Gal 5:25). It means to take Jesus with you in the deed, with Him dwelling in your heart by faith (Eph 3:17). “In the name” is in His Person – something that is done as a consequence of being in Him. It has more to do with saying and doing in accordance with the mind of the Lord, than in response to a particular commandment from Him. When we conduct our lives in fellowship with Jesus, then, when we say and do, we are doing so in His name.

“ 17b . . . giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

Previously, our text admonished us to be “thankful” – to have a grateful spirit or nature (3:15). Now we will be exhorted to do something with that spirit – to express it in words.

GIVING THANKS

“ . . . giving thanks . . . ” Other versions read, “giving praise,” BBE and “while giving thanks.” NLT

The words “giving thanks” come from a single Greek word which means to express gratefulness . In this text, the New Living Translation gives the sense of the text. It is that we are to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus WHILE giving thanks. Make no mistake about this, the expression of thanks will impact upon what we say and do.

As is declared elsewhere, thanks is to be given “for all things” (Eph 5:20), and “in all circumstances” as well NIV (1 Thess 5:18). Acceptable thanks cannot be accomplished by law alone. Thanks is to be “given” – as a “sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips” (Heb 13:15). Thanksgiving is to the life of faith like the incense was to the Holy Place, while the priests went about their activities. It is an incense that produces a certain spiritually fragrant surroundings in which words and deeds can be properly expressed.

TO GOD THE FATHER

“ . . . to God and the Father . . . ”

While this is a technical point, it is worthy of our attention. Our prayers are not to be ambiguous regarding the one to whom they are addressed. As a general rule, prayer is addressed to the Father. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “Our Father . . . ” (Matt 6:9). Regarding prayer, He told them to “pray to thy Father” (Matt 6:6). Before He left them, Jesus told His disciples they would be entering into a new kind of time – a time when they would not make direct requests of Him as they did when He walked among them in the flesh. Following His departure, they would not address their requests to Him, while He, in turn, petitioned the Father in their stead. He was quite pointed in His words. “At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you : and in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you” (John 16:23).

Earlier in Colossians, Paul said that he himself prayed “to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” giving thanks for them (Col 1:3). The giving of thanks is most always said to be “to God” or “to the Father” (Rom 1:8; 6:17; 7:25; 14:6; 1 Cor 1:4,14; 14:18; 15:57; 2 Cor 2:14; 8:16; 9:11,12; Eph 5:20; Phil 1:3; 4:6; Col 1:3,12; 3:17; 1 Thess 1:2; 2:13; 3:9; 2 Thess 1:3; 2:13; 2 Tim 1:3; Phile 1:4).

It is not that it is wrong to give thanks to Christ Jesus, and that is not suggested in this verse. Paul once said, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord , who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry” (1 Tim 1:12). This reflects the fellowship with Jesus into which we have been called. Jesus put Paul into the ministry, and he thanked Him for it. Our text, however, deals with the normal posture of prayer, and particularly of thanksgiving.

God the Father is the Architect of our Salvation, and Jesus Christ His Son is the One who has implemented it. Christ’s purpose is to “bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18), and we come “to the Father” by means of Him (John 14:6). He has reconciled us “to God” (Rom 5:10), and “through Him” was have access “unto the Father” (Eph 2:18).

In this text, giving thanks to God particularly regards the matter of our salvation, and acceptance in Christ Jesus. It is the Father who sent the Son to be the

“Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14). It is the Father who has “sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying Abba Father” (Gal 4:6). It is the Father who has bestowed a unique “manner of love” upon us, so that we are properly called “the sons of God” (1 John 3:1). It is the Father that raised Jesus from the dead (Gal 1:1), and “gave Him glory” (1 Pet 1:21). It is the Father who has “made us meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12). It is the Father upon whom we call (1 Pet 1:17). Jesus Christ Himself is our “Advocate with the Father” (1 John 2:1).

It is particularly with these things in mind that we give “thanks to God and the Father.” While it is appropriate to give thanks to God for food, clothing, shelter, and the general provisions of life, that is not the focus of this verse. Such thanksgiving is not of sufficient power to accompany all of our words and deeds. That kind of thanksgiving must be focused on the salvation that is in Christ Jesus “with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10).

BY HIM

“ . . . by Him.” Other versions read “through Him.” NKJV/NASB/NIV

Our thanks is to the Father through Christ in the sense of us coming to the Father by Him (John 14:6). It is also in the sense of having access to God through Him (Eph 2:18). It is even through Christ that we believe in God. As it is written, “Through Him you believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and glorified Him, and so your faith and hope are in God” NIV (1 Pet 1:21). Our “spiritual sacrifices” are also made “acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” 1 Pet 2:5). God will even raise us from the dead “by Jesus” (2 Cor 4:14).

Giving thanks to God by Jesus, therefore, is in strict harmony with both the nature and glory of our salvation. Such thanksgiving is to be given in the understanding of that situation. Once again, this is not referring to the general giving of thanks, but to thanksgiving that is driven by a sense of the greatness of our salvation.

That is the kind of thanksgiving that can accompany all words and deeds, bringing a sanctifying influence upon them, and thus making them profitable to the members of Christ’s body.

We have dealt with the nature of the walk of faith. That walk does not center in a commitment to an institutional emphasis, or the maintenance of organizational identity and commitment. Spiritual life is not maintained by adherence to a set of rules, or within the framework of regulations. Such an approach to life does not require fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3), being filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:19), or possessing a thankful heartt (3:15). Those who live by the Law have no perceived need of the peace of God, and consequently see no need for it to rule their hearts and minds. Nor, indeed, do such sense a need for the word of Christ to dwell richly within them.

However, real spiritual life requires all of these things. There will be no growth if peace is not umpiring the affairs of our life, enabling us to keep the Lord at the center of our lives. If we have no regard for the body of Christ, treating the people of God as though they were incidental in the affairs of our pilgrimage, we are sure to stagnate, and eventually fall away. God placed us in the body of His Son, surrounding us with those in whom He is working, “both to will and to do of His own good pleasure” (Phil 2:13).

Therefore, when we are admonished to “let the peace of God rule in our hearts” and to “let the word of Christ dwell in us richly,” we are being admonished to intentionally live in harmony with the purpose of God, into which we have been called. We are not to allow ourselves to be obstacles to the edifying of the body of Christ, but are to be contributors to their betterment.

These things will happen when we aggressively “put off the old man,” and “put on the new man.” However, where those things are not being done, the work of the Lord for good is not being accomplished within us. That work requires your consent. Give it!

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND MOTIVATION

Lesson # 18

Doing everything “in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him” is integral to spiritual life. Salvation does not make provision for any other kind of living. This understanding is essential if we are to live lives that are acceptable to God. In redemption we are liberated from enslavement to self and sin. The objective of life is abruptly altered when we are justified, delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God’s “dear Son.” This is frequently stated with unusual pungency.

- “And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again .” (2 Cor 5:15)

- “That He would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear ” (Luke 1:74)
- “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God , as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God .” (Rom 6:13)
- “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God , which is your reasonable service” (Rom 12:1).
- “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord ; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's .” (Rom 14:7-8)
- “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit , which are God's.” (1 Cor 6:20)
- “For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God .” (Gal 2:19)
- “According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ , and to die is gain.” (Phil 1:20-21)
- “Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him .” (1 Thess 5:10)
- “Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” (Titus 2:14)
- “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will , working in you that which is wellpleasing in His sight , through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (Heb 13:21)

The Spirit will now deal with interpersonal relationships – associations that are to be lived out as to the Lord. These are areas in which our faith in, and love for Christ dictates what we do. Furthermore, each of the areas that are mentioned are intensely personal. These are domains of personal life for which the ones addressed are responsible. These are not areas in which one becomes a “lord” over the other. All of these relations are under the Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, and are to be lived out in personal devotion to Him.

Putting On the New Man

These are all involved in putting on “the new man.” Success in these areas depend upon seeking

the things that are above, and placing our affection upon them 3:1-2). These are responsibilities in which the peace of God can rule in our hearts. They are included in our words and deeds that are to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father through Him. No part of our life can be lived out independently of faith, or apart from our identity with God through Christ Jesus the Lord. Life in its totality has been impacted by salvation.

All of the resources obtained in redemption are available for our use in the following areas of responsibility. None of the exhortations can be fulfilled in the energy of the flesh. All of them are to be done as unto the Lord, with a primary and dominating love for Him. Let it be clear that no other kind of life is acceptable to God. This is, in fact, becoming a “living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1).

“ 3:18 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.”

Because of improper approaches to the subject before us, it is possible for those to whom the words are addressed to assume a defensive posture. First, let it be clear that the Lord Jesus did not author a salvation that is fundamentally restrictive. The aim of redemption is to make us free, not to bind heavy burdens upon us. Thus it is written, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal 5:1).

SUBMIT YOURSELVES

“Wives, submit yourselves . . .” Other versions read, “be subject to,” NASB “submit to,” NIV “be in subjection to,” ASV “be under the authority of,” BBE and “be subordinate to.” NAB

The words “submit yourselves” come from a single Greek word (**u`pota,ssesqe**), which means “to arrange under, to subordinate, to subject one’s self, to submit to one’s control, to yield to one’s admonition of advice.”
THAYER

The words “submit yourselves,” indicate this is something the wives do of their own accord. No other person is charged with the responsibility of making them doing this. It is not, for example, the husband’s responsibility to make their wives submissive, and such an approach is not found in Scripture.

Not the Destruction of Individuality

The word “submit” does not destroy individuality. Neither, indeed, does it give license to the flesh. The example of our Lord is sufficient to direct our understanding in this matter.

The Example of Jesus

- IN HIS YOUTH. “And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them : but His mother kept all these sayings in her heart” (Luke 2:51).
- IN HIS MINISTRY. “. . . I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father hath taught Me , I speak these things” (John 8:28). “For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment , what I should say, and what I should speak” (John 12:49). “. . . the words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself; but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works ” (John 14:10).
- IN HIS PERSON. “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the Head of Christ is God ” (1 Cor 11:3) . “And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's ” (1 Cor 3:23).
- IN HIS DEATH. “Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father” (John 10:18). “Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done ” (Luke 22:42).
- IN THE AGES TO COME. “For He hath put all things under His feet. But when He saith all things are put under Him, it is manifest that He is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:27-28).

While Jesus was in subjection to the Father, doing only His will, and speaking only what He was given to speak, He was by no means enslaved against his will. He was a prodigious worker and speaker, continually active. Had He not told the people He was subject to the Father, they never would have imagined this to be the case. This was not something that was “according to the appearance” (John 5:24).

Submission was a humbling experience for Jesus because of what He was prior to becoming flesh. Therefore it is written, “And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:8). In this regard, no other person, whether man or woman, is so humbled by being in subjection.

Not Stepping Down

The words, “Wives, submit yourselves,” are not a call to step down, but to live in concert with the kingdom of God. Everyone is subject to someone, with the only exception being God the Father (1 Cor 15:27). Children are subject to their parents (Col 3:20), slaves to their masters (1 Pet 2:18), men to Christ, and Christ to God (1 Cor 11:3). Even the Holy Spirit does not “speak on His own,” but speaks “only what He hears” (John 16:13). We are to be “subject to principalities and powers, and obey magistrates” (Tit 3:1). In fact, within the body of Christ, all of the members are “subject one to another,” and are to be “clothed with humility” (1 Pet 5:5). That is the manner of the kingdom.

Submission, then, is not the removal of freedom, or banishment to inferiority – even though it is often so interpreted.

Submission involves living for someone else – a principle that pervades the whole of the Kingdom of God. As it is written, “Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth” (1 Cor 10:24). And again, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil 2:4). It is said of the nature of spiritual life, “love seeketh not her own” (1 Cor 13:5).

Paul confessed this was the manner in which he lived: “Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (1 Cor 10:33). What person would view this mighty Apostle as being restricted, and unable to express himself, or engage in most extensive activity? A person imagining such a thing is nothing more than a fool!

The subjection of the wife is to be something she renders – not something into which she is forced. The husband is not charged with the responsibility of subjecting his wife. Nor, indeed, is this word in any way addressed to the husband. The Spirit does not deliver the word to the husband in order that he might give it to the wife. The wife is a member of the body of Christ, and this is a word from the Head of that body. While this word is generally applicable to all marriages, the focus here is the body of Christ.

The notion of submitting, therefore, is not something intended only for wives. This is the manner of the kingdom. Now the Spirit will focus on WHO the wife is subject to. We will find that the arrangement is very gracious.

YOUR OWN HUSBANDS

“ . . . unto your own husbands . . . ”

The words “your own” come from a word meaning “pertaining to one’s self, one’s own, belong to one’s self.” THAYER This language assumes a single husband for the wife, belonging uniquely to her.

This destroys the thought of bigamy being acceptable before God. Although there were men in Scriptural history who had several wives simultaneously, this was never intended by God. The practice was the result of lesser light, and in no way justified the practice. Jesus put it this way: “But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife” (Mark 10:6-7).

The Genesis Account

The subjection of the wife to the husband was originally announced by God. It was a consequence of Eve’s sin. “Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee ” (Gen 3:16). Other versions read, “your desire shall be for your husband,” NASB “your yearning will be for your husband.” NJB

The Desire

This desire, or yearning, is to be compared with Eve’s original quest for the forbidden fruit, which, when she perceived as “desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Gen 3:6). The desire of our text would be a natural one – an affection for her husband. Some have erroneously taught that this verse means the wife would have desires against her husband, or would compete against him and resist him. Such doctrines have not come from God, and they are offensive to those who have a knowledge of the truth.

The wife, therefore, would NOT be coerced to obey her husband, but would have an inclination toward him . This is the normal situation. Where it does not exist, some abnormality is present. That abnormality may have been brought on legitimately – like God being moved to “abhor his own inheritance” (Psa 106:40), or Jesus being moved to vomit out His own church (Rev 3:16).

Rule

Nowhere are husbands admonished to rule over their wives, bringing them into subjection. This is a word to wives, not to husbands! The word “rule” speaks more of responsibility and gracious government than of abusive authority. For example, the peace of God rules our hearts (Col 3:15). Elders that “rule well” are to be “counted worthy of double honor” (1 Tim 5:17; Heb 13:7,17, 24). Just as there are evil and good rulers in both religion and politics, so there are on the domestic scene as well.

God “ruleth by His power” (Psa 66:7), yet is gracious to those who love Him – and even to the wicked as well (Matt 5:45). The word “rule” must not be associated with dictatorial manners, inconsideration, and maltreatment.

The Head of the Woman

“But I would have you know, that the Head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the Head of Christ is God” (1 Cor 11:3). This does not suggest that every man is the head of every woman. The reference is to marriage – husband and wife – not society in general. The headship of the husband is to be in perfect compatibility with God being the Head of Christ, and Christ being the Head of man. There is no room for the introduction of a different manner of headship within marriage.

Ephesians

A similar passage is found in the Epistle to the Ephesians. “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the church : and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing” (Eph 5:23-24).

If the wife wonders concerning her subjection to her own husband, let her ponder the relationship of the church to Jesus Christ. Is that a form of heartless enslavement that chaffs against the will and promotes misery? Indeed not. The church is free and in subjection at the same time, and so is the wife!

FIT IN THE LORD

“ . . . as it is fit in the Lord.” Other versions read, “as it is fitting in the Lord,” NKJV “as it is right in the Lord,” BBE “as it behoveth in the Lord,” DOUAY “as it is proper in the Lord,” NAB “as you should in the Lord,” NJB and “as it is fitting for those who belong to the Lord.” NLT

The book of Ephesians also speaks in this manner: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord ” (Eph 5:22).

There are two senses in which this text can be taken.

In Keeping with Divine Intention

The first is that the subjection of the wife to her own husband is in strict harmony with the real nature of things.

- Man was made first. “ For Adam was first formed, then Eve” (1 Tim 2:13).
- The woman was taken from the man. “And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man” (Gen 2:22).

- The woman was made to be an appropriate helper for the man. “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen 2:18), “a helper suitable for him.” NIV
- The woman was made for the man. “Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man” (1 Cor 11:8-9).
- The woman was in the transgression. “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1 Tim 2:14).
- Their name was called “Adam.” “Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created” (Gen 5:2).

Therefore, the wife who subjects herself to her own husband is doing so in harmony with Divine arrangements and revelation.

In Harmony with the Kingdom

There is also a matter of spiritual propriety. Sometimes it is not proper to be in subjection to the husband. First, the husband has absolutely no authority over the wife in the matter of her relation to Christ. He has no rule over her in that area, for in Christ “male” and “female” do not even exist (Gal 3:28).

There are several examples in Scripture of times when it is not appropriate to submit to ordinary authority.

- Sarah. When Sarah demanded that Hagar and Ishmael be expelled from their home, Abraham remonstrated because “the thing was very grievous in his sight.” The Lord spoke to him about the matter. “Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice ; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Gen 21:12). A point is made of this by Paul, showing that it fulfilled an essential type (Gal 4:30).
- Abigail. This was a woman noted for “good understanding” and a “beautiful countenance.” However, her husband, Nabal, was “churlish (impudent and harsh) and evil in his doing. ” When David gently asked Nabal to give provisions to his men, Nabal refused, and spoke against David. As a result of his insolence, David prepared four hundred men to wreak vengeance upon Nabal. Without consulting with her husband, and in sharp contradiction of his decision, Abigail prepared a hundred loaves, two bottles of wine, five dressed sheep, about a bushel of parched born, a hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred fig cakes. She then went to David and interceded, asking that he not shed blood. David recognized she had been sent to him by God, and did not retaliate. Later Abigail told Nabal what she did and “his heart died within him, and he became as a stone.” The Lord Himself then “smote Nabal, and he died” (1 Sam 25:18-39).

- Moses' wife, Zipporah. Following his call at the burning bush, "Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand" (Ex 4:20). As he traveled, Moses and his family came to a certain lodging place. The Scriptures tell us "that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him" (Ex 4:24). We learn from the text that Moses had not circumcised his son. Without consulting with Moses, "Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. So He let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision" (Exo 4:25-26).
- Sapphira. Early in the history of church a couple surfaced who lied about what they had contributed to the common treasury of the church. Peter presided over the situation. He first asked Ananias, Sapphira's husband, what they had done. When Ananias lied, he was killed by the Lord. Later Peter also confronted Sapphira about the situation. Although she had been given an opportunity to do what was right, she also lied, and was killed by the Lord (Acts 5:1-10). Although some teach that when a wife obeys her husband even when he is wrong, God will uphold her for her obedience, God killed Sapphira for agreeing with her husband.

There are times when the duly constituted authorities are not to be obeyed. The appropriateness of these times is not to be determined in the flesh. Rather, it is when authorities seek to exercise their power in the spiritual domain that they are not to be heeded. In such a case, obedience or submission would not be "fitting in the Lord," for a demand is being made for God to be secondary. Some examples of this are as follows.

- The Hebrew midwives refused to obey the command of Pharaoh to kill Jewish male babies (Ex 1:15-21).
- Moses' parents refused to obey the commandment of the king, sparing the infant Moses (Heb 11:23).
- Daniel refused to obey the king's edict not to pray to anyone but the king himself (Dan 6:7-10).
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to obey the king's mandate to bow to an image, even though he was their head upon earth (Dan 3:6-26).
- The wise men refused to obey Herod's command to return to him (Matt 2:8-12).
- Peter and the other Apostles refused to quit preaching as the High Priest commanded (Acts 4:20; 5:28-29).

Like all other members of the body of Christ, wives are to live their lives unto the Lord, conducting themselves as those who have been bought with a price. They have a responsibility to their husbands that can be met by no one but themselves – and they are the ones who are to fulfill it. However, that responsibility at no time becomes greater than their responsibility to God. As with all other saints, their primary allegiance is to their Savior.

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

DIVINE IMAGERY

Before beginning the exposition of this verse, I want to place it within the context of Divine intent. When God created man (or “humankind”), NRSV He did so in the Divine image: “after Our likeness” (Gen 1:26-27). That likeness was not found in Adam alone, but in Adam and Eve – together they comprised the image of God. In rehearsing the creation the second time, the Spirit states it this way: “This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made He him; male and female created He them ; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created” (Gen 5:1-2). There was a singularity in the creation – “him.” But there was also a duality – “them.” Because they were joined together as “one flesh,” the Lord “called their name Adam.” Two individuals, yet together they comprised a single image – the likeness of God. That is, mirrors of Divine qualities were found in both Adam and Eve. Eve was not a mere clone of Adam. Rather, in her certain qualities were accented that were not accentuated in Adam. The same was true of Adam.

Not Inferior Qualities

There are no Divine qualities that are inferior. Too often women are represented as having lower-ranking characteristics. How many times I have heard it said, women are basically emotional, while men are more intellectual, or some kindred thought. This is a purely fleshly assessment. As ordinarily used, the word “emotion” belongs more to the jargon of psychiatry than to the vocabulary of the Holy Spirit. It is generally disassociated from reason and connected with mere feelings. Aspects of the Divine image that seem to have been accented in the woman are tenderness, kindness, thoughtfulness, care, and the ability to be touched with the feelings of others. These are not limited to the woman, but are found in a greater measure in them. They are not a sign of moral or intellectual weakness, and are not to be viewed as though that was the case.

Recognize the Image

The text before us is urging a recognition of the Divine imagery. The previous verse called upon the wife to see her husband from that vantage point. Now, the husband is required to view his wife in the same way. This word is not addressed to the wives, but to husbands. They are responsible for their own conduct, not the conduct of their wives.

LOVE YOUR WIVES

“Husbands, love your wives . . .” Other versions read, “have love for your wives,” BBE and “And you husbands must love your wives.” NLT

This is a very appropriate word, for as soon as some husbands overhear what the Lord says to wives, they suppose that it allows for inconsiderate attitudes and behavior on their part. But it emphatically does not. The husbands are immediately admonished to “love” their wives. If a pattern of that love is sought, it is provided by the Spirit in Ephesians 5:25: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it ” (Eph 5:25).

The word “love” is an unusually strong one, with great depth and scope. From the standpoint of language it means, “to be fond of, to love dearly, to be well pleased with, be loyal to, regard highly, strive for, and long for,” FRIBERG “to show or prove one’s love; longing for, desire, place first in one’s affection,” UBS “to have love for someone, based on sincere appreciation and high regard, to regard with affection,” LOUW-NIDA “to treat with affection, to be well pleased with,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “to love, to be full of good-will and to exhibit the same; to have a preference for, wish well to, regard the welfare of.” THAYER

As you can see, “love” touches the intellect, the emotion, and the will. It involves evaluation, pondering, insight, and purpose. It includes affection, tenderheartedness, and a wide range of emotions. It also embraces the determination to do good to, to bless, and to benefit. All of this is stated even more concisely in the Spirit’s remarkable description of love, or charity. “Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth” (1 Cor 13:4-8a).

Adam first expressed this love in his response to God’s gift of Eve: “And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen 2:23-24). She was part of himself, and he would treat her in a manner appropriate to that perspective. Looking into the future, the Spirit adds that the wife would take precedence over the man’s father and mother, whom he would leave in preference for her. He would “cleave,” or cling, or be joined, to his wife. Following the death of his mother Sarah, Isaac was married to Rebekah. It is said of that occasion, “And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death ” (Gen 24:67).

Notice, our text does NOT say, “husbands, rule your wives!” It does not say “Husbands, subordinate your wives!” or “Husbands, tell your wives what they are to do!” Whatever may be said of such an approach, that is not what the Spirit says here, or anywhere else.

Although Solomon did not do so well in this area himself, he did have a word of wisdom to husbands. “Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which He hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labor which thou takest under the sun” (Eccl 9:9).

Just as the wife is not to allow her love for her husband to compete with her love for God, so the husband is not to allow his love for the wife to come between him and Jesus. That is why Jesus said, “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). This by no means contradicts what our text says. It does enforce the truth that everything is to be as unto the Lord (Col 3:17).

It is quite possible that the love of a husband can be spurned by the wife, like the love of God was spurned by Israel (Jer 31:32), and the love of Jesus rejected by the professed church (Rev 3:14-16). However, it is the business of the husband to see to it that he is not deficient in that love, just as God and Jesus are not deficient in Their’s.

The love of the husband for the wife is to be of the same order as Christ’s love for the church. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it ; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies . He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it , even as the Lord the church: for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh” (Eph 5:25-31).

This is a selfless love that seeks the betterment of the wife, and holds her in the highest regard. When speaking of the “virtuous woman,” Solomon did not paint the picture of a mindless vassal. He said she was a “crown to her husband” (Prov 12:4). She does good to her husband, selects material and works willingly with her hands. She brings her food from afar, extending herself to spread a good table. She rises before daybreak, giving food to her household. She is a good businesswoman, considering a field and buying it. She plants a vineyard, and cares for it. She senses her business is good, and even makes profit. She helps the poor and the needy. She speaks wisdom, and the law of kindness is in her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household, and is not idle.

However, Solomon preceded those glowing words with a comment about her husband. It shows us what love can do. “The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil” (Prov 31:11-30). Ah, that is the expression of love. Her husband is her head, but does not lord it over her. Instead, he trusts her judgment because she is a “virtuous woman.” There is no doubt but that much of her industriousness was motivated by his tender and thoughtful love. Husbands, go thou and do likewise.

BE NOT BITTER AGAINST THEM

“ . . . and be not bitter against them.” Other versions read, “do not be embittered against them,” NASB “do not be harsh with them,” NIV “never treat them harshly,” NRSV and “do not be sharp with them.” NJB

The phrase “bitter against” involves being resentful, harsh, and sharp. Rather than loving the wife, being bitter against them is being irritated and angry with them. It includes the idea of being unpleasant in word, conduct, or thought – being unmindful of the wife in deference for one’s own will.

Here is a word that is certainly in order. It assumes there will be irritations in life – opportunities in which the old man can awaken, as it were, and spew his venom into the home. The husband is not to be moody, unpleasing, and ill-natured, treating his wife as though she was a servant instead of “one flesh” with him.

The children of God are admonished, “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice” (Eph 4:31). So far as husbands are concerned, their wives should be the first beneficiary of this sanctified conduct. Bitterness, harshness, and inconsideration is not to be allowed in any part of our lives. It certainly is not to be permitted to erupt in our homes, or against those who are our closest companions in the body, and with whom we are “one flesh.”

Husbands are to have an affection and care for the wife that is seen in Christ’s profound consideration of the church. It is said of our Lord, “He loved the church, can gave Himself for it” (Eph 5:25), forfeiting His own will for her eternal betterment. Our Savior is not condescending in His view of the church, as though it is to be pitied because of its inferiority. His profound sacrifice and provision is driven by His love for the church, which is His bride.

The church is to provide an environment that promotes this type of consideration and mindfulness. The assembly of the saints should never encourage husbands to be inconsiderate of their wives, or to move them to be harsh and resentful toward them. Such conduct is wrong toward anyone, much more against the one to whom we have been joined as “one flesh.”

Peter’s Admonition

Peter provides a word to husbands that is appropriate at this point. “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered” (1 Pet 3:7). Another version reads, “You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way , as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” NASB (1 Pet 3:7).

According to Knowledge

Here is a manner in which husbands are to live with their wives. It refers to more than the way in which they speak to their spouses. This is not mere intellectual knowledge, as though the husband knew a lot of facts about women in general, and his wife in particular. It rather refers to a thoughtful and considerate manner.

Giving Honor

Wives are to be treated “with respect,” NIV “bestowing honor” NRSV upon them. That certainly destroys any notion of the wife being inferior, much like a slave. This honor, or respect, is not to be given hesitatingly, but freely, and without restraint. On the one hand, it is a recognition of the Divine imagery in her. On the other hand, it is the acknowledgment that she is joined to the husband as “one flesh.”

Weaker Vessel

“Weaker” does not suggest inferiority. In the fleshly body, the heart is “weaker” than the fist or the skull – but it is certainly not inferior to them. When it comes to durability, a precious vase is “weaker” than a piece of iron – but it is surely not inferior to that iron.

The wife is not “weaker” intellectually, and much more, she is not “weaker” spiritually. She is not necessarily inferior in strength and durability. However, she is the more easily offended by harshness and inconsideration – like God was offended by the wayward conduct of Israel. She is able to be touched more readily by need – like Jesus was touched with the sight of the multitudes, while the disciples sought to bring down fire upon them.

It should be obvious that God nowhere enjoins men to give honor to what is inferior. Notwithstanding, throughout history men have tended to denigrate and abuse women. This is particularly true in countries where the Gospel has not been received. There have been few instances where women banded together in armies to retaliate against this abuse. That is evidence of what our text calls “weakness” – the kind of thing that can be honored, for retaliation is strictly forbidden by the Lord (Rom 12:17; 1 Thess 5:15; 1 Pet 3:9). What, therefore, men might view as a deplorable weakness, is actually a sign of profound strength.

What person among us would desire a mother who was harsh, lacking tenderness, and thoughtfulness, or who was slow to see the need for care?

Heirs Together

The consideration of the wife is placed within the context of redemption: “as being heirs together of the grace of life,” or because “she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life.” NLT This is not a reference to earthly life, as the next clause will confirm. In Christ Jesus, husband and wife are “heirs together according to the hope of eternal life” (Tit 3:7). The wife is to be viewed as a sister in Christ, a member of Christ’s body, and one who will reign with Christ – even as one who will judge the world and angels.

Prayers Be Not Hindered

Should the husband choose to treat his wife inconsiderately, not giving her honor, it will impact upon his prayers. God Himself will react to such disobedience! The word “hindered” means “frustrated, cut down, hewn down, impeded, thwarted, delayed, and detained.” ROBERTSON “Hindered” prayers are not simply prayers that are slowed down – not quite as effective as they could have been. Rather, it means that maltreatment of the wife is conduct that builds a wall between man and God. I hardly see how the importance of our text could be affirmed with any more clarity. Let the husbands take heed to this word as those who themselves are servants of the Lord Jesus. Let them have the mind of Christ in their home. God will be with them in this activity.

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

In the home, everyone has responsibility toward the Lord . It is not that one person is the head, and all others are only responsible to that head. In Christ, we live unto the Lord, being primarily mindful of Him.

CHILDREN

“Children . . .” This refers to children with the powers of reason – who are attaining to some measure of understanding. There is also a word in Scripture for younger children, called infants and babes. The Greek word used is **bre,foj** (bre-phos), which means “baby, or infant.” It is used of an unborn child in the womb (Luke 1:44), a newborn child (Luke 2:12), a child of around two years of age (Luke 2:16), and those carried by their parents (Luke 18:15). This is not the word used here.

In this text, “children” refers to those who can receive a word, understanding and fulfilling it. In terms of years, this age may vary. Let every child with understanding give heed to what is said in this verse. While it applies to all children of understanding, it particularly applies to those who are in Christ

Jesus , for that is specifically those to whom this epistle is addressed (Col 1:2).

OBEY YOUR PARENTS

“ . . . obey your parents . . . ” Other versions read, “be obedient to your parents,” NASB “do the orders of your fathers and mothers,” BBE and “must always obey your parents.” NLT

Those with children have no need for a word concerning the appropriateness of this exhortation. The malignity of sin is not confined to adulthood, but penetrates down to the one most juvenile in their rational aptitude. In his assault upon humanity in general, and the body of Christ in particular, Satan has not excluded our children. Neither, indeed, has the Holy Spirit omitted the “children” in His exhortation to the church.

Even as husbands and wives are a picture of Christ and the church, so children and parents are a depiction God and His sons. Thus the children are told, “obey your parents.” This can be stated with three different emphases. First , “OBEY your parents.” Do not argue with them, compete with them, or ignore them. Obey them! Second , “obey YOUR parents.” Do not obey your friends parents, obey your own. Third , “obey your PARENTS.” Do not obey your friends, obey your parents. DO not obey your impulses, obey your parents. This assumes the parents are directing you, and that you are not living for yourself.

Obedience is not heartlessly doing what you are told to do, as an impersonal robot. To “obey” means to “listen to, hearken to; of one who on the knock at the door comes to listen who it is; to hearken to a command, be obedient to, and submit to.” STRONG’S Obedience involves attentiveness, sensitivity, responsiveness, and willingness. In the case of children, it involves the honor, or respect of the parents.

This verse is an exposition of the fifth commandment: “Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Ex 20:12). In the Epistle to the Ephesians, the children are told, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise ; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth ” (Eph 6:1-3).

What a unique opportunity, therefore, is set before the children. The first commandment with a promise attached to it – a promise that provides an incentive for a whole-hearted response. In the book of the Law, the promise was “that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” – that is, Canaan. Under the New Covenant, the promise is “that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long upon the earth.” Another version reads, “you will live a long life, full of blessing.” NLT Any way you look at it, this is a most remarkable promise, coupling long life with blessing and benefit. Long life can be attended with great sorrow and suffering.

Also, in the Ephesians text, “honor” is described as obeying “your parents.”

This text is particularly noteworthy for our time and place. The worldly society of young people promote rebellion against, and disrespect for, parents. It is found in their manners, their speech, their music, and their general culture. The educational system also promotes these attitudes, giving more attention to fitting in with the social mores of the time, than giving due honor to the parents. While there are some modifying circumstances, children obeying their parents is the kingdom norm. I will discuss this more thoroughly a little later.

A Pattern for the Children

As in every facet of life, the ultimate pattern is the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as their parents, children are to be followers of Christ (1 Cor 11:1). We have an example of Jesus’ attitude toward His parents while He was yet a child – a child of twelve years of age. The example reveals the superiority of one’s identity with the Father, as well as duly honoring the parents.

When Jesus “was twelve years old,” “His parents went to Jerusalem,” as they did “every year,” to attend “the feast of the passover.” This particular time, unknown to His parents, Jesus lingered in Jerusalem. After searching for Him three days, Joseph and Mary found Him “in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking questions.” They were “amazed” when they “saw Him.” In a state of amazement Mary said to Him, “Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? behold, Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing” (Luke 2:48). Jesus responded, confirming the superiority of allegiance to the Lord. “And He said unto them, How is it that ye sought Me? wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?” (Luke 2:49). Mary and Joseph, we are apprised, “understood not the saying which He spake unto them.”

However, after saying that, Jesus “went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them : but His mother kept all these sayings in her heart” (Luke 2:41-51). There is the perfect example of giving honor to one’s parents – and Jesus was twelve years old, acquainted with Scripture, knowledgeable of God Himself, and respectful of Mary and Joseph.

IN ALL THINGS

“ . . . in all things . . . ” Other versions read, “in everything,” NIV and “always.” NJB

This is the difficult part for the child – just as it is for those who are older, including husbands and wives. The obedience of children is not to be occasional, or only when it is convenient, or suits the desires of the child. This is a particularly weak area in American life, but it must not be an area of weakness within the church, which is “the pillar and ground of the truth.”

The phrase “in all things” addresses matters of lawfulness. If, for example, as in some societies, the parents demand that their children steal, or lie, or harm, they are not to do it. In such a case, their greater allegiance is to the Lord. This is also true of wives obeying their husbands, citizens obeying the governor, and slaves obeying their masters. It is true at every level that we “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). This is so apparent there should be no further need to elaborate on it.

THIS IS WELL PLEASING TO THE LORD

“ . . . for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.” Other versions read, “this pleases the Lord,” NIV “this is your acceptable duty to the Lord,” NRSV and “this is what will please the Lord.” NJB

Children are to be raised in an environment where they become familiar with pleasing the Lord. Here, the Apostle speaks to children, telling them that obeying their parents will please the Lord. He does not simply tell them this is their duty – although it is surely true that it is their duty. He holds before them a higher motivation, drawing their attention to the marvelous privilege of pleasing God.

It is said of Enoch, “that he pleased God” (Heb 11:5) – children can do the same! God said of Jesus, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17) – He can be well pleased with children also! It was said of disobedient Israel, “with many of them God was not well pleased” (1 Cor 10:5) – there are also children with whom God is not well pleased! Those within the body of Christ can offer sacrifices with which “God is well pleased” (Heb 13:16) – children can do the same.

I believe one of the great weaknesses of the modern religious youth movement is a failure to communicate this truth – that children can and must be pleasing to the Lord. While the circumference of their activities is much smaller when they are young, and the responsibilities given to them are fewer, they are nevertheless to devote themselves to pleasing the Lord. The confirmation that obeying their parents is, in fact, pleasing to the Lord, is found in the singular promise that is given to them: “that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” NIB The promise is genuine, coming from the heart of God. Obedient children will surely find it to be true. Too, they will learn of the faithfulness of God at a tender age.

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

The kingdom of God is one in which profound consideration is found. God Himself considers His people. Spiritual life promotes consideration within the body of Christ, with each member being urged to “esteem other better than themselves” (Phil 2:3). This same attitude is also to be brought within the home. The husband is to consider his wife, not being harsh, and tenderly caring for her as Jesus cares

for the church. The wife is to consider her husband, submitting to him as the church does to Jesus. The children are to consider their parents, obeying and honoring them, knowing this is pleasing in God's sight. Now a special word is delivered to the fathers concerning their relationship with their children.

PROVOKE NOT YOUR CHILDREN TO ANGER

“Fathers, provoke not your children to anger . . .” Other versions read, “do not provoke your children,” NKJV “do not exasperate your children,” NASB “do not embitter your children,” NIV “do not be hard on your children,” BBE “do not irritate your children,” NJB “don't aggravate your children,” NLT and “vex not your children.” YLT

The word “provoke” means “to stir up, excite, and kindle in a bad sense; to irritate or rouse to anger.” FRIEBERG “To cause someone to feel resentment – to make resentful, to make someone bitter.” LOUW-NIDA

Here, the emphasis is not on the will of the children – as when they are required to do something they do not want to do. Rather, the accent is being placed on the ability of the children. The provoking in question occurs when they are pressed beyond their ability, and thus lose all hope of doing what pleases their parents. God will not allow his children to be “tempted above what they are able to bear” (1 Cor 10:13). However, alas, some fathers are not so mindful of their own children.

Jesus withheld some things from His disciples because they could “not bear them” at the time (John 16:12). Our blessed Lord was considerate in a righteous way. Unlike Jesus, the lawyers loaded men down “with burdens grievous to be borne,” and would not even “touch the burdens with one of their fingers” to bring some relief to the burdened ones (Luke 11:46).

Fathers are not to probe for faults in their children, but be like the Lord, who will not quench a smoking flax, or break a bruised reed (Matt 12:20). They are not to break the confidence and trust of their children by becoming their enemy rather than their tender guides and providers.

In summary, fathers are not to exact more of their children than is reasonable and righteous. They are not to demand more of them than they are able to give. They are not to be inordinate in finding fault. This is such an appropriate word. I find a great need for it in my own life, and am grateful I have a godly wife who is faithful to put me in remembrance of these things.

LEST THEY BE DISCOURAGED

“ . . . lest they be discouraged.” Other versions read, “lose heart,” NASB “their spirit may not be broken,” BBE “quit trying.” NLT

The word “discouraged” means “disheartened, dispirited, broken in spirit,” THAYER “feel like giving up,

lack motivation,” FRIBERG “to lose heart.” LIDDELL-SCOTT The hearts of the children are tender, and can easily be brought down in discouragement. It is the business of godly fathers to see to it they are not the cause of such discouragement. Disheartenment is difficult for anyone to bear, but it is nearly fatal when experienced by children.

THE SCOPE OF TRUTH

I cannot help but note the remarkable scope of the application of Gospel truth. On the one hand our affection is to be set on things above, which things we are to seek. There are the matters of pleasing God, putting off the old man, and putting on the new man. Yet, all of these things display themselves in family conduct. I know of no other message with such remarkable breadth! It attests to the true postulate that salvation impacts upon the entire person. When an individual is reconciled to God and put into Christ Jesus, the whole of life becomes an arena for living unto the Lord – an arena for blessing, fruitfulness, and glory to God.

“ 22a Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh . . . ”

There are some relationships in life that are far from ideal – relationships that even tend to violate the freedom that is realized in Christ Jesus. Paul does not call upon those caught in such a circumstance to mount a campaign against injustice. There is a better way.

SERVANTS

“Servants . . . ” Other versions read, “bondservants,” NKJV “slaves,” NASB and “bondmen”
DARBY

A “servant” is one who is serving the interests of another. He is the opposite of a “freeman, and is considered the property of someone else. Sometimes slaves were purchased (Deut 28:68). Other times they were born to other slaves while under a master (Ex 21:4). Some made themselves slaves willingly after they had been given the opportunity to be free (Ex 21:5-6). Still others were slaves as the result of being in an army that was conquered by a superior nation (Deut 21:10-14).

There were many believers who were slaves, even though that distinction did not exist in Christ. As it is written, in Christ “there is neither bond nor free” (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). That differentiation, while

it may exist upon earth, does not transfer into the kingdom of God. In view of that, believing slaves are told, “Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather” (1 Cor 7:21). Thus, if a legitimate opportunity arose to cease from being a slave, the believer could take it, knowing he would not be displeasing to the Lord. Nevertheless, if the opportunity did not arise, slaves were to “abide in the same calling where he was called” (1 Cor 7:20).

Some Honorable Servants

Some honorable slaves mentioned in Scripture include Eliezer, servant of Abraham (Gen 15:2; 24:1-11), Joseph (Gen 39:1-2), Elisha’s servant Gehazi (2 Kgs 4:12), and Onesimus (Phile 1:10-12).

Abraham’s Servants

Abraham had servants whom he classified as “servants” born in his house or bought with his money (Gen 17:13). The patriarch was a good master, and there is no parallel between his servants and the notions of slavery that have been developed in the world – example, Ezek 27:12-13). In those spiritually primitive times, his “manservants” and “maidservants” were recognized as a blessing from the Lord (Gen 24:34-35). Therefore, he treated them kindly. There is no record of Abraham abusing, giving away, or selling, one of his servants.

Voluntary Slavery

During Old Covenant times, there was such a thing as voluntary slavery. There were two kinds of this type of servitude. First, a slave that was qualified for freedom, whether during the year of Jubilee, or after seven years, could opt to stay with his master. In such a case, the servant would remain from that time until his death with the master (Ex 21:5-6). Second, a person might sell himself to someone as a slave in order to pay off a debt (Lev 25:47). Under the Law, in all cases involving slaves, or bond servants, they were to be treated kindly and equitably (Lev 25:43).

No Disadvantage in Christ

The fact that someone was a slave put them at no disadvantage in Christ, or in the body of Christ. Their “eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15) would not be less because of their status in this world. Thus they were to “care not for it,” or “not be concerned about it.” NKJV This, however, did not mean they could be indifferent about their earthly circumstance, considering as though it did not exist. Within the framework of a condition they could not change, they were to conduct themselves in strict keeping with the manner of the kingdom of God’s dear Son into which they had been translated.

While all manner of sound arguments could be introduced concerning the impropriety of someone being the slave of another human, this is not the approach of the Spirit. The Law did spell out the unlawfulness of kidnaping a person in order to sell them – like shanghaiing. Such a person was to be put to death under the Law of Moses. “ If a man is found kidnaping any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and mistreats him or sells him, then that kidnapper shall die; and you shall put away the evil

from among you” NKJV (Deut 24:7). Earlier in the history of our country, this practice was quite common, as you no doubt know. It was a wicked practice, and can in no way be justified.

Whether or not the “slaves” now addressed by the Spirit had fallen into that kind of condition through such circumstances, we do not know. However, rather than marshaling all slaves to civil disobedience, the people are shown “a better way” – a way that will allow the Lord to work in the behalf of the slave. The Spirit is admonishing us concerning maintaining an environment in which the working of the Lord can be perceived and experienced.

This is not a general address to all the slaves of the empire. It is confined to those who are members of the body of Christ. That is the body of people among whom God dwells, and through whom the Lord Jesus works. This body of people is not charged with governmental correction or social restructure. They have been called to higher things.

OBEY IN ALL THINGS

“ . . . obey in all things . . . ” Other versions read, “in everything,” NIV “do all the orders.” BBE

The servant is not given the luxury of selecting which commands he prefers, or choosing the ones that are more easily fulfilled. With the exception of something that violated the will of the Lord, the servant was to obey everything he was told to do. We do have an example of a servant who refused to do something that violated the will of the Lord, even though he was told to do so by the wife of his master. This was Joseph, who refused to yield to the will of “his master’s wife.” She said, “Lie with me.” He “refused” to do so (Gen 39:7-8,12).

In the Epistle to the Ephesians, servants are told, “be obedient to them who are your masters” (Eph 6:5). Paul admonished Titus to “exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters” (Tit 2:9). Peter wrote, “Servants, be subject to your masters” (1 Pet 2:18). There is, then, no question about the servant’s responsibility to his master – even of the slave to his owner . This is not the master’s word to the servant, but the Word of the Lord of glory to the master himself. It is not what the master expects of the servant, but what the Lord expects of the master.

It is one thing to tell a wife to submit to her husband, or children to obey their parents. It is quite another to tell a slave to obey his master. In every facet of life, the child of God must have faith to live, faith to obey, and faith to hope. How significantly this is made known in this word.

The Employee and the Employer

In our country, the servant-master relationship is most precisely seen in employer-employee associations. That circumstance is much like the volunteer servant who sold his services to a master.

That is very much what an employee does – he sells his time, receiving compensation on a voluntary basis. This is of particular interest to me, knowing that in this text, much more is said of the master-slave relationship, than of family associations. That means this is an area where men are especially vulnerable, and where the Lord is unusually honored or dishonored. It does not suggest that master-servant matters are superior to those of the home. It does suggest that it should be given far more attention than men are prone to do.

Christian employees are not to be noted for their recalcitrance, laziness, and failure to do what they are told. Their conduct is to be exemplary on the job, as well as in the home and in the assembly. More will be said on this in the succeeding verses.

Student and Teacher

This principle also applies to the teacher-student relationship. While there may be some areas where the similarity breaks down, it generally applies. With few exceptions, unless the teacher requires the student to do something that violates the good will and purpose of God, the Christian student should yield to the will of the teacher. This is a matter in which due consideration should be given.

MASTERS ACCORDING TO THE FLESH

“ . . . our masters according to the flesh . . . ” Other versions read, “masters on earth,” NASB “earthly masters,” NIV “Your natural masters,” BBE “human masters,” NAB and “according to human reckoning.” NJB

While it is true that those in Christ have “one” who is their “Master” (Matt 23:8), this does not mean we take orders from no one else. It does mean that in matters pertaining to the Lord, we are ultimately obligated to God alone. However, there are spiritual masters over us, whom we are to “obey” (Heb 13:17). Wives “obey” their husbands (Tit 2:5). Children “obey” their parents (Eph 6:1). Citizens are “subject” to governmental powers (Rom 13:1-2). Now, servants are admonished to “obey” their “masters according to the flesh.” All of this is to be done “as unto the Lord.

All of these associations – in particular servants obeying their masters – are temporal : i.e. “According to the flesh.” They only apply to this world, and only pertain to temporary associations. Once we gain this perspective, it will lessen any inconvenience or distaste associated with such obedience. It is important to note that earthly associations are not to be neglected . Faith deals with how we conduct ourselves in these matters.

It is important to again note that the highest relationship is that of a soul to God . At no point, and at no time, are human relationships to be permitted to overshadow this association. Wrong cannot and will not be overlooked, regardless of who commands that it be done. If a master commands the slave to steal, he must not do so. If the master cites our text as proof the slave must obey, the slave still cannot

steal. He is subject to a higher law than that of his master. Wherever there is a conflict between what men demand and the will of the Lord, we are, without exception, to obey God, not men.

“ 22b . . . not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God.”

The Spirit now instructs us in the manner in which service to men is to be rendered. It will at once become apparent that even those in a most servile situation are to live with an acute awareness of the God to whom they have been reconciled, and the Christ who has accomplished that reconciliation. We cannot overemphasize this, for we are living in a society that promotes self will, and thinking of one's self “above that which is written” (1 Cor 4:6). All manner of pressure is being placed on believers to please men, and to do things to be seen of men.

NOT WITH EYESERVICE, AS MEN PLEASERS

“ . . . not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; . . . ” Other versions read, “not with external service, as those who merely please men,” NASB “not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor,” NIV “not only when being watched and in order to please them,” NIV “not serving to the eye, as pleasing men,” DOUAY “ not only when being watched, as currying favor,” NAB “not only when you are under their eye, as if you had only to please human beings,” NJB and “Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you.” NLT

Eyeservice

The Epistle to the Ephesians reads exactly the same: “not with eyeservice” (Eph 6:6). “Eyeservice” means the servant needs to be watched, else he will not fulfill his duty. The word means, “service performed ONLY under the master's eyes,” THAYER “service rendered without dedication or a sense of inner obligation but mainly to attract attention,” FRIBERG “rendered merely for the sake of impressing others,” UBS “To serve with a view to impressing others – eyeservice, to serve in order to call attention to oneself,” LOUW-NIDA

Whether in employment, education, or even church circles, everyone has encountered this kind of person – the individual who adjusts his conduct to meet the approval of men. Otherwise, such people live only for themselves, and do only what pleases them in the flesh.

Believing servants are to be more conscious of the eye of the Lord than the eye of their master.

God always sees. Their masters according to the flesh only see occasionally. In the carrying out of legitimate earthly responsibilities, there is no time when the believer can be sloppy, nonchalant, or neglectful of his duty. The earthly master may not behold such occasions, but God in heaven will!

We have already been admonished to do every thing, whether in word or deed, “in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him” (3:17). This is one way in which this is accomplished.

Let it be clear, a consciousness of the eye of the Lord being upon you provides a far greater incentive for faithfulness and productivity than the eyes of men! Among the people of God, there is no place for any who remain among those who can only be trusted to do what is right when they are under the watchful eyes of taskmasters. While believers may very well begin with this trait, they are to grow out of it. They must come to the place where they can be trusted to do what is right. Thus Paul wrote, “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Phil 1:27).

Zealously avoiding “eyeservice” is not, therefore, confined to “servants.” This is to be a common virtue found among all of the children of God. Here, the “servants” are permitted to lead us, as it were, in this noble attitude.

Menpleasers

In one place Paul wrote, “Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (1 Cor 10:33). Howbeit, this is not the meaning of “menpleasers.” Paul was seeking the spiritual profit of all men, and in that sense alone sought to please them, not casting stumbling blocks in their way. This text speaks of pleasing men as a primary motivation – particularly with regard to gaining personal advantage.

Pleasing men involves “studying to please men, and courting their favor.” THAYER The word means “desiring to please people; substantively, one who sacrifices principle to please someone of superior authority,” FRIEBERG “one who acts merely to please men,” UBS and “at the sacrifice of some principle pleasing people.” LOUW-NIDA

The believer, even when a servant, must remember that he has been bought with a price, and is not his own (1 Cor 6:19-20). His primary aim is not to please his master, but his God! Ultimately, he will be judged by God, not his master.

Servants, of course, are not the only people who are not to be “menpleasers.” There is no aspect of life for any child of God, in which pleasing men is allowed to become preeminent. Living to God does not

allow for such a frame of mind.

Speaking of being a “menpleaser,” Paul affirmed that at the precise point where one’s primary motivation was to please men, he abruptly ceased to be the servant of Christ. “. . . for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal 1:10). Other versions read, “If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ,” NASB and “or if yet men I did please -- Christ's servant I should not be.” YLT

Those who are faithless, or unbelieving, cannot process this kind of word – either in their hearts or their minds. This exhortation chafes against the flesh, and causes the “old man” to writhe in pain. Nevertheless, it is to be fulfilled.

SINGLENESS OF HEART

“. . . but in singleness of heart...” Other versions read, “sincerity of heart,” NKJV/NASB/NIV “wholeheartedly,” NRSV “all you heart,” BBE and “simplicity of heart.” DARBY

The Lord does not allow for a divided heart (Hos 10:2), which is another way of referring to an attempt to serve two masters (Matt 6:24). That is, the servant was not to try and serve his master with one part of his heart, and the Lord with another part – like secular and spiritual. He could not step out of the role of a member of the body of Christ while working for his earthly master, then step back into a spiritual role when he assembled with the saints.

The Epistle to the Ephesians also emphasizes this point: “with good will doing service, as to the Lord” (Eph 6:7). Other versions read, “Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women,” NRSV and “do your work readily, as to the Lord, and not to men.” BBE That is, the servant is not to be oblivious of his natural master, but to “please him well in all things, not answering again,” or being argumentative (Tit 2:9). He is to yield his service “with all respect,” NASB being mindful of him and his will within the greater context of a mindfulness of the Lord (2 Pet 2:18).

What About Thoughtless Masters?

What is a servant to do when he has a thoughtless and abusive master? What of an employee that has an inconsiderate manager, or a student that has a harsh teacher? What is to be done in that case?

The Lord speaks to this issue, and with great clarity. “Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward . For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this

is acceptable with God” (1 Pet 2:18-20). All of this is done out of a “conscience toward God,” or because he is “aware of God.” NIV Ah, that will take a lot of grace! However, a lot of grace is available, and the servant is to avail himself of it.

The servant is not at liberty to withhold subjection from a master who appears unworthy of it. Only if the master requires something that God does not allow can obedience be withheld. Good and gentle masters are not the only kind that manage men, as most of us know all too well. There are also the “froward,” or the “unreasonable,” NASB and “harsh.” NIV However, the Spirit reasons, it is better – yea, more “thankworthy,” or “commendable,” NIV when a person suffers for doing what is right, than when he pays the price for doing what is wrong. Now, there is a line of reasoning the world cannot accept. Still, this is the manner of the kingdom, and we are adapt to it.

What About a Believing Master?

Perhaps, it might be reasoned, if the believing slave has a believing master, his service can be more casual and less hearty. Maybe if an employee works for a very kind and patient employer he can be less diligent. It might be thought that because a student had a very lenient teacher, there is no need to study hard and do good work. However, this is not the case at all. The Spirit reasons with us about this.

“And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort” (1 Tim 6:2). A believing master, manager, teacher, or the likes, is worthy of even more effort. They are members of the same body, and are loved by God. It is also right that they should be loved by their servants. They are also “partakers of the benefit” – enjoying certain advantages that are given to the children of God. Why should some of those benefits not come from their believing servants? The good and faithful servant will, indeed, be a source of blessing to a believing master.

FEARING GOD

“ . . . fearing God.” Other versions read, “fearing the Lord,” NASB “ . . . with reverence for the Lord,” NIV “out of respect for the Master,” NJB “because of your reverent fear of the Lord.” NLT

While the word “fearing” contains the idea of reverence, that is not its primary meaning – at least not in the sense in which “reverence” is ordinarily understood. From the standpoint of language, the word “fearing” comes from the Greek word **fobou,menoi** (phob-ou-men-oik), which means “to be put to flight by, to fear or be afraid, to be struck with fear, to be seized with alarm . . . to be struck with amazement.” Under that canopy, the word includes the idea of “reverence, veneration, and to treat with deference or reverential obedience.” STRONG’S

In my perception, fearing God includes the following.

- When faced with the Lord, running to Him rather than from Him (Psa 66:16).
- Zealously avoiding anything that provokes or alienates Him (Neh 7:2; Job 1:1).
- Deferring to His will when faced with conflicting influences (Ex 1:17).
- Being afraid of confronting the Lord while in a sinful state (Gen 3:10).
- Being moved to depart from iniquity (Job 28:28).
- Being constrained to serve the Lord faithfully and with a perfect heart (2 Chron 19:9).
- To hate evil (Prov 8:13).
- An spirit of mind that keeps us from coming short of the promises of God (Heb 4:1).

In short, fearing the Lord is living with an acute awareness of God – an awareness that dominates all other perceptions. It has been well said, “Where true reverence of the Master is, there is singleness of heart, for His eye searches the heart.” JOSEPH BEET The person who fears the Lord knows the Lord “tries the feelings and the heart” NASB (Jer 11:20), giving to every man “according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (Jer 17:10). That knowledge assists us in developing sensitivity to our conduct.

“ 23 And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.”

While this word is addressed to “servants,” it is not confined to them. This is another expression of the manner of the kingdom – the nature in which new life is conducted in this world. In fact, it is an elaboration of a previous word that is addressed to all saints: “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him” (Col 3:17). That word was a summation of the Spirit’s guidance concerning the activities of the assemblies of brethren. It was also an introduction to His consideration of domestic life.

WHATSOEVER YE DO

“And whatsoever ye do . . . ” Anther version reads, “Whatever your task.” NRSV This differs slightly from “whatsoever ye do in word of deed,” which focuses on expression. Here the emphasis is on the task, or project, that is being undertaken, and the manner in which it is carried out.

All justified ones must come to the point where they think in terms of “whatever” they do – a manner that does not compartmentalize life. There is no facet of life that can be fulfilled apart from a lively awareness of the Lord who has bought us (1 Cor 6:19). In our world, the term “whatever” has come to indicate indifference – a way of dismissing what is said to the individual. But that is not what the word means here. The Spirit uses it in such a way as to engage our interest, not dismiss it – to marshal our resources, not dismiss them.

A Brief Word

The children of God must take care not to adopt the jargon of a world that is alienated to God. Words are a vital aspect of kingdom life, and ought not to be spoken in such a way disarms the soul. Jesus said, “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Mat 12:37). We must not allow the world to influence us to adopt loose and meaningless language, so that our speech is no longer seasoned with salt.

DO IT HEARTILY

“ . . . do it heartily . . . ” Other versions read, “do your work heartily,” NASB “work at it with all your heart,” NIV “put yourselves into it,” NRSV “do it readily,” BBE “put your heart into it,” NJB “work hard and cheerfully,” NLT and “out of soul work.” YLT

“Heartily” means, “out from one’s inner life or self.” STRONG’S That is, the motivation for doing the work comes from deep within, not merely because men are told to do something. The postulate is that in Christ we have higher and more noble reasons for doing everything. We are compelled from within, which frame of mind contrasts with “eyeservice” and “menpleasers,” which are from without.

It is possible for those whose work tends to be of a repetitive nature – like that of a servant – to perform their tasks heartlessly, or mechanically. In such a case, their heart is not in it, but they merely work by rote, or empty habit. In such a case, the task becomes long and tends to be tedious. Such work is not acceptable to the Lord, whom we serve in every facet of our lives.

In a similar word to servants, the Epistle the Ephesians reads, “as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart” (Eph 6:6). This word assumes that men and women are in their various stations of life through Divine appointment , and not mere happenstance – that God has “determined

the times set for them and the exact places where they should live” NIV (Acts 17:26). The Lord may very well open an opportunity for them to occupy another position – such as a slave being made a freeman (1 Cor 7:21). However, unless a consciousness of the Lord is maintained IN their activity, such an opportunity will not be known.

God’s people are not to be known for half-hearted work. Whether it is a husband, wife, child, or servant, work is to be done “heartily.” If we are given a task to do by a superior, we are to put our hearts into that task. Our hearts and minds are to be in it.

Ponder the effects this would have on the body of Christ. Let preachers approach preaching in this manner. Let teachers fulfill their teaching in this way. Students, fulfill your assignments with all of your heart. Elders and deacons, throw yourselves into your work. When we sing, let us do it with all of our heart. When we listen, let us do so purposefully and with godly intent. When we admonish one another, or speak to each in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, let us do it heartily!

Bring the heart into the home. Husbands, wives, and children are to fulfill their obligations heartily. Not mechanically.

Christian employees, which most closely parallels the role of a “servant,” are to be the best employees. Compelled from within, their work is to be done heartily, not perfunctorily. This is not a mere goal of life, but something believers are to see that they do. On the job, they are not allowed the luxury of stepping out of their role as “the light of the world” and “the salt of the earth” (Matt 5:13,14).

There is some sense in which we all are “servants,” and thus the word to servants, as ordinarily perceived, becomes a word to us all. The servants, therefore, become our leaders in this matter.

AS TO THE LORD, NOT UNTO MEN

“ . . . as to the Lord, and not unto men.” Other versions read, “as for the Lord rather than for men,” NASB “as working for the Lord, not for men,” NIV “as done for the Lord, and not for your masters,” NRSV “as serving the Lord and not men,” RSV and “as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.” NLT

Rather than working to be seen of men (“eyeservice”), the servant is to perform the work as unto the Lord – presenting it as an offering to the Lord. Rather than seeking the good will of men (“menpleasers”), the servant is to exert himself to please the Lord IN what he is doing. He is to take what he has been given to do as a directive from the Lord. He is to fulfill that word as though the finished task was to be presented to the Lord.

The reason for this exhortation is found in the words that follow. Working heartily as to the Lord, and not unto men, is to be done in view of what is ahead. We are to be motivated by reality, not mere imaginations. The Spirit will now set before us what will be realized in the future – a future that it is not possible to avoid. Now, He is calling upon us to live in view of what is surely coming – to live in preparation for that time.

“ 24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.”

In Christ Jesus, motivation has reached new heights. Under the Law, men were compelled by the threat of death. As it is written, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage ” (Heb 2:14-15). There are adjustments in life that can be made in an effort to avoid dying, or going to hell. However, that is not a sufficient motive for all of life. There must come a point where we really understand the “issues of life” (Prov 4:23) – a time when we possess high incentives.

KNOWING

“Knowing . . . ” Other versions read, “since you know,” NIV/NRSV “being certain,” BBE and “having known.” YLT

This is not knowledge to be acquired, but knowledge to be used. It is assumed that the individuals being addressed already know this. Now they are being admonished to “remember” what the Lord will do. NLT

Sound doctrine includes the declaration of the things that follow. Where there is a fundamental ignorance of them, there has either been a rejection of the basic message of the Gospel, or it has not been heard. Wherever the sound of the Gospel has gone forth, there has been an announcement of things to happen in “the world to come.” The day of judgment, and the things that will take place at that time, are declared in the Gospel of Christ.

Spiritual life is lived out within the framework of understanding, or what is comprehended. If

life is really a mystery, and the future remains under the shroud of ignorance, we will not do well in our living. This is not only true of servants, but of every member of the body of Christ.

The postulate of this text is this: if we are to do our work as unto the Lord, and not unto men, we must have a strong reason for doing so. In this matter naivety, simplicity, and ignorance are our foes, not our friends.

RECEIVING FROM THE LORD

“ . . . that of the Lord ye shall receive . . . ” Other versions read, “from the Lord you will receive,” NKJV/NASB “the Lord will give you,” BBE and “the Lord will repay you.” NJB

Just as our identity with the Lord is personal, so His dealings with us in the coming age will be personal. Now, in this life, the Lord speaks to us through “ministers . . . even as the Lord gave to every man” (1 Cor 3:5). This promise, however, speaks of something the Lord Himself will give us – something we will receive from His own hand.

Here is the manner in which we work as “to the Lord.” It is by considering what we will receive from Him. It is not that we simply view the Lord as our “Boss,” so to speak. We are to perceive Him as the One who will duly compensate us for our labors – even the labors of a slave for his master.

Even though, on the surface, the work appears to be done because of human demands, and for men, yet that is not the case for the one who is in Christ. For such a person, the work is really being done for the Lord, and the Lord will give the ultimate compensation for the work.

THE REWARD OF THE INHERITANCE

“ . . . the reward of the inheritance.” Other versions read, “receive an inheritance . . . as a reward,” NIV “the inheritance as your reward,” NRSV “the recompense of the inheritance,” ASV “the reward of the heritage,” BBE “the due payment of the inheritance,” NAB and “the Lord will repay you by making you His heirs.” NJB

Here is an aspect of spiritual life that must be seen. While salvation is “not of works” (Eph 2:9; Tit 3:5), that is not the case with the reward. Justification is not based upon works (Rom 4:2; Gal 2:16), but the reward is on another principle. Our calling was “not according to our works” (2 Tim 1:9), but our rewards will be. The Holy Spirit has extended Himself to make this clear.

- “Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward

according to his own labor ” (1 Cor 3:8).

- “If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward ” (1 Cor 3:14).
- “For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward : but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me” (1 Cor 9:17).
- “For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The laborer is worthy of his reward ” (1 Tim 5:18).
- “Cast not away therefore your confidence , which hath great recompense of reward ” (Heb 10:35).
- “Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought , but that we receive a full reward ” (2 John 1:8).
- “And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev 22:12).
- “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb 11:6).

Wages

There is such a thing as good “wages” received from the Lord. As it is written, “And he that reapeth receiveth wages , and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together” (John 4:36). Jesus said the kingdom of heaven “is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard” (Matt 20:1). Those laborers were given wages.

Proportionate to Faithfulness

In the parable of the talents, Jesus taught that Divine compensation will be directly related to the manner in which the Lord's goods were handled. The servants were given differing responsibilities: five talents, two talents, and one talent. Each servant handled their goods uniquely. They returned varying amounts: ten talents, five talents, and no talent. They received divergent compensation: ten cities, five cities, banishment (Matt 25:20-30).

The Inheritance

For the child of God, the inheritance is everything. This is not an inheritance in this world, but in the world to come. There is a sense in which we, like Abraham, do not receive an inheritance in this world (Acts 7:5). He did have possessions in this world, but not an inheritance – and there is a

difference.

- One of the purposes of being built up in the faith is in order that the Lord may give us “an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).
- Those who come to Christ not only receive “forgiveness of sins,” but an “inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith” (Acts 26:18).
- The gift of the Holy Spirit is the “earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession” [our bodies] (Eph 1:13-14).
- In Christ Jesus, God has qualified us for “the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12).
- Jesus is presently “the Mediator of the new testament,” in order that “they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15).
- We have been born again in order to obtain “an inheritance, incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet 1:14).

Associated with Working as unto the Lord

Here, the faithful servant who works as unto the Lord is told to do so KNOWING he will receive the reward of the inheritance from the Lord. That eternal reward is associated with the manner in which he carried out his earthly responsibilities!

The world to come is something like Canaan. Although all of the saints will inherit it (Matt 5:5), and be given charge of it (Heb 2:5-7), it will be distributed “by lot,” as was Canaan (Num 26:55-56; Josh 13:6; 14:2). The right to have a portion of the world to come was determined by the Lord Jesus. The actual measure you possess will be, in part, determined by your faithfulness, and the manner in which you lived in this world.

Whether you are bond or free, male or female, husband or wife, or even a child, you are to live your life with a mind to obtaining that inheritance. The fulfillment of your responsibilities in this world are directly related to that inheritance. In the case of a slave, although in this world he was under the control of a master, yet a record was kept of his labors in heaven. Whether, in this world, the compensation he received appeared to be fair or not, in the world to come every work performed unto the Lord will be duly rewarded.

Employees, take this attitude to your job! Husbands, wives, and children – have this frame of mind in the home. By so doing, you will be laying up “for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither

moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matt 6:20). That certainly does open the door to remarkable possibilities!

A Holy Mingling

Here there is a holy mingling of two different thoughts. “Reward” has to do with labor. “Inheritance” has to do with being the sons of God. In the same way that “mercy and truth are met together,” and “righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psa 85:10), so reward and inheritance are joined together in Christ . From one point of view, they appear to be unsuitable to dwell together. From another view, however, the salvation of God has enabled them to be joined together.

YOU ARE SERVING THE LORD CHRIST

“ . . . for ye serve the Lord Christ.” Other versions read, “It is the Lord Christ whom you serve,” NASB “It is the Lord Christ you are serving,” NIV “for you are the servants of the Lord Christ,” BBE and “the Master you are serving is Christ.” NLT

This circumstance is not the way it ought to be. This is the way it is ! Whether the work is performed satisfactorily or unsatisfactorily, the Lord takes it personal. As the redeemed we belong to Him, and He is the One we are serving – even in servile areas of life in this world. Thus, in a very real sense, every believer is a “full time servant.” In fact, there is no other kind of “servant.”

The Lord Christ

By using the unique expression “Lord Christ,” the Spirit emphasizes that part of the stewardship given to the Son is that of duly compensating His disciples. He is “Lord” of that distribution, and will do so as “the Christ,” who is the appointed Representative and Judge of humanity.

If earthly masters are not fair with their servants – in particular those who are Christ Jesus – the servants are to know there is another Lord: THE Master in heaven, who observes their most minute labors, and will duly compensate them. He will not overlook their faithfulness to Himself, or the humble manner in which they submitted themselves to His will. A faithful record of their attitude and behavior is recorded in the books. On the one that that will really count, the books will be opened. This is a most blessed consideration.

“ 25 But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.”

If there is a reward for doing what is right, there must also be due compensation for doing what is wrong. If this is not the case, there really is no justifying point in rewarding those who “do good” (1 Tim 6:18; Heb 13:16; James 4:17; 1 Pet 3:11). Just as surely as the Lord is “not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labor of love” (Heb 6:10), so He will not ignore those who do wrong.

HE THAT DOETH WRONG

“ But he that doeth wrong . . . ” Other versions read, “the wrongdoer,” NRSV “he that does a wrong,” DARBY “if you do what is wrong,” NLT and “he who is doing unrighteously.” YLT

To do “wrong” is to “act unjustly or wickedly, to sin, to have violated the laws in some way,” THAYER “acting unjustly, be in the wrong, injure,” FRIEBERG “treat unjustly, harm, be in the wrong,” UBS “to hurt or harm, with the implication of doing something which is wrong and undeserved,” LOUW-NIDA and “to do wrong, wrongdoing.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

There is absolutely no provision in Christ for doing what is wrong – no allowance for improper conduct. Men may be lenient in such matters, but the “Lord Christ,” whom we serve, is not.

There are two ways we can view this text, and there is value in them both.

The Servant Himself

First, this refers to any “wrong” committed by the servant himself. If the servant does not obey his master, he has done wrong in withholding such obedience, unless it be that he has been required by the master to do what is “wrong” before the Lord. Any servant that fails to do what the Spirit admonishes him to do, has done “wrong.”

In a word given to Titus, Paul mentions possible “wrong” conduct by servants. He told Titus to “Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again ; not purloining , but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things” (Titus 2:10).

“Not answering again,” is talking back, or arguing, with the master. The laws of our land may allow for such a response, but the Lord does not. To be “argumentative” NASB is “wrong.”

“Purloining” is “pilfering,” NKJV or “stealing,” NIV doing so secretly. The word “purloin” means “to set apart, separate, or divide for one’s self; to embezzle, withdraw covertly, and appropriate to one’s own use.” FRIEBERG This is what Achan did when he coveted and took the Babylonish garment, a wedge of

gold, and two hundred shekels of silver (Josh 7:21). It is also what Ananias and Sapphira did when they kept part of the price of their land for themselves (Acts 5:3). It is what Gehazi, Elisha's servant, subtly did when he sought to obtain garments from Naaman (2 Kgs 5:20-22). It is what Judas did when he acted as the treasurer of Jesus and His disciples (John 12:6). All such doing is "wrong."

Whether it is among the fellowship of believers, in the home, or in the work place, the children of God are to maintain a lively consciousness of this fact: the Lord will deal with those who do what is "wrong."

The Master

If the servant is being wronged by his master, he is to be confident that the Lord is beholding that as well. The Lord will avenge the servant, and punish his master for doing what was "wrong."

SHALL RECEIVE FOR THE WRONG

" . . . shall receive for the wrong which he hath done . . . " Other versions read, "will be repaid for what he has done," NKJV "will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done," NASB "will be repaid for his wrong," NIV "will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done," NRSV and "will have punishment for the wrong he has done." BBE

The sobering nature of these words is arresting – and so they are intended to be. The people of God must zealously avoid any theology that neutralizes these words, or moves them to take them lightly. It is ever true that every member of the body of Christ, whether a "servant" or not, "must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad " (2 Cor 5:10). There is a price to be paid for doing wrong, and we do well to remember it.

Speaking of this recompense, the Thessalonians were reminded, "the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified" (1 Thess 4:6). It would be good if there was more forewarning and testifying of this reality in our time. There is certainly a profound need for it.

NO RESPECT OF PERSONS

" . . . and there is no respect of persons." Other versions read, "there is no partiality," NKJV "and that without partiality," NASB "and there is no favoritism," NIV "without respect for any man's position," BBE and "God has no favorites who can get away with evil." NLT

It is good to know this is the Divine nature! God is not tolerant of wrongdoing in some, while intolerant of it in others – even though much theology declares that He is.

- Moses was close to God – one of the very few men with whom God spoke “mouth to mouth” (Num 12:7-8). Yet, when he did wrong in becoming provoked by the people, he suffered the consequences, not being allowed to enter the promised land (Num 20:12). When he failed to have his son circumcised, God met him and sought to kill him (Ex 4:25). With God, “there is no respect of persons.”
- David was a man after God’s own heart. Yet, when he did wrong in sinning with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:2-4), he suffered for the “wrong” that he had done (2 Sam 12:9-12). With God, “there is no respect of persons.”
- Solomon is described as a man whom the Lord especially loved (2 Sam 12:24). Yet, when he sinned in spite of the fact that the Lord “had appeared to him twice” (1 Kgs 11:9), he suffered for the “wrong” that he had done. The kingdom was taken from him (1 Kgs 11:11). With God, “there is no respect of persons.”

This word is to be taken seriously by every child of God. The Lord is not only faithful to His people, He is faithful to Himself: “He cannot deny Himself.” It is His nature to recompense wrong. It is to be our nature not to commit wrong. If wrong is committed, the Lord will not overlook it because we are His children. The earthly position that a person occupies will not bring such exemption either. Serious thinking on this will impact upon human conduct.

“ 4:1 Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.”

It is the manner of the Spirit to be thorough in His instruction, not allowing for any individual to imagine they are excluded from responsibility to God. In this world, men tend to imagine themselves as not being answerable to anyone. There is an inordinate promotion of this kind of attitude in our country. Our text throws such imaginations down to the ground, showing them to have no place among the elect.

GIVING WHAT IS JUST AND EQUAL

“Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal . . .” Other versions read, “give your bondservants what is just and fair,” NKJV “grant your slaves justice and fairness,” NASB “provide

your slaves with what is right and fair,” NIV “treat your slaves just and fairly,” NRSV “render unto your servants that which is just and equal,” ASV “provide your slaves with what is right and fair,” NIB “make sure your slaves are given what is upright and fair,” NJB “be just and fair to your slaves,” NLT and “that which is righteous and equal to the servants, give ye.” YLT

Here the Lord comes to the aid of believing servants, confirming His interest in, and care for, them. Even in this world, He seeks their welfare by addressing their masters. As with the other exhortations, this is not a word the servants are to promote, but that the masters are to obey.

That Which is Just

Something that is “just” is upright, righteous, virtuous, and in keeping with the commands of Gods. It is something that is right or proper. The master is not at liberty to do “wrong” to his servant, any more than the servant can do “wrong” unto him. The emphasis here is to do what is proper, or right.

Something that is “just” includes kindness and consideration. There is the idea of thoughtfulness, so that the aptitude of the servant is taken into consideration in the distribution of responsibilities.

That Which is Equal

There are three aspects to this equality.

Brethren in Christ

First , believing masters are to remember that their believing servants are also their brethren in Christ Jesus. In regards to spiritual life, their servants are coworkers and fellowheirs.

Daily Needs

Second , This would include proper food, raiment, and housing. As Solomon provided for his household (1 Kgs 4:23), and Nehemiah for his (Neh 5:18), so the godly master is to provide appropriate daily provisions for his servants. This should also take into consideration any family that the servant has (Ex 21:5).The master must not be a “hard man.”

Compensation

Third , what is “equal” also refers to compensation, or wages. There should be an obvious association between the wages that are given and the work that has been rendered. You may recall that James severely upbraided some who were not “equal” in the wages they gave their servants. Their

maltreatment was noted in heaven. “Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth ” [hosts or armies] (James 5:4).

KNOWING

“ . . . knowing . . . ” Other versions read “conscious of,” BBE “realizing that,” NAB “because you know,” NIB and “having known.” YLT

Here again, the response of the masters is not to be perfunctory – a mere discipline. As with everything done unto the Lord, the “heart, soul, mind, and strength” are to be employed. Masters are not to conduct themselves toward their servants within the framework of a law, but within the consciousness of God Himself.

YOU HAVE A MASTER IN HEAVEN

“ . . . that ye also have a Master in heaven.”

Everyone in the body of Christ is subject to someone else – as well as to one another (1 Pet 5:4). The master, however, is to be keenly aware that he also has “a Master in heaven” – and “the heavens do rule” (Dan 4:26).

There is a principle extant in the kingdom of God of which we are to be mindful. The “Master in heaven” deals with us in accordance with the manner in which we have dealt with others. A point is made of this in Scripture.

- “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mat 6:14-15).
- “With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt show thyself upright” (Psa 18:25).
- “With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward” (Psa 18:26).
- “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Mat 7:2).

- “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:38).
- “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (2 Cor 9:6).
- “Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you” (2 Thess 1:6).
- “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment” (James 2:13).
- “Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double” (Rev 18:6).

In his just and equal dealings with his servants, the master is ensuring the Lord will, in the day of judgment, be considerate of him also.

This principle, of course, applies to every member of the body of Christ. It is a worthy thing to remember, enabling us to reap a harvest of kindness in the day when we stand before the Lord. There is a sense in which we can shape the manner in which God deals with us. All of the grace and Divine resources required to accomplish this are found in Christ Jesus – everything pertaining to life and godliness!

Thus we have dealt with a very practical aspect of our salvation – what some might call “every day life.” However, it is imperative that we see this text correctly. It is infinitely more than a mere outline of how we are supposed to live. There is certainly nothing wrong with that view from an initial viewpoint, or when we are first “added to the church.” The novice may not be able to see much more than this in the beginning of his life. However, at some point, the child of God must advance to a higher view of things, else life will soon become tedious and tasteless, and he will revert to vain living. A lack of vision leads to perishing – only when we can see, walking in the light, will we “not stumble.”

The Spirit has testified to us of the manner in which “the new man” reacts to the various

positions and responsibilities of life in this world. This is the way in which Divine resources are appropriated for, what we might call, routine or ordinary life. This is not to demean this aspect of our live, but to see it from a proper perspective.

The relationships that have been mentioned – wives, husbands, children, fathers, servants, and masters – are all temporary. They pertain only to this life and this world. They cannot transfer into the world to come. For that very reason, they cannot become our primary focus, or the main things in our lives.

Notwithstanding this condition, neither can this part of our life be neglected or treated with contempt. Our faith must be brought to bear upon these relationships, otherwise they will all be in vain. Faith cannot be divorced from any part of our lives, however complex they may appear to be. At no point can we live independently of reliance upon the Lord. In every word and deed, we must “put off the old man,” and “put on the new man.”

In every human relationship, we must “walk by faith, and not by sight.”

Living “soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Tit 2:12), provides a context in which the Lord can and will work. Whether viewed by heavenly personalities, or the saints who are upon the earth, “the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace” (James 3:18). However, where anarchy and a lack of submission are present and inconsideration reigns, the hand of the Lord will not be present for good. This may be a difficult lesson for some to learn, but a due consideration of it will provide an explanation for many things that are otherwise most difficult to understand.

PARTICIPATION IN PRAYER

Lesson # 19

The Kingdom of God is one of participation. This is not a Kingdom in which personalities are inactive or uninvolved. In former times, when Israel was separated unto God, He emphasized His intention was for them to become involved with Him. This involvement included obedience to the voice of the Lord, and the keeping of His covenant. As it is written, “Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine: and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation . These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel” (Ex 19:5-6).

If Israel chose to ignore this involution with the Living God, He was quite clear concerning the

results that would follow. “But if ye will not hearken unto Me, and will not do all these commandments; and if ye shall despise My statutes, or if your soul abhor My judgments, so that ye will not do all My commandments, but that ye break My covenant: I also will do this unto you ; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set My face against you , and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you. And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins” (Lev 26:14-18).

The Lord has never intended or condoned a people He has saved failing to be involved with Him. If men choose to believe it is God’s manner to maintain an association with those who ignore Him, they are simply wrong. There is not a syllable in the entirety of Scripture that suggests such an absurdity. Furthermore, the history of His dealings with people unquestionably confirms such a thing will not take place. If people concoct theologies that leave men imagining they can remain in the favor of God without participating in will and purpose, they have only moved men closer to damnation. Those who promote such teachings and conclusions are false prophets in every sense of the word!

Ponder the various statements of this book from the standpoint of participating with God – becoming personally involved with Him in His great salvation.

- Faith in the Lord Jesus and love toward all the saints (1:4).
- The word of the truth of the Gospel bearing fruit in the people (1:4-6).
- Their love in the Spirit (1:8).
- A prayer that the saints would be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding (1:9).
- Walking worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing (1:10a).
- Being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God (1:10b).
- Giving thanks unto the Father who has qualified us for the inheritance (1:12).
- Translated into the Kingdom of His dear Son (1:13).
- A presentation to the Lord unblameable and unproveable in His sight IF we continue in the faith, grounded and settled (1:22-23).
- Not being moved away from the hope of the Gospel (1:23b).

- Christ in you is the hope of glory (1:27).
- Hearts being comforted, being knit together in love (2:2a).
- Experiencing the riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ (2:2b).
- An orderly life, and steadfastness of our faith (2:5).
- Walking in Christ, being rooted and grounded, established in the faith, and abounding with thanksgiving (2:7).
- Not allowing any man to beguile us of our reward (2:18).
- The body of Christ having nourishment ministered to it, being knit together, and increasing with the increase of God (2:19).
- Seeking the things that are above, where Christ is seated on the right hand of God (3:1).
- Setting our affection on things above, and not on things on the earth (3:2).
- Mortifying our members that are upon the earth (3:5).
- Putting off anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy communication out of our mouths (3:8).
- Putting off the old man, and putting on the new man (3:9-10).
- Putting on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and longsuffering (3:12).
- Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another (3:13).
- Putting on charity, which is the bond of perfectness (3:14).
- Letting the peace of God rule in our hearts (3:15).
- Letting the Word of Christ dwell in us richly (3:16a).

- Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (3:16b).
- Doing whatever we do in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him (3:17).

NONE ARE AUTOMATIC

None of these things are automatic. None of them occur without thoughtful involvement on the part of the saved. All of them require faith. All of them require love. All of them require hope. All of them require grace. None of them can be accomplished in the energy of the flesh, or by the natural man. None of them can be done by someone who is not in Christ Jesus. None of them are done for us by God without our participation. None of them are conferred upon us by some unique spiritual experience.

You might as well envision Israel coming out of Egypt by being miraculously delivered while they slept, as to imagine the twenty-nine things to which I have referred could be accomplished without personal involvement with God.

One of the serious deficiencies of the nominal church is that it has not instilled in its people a zeal for the things of God. Rather than the Lord becoming the heart and soul of life, He is generally viewed as an adjunct to life – a sort of accessory that is used in times of trouble or crisis. But this is a wholly distorted view, and has no association with God or His salvation. If people are not working with God, it because they have withdrawn from Him , for there is no inactive position in His kingdom.

THE KINGDOM SPELLED OUT

The Spirit reminds us that we have received a kingdom that is immovable: “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb 12:28). Notice that this reception is associated with serving God acceptably – involvement with Him .

The Kingdom we have received is spelled in verses twenty-two through twenty-four. There, we are provided a view of some of the details of the Kingdom into which we have been translated. Observe how none of them are inactive or disassociated from the Lord.

“But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb 12:22-24). This is the kingdom we are said to have “received.” Note that every one of the things mentioned is associated with life and activity.

- The city of the Living God.
- The heavenly Jerusalem.
- An innumerable company of angels.
- The general assembly and church of the Firstborn.
- God the Judge of all.
- The spirits of just men made perfect.
- Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant.
- The blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

None of those are museum pieces, or mere lifeless relics. All are noted for what they are presently doing. There are benefits associated with them all, and none of those benefits can be realized independently of involvement or participation.

All of this may appear to be a literary bypath, or a sort of hobbyhorse to be ridden now and then. However, the religious climate of America demands that men be brought to consider these things. We are being faced with church activities that are never mentioned in Scripture. Yet, they are areas with which certain religious distinctions are being associated. What kind of response would be elicited from the Apostle Paul, who wrote this Epistle, if men gave him a report of the following congregational achievements.

- A flourishing praise and worship service.
- An effective praise and worship leader.
- A dynamic youth program.
- A burgeoning junior church service.

- Outstanding Christmas and Easter programs.
- A popular counseling program.
- A growing sports program.
- A large Christian school.
- A fully credentialed church staff.
- An effective ministry for senior citizens.
- A community exercise program.
- The distribution of food and clothing to the poor of the community.

None of these things are wrong of themselves. In fact, there is much that commends them all. However, none of them, of themselves, demand the Lord, His Spirit, a love for the truth, or an absolutely holy and submitted life. They can all be rendered acceptably to the professed “church” without the possession of faith and love.

This is by no means intended to be a condemnation of such things. However, it is to say that they are not to become the most prominent thing, or become the basis for supposed Divine approval. The emphasis of the church must not be shifted from what God is doing to what men are doing. The only way to avoid this type of change is to be “laborers together with God” (1 Cor 3:9). That type of activity can only be done by those who live by faith (Rom 1:17), and walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:25). There must also be fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3; 1 Cor 1:9), and the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14).

CALLING US HIGHER

Now the Spirit will call us higher than our domestic responsibilities. What we are here summoned to do demands that no carnal distractions be found in our lives. If we are deficient as wives, husbands, fathers, children, servants, and masters, that deficiency will impact upon what we are now called to do. If we have not participated with God in our lower responsibilities, how will we be able to enter into more central matters – matters for which we have been called.

The activity to which we are now subjected touches directly upon God’s “eternal purpose.” Our calling was not in order to be wives, husbands, fathers, children, servants, or masters. We have a responsibility to conduct ourselves to the glory of God in those relationships, but they are not the “vocation wherewith ye are called” (Eph 4:1). Rather, they are areas in which we prove ourselves worthy of handling matters that bear directly upon eternity.

Fundamentally, Jesus has washed us from our sins in order that we might be “kings and priests unto God” (Rev 1:6). Now the Spirit will deal with one of the functions of king-priests. This is word for every member of the body of Christ, without regard to age or gender.

“ 4:2a Continue in prayer . . . ”

I do not believe the Spirit changes the subject in this passage. Rather, I see the previous admonitions (3:1-4:1) as a preparation for this call into holy involvement . The ultimate aim of the Spirit is not to produce ideal families, or the most comely association between masters and slaves. However noble those circumstances may be, they are subordinate to a higher work.

If spiritual life was merely a matter of proper earthly associations, it would not justify the staggering investment that has been made in our salvation. The prodigious ministry of the Prophets and John the Baptist in preparation for this salvation can hardly be vindicated by perfecting associations that are not common to all who receive that salvation. Too, I do not believe a case be built for the life, death, resurrection, exaltation, enthronement, and intercession of Jesus, solely for the purpose of achieving optimum temporal relationships. Who is willing to affirm that godly families and comely relationships between servants and masters required that Jesus be made sin (2 Cor 5:21), and cursed by God (Gal 3:13), for us? And if this is not the case, such associations cannot be the ultimate aim of God’s great salvation.

While no person of sound mind is willing to brush aside temporal interconnections as inconsequential, they are to be seen a means to an end, and not the end itself. That is, when we have fulfilled the will of the Lord in those relationships, our work is not done, but is only begun. By being faithful to God in these earthly matters, we become qualified to handle things more directly related with the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. If the latter stewardship is not taken seriously, there is no virtue in supposed achievements in the earthly matters.

FOR THE LORD

Wives are admonished to fulfill their role “as it is fit in the Lord,” and as the “church is subject to Christ.” Husbands are to love their wives as “Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it.” Children are to obey their parents “for this is well pleasing to the Lord.” Fathers are not to provoke their children, but “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Servants are to be obedient to

their masters “with singleness” of “heart, as unto Christ.” Masters are to give what is “just and equal” to their servants, knowing they also “have a Master in heaven.”

In all of these relationships, a keen sense of personal responsibility to the Lord is to be maintained. The seasoning of eternal purpose is to be sprinkled on the whole of life. This not only sanctifies life in this world, it readies us for participation in eternal matters.

SETTING THE STAGE

In order to set the stage for the words that follow, consider who it is that is speaking. This is THE “Apostle of the Gentiles” (Rom 11:13), charged with taking the Gospel the Gentile world with a mind to provoking the Jews to emulation (Rom 11:13-14).

The commission he was given is staggering to ponder. It is this: “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:18). It involves individuals doing the following.

- Seeing what the Lord has done, being enlightened concerning His salvation.
- Being turned from the power of enslaving darkness.
- Being translated into the Kingdom of God’s Son.
- Embracing, and profiting from, the very power of God.
- Receiving the forgiveness of sins.
- Receiving an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith.

A ministry of this magnitude cannot be accomplished independently of the body of Christ. The Apostle Paul was not a loaner – isolated from the rest of Christ’s body, and operating on his own. He will now call upon the people he has just admonished to join him in the labors to which he has been appointed. He will call upon them to lift up his hands, as Aaron and Hur lifted the hands of Moses (Ex 17:10-13). He sensed that the success of his commission depended, in part, upon the involvement of the saints. That involvement, however, must not be sullied with defiled hands.

CONTINUE – THE MANNER OF THE KINGDOM

“Continue . . .” Other versions read, “continue earnestly,” NKJV “continue steadfastly,” RSV

“devote yourselves,” NASB/NIV “give yourselves to,” BBE and “persevere.” DARBY

The word “continue” comes from a word that means “to be earnest towards, to persevere, be constantly diligent, to attend assiduously to, to adhere closely.” THAYER “Persist at, stay by, to be loyal to, attach oneself to, associate closely with, stand ready, occupy oneself diligently with, pay persistent attention to, cling to, spend much time in.” FRIBERG “To continue to do something with intense effort, with the possible implication of despite difficulty.” LOUW-NIDA “To persist obstinately in, to adhere firmly, be faithful.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

Continuing is not a mere habit. It is not done perfunctorily, without heart and with purpose. It is not a repetitious exercise that can be done casually, without trust, or without purpose. Continuance requires commitment, being earnest, and being diligent. It is being persistent even though obstacles are thrown in our path. Effort is characterized by intensity, faithfulness, and giving ourselves to the matter.

“Continuing” is the manner of the Kingdom. This is what characterizes all legitimate activity for Jesus.

- Continue in the grace of God (Acts 13:43).
- Continue in the faith (Acts 14:22).
- Continuing in God’s goodness (Rom 11:22).
- Continuing in the faith grounded and settled (Col 1:23).
- Continuing in the things we have learned (2 Tim 3:14).
- Letting brother love continue (Heb 13:1).
- Continuing in the Son and in the Father (1 John 2:24).
- Continuing in the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25).
- Continually offering the sacrifice of praise (Heb 13:15).
- Patient continuance in well doing (Rom 2:7).

Continuance is the opposite of falling away (Heb 6:6), drawing back (Heb 10:38-39), and coming short of the promise (Heb 4:1). It contrasts with believing for a while (Luke 8:13), becoming lukewarm (Rev 3:16), and failing to go on to perfection (Heb 6:1). Continuance cannot take place when life is not lived as unto the Lord, with zeal and consistency.

I want to reaffirm that continuing is the manner of the Kingdom. Even though earnest and consistent disciples are exceedingly rare in our part of the world, there is no other legitimate disciple. Jesus said, “And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27). That is not something that can be done sporadically or seasonally.

The landscape of Christianity is strewn with the wreckage of works that were never completed, noble ambitions that failed of fulfillment, and efforts launched in the name of Christ that eventually fizzled out. Legion is the name of preachers who have quit preaching, teachers who have quit teaching, and church members who have ceased to be productive. Dropouts are altogether too common in the professed church, and that condition is at sharp variance with the very nature of spiritual life. Our God is noted for finishing His work (Rom 9:28). The Lord Jesus is not only the Author, but the Finisher of our faith (Heb 12:2). The epitaph of a faithful kingdom laborer is, “I have finished my course” (2 Tim 4:7).

Continuance has to do with finishing. It involves dependability and faithfulness. It is altogether uncomely for anyone to begin in Christ but not finish. Whatever excuse may be offered for failing to continue will be thrown down to the ground in the day of judgment. Not continuing is equivalent to being unfaithful, and God has spoken clearly about that condition and the determined outcome of it.

IN PRAYER

“ . . . in prayer . . . ” To “continue in prayer” is to remain steadfast and earnest in this aspect of spiritual life. After all, prayer is a vital part of “the whole armor of God.” As it is written, “Put on the whole armor of God . . . Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints ” (Eph 6:11-18). “Praying always” is the same as continuing in prayer. It is being dependable in this facet of newness of life.

Notice, the particular focus of prayer is “all saints” – something that Paul will now address. The work of the Lord relies upon the prayers of the saints. While it is true that there are leaders in the body of Christ, the work itself is put into motion through the prayers of the saints. Paul knows this, and therefore urged the saints to join in this good work.

When John was given the magnificent revelation on the Isle of Patmos, he was confronted with the book of Divinely determined destiny – a book that could only be opened and expounded by the Lamb of God (Rev 5:1-7). When the Lamb of God “took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne,” one of the very first things that was mentioned was the prayers of the saints. “And when he had

taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints ” (Rev 5:8).

Later in the Revelation the prayers of the saints are again associated with the fulfillment of Divine purpose. “And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints , ascended up before God out of the angel's hand” (Rev 8:3-4).

The truth of the matter is that God has brought the saints into intimate involvement with His will. He has chosen to incorporate them into His purpose, allowing them to put their hands on the plow of Divine intent. It is this arrangement that necessitates the saints continuing in prayer. The Lord has so arranged things that prayer is integral to the fulfillment of His will.

That is the way He has designed things, and that is the way in which He works. Knowing this, Paul summons the saints into that holy involvement.

“ 4:2b . . . and watch in the same with thanksgiving.”

There is a certain attitude that accompanies valid prayer. Like all other activities in the Kingdom, prayer cannot be accomplished perfunctorily, or by rote. For example, Jesus said that prayer must be attended by “believing” (Matt 21:22). Paul reminded us that steadfastness, or being “instant,” is also required (Rom 12:12). Now he admonishes the saints concerning another frame of mind that is to be built into our prayers.

WATCHING – ANOTHER KINGDOM MANNER

“ . . . and watch . . . ” Other versions read, “be vigilant,” NKJV “keeping alert,” NASB “being watchful,” NIV “stay awake,” NJB and “with an alert mind.” NLT

The word “watch” means “to be have been aroused from sleep, to be awake .. Give strict attention to, be cautious, active – employ the most punctilious care in a thing.” THAYER “To watch, be or keep awake, be watchful,

vigilant, alert.” FRIBERG “he would surely see what was happening.” LOUW-NIDA

Being watchful postulates the possible presence of danger, or the imminence of great blessing. In both cases, there is a need to be alert. Once again, it is clear that a religion of habit or routine has no place in Christ Jesus. IN our prayers we are to be alert – alert for direction and alert for an answer.

It is while Jesus was praying that He was transfigured and Moses and Elijah appeared, speaking with Him about the death He was to accomplish (Luke 9:29-31). When Peter was on the housetop of Simon the tanner, praying, the Lord directed him concerning delivering the Gospel to Cornelius (Acts 10:9-17). You may also remember that it was while the early church was ministering to the Lord and fasting that the Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2). Again, while Paul was “praying in the Temple,” the Lord directed Him: “Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me” (Acts 22:18).

The consolation and direction that was received in each of these instances required a watchful spirit.

An Example of NOT Being Watchful

We do have a Scriptural example of some who were NOT watchful in prayer. It was one of the most critical times in the history of the world – if not the most critical time. Jesus is praying with “strong crying and tears” to Him who was able to Him who was “able to save Him from death” (Heb 5:7). His prayers were so fervent and taxing to his physical constitution (Lk 22:44), that “there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening Him” (Luke 22:43).

Rising from his intense prayer, He returned to His disciples (Peter, James, and John), only to find them asleep. In plaintive tones He asked them, “What, could ye not WATCH with Me one hour?” (Matt 26:40). At that hour, when He was struggling with the forces of darkness and of nature, the weary disciples were not watchful. He then told them, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt 26:41). Unbeknown to them, they were in the midst of a great spiritual battlefield into which the hosts of heaven and hell had converged. But they knew it not.

IN THE SAME

“ . . . in the same . . . ” Other versions read, “in it,” and NKJV/NASB “therein.” ASV

The “same” refers to prayer. It is IN the praying itself that the saint is to remain watchful, alert, earnest, and aware in both mind and spirit.

Many a poor soul has developed the dreadful habit of being unalert in periods of prayer. Although prayer is not to be approached from Mount Sinai, there are some practical observations that are in order. Over the years, I have confronted people who prayed with their eyes open, sometimes gazing around the group. I remember seeing this as a young boy without understanding, and wondering at this strange phenomenon. Mind you, it is not that such a practice is necessarily a sin. It does, however, contradict the admonition to be “watchful” in prayer. There is a sense in which the sights of this world are distracting to the heart, introducing competitive thoughts, and separating one from the spirit of prayer.

Each believer must determine to culture the practice of being “watchful” IN prayer. An alertness is required that enables the individual to be directed from heaven, and to pray “with the spirit and with the understanding” (1 Cor 14:15).

WITH THANKSGIVING

“ . . . with thanksgiving.” Other versions read, “with an attitude of thanksgiving,” NASB “keeping watch with praise,” BBE and “a thankful heart .” NLT

In this case, “thankfulness” is the environment in which prayers are offered. This is when there is, IN prayer, a prevailing sense of the goodness of God, and of the abundance of His grace. At once there is a consciousness of the past and the present, in which the Lord has been active. This is when the follower of Jesus can say with Solomon, “Blessed be the LORD . . . there hath not failed one word of all His good promise” (1 Kgs 8:56). Surveying the landscape of life, the believer can say with Joshua, “that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning” (Josh23:14). He can confess with Zacharias, “He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy” (Luke 1:54).

The well of thanksgiving is opened by such truthful recollections. Thankfulness also has a way of clearing our vision, so that we are better able to see past blessings, as well as coming benefits. This vision is essential to effective prayer.

Prayers that are driven by such a spirit are more effective. Thus Peter admonished, “Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray” NIV (1 Pet 4:7). Effective prayer requires these qualities.

“ 3a Withal praying also for us.”

Now the Spirit will show us why cultured spirits are essential. The necessity of being watchful and thankful in our prayers will be made more clear. This is one of the reasons for admonishing wives, husbands, fathers, children, servants, and masters. Fulfilling their responsibilities is not an end of itself, but better prepares them to enter into the work of the Kingdom, being “laborers together with God” (1 Cor 3:9). It should not surprise us that “joint heirs” with Christ are also “laborers together” with Him.

While we are to “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil 4:6), this is by no means a total view of prayer. At some point, our prayers must include interests that are higher than our own, and pursue larger matters than those that impact directly upon us. We must venture beyond the circumference of our own lives. This will become evident as we delve into this text – a request that we pray for someone other than ourselves.

WITHAL PRAYING ALSO

“Withal praying also . . .” Other versions read, “meanwhile,” NKJV “at the same time,” NASB “too,” NIV “also,” RSV and “especially.” NJB

The word translated “withal” means “at once, at the same time, at the same the with, together with.” THAYER “In association with,” FRIBERG “A point of time which is emphatically simultaneous with another point in time.” LOUW-NIDA Here, then, is something that is to be done WHILE we are continuing in prayer – whether personal or collective.

There is a certain harmony in the Kingdom of God and of Christ – a harmony that allows for great versatility without the compromise of godly focus. In the world, and especially within the false church, “Babylon the Great” (Rev 17:5), this kind of diversity is not seen. Within the very social fabric of organized religion there is a sort of ungodly competition. This trait is often what drives, what is called, “specialized ministries.” This, however, is not the manner of the Kingdom.

While it is quite common to find this, no valid work for Christ should have to operate without the confines of local congregations. Notwithstanding, many good men and women have found it impossible to fulfill their calling within the organizational structure of the professed church. Contrary to this circumstance, we will find Paul fulfilling his ministry as a member of the body of Christ, calling upon congregations to lend their influence to his calling.

Valid personal concerns do not conflict with larger Kingdom matters. Men and women of faith can throw themselves into fervent prayer for matters that do not directly impact upon their personal calling or ministry, and do so without any interruption of their work. Congregations can do the same.

FOR US

“ . . . for us . . . ”

The prayer is for Paul and those who traveled with him – “us.” We read of “Paul and his company” (Acts 13:13), “Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 13:43), “Paul and Silas” (Acts 16:19), “Paul and Timotheus” (Phil 1:1), and “Paul and Sylvanus, and Timotheus” (1 Thess 1:1). Although he was the one commissioned to be “the Apostle to the Gentiles,” he gathered around him faithful souls to co-labor with himself. That also is the manner of the kingdom.

It is apparent that there is no conflict between the objectives of Paul and that of the saints in Colossae. While continuing in prayer, they can take up matters pertaining to Paul’s Apostleship.

Probably, with the only exception of Christ Jesus, Paul is the leading man of all time. He “labored more abundantly” than the other Apostles (1 Cor 15:10). Three years after he had been personally tutored by Jesus, he “went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days” (Gal 1:18). Even though Peter and the other Apostles had been in Christ much longer than Paul, they were not ahead of him in their understanding. Paul says of the most noble of them, “they who seemed to have been somewhat in conference added nothing to me” (Gal 2:6). This was in no way intended to be derogatory, but did accent the remarkable abundance that had been revealed to Paul. James, Peter, and John “perceived the grace” that had been given to Paul, extended the right hand of fellowship to him, and knew that he “should go unto the heathen, and they to the circumcision” (Gal 2:9). They saw the extent of his understanding.

Paul saw more than others saw, being given the understanding required to open men’s eyes and turn them from the power of Satan unto God (Acts 26:18). As it is written, “If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) ” (Eph 3:3-5).

Yet, with all of the revelation that had been given to Paul, and with the absolute uniqueness of his ministry, he relied upon the prayers of the saints. When addressing the Ephesians concerning “the whole armor of God,” Paul declared prayer was integral to that armor. He focused upon being watchful “with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me ” (Eph 6:19-20a). How is it that he spoke in this way? It was because he knew the nature of the Kingdom into which we have been

transferred. There is an interdependence in that Kingdom that is by Divine design.

Just as surely as Aaron and Hur held up the hands of Moses in a strategic battle (Ex 17:10-13), so Paul calls upon the saints in Colossae to hold him up. Aaron and Hur were not equals with Moses, for he had no equals. God did not speak to anyone else like He spoke to Moses. God said of him, "With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold : wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" (Num 12:8). Yet, Moses, in order to fulfill his work, was dependent upon those who had less distinction than himself.

That is still the manner of the Kingdom. Labor to see it with understanding, and to enter into the labors of others as best you can. Run from self-centeredness. It is not of God.

" 3b . . . that God would open unto us a door of utterance . . . "

Paul is not vague about how the saints are to pray for him. He not only has a grasp of what he has been called to do, but he is also perceptive of how that calling will be fulfilled. He comprehends the manner in which Jesus works.

GOD OPENS

". . . that God would open unto us . . ." Other versions read, "that God may give us an open door," BBE "asking God to throw open a door," NJB and "that God will give us many opportunities." NLT

Because "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psa 24:1), He can create opportunities. Those in whom faith is working know this is the case. They know that, in Christ, the " opening of the prison to them that are bound" is boldly announced (Isa 61:1; Luke 4:18). He "opened" Leah's barren womb (Gen 29:31), and Rachel's as well (Gen 30:22). He " opened the eyes of Balaam" (Num 22:31), and the eyes of Elisha's trembling servant (2 Kgs 6:17). He "opened" Lydia's heart so she could respond to the things spoken to her by Paul (Acts 16:14). Even in Job's day, men knew the Lord " openeth the ears of men" (Job 33:16). Jesus told the church at Philadelphia, "These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth" (Rev 3:7).

A Door Opened to Philadelphia

In a special message sent to the church in Philadelphia, Jesus spoke of creating an opportunity. This is one church against which Jesus had nothing. Because of the fierce warfare in which it was engaged, this church is described as having “a little strength.” Notwithstanding “the King of glory” declares He is going to “set before” them an “open door, and no man can shut it” (Rev 3:8). This was an opportunity in which this faithful body of believers would be able to bring glory to God. Although they were spiritually fatigued, no man would be able to take this opportunity from them, or inhibit them from taking advantage it.

Evidence at Colossae

This is the way in which Jesus worked, and Paul knew it. With a message burning in his heart, he sought for an opportunity to declare it. This involved more than simply speaking the message. He was keenly aware that the Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16), and he desired an opportunity to declare it where it would bring forth fruit . It was no consolation to Paul simply to preach the message. His desire was for fruit like that which had been reaped in Colossae: “. . . the word of the truth of the Gospel, which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit , as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth” (Col 1:6).

A Sense of Stewardship

Paul had a keen sense of the requirement for stewards. As it is written, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor 4:2). This involves more than simply speaking the Gospel. It also includes declaring it at the right time and in the right place. This is why, at one time, the Spirit forbade Paul and company to go into Asia, and did not allow them to go into Bithynia (Acts 16:6-7). It was not the right time or place.

Being a faithful steward involves being sensitive to the Lord and following His direction. Kingdom activities are directed from heaven, where the Head of the body is enthroned. The finely tuned organizations of men cannot bring glory to God, for they are operating in the flesh. The church, with all of its members, is “ the body of Christ,” who is its solitary Head. It is a sin of the greatest magnitude for men to attempt to marshal the saints to implement programs spawned in their own minds. Although this practice is quite common, it is impotent to yield anything but external and temporal results.

When Jesus charged His disciples with preaching the Gospel, He commissioned them to begin where most of the preparative work had already been done. “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem , and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Earlier He said that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name beginning at Jerusalem ” (Luke 24:47). That is where the door was opened, as the results confirmed.

A DOOR OF UTTERANCE

“ . . . a door of utterance . . . ” Other versions read, “a door for the word,” NKJV “for our message,” NIV “a door for the preaching of the word,” BBE “a door of speech,” DOUAY “a door for us to announce the message,” NJB “to preach,” NLT and “to speak.” YLT

The word “utterance” means “of speech, a word uttered by a living voice.” STRONG’S It refers to an opportunity to speak – to express the message of the Gospel in words. Those who say the best sermon is one that is seen are only expressing their own ignorance. Faith does not come by seeing, but by hearing. The Gospel cannot be comprehended by seeing, it must be heard in words, else it will forever remain a mystery.

A “door of utterance” is an opportunity to preach the Gospel to those who want to hear it. It is a Divinely orchestrated circumstance that brings the Gospel to a people who are ready to receive it – like Philip being sent to a Ethiopian official who had a desire to understand the Word of God (Acts 8:26).

There are several things that characterize a faithful steward of God.

- He has received something from God that is to be declared.
- He has perceived the sense of the message received, having an understanding of it.
- The message is burning in his heart like a fire, and he is compelled to speak it out.
- He has a desire for the message to be comprehended and received by others.

Where these characteristics do not exist, a real preacher is not present. Anyone else who presumes to preach in the name of the Lord is actually an imposter. Those who preach without being “sent” have done nothing more than attempt to impose their will in an arena in which they are not licensed to operate.

A “door of utterance” assumes the conditions that I have just mentioned. It assumes there is a message to be declared. It takes for granted the person who will speak has an understanding of that message. It accepts that there is a driving compulsion to speak the message. It assumes there is a fervent desire for that message to be understood. To give an opportunity to speak to anyone else would contradict the very character of Christ and the nature of His salvation.

It is not enough to have a message – a valid and powerful message from heaven! There must be

an opportunity to declare it – and that is something men cannot create. When preaching the Gospel, men are not to stab in the dark, making vain attempts here and there to declare the good news – trying, as it were, to get the message out. They are not to study the layout of the world to see where they conceive the Gospel to be needed most. However noble this may appear, it is not the strategy that has been employed by heaven. I suppose a case could have been built for the priority of preaching the Gospel to Asia – but there was a time when the Holy Spirit would not allow it. Perhaps a convincing case could have been presented for going into Bithynia, but there was a time when the Spirit would not allow that either. At that time, the door of utterance was opened in Macedonia, where a group of women were gathered by a river to pray (Acts 16:9-14).

Thus Paul calls the saints into holy involvement with his own Apostleship. He exhorts them to pray that the Lord will open opportunities for him to declare the Gospel to those who will receive it. He knew Jesus could do this. He also knew the manner of Christ's working – that He works through His church, "which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph 1:23).

My own testimony

I cannot help but testify of the blessing of the Lord that I myself have received in this area. Over a period of more than five decades, I have prayed in the words of David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law" (Psa 119:18). In great mercy, He continues to answer that prayer. I have found that when truth is discerned it is like "a burning fire shut up in my bones" that could not be contained (Jer 20:9).

The complicating factor was that I was associated with a people who, for the most part, had little or no appetite for these "wondrous things." Here and there among them, by the grace of God, the remnant of those who have received the love of the truth were found, but they were precious few and far between.

The Lord opened a door of utterance to me in writing – a vehicle through which I could express the things I was given to see. Several thousand readers in America, Korea, and India were opened up to me – a fellowship in which I found great joy and strength.

In 1958, the Lord opened a door of utterance to me in Gary, Indiana. There a band of disciples gathered together with a fervent desire for the truth. They came from all kinds of backgrounds, and with a single purpose. Through them my writing ministry expanded, and a national radio ministry was opened. In 1980, a door was opened in India. In 1988 a door was opened for the publication the book "The Kingdom of God." In 1989, another door was opened for the preparation and dissemination of sixty-five 30-minute videos on pertinent themes related to stabilizing the saints.

In 1992 another door of utterance was opened within a group of churches, permitting me to speak the things God has given me to see. In 1993, another door of utterance was opened in my own

home, where saints gathered together for the solitary purpose of feasting on the riches of God's Word.

In 1997 the Lord opened a door through the Internet, allowing access to thousands of hungry souls throughout the world. This has developed into a significant ministry, and has been used by the Lord to open other doors of unparalleled opportunity.

In 2002 and 2003 the Lord opened doors in West Africa, Pakistan, Mauritius, Nigeria, South Africa, and the Philippines.

In every single one of these opportunities, there was glorious receptivity to the message of the Gospel. The recipients did not resist us, but received the Word with all gladness and readiness of mind. Also, in all of them a static approach to preaching and teaching was strictly forbidden. All of them required ongoing growth and insight on my own part, therefore providing for constant freshness and joy. These experiences continue to this very day (April, 2004).

Great and Effectual

These experiences can best be described the words of Paul, who enjoyed such blessings on a vastly larger scale: "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor 16:9). Another version reads, "a wide door for effective work has opened to me." NRSV

It was the Lord who opened that large and efficacious opportunity. However, he did so through the prayers of those who had been "called into the fellowship" of the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:9) – souls who were intimately involved with the Son of God.

Perhaps one reason for the seeming lack of "effectual" doors is the lack of involvement with the Living God on the part of professed believers. This is another result of an approach to religion that makes the people primarily spectators. It is the consequence of lifeless organizationalism, where the people are not called to consistently participate in eternal purpose of God. Satan has become a more hindering force because of the general deadness of the church. Thus the Spirit calls the lethargic to "awake out of sleep, for not is our salvation nearer than when we first believed" (Rom 13:11). The need of the hour is alertness!

“ 3c . . . to speak the mystery of Christ . . . ”

There is no question in Paul’s mind what he will do with an open door. He knows why the Lord has called him. He emphatically stated elsewhere that he was not fulfilling the agenda of men. “For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ” NASB (Gal 1:10). Prior to being called by Christ, Paul excelled in the religion of the Jews. “And profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers” (Gal 1:14). He was a “Hebrew of the Hebrews” (), and “lived a Pharisee” after “the most straitest sect,” he said, “of our religion” (Acts 26:5).

All of that changed when he came into Christ and the mantle of Apostleship was placed upon him. He was not a Christian of Christians but “an Apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God” (1 Cor 1:1). He no longer sought profit “in the Jews’ religion,” but was “separated unto the Gospel of God” (Rom 1:1). Now he was not living as a Pharisee “of the most straitest sect of our religion,” but was the “Apostle of the Gentiles,” in order to provoke some of the Jews “to emulation, and might save some of them” (Rom 11:13-14). Now Paul spells out more specifically what he will do when the Lord opens the door of opportunity for him.

SPEAKING

“ . . . to speak . . . ” Other versions read, “so that we may speak forth,” NASB “so that we may proclaim,” NIV “that we may declare,” NRSV “for the preaching of the Word,” BBE and “to announce the message and proclaim.” NLT

The “door or utterance” was opened in order that they might speak, proclaim, preach, or declare. That is what the opportunity was for. The open door was not for the purposes of making acquaintances, forging a religious career, or even establishing a church. It was a Divinely orchestrated occasion when the appointed message could be spoken.

In a day when religious institutionalism has upstaged the revealed purpose of God, preachers are rarely noted for preaching. In fact, that is generally acknowledged to be the least of all their duties. It is not unusual for a prestigious preacher to actually speak only a few minutes a week, yet be known as a “preacher.” Preachers are often known for their administrative abilities, waiting on tables, developing various church procedures, etc. Paul, however, was noted for what he SAID. That means when God opened the door of utterance, he took advantage of it and spoke the Word of God.

Paul was noted for what He SAID – what he spoke, or declared. That is where his focus was placed – declaring. If you take away what Paul said, whether in person or in writing, he would soon

have been forgotten. It is his message that has given him kingdom distinction.

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

“ . . . the mystery of Christ . . . ” Other versions read, “the secret of Christ,” BBE and “to preach about His secret plan – that Christ is also for you Gentiles.” NLT

In Scripture, a “mystery” is not something that remains unknown or hidden. Rather, it is something that is hidden by nature, but has been revealed by God. A Scriptural “mystery” is something that cannot be deciphered by the wisdom of men. Apart from Divine intervention, it is something that cannot possibly be known.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul asked that they pray he would open up his mouth and “make known the mystery of the Gospel” (Eph 6:19). This is the same “mystery” mentioned our text. “Christ” is the substance of the Gospel, and “the Gospel” is the good news about Christ. That is, Christ is the total answer to the human dilemma caused by the entrance of sin and death. And let it be clear, the problem that plagues humanity is sin ! All of the deficiencies, inadequacies, and challenges within humanity are only sub-points of sin – and sin is the matter Christ came to address.

Earlier in this Epistle, Paul referred to the “mystery of Christ,” affirming he had received it to make it known, among others, to the Colossian brethren. “Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory ” (Col 1:25-27).

The mystery to be proclaimed was not God’s plan for the family. It was not an evangelistic strategy. It was not a way to impact the governments of the world. It was not the secret to mental health and personal achievement. The “mystery” that Paul proclaimed was not the manner in which the local congregation is to be organized, nor was it the official roles of its various members. Compressed into a single word, the “mystery” was “Christ” – “the mystery of Christ .”

The power of that message was realized when it became personalized – “Christ IN you.” Until that happened, Christ remains a “mystery,” inaccessible to the human intellect. Until Christ is within, men only philosophize about Jesus, and in very small measures at that.

The effectiveness of Christ is experienced when we are dominated by hope – “Christ in you the HOPE of glory.” Let it be clear, Christ is relevant to people only to the extent that they dominated by the anticipation of being glorified. Wherever people are not purifying themselves because of that hope (1 John 3:2-3), they easily adopt an emphasis other than Christ.

Christ's Person and accomplishments were what Paul expounded. The function of Christ in the Divine economy was what he expatiated, not the role of the Christian, the church, or the family. While he did teach on those matters, that teaching was not his message. Rather, he dealt with such things because they could prove to be obstacles in grasping the real message.

As soon as Paul was converted, he spent several "days with the disciples which were at Damascus, and straightway preached Christ" (Acts 9:19-20). During a period of "two whole years" in his own hired house he continued "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:30-31). To the Corinthians, accustomed to all manner of Grecian wisdom, Paul said, "we preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:23). That was the thrust of his message.

All of Paul's teaching and preaching found its center in the Lord Jesus Christ. Without Him, none of his teaching made any sense, or had any relevance. To be sure, what he taught brought a greater understanding of the people themselves. But that is only because he has provided an understanding of "the Lord's Christ."

Within the Christian community there is a remarkable diversity of messages. Some preach the church. Others preach the Holy Spirit. There is preaching about health and prosperity in all of its varied forms. There are messages that are tailored for the young, the old, the singles, and the married. There are those who major on some historical movement, together with its slogans and positions. Others focus on the future, emphasizing what they call "prophecy." There are even some who emphasize praise, music, and worship, doing so with somber tones and disfigured faces.

However, none of these things can appropriately be termed a "mystery." Nor, indeed, are they suitable subjects for doctrinal emphasis. God has nowhere committed himself to open a door of utterance for the proclamation of such things – nowhere! When John spoke of the real message – the one associated with "eternal life" – he referred to it as "the record that God gave of His Son" (1 John 5:10-11). That, and that alone, is the message for which God provides a "door of utterance" – a "great and effectual door." Opportunities to speak other messages, "another Jesus," and "another Gospel," do not come from Him.

"3d . . . for which I am also in bonds."

Paul now confirms his total commitment to the message – “the mystery of Christ.” He has not only been appointed, called, and commissioned to preach this message, that is precisely what he has been doing. His testimony will confirm that his heart is in his work. He can be trusted, therefore, to take advantage of a “door of utterance.” One of the reasons Jesus “enabled” Paul, “putting him into the ministry,” was that He “considered” Paul to be “faithful” (1 Tim 1:12). No other person can be trusted with an opened “door of utterance.” Unfaithful people are wasting their time in praying for opportunities. Such graces are reserved for the faithful, and for the faithful alone.

FOR WHICH

“ . . . for which . . . ” Other versions read, “on account of which,” RSV “wherefore,” GENEVA “for the sake of which,” NJB and “That is why.” NLT

Even though the message Paul consistently delivered was “good,” declaring the “way of salvation,” and opening the marvelous accomplishments and ministry of the Lord Jesus, it was not so received by many. The very message that brought joy to some, produced anger in others. As it is written, “For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor 2:16).

What Paul now relates was the result of his preaching. The irony of the situation is that it was not the heathen that instigated most of his suffering, but his own countrymen. He delivered a message that those devoted to justification by law could not receive. He was so dogmatic and unrelenting in his proclamation of “the mystery of Christ” that the “enemies of the cross” lashed out against him. Of these opponents, who were Jews, Paul said, “who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost” (1 Thess 2:16).

This opposition from the Jews began early in Paul’s ministry.

- Soon after his conversion we read, “But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him : but their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him” (Acts 9:24).
- In Antioch of Pisidia, “ the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts” (Acts 13:50).
- In Iconium, “ the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles , and made their minds evil affected against

the brethren” (Acts 14:2).

- In Lystra, “there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul , drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead” (Acts 14:19).
- In Thessalonica, “the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people ” (Acts 17:13).
- In Corinth the opposition began to pick up. “And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat” (Acts 18:12).
- When Paul gave his defense before a tribunal, speaking to his brethren, “ they cried out , and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air” (Acts 22:23). Eventually this opposition led to Paul’s imprisonment in Rome.
- Before he was transported to Rome, forty Jews “banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul ” (Acts 23:12).

And what was the cause of all of this opposition? It is what Paul preached. He preached Christ with such strength and commitment that it exposed the hearts of those who were set against the Son of God. That is why he suffered – it was because of what he preached!

I AM ALSO IN BONDS

“ . . . I am also in bonds.” Other versions read, “I am also in chains,” NKJV “I have also been imprisoned,” NASB “for which I am in prison,” NRSV and “That is why I am here in chains.” NLT

Here is a faithful man, imprisoned because of his preaching. Elsewhere he associated his imprisonment with his labors for Christ. He called himself “the prisoner of Jesus Christ” (Eph 3:1; Phil 1:1; Phil 1:9), “the prisoner of the Lord” (Eph 4:1), and “His prisoner” (2 Tim 1:8). He referred to his bonds as “the bonds of the Gospel” (Phil 1:13). He asked the Lord to give mercy to the household of Onesiphorous, “for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain” (2 Tim 1:16).

Because the preaching of the cross is “foolishness” to those who are perishing (1 Cor 1:18), there was great opposition against Paul. Thus he was placed in restraints – “bonds.” Standing in defense of his faith, he referred to his condition in these words: “I am bound with this chain.”

How does a man like that want people to pray for him? Here he asks the saints to pray that a “door of utterance” will be opened to him – an opportunity to preach the message for which he was currently “in bonds.” This is in perfect accord with several other requests he made for prayer.

- “Finally, brethren, pray for us , that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified , even as it is with you, And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men : for all men have not faith.” (2 Thess 3:1-2).
- “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me , that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly , to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph 6:20).
- “Ye also helping together by prayer for us , that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf” (2 Cor 1:11).

When Paul said “pray for us” (1 Thess 5:25; Heb 13:18), he was not taken up with personal concerns. Rather, his thoughts centered in the work of the Lord, and the Divine appointment that had brought him into involvement with that purpose.

Angels are occupied with the will of God (Psa 104:4). The Lord Jesus Himself is occupied with the will of God (John 4:34). The Holy Spirit is occupied with the will of God (Rom 8:27). Paul’s calling has brought him into that will also. What about you?

“ 4a That I may make it manifest . . . ”

What is it that needs to be clarified, or made plain? Is it the church? The family? The role of government? The way the church is to be organized? Who has the authority in the church? What is it that God commissions people to manifest, declare, or make known? If one put his ear to the religious landscape, there might be considerable confusion on the matter. However, there is no discombobulation on this subject in Scripture. We have been drawn to “the mystery of Christ” – the hidden things pertaining to the One God has anointed to destroy the devil his works, and deliver those who were all their lifetime subject to the fear of death .

THAT I

“That I . . .” Other versions read, “in order that I,” NASB and “so that I may,” NRSV and “to the end that I may.” DARBY

This is the purpose for which Paul asks for prayer. He is seeking Divine enablement. Note, he does not ask for saints to pray that somehow someone would be found to do the work of the Lord. Rather, he is seeking capability for his personal involvement in the purpose of God. After all, “the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him” (2 Chron 16:9). Such a person was found in the Apostle Paul. He knew it, and asked for prayer that he might be equal to the challenge the Lord placed before him.

MAKE IT MANIFEST

“ . . . may make it manifest . . .” Other versions read, “make it clear,” NASB “proclaim it clearly,” NIV “reveal it clearly.” NRSV

The heart of the Apostle knows that if men are to gain an advantage from the Gospel, it must, to some degree, be understood. A Gospel that remains a mystery will not bring faith – for faith comes by hearing this Gospel (Rom 10:17).

This understanding requires Divine involvement. Only the Lord can open the heart, so that men can respond appropriately to that Gospel (Acts 16:14). However, that by no means excludes the need for a messenger – one who is “sent” by God to deliver the appointed message (Rom 10:14-15).

Focused Calling

It is the responsibility of every preacher to make “the mystery of Christ” clear. That is to be the compelling objective and the effective result of preaching. If that does not happen, the preaching is worthless. God does not call men to clarify earthly responsibilities and temporal relationships. That is, that is not thrust of the work into which He calls His laborers. He raises up laborers for “ HIS harvest,” not the ambitions and projects of men. Like it or not, the Lord does not call people to solve the problems of their peers. They may give wise counsel, assist in bearing burdens, and clarify what God has said concerning temporal relationships. But that is not to be their focus, nor is it to be the thing for which they are known.

Throughout the centuries, God has called men into His own work. Such notables as Moses, David, the Prophets, John the Baptist, the Apostles, and others like James, Jude, Luke, Timothy, Titus were included. Not a single one of them were called to resolve a social issue. Many of them delivered a word concerning such things, but that was never their focus.

Today, the professed church has become too diverse in its work. It has lost its focal point, and is

dabbling in too many things. The church is primarily “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15), and it is to be occupied with the business of clarifying what is “hidden in Christ.” It has not been called to serve the community, but to serve the Lord.

Right Words

In manifesting “the mystery of Christ,” it is imperative that right words be employed. Paul was keenly aware of this. That is why he said , “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words , lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect ” (1 Cor 1:17). Note, the employment of “cleverness of speech,” NASB or “words of human wisdom,” NIV actually negate “the cross of Christ,” making it ineffective. The more of man that is in preaching, the more impotent it becomes. Novel preaching is powerless preaching. When men fill up their messages with earthly illustrations, humorous anecdotes, and the likes, their messages become feeble and ineffectual. It is quite possible for homiletical rules to do nothing more than neutralize the truth.

Powerful preaching is “a message of wisdom among the mature” (1 Cor 2:5). That is why Paul said, “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom , but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Cor 2:4-5). With holy deliberation he spoke “not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words ” (1 Cor 2:13). That is the kind of preaching that makes manifest “the mystery of Christ.”

The Nature of Things Manifested

Throughout Scripture, things that are “manifested” are consistently associated with the Person and purpose of God. These are the things that God reveals or makes known. A brief perusal of the things said to be “manifest” will serve to confirm this.

- What may be known of God is “manifest” (Rom 1:19).
- The righteousness of God without the Law is “manifested” (Rom 3:21).
- The whole creation is waiting expectantly for the “manifestation of the sons of God ” (Rom 8:19).
- God Himself was “made manifest unto them” that asked not for Him (Rom 10:20).
- The message of the Gospel , kept secret since “the world began,” is now made “manifest” for “the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:26).
- God makes “manifest” the savor of His knowledge (2 Cor 2:14).

- The truth is made “manifest” in the preaching of the Gospel (2 Cor 4:2-3).
- The “ life of Jesus ” is “made manifest” in the bodies of the saints (2 Cor 4:10).
- The “mystery” of salvation , that has been “hid from ages and generations,” is now “made manifest to His saints” (Col 1:26).
- In Christ, God Himself “was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim 3:16).
- The “ purpose and grace ” of God are “made manifest by the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Tim 1:10).
- God’s word is “manifested . . . through preaching” (Tit 1:3).
- The Lamb of God , “foreordained before the foundation of the world,” is “manifest in these last times for you” (1 Pet 1:20).
- The life of God has been “manifested” in Christ Jesus (1 John 1:2).
- Jesus was “manifested to take away our sins” (1 John 3:5).
- The Son of God was “manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

These texts speak for themselves, making quite clear where the emphasis is to be placed.

“MANIFEST” AND “MYSTERY”

The word “manifest” appropriately has to do with a “mystery ” – something that is presently hidden, yet is intended by God to be known. Things that are “manifested” are things that already exist, but are, by nature, hidden from the natural understanding.

God, Christ, the righteousness of God, the purpose of God – these are all existent in their fulness. None of them are in a state of development. All of them are made accessible to men through Christ Jesus and by faith. These are the substance of preaching – the core of what is being made known.

Summarized in a single statement, the hidden thing that is being made known is “the mystery of Christ.” This is not a message about Jesus that is derived from uninspired accounts. It is not a word

that is developed through etymological research, archeological findings, or extra-biblical writings. Those are not things that are hidden to men, or require prayers, such as the one that is now set before us. “The mystery of Christ” has to do with Divine determinations and objectives that can only be known by revelation. It deals with the accomplishments of Christ that cannot be seen with the eye, or grasped with the natural understanding. These are the things that are to be made known, or “manifested.”

Some Examples

A brief review of things relating to Christ that are hidden to nature will suffice to confirm this point. If we had all of the historical facts before us concerning the birth, life, and death of Christ, there are several things that could not possibly be derived independently of revelation. These all pertain to the Lord Jesus Christ.

- He was sent from heaven (John 6:38).
- He was “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).
- He received a commission to lay down His life and take it up again (John 10:17-18).
- He only spoke what the Father told Him (John 12:49).
- He only did what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19).
- He partook of flesh and blood that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death (Heb 2:14).
- He came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim 1:15).
- He came into the world to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).
- He was tempted in all points like as we are (Heb 4:15).
- No man took His life from Him (John 10:18).
- God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor 5:19).
- In His death He destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14).

- He made peace through the blood of His cross (Col 1:20).
- On the cross He blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us (Col 2:14).
- He made a public show of inimical principalities and powers, triumphing over them in His cross (Col 2:15).
- He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb 9:26).
- He bore our sins in His body on the tree (1 Pet 2:24).
- God made Him to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor 5:21).
- He was made a curse for us, redeeming us from the curse of the Law (Gal 3:13).
- He was obedient unto death (Phil 2:8).
- He was declared to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection (Rom 1:4).
- By one offering He perfected forever those who are sanctified (Heb 10:14).
- We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ once for all (Heb 10:10).

There is not a single one of these things than can be derived by merely viewing the history of Christ's birth, life, and death – not a single one. Given all of the external facts in the case, we could not have concluded one of these sentences, much less all of them. No amount of expertise in the “original language” can produce the knowledge of these realities. If God did not raise up men to declare them – to make them “manifest” – they would have remained in obscurity.

This is a part of “the mystery of Christ” that is to be made clear to the people. If this does not take place, nothing pertaining to godliness, or living acceptably, will make sense to us. The persuasion of these things is the catalyst that enables us to walk by faith and live in the Spirit.

The modern church has not done well in clarifying these things – things gathered together in “the mystery of Christ.” You will find a staggering consistency in the ignorance that exists concerning them. These are the very things that are excluded from preaching, in favor of what is called relevant matters. If a person cannot comprehend the things pertaining to Christ, such things as the resurrection of the dead and appearing before the judgment seat of Christ will be viewed as irrelevant. However, when faith takes hold of them, and they are made manifest to the heart and mind, everything else

makes sense. Godliness is then seen as essential. Alertness and vigilance make perfect sense. Diligence and perseverance are then seen as indispensable.

It is no wonder that Paul asked for prayers that He would clarify “the mystery of Christ,” opening the riches of that mystery to the people. He knew that was the means through which faith is spawned.

“ 4b . . . as I ought to speak.”

The heart that is “established in grace,” and not by empty religious routines (Heb 13:9), views the work of the Lord quite differently than those who are under the dominion of Law. Those who know that God has made them “meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12) have a unique perception of what they are supposed to do. In the verse before us, we find a sterling example of this.

AS I OUGHT TO SPEAK

“ . . . as I ought to speak.” Other versions read, “as I should,” NIV “as it is right for me to do,” BBE “as it becometh me to speak,” GENEVA “as I must speak,” NAB and “as it behoveth me to speak.” YLT

The word “ought” comes from a Greek word that means, “it is necessary, there is a need of, it behooves, it is right and proper.” THAYER “It is necessary, one must, one has to, it is necessary or binding, one ought, one has to, one must.” FRIBERG “That which must necessarily take place.” LOUW-NIDA “It is binding on one to do a thing, one must, one ought.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

Even in English, the word means, “Used to indicate duty or correctness.” OXFORD

Absolutely Essential

Making “manifest” the “mystery of Christ,” clarifying it to the minds of the people, was not a mere noble objective. Paul is not requesting that he excel above his equals in the matter of preaching, by

doing better than ordinary. In this, he is asking for prayer to preach in the only acceptable way.

In the Scriptures, this word is often translated “must.” In preparing to die, Jesus showed His disciples that He “ must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matt 16:21). When speaking to them of certain signs of great trouble that was coming upon the earth, He said “for all these things must come to pass” (Matt 24:6). It is obvious from these texts that “must” is not one of several differing options.

Elsewhere, where the word is translated “ought,” it is equally apparent that something essential is being addressed. “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak” (Rom 15:1). “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies” (Eph 5:28). “. . . ye ought to walk and to please God” (1 Thess 4:1). “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip” (Heb 2:1). “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness” (2 Pet 3:11).

As you can see, there is nothing about this word that suggests something that is optional. “Ought” speaks of something that is essential, imperative, and necessary. It is a requirement or requisite.

Paul wrote something similar in his Epistle to the Ephesians. “For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph 6:20). On the one hand, he asks the Colossians to pray that he may speak with great clarity, making the mystery known. On the other hand, he asks the Ephesians to pray that he will make “the mystery of the Gospel” known boldly, or fearlessly – with frankness in utterance, and confidence in spirit.

When it comes to preaching, here are two things that must be done. They come under the heading of “OUGHT.”

- **CLARIFY THE GOSPEL.** If hungry souls are left in a quandary about anything, it had better not be the Gospel of Christ! If the quest of the believer is to “know Christ,” what may be known of Him must be manifested or clarified! Those who spend the burden of their time developing other subjects are recreant to their trust and useless to the church. If the Scriptures themselves primarily testify of Christ (John 5:39), what may be said of the professed preacher or teacher who does not do so? Paul describes such men in these arresting words: “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ : whose end is destruction , whose God is their belly , and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things ” (Phil 3:19).
- **PREACH IT BOLDLY.** Many a would-be preacher has caved in to pressure to clarify other things –

things that have little to do with the Person and accomplishments of Christ. In the church culture in which we find ourselves, it will take “boldness” to clarify “the mystery of Christ” – but it must be done! If men say to be silent, the message must be still be declared. If the religious group with which we are identified does not allow for making “the mystery of Christ” plain, men must do it anyway. If elders or other leaders oppose this kind of message, it is still to be declared. If it conflicts with other interests, preach it! If it drives people away, declare it still!

It does not appear to me that these things are generally known within the professed church. There are simply too many other messages being declared! Churches are putting up with deficient and flawed teaching and preaching. This is nothing new. Paul dealt with this in the church at Corinth – a congregation that had a noble beginning and came “behind in no gift” (1 Cor 1:7). Yet, they had become so novel in their approach to the things of God that Paul said this of them. “For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough ” NIV (2 Cor 11:4).

For that matter, Jesus Himself said the church at Thyatira tolerated a false prophetess among them, who was teaching His servants “to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols” (Rev 2:20). The church in Pergamum had those who held to the “doctrine of Balaam,” and others who had embraced “the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes,” which thing Jesus hated (Rev 2:14-15).

The Galatians endured some teachers who troubled them and perverted the Gospel of Christ (Gal 1:7). They moved the Galatians to cease to obey the truth, persuading them of things that were not true (Gal 5:7-8).

The Colossians were being exposed to teachers who had a penchant for Law, and were encouraging the observance of days, new moons, and Sabbaths. They heard messages that promoted voluntary humility, the worshiping of angels, and the rudiments of this world (Col 2:16-20). They were also being exposed to lifeless religious routines by men who were not holding to the Head, Jesus Christ, and thus were not delivering His message (Col 2:19-20). Those conditions occasioned some of the words we are now reading.

All of these instances had something in common: Jesus was not at the center of what was being taught! “The mystery of Christ” is not what was being “manifested.” The people were being diverted to spiritually profitless areas of thought. God provides for no other message!

Thus Paul asks the Colossians to pray that he would open up the only message that saves and sanctifies , doing do boldly and without fear. May the Lord grant that such a spirit will be found in abundance among those who profess to speak for God. Where the Gospel is not being clarified boldly, a person is found who is not speaking for God.

There are certain staple kingdom activities that are common to all who are in Christ Jesus. The text we have just reviewed focuses upon prayer. Prayer is an activity that is aided by the Holy Spirit. As it is written, we are to build ourselves up by “praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 1:20). For some, this means praying in a language that is not understood by the one who is praying. However, that meaning has been superimposed upon the text. There is no clear statement in Scripture that affirms such a thing. Those who teach this are teaching a human conclusion. Every other exhortation to prayer is one that requires an understanding and focus in the one doing the praying. Too, when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He taught them to pray with words they understood, and for matters that could be intelligently articulated (Matt 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4). Our text also speaks of prayer that is intelligent and thought out by the one doing the praying.

Our text admonishes us to “continue in prayer,” being alert within prayer to give thanks. Such a posture is inconceivable if the individual either does not know what he has prayed, or is not focused in that prayer.

Prayer is one of the means through which the Lord manages His kingdom. Through His grace, He has called His saints into the activities of His kingdom. In our text, the Colossians were exhorted to come along side the Apostle in his prodigious ministry. Through their prayers, doors of utterance could be opened for Paul to disseminate the understanding he had been given. He did not resort to marketing techniques, advertising campaigns, or other systems reflecting the wisdom of men. His approach would not be considered acceptable by any religious institution. However, it is, in my judgment, the only acceptable approach. Our Lord Jesus Himself told His disciples, “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest ” (Matt 9:38).

At this point there is something that we must see. The kind of prayer our text admonishes can only be fulfilled in a spiritually mature people. Those who live slovenly spiritual lives cannot fervently pray for the Lord to open doors of utterance. In fact, they do not even have minds that can embrace such a thought. Partaking of the Divine nature, and being workers together with God requires an eye that is single, and a heart that is wholly devoted to the Lord. A person attempting to serve two masters cannot engage in such prayer. One who is not taking up his cross daily and following Jesus cannot be counted on to pray in this manner.

Here is where the previous exhortations in 3:1 through 4:1 are seen more clearly. Ponder them once again, and see if they do not make more sense.

- Seek the things which are above (3:1).
- Set your affection on things above (3:2).
- Mortify your members that are upon the earth (3:5).
- Put off anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy communication out of your mouth (3:8).
- Lie not to one another (3:9).
- Put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and longsuffering (3:12).
- Forbear and forgive one another (3:13).
- Above all, put on charity (3:14).
- Let the peace of God rule your hearts (3:15a).
- Be thankful (3:15b).
- Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly (3:16a).
- Teach and admonish one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs (3:16b).
- Do everything in the name of the Lord, giving thanks to the Father through Him (3:17).
- Wives, submit to your own husbands (3:18).
- Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them (3:19).
- Children, obey your parents (3:20).
- Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath (3:21).
- Servants, obey your masters (3:22).

- Whatever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord, not men (3:23).
- Masters, give to your servants what is just and equal (4:1).

Those who achieve growth in these areas will be able to pray effectively concerning the Lord opening doors of utterance to those who have an understanding of the Gospel – and doors will be opened to no one else! However, those who do not grow in these areas will not be able to enter into such a work.

Who is able to adequately measure the effectiveness of a church that is spiritually alive and mature? Equally true, who is able to estimate the hindrances and blockades that are thrown in the path of Kingdom progress by churches that are sloshing aimlessly through life, with no commitment to God, no fellowship with Christ, and no communion with the Holy Spirit? These circumstances represent a condition that is serious beyond measure.

May you be challenged to so live that those in God's harvest fields can be helped along by your prayers. That is an indispensable ministry into which holy people can enter with joy and zeal. It is both satisfying and productive.

The Epistle To The Colossians

WALKING AND SPEAKING

Lesson # 20

The “newness of life” in which we walk is actually the context in which Divine fellowship is realized. It is critical that this be seen. In our baptism, newness of life is equated with us being raised with Christ. While this is a technical point, it is worthy of much consideration. Romans 6:4 states the circumstance in these words: “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life .” Note, the text does NOT say we were raised to walk in newness of life. Walking in newness of life is not the purpose of being raised with Christ Jesus. Rather, it is the evidence that we have “risen with Him through faith in the operation of God” (Col 2:12). I want to be clear about this. Where there is no walk in newness of life, the individual is not “risen with Christ.” The professed church has too long contended with spiritually dead people among them.

The condition that is realized in Christ Jesus is stated in this fact - a fact upon which we are to

reckon, or consider to have taken place: “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord ” (Rom 6:11). In a real baptism, a death to sin and a connection with the living God through Jesus Christ took place. It was not a relationship by proxy, but a personal one. It was not a merely formal one, but an effective one. This is not how people ought to be saved, it is how they ARE saved. There is no such thing as a salvation that allows a person to remain alive to sin and dead to God. Reconciliation to God makes no such allowance. Sanctification does not provide for such a condition. If men do not “walk” in newness of life, it is because they have no newness to walk in. Those are the facts in the case, whether they are received or not.

While it is important that we do not set ourselves up as judges, to determine whether other people are really saved or not, it is absolutely essential that we examine our own selves with these things in mind (2 Cor 13:5).

One of the condemning traits of the modern church is that it is not providing an environment in which the need for being dead to sin and alive to God is stamped upon the human conscience. Sin is too easily explained and tolerated, with a hatred of it rarely surfacing.

If we can see it, Epistles like Colossians are challenging the saints to be godly in their thinking about life in Christ Jesus. They are not to allow themselves the luxury of thinking differently about being saved than the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit think.

DIVINE FELLOWSHIP

As I have already said, “newness of life” is the only proper environment in which fellowship with Jesus can be enjoyed – and fellowship with Christ is integral to salvation. There is no such thing as salvation without it! God has, after all, called us “ into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9). John also referred to having fellowship “with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ,” affirming that he wrote in order that we might be also participate in that fellowship: “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ ” (1 John 1:3). There is, then, no question about what God is doing in salvation, and of the necessity of the involvement of the saved with the Savior. We are not speaking about some merely legal transaction in which the mind, will, affection, and purpose are not involved.

A HOLY LOGIC

There is a holy logic behind God calling us into the fellowship of His Son. In salvation, God is giving us to His Son , in order that He might “bring” us “to glory” (Heb 2:10), or bring us to Himself (1 Pet 3:18). No one can come to God on his own. He must be “brought” to God by the Lord Jesus Christ. In order for that to happen, they must be “given” to Christ by someone transcendent to themselves - -and God is that “Someone.” It is He, and He alone, who has put us “in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). That equates to being “given” to the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said it this way, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John 6:44). And again, “Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of my Father” (John 6:65).

In the day when the people of God are recognized for who they really are, the Son will say to the Father, “Behold I and the children which God hath given Me ” (Heb 2:13).

Given to Jesus

Frequently Jesus referred to the saved as those who were given to Him by the Father.

- “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).
- “And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day” (John 6:39).
- “As thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him ” (John 17:2)
- “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me ; for they are Thine” (John 17:9).
- “And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me , that they may be one, as We are” (John 17:11).
- “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me , be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24).

Alluding to this kind of thing, the Father spoke through the Psalmist, referring to giving people to the Son . “Ask of me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for thine inheritance , and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession” (Psa 2:8). The magnitude of this is seen in Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the greatness of salvation. Through Isaiah the Father declared it was not enough to simply give the Savior the “tribes of Jacob.” That was too small to justify the kind of investment He asked the Son to make. “ It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth” NASB (Isa 49:6). This is an exalted view of the Father giving people to the Son. That gift was in order to the salvation of the people. That is the genius behind the statement, “This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other : for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

THE POINT

The point is that the fellowship into which we have been called is not sporadic, only in times of crisis, or only within an official Christian setting. It is not confined to periods of praise, prayer, or Bible reading – although it is surely and emphatically realized in all of them. It is in life itself, that the fellowship takes place – the entirety of it.

Fellowship

The meaning of the word “fellowship” is greatly obscured in an institutional setting. It is not uncommon to find the average church viewing “fellowship” from a purely fleshly point of view. Some refer it to their own particular sect – “our fellowship.” Others see it as a sort of religious camaraderie that is realized in informal gatherings like meals and outings. In Scripture, however the word “fellowship” reflects the very nature of our salvation.

The word, “fellowship” is translated from the Greek word **koinwni,an** (koin-o-ni-an), which is a form of the word **koinwni,a** (koin-o-nia). This word (koinwni,an) is used seven times in Scripture and, with a single exception (Rom 15:26), is translated “fellowship.” The parent word (koinwni,a) is used nine times, and is translated “fellowship,” “communion,” and “communication.” A brief outline of these uses is provided below. On a lower level, this will serve to confirm the nature of fellowship. The manner in which the Holy Spirit uses this word will be evident.

- Romans 15:26: “contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.”
- 1 Corinthians 1:9: “fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”
- 2 Corinthians 8:4: “fellowship of the ministering to the saints.”
- Philippians 3:10: “fellowship of His sufferings.”
- 1 John 1:3: “fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”
- 1 John 1:6-7: “If we say that we have fellowship with Him . . . we have fellowship one with another.”
- Acts 2:42: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship .”
- 1 Corinthians 10:16: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of

Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?”

- 2 Corinthians 6:14: “ what communion hath light with darkness?”
- 2 Corinthians 3:13: “the communion of the Holy Spirit.”
- Philippians 1:5: “your fellowship in the gospel.”
- Philippians 2:1: “ fellowship of the Spirit.”
- Philemon 1:6: “the communication of thy faith.”
- 1 John 1:3: “that ye also may have fellowship with us.”

It is evident from the Spirit’s use of this word that it does not refer to something casual or incidental. This is also reflected in the technical meaning of the Word: “fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation; the share which one has in anything.” THAYER “As a relationship characterized by sharing in communion.” FRIBERG “A close mutual relationship; participation, sharing in, partnership, contribution.” UBS “An association involving close mutual relations and involvement.” LOUW-NIDA

Even in the English language the word means, “1. Friendliness and companionship based on shared interests. 2. A group of people meeting to pursue a shared interest or aim.” OXFORD DICTIONARY

As you can see, the point in all of these definitions is common interest and sharing . Where either of these are missing, there is no genuine fellowship.

FELLOWSHIP WITH THE SON

In view of this, and considering the manner in which the word is used in Scripture, “ fellowship with His Son” speaks of involvement with Him, participation with Him, experiential association with Him, a mutual sharing with Him, a close and intimate relationship, and sharing or partnering in which He is doing. It presumes the heart of the saved one is in synch with the heart of Jesus – i.e. that the saved have an intense and vested interest in what Jesus is doing. They have been “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17) in their objectives, loves, hates, and will. Where these results have not taken place, there is no evidence of being “in Christ.” These are admittedly strong words. However, the time has come for men to break through the crust of hackneyed religious traditions, and get to the heart of the “salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10).

We have been called into holy involvement with the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the question arises

as to when and how this involvement takes place. Is it confined to when we “worship,” sing, pray, attend church, etc. Is this “fellowship” ever represented as being realized in that manner? Whatever may be said of those indispensable activities, they are not the appointed arena in which the intended Divine fellowship is realized.

Paul referred to this higher relationship when he said “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). John referred to it when he wrote, “if we walk in the light as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7). Paul spoke of it when he said, “For in Him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Fellowship with Christ is the sphere of valid activity.

We experience Divine fellowship as we live unto the Lord, doing everything – even down to eating and drinking – as unto Him (1 Cor 10:31). That is what makes focused times of assembly productive. That is what gives meaning to the Lord’s Supper, singing, praying, etc. When our lives are centered in Christ, the Scriptures come alive, as it were, and the Lord – in fellowship with us – opens the eyes of our understanding.

The exhortation that follows is not a mere law – a sort of discipline of life that is being bound upon us. Be clear in your mind about this. Jesus did not die, rise from the dead, and return to heaven in order for us to obtain a new “way of life.” The Lord Jesus Himself said He came that we might “have life, and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10) – not have a “way of life.”

That life is realized as we walk with Him through all of the aspects of living. Now we will see how that walk touches relating to sinners.

“ 4:5a Walk in wisdom . . . ”

The Spirit will now speak to us of ACTIVITY – holy activity. The life of faith is one of action, not mere philosophizing and speculation. It is not found in talking, but in the power of God – which has to do with doing. That is why it is written, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power” (1 Cor 4:20).

WALK

“Walk . . . ” Other versions read, “ conduct yourselves,” NASB “in the way you act ,” NIV “your

behavior ,” BBE and “ live .” NLT

As used here, walking is not aimless, like roaming about with no particular destiny in mind. Walking is like Abraham leaving Ur of the Chaldees and heading for Canaan (Gen 12:1; 15:7). It is like Jacob and his household leaving the land of famine and heading to Egypt for sustenance (Ex 1:1-5). The significance of “walk” is confirmed in the trek of the Israelites through the wilderness, as they “walked” to the promised land (Josh 5:6).

A Specific Destiny

A “walk” presumes a specific destiny – a determined goal. With Abraham it was Canaan. For Jacob, it was Egypt. For Israel, it was the promised land. Paul referred to this as “the mark.” “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus ” (Phil 3:14).

For the people of God, it is His Kingdom and glory (1 Thess 2:12), the New Jerusalem (Rev 3:12; 21:2), and being forever with the Lord (1 Thess 4:17). The aim of the saints is to get through this world “undefiled” and “unspotted” by it (James 1:27) – i.e. without being contaminated by it. This is WHY we are walking – moving toward those appointed objectives.

A Specific Purpose

Our “walk” postulates that we are living with a specific objective – driven by a purpose. Paul stated that purpose in these words, “For to me to live is Christ , and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). Again he stated it in this way: “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus ” (Phil 3:12). David stated it this way, “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple ” (Psa 27:4). Paul spoke of it as obtaining “a incorruptible crown” (1 Cor 9:27). The saints of God have a reason for being godly – for living by faith and walking in the Spirit. It involves infinitely more than simply doing what they are supposed to do. They do not live by rules, but by faith, which is far more exacting than rules.

Deliberate

Our “walk” is deliberate. It is the result of considering the Lord Jesus, what He has accomplished, and what He is completing. Abraham left Ur because he wanted to. Jacob went down into Egypt for food because he wanted to. Israel left Egypt for Canaan because they wanted to. The truth of the matter is that no one can “WALK by faith” who does not want to. God can make Nebuchadnezzar eat grass like a wild animal for seven years. He can make Pharaoh let His people go. He can even make the weak to stand (Rom 14:4). But He will not make a person walk by faith or in the Spirit who does not want to! Through the Gospel He provides a message that will stir the will if it is received. But the “walk” from earth to glory requires that willingness. Spiritual life can only be lived deliberately.

Progress

In Christ, “walking” presumes progress toward the appointed goal. In the wilderness, a great number of Israel, because of their disobedience, only “wandered,” finally dying in that place of desolation (Num 14:23). Others “walked,” making progress until they finally reached the land of promise (Josh 5:6).

When Peter “walked on the water,” it was to “ go to Jesus” (Matt 14:29). That progress was interrupted when he doubted (Matt 14:31). Cleopas and his companion walked “from Jerusalem” to Emmaus (Mk 16:12; Lk 24:13), and again from Emmaus to Jerusalem (Lk 24:33).

In each of these cases, there was progress. They moved toward the goal of their journey. In this case, walking is to be contrasted with sleeping or being idle. The child of God is moving forward, advancing toward glory and away from this present evil world. During difficult trials, that advancement may appear slow and minuscule. At other times, the grace of God may enable us to mount up with the wings of an eagle, and make much progress in a short time. But in every case, and at all times, walking involves progress – moving forward and not backward.

In This World

The word “walk” is applied to our lives in this world. It is the posture of a pilgrim and a stranger (1 Pet 2:11; Heb 11:13). Walking covers the distance between “this present evil world” (Gal 1:4) and “the glory that shall be revealed” (1 Pet 5:1). It is the activity that covers the time between our entrance into Christ and our exit from the world.

Many a professing Christian is not noted for “walking” – for heading for a specific destiny, living with purpose, conducting his life deliberately, and making spiritual progress . It is with great sorrow that I must admit such people appear to make up the majority of “churchdom.” However, this is not the way it is “in Christ Jesus!” For the saved, it is not a matter of whether or not they are walking, but HOW they are walking.

IN WISDOM

“ . . . in wisdom . . . ” Other versions read, “with wisdom,” NASB “Be wise,” NIV and “wisely.”
NRSV

In this world, those who are not endowed with wisdom can find an acceptable place. Wisdom is not a requirement for living in this world, and many, for reasons over which they have no power, are not able to be wise in this world. However, in Christ Jesus, this is not the case. Even those who are not wise after the flesh can obtain the kind of wisdom this text mentions. According to measure, God makes Jesus to be “wisdom” to all whom He puts into Him. As it is written, “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God , and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” NASB (1 Cor 1:30).

The phrase “in wisdom” postulates its preexistence. Solomon said “get wisdom” (Prov 16:15; 23:23). Our text says, “walk in wisdom.” What is the difference between the two? Under the New Covenant, wisdom is of a higher and more consistent order. It is supplied in Christ Jesus, and appropriated by faith.

Those who “lack wisdom” are exhorted to ask God for it, who “giveth liberally, and upbraideth not” (James 1:5). However, this is a different “wisdom” than is mentioned in our text – not different in kind, but different in scope. It does “come down from above,” yet it has more to do with particular matters – such as Solomon asking for wisdom to rule the people in a proper manner (2 Chron 1:10).

Solomonic Wisdom

As seen in Solomon himself, such wisdom has more to do with things in the world than with eternal matters. It is said of him, “And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes” (1 Kgs 4:32-33). All of that wisdom was given to him by God. He did not obtain one whit of it through education. It caused Solomon’s fame to be spread abroad. As it is written, “And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom” (1 Kgs 4:34). Yet, this was a lower order of wisdom, as compared to the “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” that are hidden in Christ Jesus.

Solomon never mentioned the word “eternal.” He used the word “eternity” once, affirming God had placed it in the heart of man (Eccl 3:11, the KJV uses the word “world”). Solomon’s meaning was that God gave mankind a sort of intuition that there is more than the present – there is the past and the future as well. He referred to “everlasting” twice: once in the personification of wisdom (Prov 8:23), and once to the stability of the righteous (Prov 10:25). He mentioned “heaven” seven times (Prov 23:5; 25:3; 30:4; Eccl 1:13; 2:3; 3:1; 5:2). Most of those references had to do with the natural heavens, with two exceptions: one refers to the fact that no man has ascended into heaven, or descended from it (Prov 30:4). The other declares that “God is in heaven” (Eccl 5:2). He delivered no prophecies, or speak with clarity concerning the need of a Savior. He did not expound any of the Prophets or speak of Moses – although He did refer to “the law” (Prov 6:23; 28:4,7,9; 29:18; 31:5). Some of those references appear to refer to the “law” of parents and the land rather than the law of God.

The point here is not to denigrate Solomon. Rather, it is to see that the wisdom he received was not the same as that which is received in Christ Jesus. It primarily had to do with expertise in matters relating exclusively to this world. That wisdom was not able to keep Solomon from marrying a multiplicity of heathen women in contradiction of the Law of God (Deut 17:17; 1 Kgs 11:3). It could not turn him away from indulging his fleshly appetites in extravagant manners (Eccl 2:10). His wisdom, as extensive as it was, could not keep him from being turned away to other gods by his wives (1 Kgs 11:3-4). He loved many “strange women” including “the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites” (1 Kgs 11:1). It is even said of him, “ Then did Solomon

build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods. And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice” (1 Kgs 11:9).

I am very careful to say this is not intended to be a diatribe against Solomon. Rather, it is to show that wisdom revolving around this world is not sufficient to keep the soul or constrain consistent godly conduct. That, of course, is the whole point in the record of Solomon. It is not to show that he was weak, but that his wisdom was not adequate in matters pertaining to life and godliness.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO OUR TEXT?

Here is something that must be seen, particularly during a time when academic pursuits are being inordinately embraced, and unduly honored. The child of God cannot approach life in Christ with expertise in earthly wisdom. Psychiatric knowledge, for example, provides not a single particle of understanding that is relevant to the “newness of life.” Neither, indeed, does it better equip a person to deal with the people of this world in a manner that is acceptable to God. The same may be said of historical knowledge, statistical analyses, and philosophical opinions. Whatever place any of these things possess, it is certainly not one of preeminence. Nor, indeed, is a place made for such wisdom in the text before us.

The “wisdom” in which we are to walk is fundamentally spiritual: “all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). Because it is hidden in Christ, it centers in both God and Christ, not men and their ways (Col 2:3). This is the kind of wisdom Paul sought for the churches: “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him ” (Eph 1:17). This is a wisdom having primarily to do with God and His purpose. That is the wisdom that sheds light on everything else. It superintends all lesser wisdom like the light of the sun determines the extent of the light of the moon.

“ 5b . . . toward them that are without . . . ”

Our “walk” depicts the activity of spiritual life. That “walk” eventually leads to the presence of the Lord. However, along the way, we confront a variety of personalities – and not all of them are kindred spirits. Our fellowship with Christ bears upon this aspect of life. It is not to be divorced from our association with Him, or treated as though it was a strictly extraneous aspect of life with no eternal

consequences. There simply is no facet of life that allows us to sever fellowship with Christ in order to deal with it.

TOWARD THEM

“ . . . toward them . . . ” Other versions read, “ to those,” BBE “ with ,” NJB and “ among .” NLT

The truth of the matter is this: “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself” (Rom 14:7). No person is an island unto himself, and woe to that person who lives as though he was. Further, Jesus died in order that those who are alive with Him “should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). Our lives, therefore, are not driven by purely selfish interests – a manner of life that is especially and vigorously promoted by the “generation” we are serving (Acts 13:36).

While our lives are to be consistent, there are people among whom we must be especially wise. The Spirit will now address that manner with characteristic pungency.

THAT ARE WITHOUT

“ . . . that are without . . . ” Other versions read, “who are outside,” NKJV “outsiders,” NASB “who are not Christians,” NLT “outside the church.” RWB and “those of the outside world (the none Christians.” AMPLIFIED BIBLE

The Concept of an Outside

The very concept of someone that is “without,” or an “outsider,” affirms that we have been called into a special community or fellowship. It is an exclusive association that is not based upon earthly distinctions or attainments. What is more, being in this special communion is not our own doing, but is the work of God Himself. This is declared again and again, and with focused emphasis.

- “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus” NASB (1 Cor 1:30).
- “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18).
- “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body , whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13).
- “Giving thanks unto the Father . . . Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath

translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son ” (Col 1:13).

- “And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6).
- “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col 2:13).
- “But as many as received him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God ” (John 1:13).

Those to whom this has not occurred are “without.” They are outside the haven of safety, disassociated from the Living God, apart from Christ, and without the Holy Spirit. However, if the Divine activity involved in saving us is not perceived, those who remain alienated from God will not be seen as “without.”

This is not the only place in Scripture where the Spirit refers to those who are “without.” This kind of language is repeatedly employed in spiritual expressions.

- “For what have I to do to judge them also that are without ? do not ye judge them that are within?” (1 Cor 5:12).
- “But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Cor 5:13).
- “That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without , and that ye may have lack of nothing” (1 Thess 4:12).
- “Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without ; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (1 Tim 3:7).

Some of these people may appear quite good. They may be good neighbors, considerate people, excellent helpers, and possessing high morals. However, they are still “without,” outside the walls of “Jerusalem that is above” (Gal 4:26), and “alienated and enemies” in their “mind by wicked works” (Col 1:21). Those who are “ without” are in the circumstance in which we ourselves were once found. “That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope , and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). They fall into the category that is delineated in the third chapter of Titus. “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Titus 3:3).

Such people are not “without” merely because of their conduct – although that is surely involved. Ultimately, it is their lack of identity with the Lord Jesus Christ that puts them outside. They are not “in the Son” (1 John 2:24), have not been “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17), and are “dead in trespasses

and sins” (Eph 2:1). That is why they are “without.”

What Those “Without” Are Not

Because much is made of this in Scripture, we must be able to see it clearly. Because they are “without,” there are certain benefits these people do not possess. All of these conditions are found exclusively “within,” and none of them are found “without.”

Those who are “without” are not “washed,” “sanctified,” or “justified” (1 Cor 6:11). They are “without.” They are not “purified” (1 Pet 1:22), “raised” (Eph 2:6), or “reconciled” (Col 1:21). They are “without.” They have not been “delivered” (Col 1:13a), “translated” (Col 1:13b), or “made heirs” (Tit 3:7). They are “without.” They are not “born again” (John 3:3,5), “in the Spirit” (Rom 8:9), or “in heavenly places” (Eph 2:6). They are “without.” They have not “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27), “put on the whole armor of God” (Eph 6:11), or “put on the new man” (Col 3:10). They are “without.” They are not a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17), have not been “added to the church” (Acts 2:47), and their names are not “written in heaven” (Heb 12:23). They are “without.” They have not been “buried with Christ” (Rom 6:4), are not “risen with Christ” (Col 3:1), and are not “delivered from the Law” (Rom 7:4). They are “without.” They do not have “peace with God” (Rom 5:1), “access” to God and His grace (Rom 5:2; Eph 3:12), or “hope in Christ” (1 Cor 15:19). They are “without.” They do not have “a new heart” (Ezek 36:26), a “new spirit” (Ezek 11:19), or “renewed” minds (Eph 4:23). They are “without.” God has not “put” His laws into their “mind,” or “written” it upon their “heart” (Heb 8:10). They are “without.” They have not been “enlightened,” “tasted of the heavenly gift,” or been made “partakers of the Holy Spirit” (Heb 6:4). They are “without.” They have not “tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come” (Heb 6:5). They are “without.”

O, there is a lot that can be said about being “without!” It is anything but an enviable position. To be “without” means to be ineligible for all of the blessings that are in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:3). It is to be unqualified to come to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16).

Only Two Categories

So far as heaven is concerned – and “the heavens do rule” (Dan 4:26) – there are only two categories of people . They are NOT male and female. They are NOT bond or free. They are NOT Jew and Gentile. From an even lower point of view, they are NOT clergy and laity, professional and unprofessional, or educated and uneducated. None of those categories are valid in the Lord Jesus Christ where “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female” Gal 3:28).

The two categories are referred to in different ways, each emphasizing their opposition to each another.

- Without and within and (1 Cor 5:12).
- Darkness and light (Eph 5:8).
- Lost and found (Luke 15:32).
- Unrighteous (1 Cor 6:9) and righteous (1 Pet 4:18).
- Children of the wicked one (Matt 13:38) and children of the kingdom .
- Unholy (1 Tim 1:9) and holy (1 Pet 2:5).
- Ungodly (1 Pet 4:18) and godly (2 Pet 2:9).
- Infidels and believers (2 Cor 6:15).
- Unbelievers (1 Cor 6:6) and believers (1 Tim 4:12) .
- Reprobate (2 Cor 13:5) and Accepted (Eph 1:6).
- Carnal and Spiritual (1 Cor 3:1).
- Of the world (1 John 4:6) and of God (1 John 4:4).
- Far from God (Eph 2:17) and near to God (Eph 2:13) .
- Without God (Eph 2:12) and with God (1 Cor 7:24).
- Having no hope (Eph 2:12; 1 Thess 4:13) and having hope (Heb 6:19).
- Dead (Eph 2:1) and alive (Rom 6:11).
- In bondage (Gal 4:9) and made free (Rom 8:2).
- Deceived (Tit 3:3) and illuminated (Heb 10:32).
- Disobedient (Tit 3:3) and obedient 1 Pet 1:14).
- Aliens (Eph 2:12) and citizens (Eph 2:19; Phil 3:20).

- Strangers (Eph 2:19) and friends (3 John 1:14).

Now the Spirit shows us how to walk toward these people – or live toward them. How are we to conduct ourselves toward “them that are without?” It is to be “in wisdom” – knowing not only what they are now, but what they can be in Christ as well. Our knowledge of God and acquaintance with His purpose is to dictate how we live when among those “who are without.” We are not to be governed by human perceptions and “fleshly wisdom,” but by the wisdom that is “from above,” that is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17).

The Law provided an introduction to living among those not enjoying the privileges vouchsafed to the people of God.

“Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD” (Lev 19:14). The Israelites were not to give anything unclean to the “stranger” within their gates (Deut 14:21). They were not to be a distracting influence to them.

Walking in wisdom toward those who are without involves similar conduct on our part. We are to live prudently and with propriety. In the words of the Spirit, “Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God” (1 Cor 10:32). We are not to depart from a godly manner of speaking when we are with them. We are not to adopt their views, or speak as though we do. In their presence, we are to be more aware of the living God than we are of them.

NOT STEREOTYPED

There is not a fixed manner of speech and conduct that is to be adopted when walking “toward them that are without.” The Spirit does not provide us with a routine that can be followed by rote, or apart from fellowship with Jesus. This is a matter having to do with wisdom – wisdom that is appropriated in Christ Jesus alone, and that can be utilized only while abiding in Him. This kind of wisdom is seen in the life of our Lord.

Jesus

Jesus did not conduct Himself before Herod in the same way as He did before Pilate. He did not answer Herod (Luke 23:9). He did answer Pilate (Mark 15:2; John 18:34-37). He spoke differently to Nicodemus the Pharisee than He did to the rest of the Pharisees (John 3:1-21; Matt 23:13-36). The first words he said to the Gentile centurion who sought mercy for his servant were, “I will come and heal him” (Matt 8:6-7). The first words he said to the Gentile Syrophenician woman were, “Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs” (Mark 7:27). Ponder His approach to the Gentile woman at the well – how He asked her for a drink (John 4:7). All of these people were “without.” Yet, our Lord did not approach them all in the same way. He walked in wisdom toward those who were without – a wisdom marked by perception and discretion.

We are to do the same, being motivated by our understanding of the Lord's desire, “Who will

have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). We are to “give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully” 1 Tim 5:14). The name of the Lord has been much maligned because professing “Christians” have conducted themselves unwisely before those who are “without.” They have not duly considered the impact they can have for either good or evil.

Believers are not to conduct themselves like chameleons, blending in with every environment so as to disguise who they are in Christ Jesus. They are not to be naive, and even foolish before the heathen, but walk “in wisdom,” fully aware of both the circumstance and opportunities that are before them. They must be able to distinguish between an inquiring Ethiopian eunuch, and a pretentious miracle-seeker like Herod.

“ 5b . . . redeeming the time.”

The Spirit now expounds more fully what He means by walking in wisdom toward those who are without. He is going to suggest that our contact with them is not coincidental or happenstance. He will, in fact, put before us that such occasions are properly seen as opportunities!

REDEEMING

“ . . . redeeming . . . ” Other versions read, “making the most,” NASB “make the most,” NIV “making good use,” BBE “making the best use,” ESV and “forestalling.” YLT

The word translated “redeeming” is filled with significance. It means “to buy up, to buy up for oneself, for one’s use, and to make a wise and sacred use of every opportunity for doing good, so that zeal and well-doing are as it were the purchase money by which we make the time our own.” THAYER “Making the most of an opportunity, make the best use of, take advantage of.” FRIBERG “Make the most of, make good use of.” UBS

This postulates that an opportunity has been placed before us that can be procured for the glory of God and godly advantage. It presupposes that certain possibilities confront us that can only be appropriated by living and walking with Jesus. Also, it presumes that life is not lived by happenstance. Additionally, it suggests there are windows of opportunity opened to us in which the ripened wheat of humanity can be harvested.

Real spiritual life is lived under the management of the Holy Spirit – a management to which faith joyfully consents, and of which it can be keenly aware. Remember, “newness of life” is a life of being co-partners with the Lord Jesus. It is not merely lived in concert or harmony with the Lord, but in fellowship, or participation, with Him. Just as surely as Cleopas and his companion walked with Jesus, profiting from His presence, and sharing their own hearts, so the believer walks with Him. This is a point that must be especially emphasized in our day – a day that is characterized by the promotion of routine, life-disciplines, and habits.

Redeeming Under the Law

The proper concept of “redeeming” was introduced under the Law. There men were taught concerning moving things from one category to another – from unacceptable to acceptable . Redeeming was generally associated with a cost. It was not accomplished by a mere decision, or by human will alone.

- In offering a sacrifice associated with making a vow, if the beast was unclean, it had to be “redeemed” (Lev 27:11-13).
- If a man sanctified his house to be “holy unto the Lord,” it first had to be “redeemed” (Lev 27:14-15).
- If an individual sanctified a field after the year of Jubilee, it had to first be “redeemed” (Lev 27:18-19).
- If a firstborn beast, declared to be the Lord’s, was “unclean,” it has to first be “redeemed” (Lev 27:27).

In each of these case, the thing redeemed was to be for the Lord – dedicated to Him.

Redeeming Under Christ

Under Christ, redemption most generally relates to the sanctifying of humanity to God – setting them apart from enslavement to sin and the consequent curse of the Law.

- The means through which we have been justified is identified as “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24).
- The resurrection of the dead is referred to as “the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:23; Eph 1:14).
- God has made Christ to be “redemption” unto us (1 Cor 1:30).

- Christ has “redeemed us from the curse of the Law” (Gal 3:13).
- Jesus came to “redeem them that were under the, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal 4:5).
- “Redemption through His blood” is associated with “the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14).
- The day of Christ’s return, and the consequent removal of all impediments for the elect, is called “the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30).
- Jesus “gave Himself to redeem us from all iniquity” (Tit 2:14).
- Through His own blood, Jesus entered into the true holy place, “having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb 9:12).
- We “were redeemed” from our vain manner of life “with the precious blood of Christ” 1 Pet 1:18-19).

Thus, by means of the payment of Christ’s life, or the shedding of His blood, we were redeemed from sin and vanity. This was in order that we might live toward God, becoming His sons through a satisfactory and righteous means. The point is that we now belong to the Lord in a way that brings glory to Him, and eternal advantages to us.

When, therefore, we speak of redeeming something, we are referring to an act that moves something or someone from mundane use to the service of God. Generally this movement is accomplished by Deity – God the Father in the sense of purpose, and Jesus Christ in the sense of the sanctified means. However, our text speaks of a redemption that is to be accomplished by us .

THE TIME

“ . . . the time.” Other versions read, “the opportunity,” NASB “every opportunity,” NIV “opportunities,” DARBY “the season,” GENEVA and “the present time.” NJB

The word “time” comes from a word that means “a measure of time; larger or smaller portion of time; a fixed measure of time . . . a season . . . a certain time . . . an opportune or seasonal time.” THAYER “A seasonal or favorable time, opportunity . . . often a Divinely allotted time, season.” FRIBERG “Appointed or proper time, season . . . the right time . . . opportunity.” UBS

As used in this text, “time” does not refer to “time” in general – i.e. the period between “the beginning” when God “created and heavens and the earth,” and “the end of all things.” Time is narrowed down from several differing perspectives.

- From the standpoint of God’s covenantal workings: Before the Law, or “from Adam to Moses” (Rom 5:13-14); during the Law (Rom 5:20); and during the “day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2).
- From the viewpoint of the particular generation in which we live – a generation that is to be “served” (Acts 13:36).
- Considered as the period between our new birth and the time of our departure from this present evil world (2 Tim 4:7; 1 Pet 4:2).
- A particular appointment – like “a time to be born, and a time to die” (Eccl 3:1-8).
- An opportunity that is set before us, during which certain advantages are offered – such as Jesus’ ministry being Jerusalem’s time of “visitation” (Luke 19:44).

Here “time” has to do with our manner of life before those “that are without” – alienated from the life of God. Two things may be deduced from this circumstance.

- First, there are specific opportunities during which those who are “without” may be influenced. These are windows of opportunity when holy influences can be productive – like Philip confronting the Ethiopian eunuch in the wilderness. Another is when a shipwreck brought Paul into contact with the heathen of the Island of Melia (Acts 28:1-10).
- Second, there are times when the wicked are to be apprised of their real situation, and the Spirit will strive with their hearts – like Paul reasoning with Felix concerning “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come” (Acts 24:25). Another is when Paul expounded the prophets to Agrippa (Acts 26:28).
- Third, there are occasions when the wicked must be informed of their real situation, being soundly rebuked, as when Peter upbraided Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:20-23). Another occasion was when Paul confronted Elymas the Sorcerer (Acts 13:8-11).
- Fourth, there are times when the wicked behold how we conduct ourselves in the hour of trial , as when Paul was bitten by a serpent, and the heathen of Melia beheld him to see what would happen (Acts 28:3-6).
- Fifth, there are occasions when, in the very midst of opposition, an opportunity is granted to give a defense of the faith , as when the chief captain of a Roman guard rescued Paul from a beating (Acts 21:37-22:1).
- Sixth, there are times when those who are without ask us a reason for the hope that is within us , as affirmed in First Peter 3:15. “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to

give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet 3:15). Paul was confronted with such occasions in Athens (Acts 17:19), and before Agrippa as well (Acts 24:24-25).

- Seventh, there are times when we are given the opportunity to “do good,” as when the good Samaritan confronted a man who was beaten and left “half dead” (Luke 10:30-33).
- Eighth, there are times when we are especially observed by the holy angels, who look for opportunities to minister to us, for we are their stewardship (Heb 1:13-14). Once when faithful Paul was on a vessel that was about to be shipwrecked, surrounded by those who were “without,” the “angel of God” stood by him saying, “Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee” (Acts 27:24). Thus he was made adequate for the occasion. Even though he was a prisoner, he was made the captain of the vessel that night.

Make the Most of It

The above are a sampling of occasions that are to be purchased for the glory of God. Such time is to be recovered from waste and squander, for they may never come again. We “redeem the time,” buying it up by employing the bartering principle. We exchange fleshly interests in order to make these opportunities our own. We forfeit times of pleasure and relaxation in order to invest in eternity. Thus, time is not “consumed” on our own lusts (James 4:3), but in interest of the glory of God.

Another Perspective: The Days Are Evil

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul adds yet another perspective to the matter of redeeming the time. “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph 5:16). The context of this admonition also has to do with “the world of the ungodly” (2 Pet 2:5). There the approach differs slightly to that of the Colossians text, but is measurably the same. The Ephesian brethren are warned to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove [expose NKJV] them” (Eph 5:11). This assumes we are in the presence of the ungodly, and that they are the ones who are being “reproved” – that is, it is their works that are being “exposed.”

The life of circumspection, or careful diligence and caution, has to do with being among the ungodly. The idea is that all involvement with the wicked is dangerous, even though it is sometimes necessary. We are to walk wisely before them with a mind to avoiding contamination and defilement. If, unlike righteous Lot, we are not “vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked” (2 Pet 2:7), we will be infected and debased by them. That condition mandates that we “walk in wisdom toward them that are without.”

Also, this is to be done in knowledge of the fact that “the days are evil.” Other versions read, “it is a wicked age,” NJB and “these are evil times.” CEV Here, the word “evil” means “depravity, iniquity, wickedness, evil purposes and desires.” THAYER “Intentionally practiced ill-will, wicked ways, evil doings, malicious deeds.” FRIBERG “Wickedness, evil intention.” UBS “Pertaining to being morally corrupt and evil.”

At the root of the meaning of “evil” is the idea of being worthless, pointless, vain, and without any good purpose of affect. What is “in the world” tends to corruption, fading, diminishing, and losing its value. This is because the entire realm of nature, together with everything associated with it, has been consigned to “the bondage of corruption” (Rom 8:21). Therefore, “all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16).

While this has been the case since the fall of man, there are times, or “days,” when it is particularly true. These are times when the forces of darkness have a more unfettered rule, and the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God” is more sparse. The day in which we live falls into this category – “the evil day” (Amos 6:3; Eph 6:13).

Under Attack

Presently, the body of Christ is under a fierce attack; an onslaught of subtle iniquity. The manners of the world are so aggressive that they have even been adopted by the professed church. There is scarcely a different in the appearance, words, and manner of life of professing Christians and those who “know not God.” Too often they speak the same, conduct their lives the same, go the same places, and entertain the same values. Today religion cavorts about on the surface of life with no real depth. Professing believers are not generally grounded, confident, consistent, or zealous for the Lord. It is the result of failing to recognize that “the days are evil.” Of such occasions Jesus said, “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Mat 24:12).

It is not uncommon to find Christians changing their entire manner of life simply because of the pressure of the ungodly: “the days are evil.” Some whose lives once had a degree of spiritual consistency in them, are suddenly characterized by instability and erratic spiritual manners: “the days are evil.” Many local congregations have adopted a program that appeals more to the ungodly than the godly: “the days are evil.” There is a pervading dominance of immature people in positions of church leadership: “the days are evil.” Academic approaches are superceding spiritual ones: “the days are evil.” An entire generation is being lost to a concept of Christian life that emphasizes entertainment: “the days are evil.” The knowledge of the Word of the Living God has been exchanged for expertise in psychological principles, language, history, statistics, and the likes: “the days are evil.” Personal interests have been vaunted above the revealed and appointed interests of the Savior of the world: “the days are evil.”

These conditions, and many more like them, are the direct result of not walking wisely and redeeming the time, knowing that the days are evil. As “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15), the church must abandon the posture of being influenced by the world, and regain the role of being an undeniable influence upon the world. It must resume the role of leadership in both spiritual and moral matters. It must shed light upon the situation rather than being covered with darkness, like a light hidden under a bushel.

Pay the right price

In order to do this, there is a price that must be paid: time must be “redeemed.” Nothing that is essentially good can be forfeited, and we must not fight to obtain or maintain anything that is temporal: “the days are evil.”

No advantage must be given to the flesh or the devil. Whatever awakens the carnal mind, or moves a person to become fundamentally selfish, is to be opposed and “mortified” (Col 3:5). The time is to be “redeemed” in interest of the appointed end of the world, our appearance before the judgment seat of Christ, and an entrance into glory.

“ 6a Let your speech be always with grace . . . ”

The totality of life is impacted by the new birth. That is why we are exhorted to bring our full lives into harmony with the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Beginning with our induction into Christ, life is no longer to be lived primarily for self (Lk 1:74; Rom 6:13; 12:1; 14:7-9; 1 Cor 6:20; 2 Cor 5:15; Gal 2:19; Phil 1:21; 1 Thess 5:10; Tit 2:14). Now the Spirit will expand another critical aspect of “newness of life.”

LET

“ Let . . . ” Some versions omit this word. NJB, YLT The vast majority of English versions, whether word-for-word translations or paraphrased versions, do employ this word.

The word “let” emphasizes the very nature of spiritual life – a nature that is reflected in our text, even though it is not represented by a specific Greek word. Spiritual life is described by Jesus in these words: “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water ” (John 7:38). Again He revealed, “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life ” (John 4:14).

Elihu told Job he was “full of matter” – the spirit within him was moving him, and his inward parts were like “wine which hath no vent,” and “is ready to burst like new bottles” (Job 32:18-19). Solomon said the mouth of a righteous man “is a well of life” – a well that bubbles up (Prov 10:1). He

also said a wise man's mouth was like a "wellspring of wisdom" and a "flowing brook" (Prov 18:4).

It is the nature of spiritual life to express itself, and to be most difficult to contain. Jeremiah confessed, "Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.' But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not" NKJV (Jer 20:9). That is the nature of true life.

The word "let" speaks to us of allowing the living water to flow out of us. This is done by not quenching (1 Thess 5:19) or grieving the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30). If we, in fact, "walk in the light," spiritual life will express itself through us.

YOUR SPEECH

". . . your speech . . ." Other versions read, "your conversation," NIV "your talk," BBE and "your word." DARBY

The word "speech" means more than sounds, or mere words. It includes the idea or conception that is being communicated by what is said. Your "speech" involves the communication of an idea. It reflects and articulates your perception. It reveals your heart, values, and motivations. Jesus said, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Mat 12:34; Luke 6:45).

"Newness of life" bears upon the way we walk, what we communicate, and how we speak. As we will find, this particular text has to do with the way we speak before those who are "without," although it is certainly not limited to them.

Paul said his "speech" was "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor 2:4). He also admonished Titus to use "sound speech that cannot be condemned" (Tit 2:8).

It would be well if all who wear the name of Jesus were more conscious about their speech. It appears as though this is a particularly weak point among professing Christians. Many who wear the name of Jesus seem to abandon all restraint when they speak before those who "are without." It is not unusual to find them adapting the jargon of those who are not reconciled to God, and remain yet in their sins. Such things are wholly inappropriate!

Paul took care to admonish the younger about the way they talked. They were to employ "words of faith," use "wholesome words," and utilize "sound words" (1 Tim 4:6; 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13). Their words

were not to be “without profit,” but “become the sound doctrine,” and be “sound speech that cannot be condemned” (2 Tim 2:14; Tit 2:1,8).

There is a noticeable absence of this kind of emphasis in the Christian community. It is not unusual to find whole generations adopting a vocabulary in which the things of God cannot be clearly and concisely expressed. The text before us soundly refutes the notion that such speaking is in any way acceptable.

BE ALWAYS

“ . . . be always . . . ” Other versions read, “always be.” NKJV

Spiritual life must be consistent to be effective and satisfactory: “always.” Jesus said, “men ought ALWAYS to pray, and not to faint” (Lk 18:1). To those who heard Him declare the end of heaven and earth and being caught unawares by it He said, “Watch ye therefore, and pray ALWAYS , that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man” (Luke 21:36). Setting the example for us all He said, “I do ALWAYS those things that please him” (John 8:29).

Believers are exhorted to be consistent in the manner of their spiritual lives.

- Be “unmoveable, ALWAYS abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58).
- Paul spoke of be “ ALWAYS confident” (2 Cor 5:6).
- We are admonished to be “ ALWAYS rejoicing” (2 Cor 6:10).
- There is such a state as “ ALWAYS having all sufficiency in all things” (2 Cor 9:8).
- It is good to be “zealously affected ALWAYS in a good thing” (Gal 4:18).
- Believers are admonished to give “thanks ALWAYS ” (Eph 6:20).
- There is such a thing as “ ALWAYS ” obeying (Phil 2:12).
- We are also urged to be rejoicing “in the Lord ALWAY ” (Phil 4:4).

- Consider “ ALWAYS laboring fervently” (Col 4:12).
- We are even admonished to “ ALWAYS ” be “ready to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15).

God is not glorified by sporadic and inconsistent spiritual lives. It is neither right nor acceptable to live unto the Lord seasonally, with spiritual lives rising and waning like the troubled sea. While this may be common among men, it is not satisfactory in the eyes of the Lord. Vacillation is a sign of instability, and instability confirms the individual is lacking in faith , for we stand by faith (2 Cor 1:24).

Nor, indeed, is it right for our speech to be spiritually erratic, as though our minds were running footloose in an uncertain field. It is time for the professing church to get some stability into its speech. Whether it is a message to the sanctified, an answer to the unsaved interrogator, or speaking among those who are “without,” saints must have both language and a message that is consistent: “always.”

If you were to be privy to the sundry conversations that take place in and around church assemblies, you would find that precious few of them have anything to do with “the things of the Spirit of God,” which those “who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on” NIV (Rom 8:5). This is a most serious condition, for it reveals an aloofness from God that can in no way be justified. If Christ has “reconciled us to God” (Col 1:21), brought us “nigh” to Him (Eph 2:13), and we have been called into His “fellowship” (1 Cor 1:9), what possible reason can be adduced for our speaking not being in harmony with those circumstances?

WITH GRACE

“ . . . with grace . . . ” Other versions read, “full of grace,” NIV “gracious,” NRSV “in grace,” DOUAY and “pleasantly.” NJB

And how is our speech “always” to be? It is to be “with grace” – filled with grace, thus becoming a proper vehicle of grace. Our speech is to be profitable, lending itself to the proper culturing of the soul. Speech that is damaging, promoting wickedness and vice, is strictly forbidden for the child of God – including “filthiness . . . foolish talking . . . jesting, which are not convenient” (Eph 5:4). Now the Spirit admonishes us concerning the profitability of speaking. Our words must have some value, and be able to contribute to the welfare of the saints. It must be “with grace.”

Grace can shape our vocabulary. Even when we speak about things pertaining to this life, we speak from a godly perspective , and not as those who “know not God.” Worldly assessments and values are not to penetrate our thoughts and words. The world thinks and speaks with the wrong perspective – a perspective we are not to adopt.

Some commentators are of the opinion that “with grace” means courteous and agreeable, not morose and melancholy. Although that may be involved, it is certainly not the focus of this text, as though the Holy Spirit is merely telling us to be polite and mannerly. Mind you, grace will produce those qualities, but they are only wrappings and do not reflect the full intent of this admonition.

Some translations suggest this lower meaning of the text: “Let your speech always be gracious,” NRSV “Always talk pleasantly and with a flavor of wit,” NJB and “Let your conversation be gracious and effective.” NLT Such translations assume the text is saying the same thing as Solomon: “The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious” (Eccl 10:12).

An Example

Our text is more in keeping with a Psalmic expression that articulated how and what grace caused the psalmist to speak. “My heart is inditing a good matter : I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips : therefore God hath blessed thee for ever” (Psa 45:1-2).

Notice, the speaking was preceded by the consideration of a “good matter,” or “a noble theme.” NIV The Psalmist was thus enabled to speak in the same manner as a skillful writer wrote. Grace was thus poured out upon his lips so he could articulate what his heart had been “inditing.”

The Psalms are examples of speaking “with grace.” Most of them are testimonies, praise, and personal expressions, versus doctrinal dissertations. In them we read testimonies of being assaulted by the enemy (Psa 6:7) and being inundated with blessings from above (Psa 68:19). We read of the consideration of the prosperity of the wicked, and a ray of light that illuminated their real condition (Psa 73:1-18). There are expressions of being overcome with grief (Psa 18:4-5), and the glorious relief of abounding joy (Psa 21:1). There are expressions of personal determination (Psa 7:17; ; 16:7), and words of insightful exhortation (Psa 117:1). These are all words spoken “with grace.” They are characterized by insight, concern, and fervency.

A person who speaks “with grace” is dominated by a love for the Lord Jesus, who has redeemed him. Such a person has a heart in which the love of God has been shed abroad, so that he cannot view life in any of its facets without relating it to the One who has delivered him from the power of darkness, and translated him into the kingdom of His dear Son.

Speech that is “with grace” is uttered within the framework of sound spiritual perspective, and with a mind to give eternal advantages to those to whom it is addressed. It is in harmony with the truth, and in no way detracts from it. It is speech that can be employed by the Spirit of God for eternal advantage.

“ 6b . . . seasoned with salt . . . ”

We are living in an American generation in which speaking has been “dumbed down.” Slang has taken the place of precision, and simplistic expression has supplanted thoughtful and beneficial locution. In religion, this is the day of paraphrased Bibles, the Cotton Patch Bible, and other sundry versions that affirm they are making the Word more clear – especially for those who have no sound conception of spiritual things. One can only imagine what would happen in society if the same approach was taken to medical references, engineering textbooks, and automobile repair manuals.

One of the sure marks of an unprofitable generation is a deterioration in the manner and content of its speech. When the language of the street is dignified, humanity has been degraded.

I know of no person of sound mind who would conclude from the First and Second Epistles of Peter that Cephas was an unlearned fisherman. Nor, indeed, would a purposeful perusal of the Gospel of John, First, Second, and Third John, and the Book of the Revelation bring one to the conclusion that John had a background in the commerce of fishing. For that matter, the speaking of our blessed Lord was confusing to the pretentious because they could not match it with their social perception of Him (John 7:15).

The truth of the matter is that spiritual mindedness impacts upon both the content and manner of our speech. The words that follow are an exhortation for us to yield to that impact, refusing to allow our speech to be molded by the flesh and all that is associated with it.

SEASONED

“ . . . seasoned . . . ” Other versions read, “mixed with,” BBE “powdered with,” GENEVA “as though seasoned with,” NAU and “with a flavor.” NJB

Already we have been admonished to let our speaking be “ with grace.” Now the Spirit directs us to consider the seasoning of our speaking.

The word “seasoned” means “to prepare, arrange, to season, make savory, pleasant and wholesome.” THAYER “Season, make tasty.” FRIBERG

In speaking, merely expressing ourselves is not the primary consideration. To simply convey our view of things must never become our primary motive. Our speech is to be prepared with special spiritual seasoning that tends to make it as savory as it possible under the conditions. We are to make

allowances for our speaking to be remembered, and that with eternal profit.

WITH SALT

“ . . . with salt . . . ” Other versions read, “of wit,” NJB and “effective.” NLT

The Spirit speaks frequently to us of “salt.” Jesus said His disciples are “the salt of the earth” (Matt 5:13). He also said “every sacrifice shall be salted with salt,” and that “salt is good,” unless it has “lost its saltiness” (Mk 9:49-50).

The word “salt” speaks of acceptability and preservation – acceptable to God, and preserved in the world. That is, speech that is “seasoned with salt” is more spiritually palatable, and tends to be remembered, being preserved in the mind.

The Concept Developed Under Law

As it true with most spiritual conceptions, the use of “salt” was introduced and developed under the Law. There men were taught that what they offered to God was not, of itself, acceptable. Something had to be applied to it in order for it to be received by the Lord.

When specifying the requirements for a grain offering, the Lord said, “And every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt ; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt ” NKJV (Lev 2:13). No leniency was allowed in this matter.

The Levitical law also made reference to the “covenant of salt” (Num 18:19; 2 Chron 13:5), together with the above reference to “salt of the covenant .” It is generally concluded that this language referred to a “perpetual covenant,” a phrase used in Exodus 31:16 and Jeremiah 30:5. That is, this was a covenant that did not rise and fall with the inconsistencies of men. “Salt,” therefore, came to be associated with incorruptibility or permanence.

The point of this exhortation is to provoke us to season our speech with things that cause our words last, not be easily forgotten, and lending themselves to further consideration. Something must be in our speech that causes it to be preserved, more readily remembered, and eternally profitable. The words of a believer should never be spoken into the air!

When our speech is “seasoned with salt,” our words take the form of “sound words” (2 Tim 1:13), comforting words (1 Thess 4:18), and “words of faith” that nourish the soul (1 Tim 4:6). Then words are “wholesome” (1 Tim 6:3), and conducive to spiritual progress.

Compared With

Speech that is “with grace” and “seasoned with salt,” is to the opposite of “evil speaking” (Eph 4:31), “speaking things which they ought not” (1 Tim 5:13), and “excellency of speech” (1 Cor 2:1). It stands in contrast to speaking “with words of man’s wisdom” (1 Cor 2:4), and “foolish talking, and jesting which are not convenient” (Eph 5:4). It is the opposite of “idle words” (Matt 12:36), “grievous words” (Prov 15:1), and “vain words” (Eph 5:6).

Some who are less acquainted with the manner of the kingdom will declare we cannot always be speaking about the things of God. We must be more practical, else we will be viewed in an unfavorable light. Whatever justification there may be for such an observation, it is only on the surface of our consideration, lacking any real intelligence or depth. In order for such a statement to be made, we would have to be faced with an avalanche of spiritual talk that scarcely allows for any “ordinary” [as men would say it] communication. I have never witnessed such an environment, although I have traveled extensively. Nor, indeed, have I ever witnessed such a phenomenon.

The truth of the matter is that those who champion mundane conversations, and evince a fear of being too godly or Biblical in our talk, have only betrayed their own carnality. There is no merit to their objections, and they ought not to be heard or considered.

The church would do well to have more talk that is “with grace” and “seasoned with salt.” It certainly is in no danger of overextending itself in this area. That, of course, is precisely why this exhortation is in Scripture. There is no admonition to become more mundane and down-to-earth in our language – not so much as a single word or hint! The reason for this condition is quite simple. By nature we have to struggle against excesses in this area, not deficiencies.

“ 6c . . . that ye may know how ye ought to answer . . . ”

Now the Spirit gets to the heart of the matter. Our own speaking sets the stage for giving proper responses to the interrogations of those who “are without.” The general trend and substance of our words provide the real context in which the ungodly will consider or discard what we say . They are also the framework within which those who are not far from the kingdom will ponder our replies. The same consideration applies to members of “the household of faith” (Gal 6:10).

THAT YE MAY KNOW

“ . . . that ye may know . . . ” Other versions read, “so that you may be able,” BBE “so that you will know,” NAU “be sensitive to,” NJB “so that you will have,” NLT and “know how it behoveth you.” YLT

Here is a most arresting consideration: The manner and content of our words can assist us in the acquisition of knowledge. Normally one would reason just the opposite – that acquiring knowledge, or studying, will enable us to “know how to . . . ”

Our own words – their subject and drift – can cause us to be snared by foolish conversations, and be caught upon the discussion of vanities. Thus you can be “snared by the words of your mouth” (Prov 6:2). Those, for example, who always speak accommodatingly of religious matters, jesting about Scripture, and speaking lightly about matters pertaining to life and godliness, are easily stymied by serious spiritual talk. As soon as someone begins to ask about spiritual matters, the fountain of wisdom dries up in such people. They have to refer the inquirer to someone else, or perhaps a book – any reference point but themselves.

The reason for this condition is quite simple. It is because their speaking has been given over to the dominance of other considerations – considerations that are of no measurable consequence.

HOW YE OUGHT TO ANSWER

“ . . . how ye ought to answer. . . ” Other versions read, “how you should respond,” NASB “be able to give an answer,” BBE “how you should respond,” NAB “the kind of answer,” NJB and “the right answer.” NLT

There is an intriguing reality behind this word. It is that “newness of life” is provocative, eliciting inquiry from those who “are without.” The interrogations to which the text refers have to do with life in Christ Jesus, together with its implications. Nowhere are believers admonished to answer questions regarding politics, the various sciences, matters of diet, and the likes. At some point, a valid question intersects with moral and spiritual issues. It is at that point that those in Christ are obliged to speak up, giving an answer.

It is the business of every believer to recognize and address common issues of the day in light of the truth of God . This will require wisdom. It will also necessitate a manner of speaking that reflects “the mind of Christ.”

Jesus Answered Questions

The manner in which Jesus approached and answered the questions directed to Him will be most helpful in discerning the intent of this exhortation. This is truth incarnate speaking!

- Jews in a synagogue. “Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days?” (Matt 12:10).
- The disciples. “Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?” (Matt 17:10).
- The Sadducees. “Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her” (Mat 22:24-28).
- A Lawyer. “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” (Matt 22:36).
- The Pharisees and scribes, eager to maintain their traditions. “Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?” (Mark 7:5).
- The disciples, upon failing to cast out a demon. “Why could not we cast him out?” (Mark 9:28).
- The Pharisees who were tempting Him. “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?” (Mark 10:2).
- A certain ruler who appeared to be searching. “Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17).
- His disciples when hearing of the destruction of Jerusalem, the end of the world, and Christ’s coming. “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?” (Mark 13:4).
- An unbelieving high priest. “Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” (Mark 14:61).
- Skeptical Pilate. “Art thou the King of the Jews?” (Mark 15:2).
- Spies feigning themselves as just men. “Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no?” (Luke 20:22).
- Mocking soldiers. “Prophecy, who is it that smote thee?” (Luke 22:64).
- His disciples concerning a blind man. “Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2).

The nature of the questions people asked Jesus indicated the thrust of His speaking. None of these questions were answered academically. Jesus employed wisdom in responding to them all. Note the different nature of His responses.

- When asked if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath day, Jesus asked what man among them would fail to lift a sheep out of a pit into which he had fallen on the Sabbath day. He then affirmed that a man was better than a sheep, and that it was lawful to “do good” on the Sabbath (Mk 12:11-12).
- When asked why the Scriptures said Elijah must come first, He replied that Elijah truly would come first and restore all things, adding that he had already come, but the people did to him whatever they wanted – referring to John the Baptist (Mk 17:11-12).
- When asked concerning which wife a man would have “in the resurrection” after he had seven wives, Jesus said the inquirers erred, “not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.” He then told them there is no marriage “in the resurrection” (Matt 22:29-31).
- When asked which commandment was the greatest “in the Law,” He chose one that was not listed on the tables of stone and was a summary of the commands relating to God. He then cited the second one, which was a summary of the commandments relating to men (Matt 22:37-40).
- When asked why His disciples ate bread without washing their hands, He said the questioners had laid aside and even rejected the commandment of God in order to hold to their own traditions (Mk 7:6-9).
- When the disciples asked Jesus why they could not cast the demon out of a young boy, He candidly told them it was because of their “unbelief,” and that the kind of spirit they had confronted could only come out “by prayer and fasting” (Mk 9:28; Matt 17:20).
- When the Pharisees asked Him about divorce, Jesus asked them what Moses said. When they told Him, Jesus said Moses spoke that because of the hardness of their hearts, going on to say that God never intended for a husband to put away His wife (Mk 10:3-9).
- When a young ruler asked Jesus what to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus asked him why he called Him good, saying that he ought to keep the commandments. When the inquirer said he had kept the commandments, Jesus told him to sell everything he had, give to the poor, and follow Him (Mk 10:18-21).
- When Jesus’ disciples asked him concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, the end of the world, and His coming, Jesus replied in remarkable detail. Yet, His answer placed the accent on their preparation rather than the signs, and was given in such a way as causes confusion to this day among those who approach things from an academic point of view (Mk 13:5-37).
- When the high priest asked Jesus if He was “the Christ, the Son of the blessed,” Jesus replied that He was, and that the high priest would “see the Son on man sitting on the right hand of power, and

coming in the clouds of heaven” (Mk 14:62).

Our blessed Lord provided us excellent examples of answering wisely, versus merely referring to a text of Scripture, or providing an answer that neither instructed nor challenged.

Once when certain people told Jesus “ of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices,” He responded by asking if the reporters thought the Galileans who died were greater sinners than other Galileans. He then told them if they did not perish, they would also perish (Lk 13:1-3).

On another occasion, a young man asked Jesus to tell his brother to “divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbiter over you?” NASB (Luke 12:14). He then spoke to those around them, telling them, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15).

Behold with what wisdom our Lord answered those who questioned Him. This is the same Christ who now dwells in the hearts of His people. In the process of our fellowship with Him, we will come to know “HOW” to respond to those we confront. Note, the text does not say “WHAT to respond,” but “HOW to respond! “How” includes the manner of our response as well as its contents. The objective is to have a response that conforms to the truth, and provides something through which the Spirit can work. It speaks of a response that God can use, and that contributes to the development of a sound perception of God and His great salvation.

REDEEMING THE TIME

If redeeming the time involves knowing how to answer, then NOT knowing how to answer fails to redeem the time. In such a case, time has been squandered, an opportunity given to us from above has been wasted, and we have proved to be unfaithful stewards.

Does all of that seem a bit strong? If so, it is only because of the false impressions that have been left in the wake of shallow religion . The Lord has consistently underscored the importance of speech. He has told us, “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matt 12:37). Jesus even went so far as to say, “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Mat 12:36). Believers are admonished to use “sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you” (Titus 2:8).

What is there in the Word of God that would lead anyone to market their own private opinion to others? What has God ever said that leaves the impression that responses are inconsequential, or that our manners before the world are not important? The answer to such questions is very obvious, and requires no further comment. It is enough to take this text seriously, and seek grace to fulfill it to the

glory of God. The Lord will assist those who engage in such an effort.

“6d . . . every man.” Other versions read, “each one,” NKJV “each person,” NASB and “everyone.”
NIV

Are we to pick and choose those to whom we respond in wisdom? Can we conduct ourselves unwisely toward some, and wisely toward others? Indeed not! “Newness of life” involves a consistent walk before those who “are without,” always responding wisely when confronted with other personalities. Jesus responded wisely to Herod and to His disciples, to Pilate and to a lawyer, to a young man wanting to obtain a share in an earthly inheritance, and to a young man who asked about obtaining eternal life.

All of this means that there are greater issues than the moment that confronts us. It is possible that our response may work long-term results like beholding Stephen’s response to those who stoned him worked on Saul of Tarsus.

Our text has admonished us to bring grace to bear upon our speaking, so we will know how to answer “every man.” We are to become accustomed to speaking with the influence of God’s grace upon us. We are to live in concert with the “spirit of grace,” which will finely tune how we speak, as well as what we say.

One More Word

We cannot leave this text without recalling a similar admonition given by Peter. He also spoke of responding to “every man.” His word also postulates that the “newness of life” provokes inquiry from those who “are without.” Here is what he said, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet 3:15).

- “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.” Other versions read, “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts,” NASB “in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord,” NIV Jesus is not only the heart and core of our message, He is to dwell in the heart and core of our persons. This involves walking by faith and living in the Spirit. It involves an earnest quest to know, or be more familiar with, the Lord

Jesus, experiencing the “power of His resurrection” (Phil 3:10). The strength of true religion is not found in the creed we embrace, but in a strong fellowship with Christ. If men can settle in their hearts WHO they believe, it will dramatically impact upon WHAT they believe. Sanctifying the Lord in our hearts equates with our speech being “with grace” and “seasoned with salt.” Only a personal and effectual affiliation with Him can yield such results.

- “Be ready always.” Other versions read, “always be ready,” NKJV “always be prepared,” NIV and “be ready at any time.” BBE You do not know who is watching you, and what questions may be provoked by the manner in which you live and speak. It is dangerous beyond description to live in a state where you are not ready. Such a condition lends itself to causing you not to be ready when Jesus comes again – like the five foolish virgins. ONLY those who are “ready” will be joined to the Lord when He comes again (Matt 25:8-10). Being ready “always” equates to letting your speech be “alway with grace.”
- “To give an answer . . .” Other versions read, “ready to give a defense,” NKJV “to make a defense,” NASB and “to give an explanation.” NAB Some might say “What I believe is my business,” or “What I believe is none of your business.” Neither of those answers is acceptable. As a child of God, you are to be ready to provide an explanation to those who inquire concerning your faith. This is one of the means the Lord employs to spread the truth of God, and provoke hearts to inquire into the things of God. “Ready given an answer” equates to “know how ye ought to answer.”
- “To every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in you.” Other versions read, “asks you to give an account of the hope that is in you,” NASB and “when you are questioned about the hope that is in you.” BBE Notice, the Spirit does not posit men asking about your church affiliation, or the religious movement to which you belong. He does not suppose men are asking you what you think about baptism, or predestination, or the working of the Spirit. All of those, and more, may surely be matters about which you are asked. However, the Spirit does not urge us to be ready for such inquiries. Rather, it is the “hope” – our expectation of the future – that we must be ready to explain. This presumes it is evident that we are not of this world, and are not living for the present time. It assumes that it is apparent we are looking to some other time for ultimate satisfaction. Men ought to sense we are strangers in this world.
- “With meekness and fear.” Other versions read, “with gentleness and fear,” NASB “with gentleness and respect,” NIV and “in the fear of the Lord and without pride.” BBE We are not to assume a “my church-your church” mentality in answering for the hope that is “in us.” Our purpose is not to explain why we do or do not belong to “this church” of “that church.” All of that may be important to men, but what lies ahead – beyond the destruction of the heavens and the earth – is what matters to hope. The thing that really matters is what takes place AFTER we die, AFTER the heavens and earth pass away, AFTER the dead are raised, and AFTER we stand before the “Judge of all the earth.” What takes place AFTER the devil is cast into the lake of fire is what hope considers. We reply in “meekness and fear” regarding such inquiries because we have a heart for others also embracing this hope.

In a way, our response to those who are provoked by our lives to inquire concerning our motivations, is constrained by the spirit Moses expressed to Hobab the Midianite. “We are journeying unto the place of which the LORD said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good : for the LORD hath spoken good concerning Israel” (Num 10:29). What a blessed thing to ponder – that we could constrain some to go with us to glory!

We have dealt with a facet of spiritual life that is often neglected among those professing faith in Christ – how we walk toward those who are “without.” For some, the only time the unsaved are mentioned is within the context of religious recruitment, sometimes called “soul winning.” However, this text has posed those who are unreconciled to God as inquiring into why we are the way we are. That means they can see a marked difference in the manner in which those who are in Christ live. If that difference is not seen, all of the “witnessing” in the world will be of no avail – at least not in the critical matter of being reconciled to God.

This approach to life may not be conducive to the development of religious organizations – but they will all be instantly obsolete when Jesus returns. I will tell you that many of the modern religious movements are wholly lacking in the subject of this passage. Whether we are talking about the “praise and worship” movement, “youth-centered” movements, movements that meet the needs of the poor and needy, or academic “ministries,” the element of walking wisely “toward them that are without” is all too often missing.

This is a word delivered to the whole church, not a part of it. It has been given because it is required – not by law, but by the nature of spiritual life . The Word of God is to be “adorned” by godly conduct (Tit 2:10). Newness of life is lived out in an awareness of and fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no time or place when the expression of that life is out of order or unnecessary – even as we live “toward them that are without.” I encourage you to seek growth in this area.

FINAL LESSON IN COLOSSIANS

**SUNDRY
SAINTS**

Lesson # 21

The closing section of this Epistle provides numerous references to other brethren – brethren who were involved in the good work of the Lord. There is more in this section than the mere mentioning of a few names. A certain spirit exudes from this text that must be maintained among the people of God. It reflects a sense of spiritual values, and the manner in which the saints are regarded. You will behold an evident closeness of spirit among these brethren, and the way in which they profited one another.

A very real concern for one another is also made known. These were not mere professional acquaintances, or people who, so to speak, just belonged to the same group.

It will also become evident that what is delivered to one group of believers can also be of profit to another group. There is a commonality among those who are in Christ Jesus that produces this kind of circumstance. Churches were not islands unto themselves. Nor, indeed, were they united by denominational affiliation or an institutional agenda.

There are people whose names are so undeniably associated with the work of the kingdom, that the mere mentioning of their name ministers edification to the faithful, exhortation to the lagging, and conviction to the lethargic.

This is a depiction of “the whole family in heaven and earth” that is named after “our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 3:15). It reflects how we see one another, and how we speak of one another. The saints are more than a confraternity of people with similar fleshly interests. They are not a cluster of people from the same age group or domestic circumstance. The thing that binds them together is not their marital state, their positions in society, or their similar backgrounds in the world. They are not bound together by a religious creed, a church name, or educational attainments.

Having said all of that, I must acknowledge that I have had precious few experiences of being associated with such a group of people. For some, the size of their assembly is their distinction. On an even lower level, some are noted solely for the facilities in which they meet. For still others, the only thing for which they are noted is their minister, or their church staff, or a particular service they may render to the general community. You will find no such associations in the text before us.

The fact that professing Christians rarely refer to each in the manner reflected in this text, indicates that a certain spiritual deterioration has taken place in the church. This is evidence that the departure of which the Apostles warned has, indeed, taken place (1 Tim 4:1). Therefore, for the most part, people are not viewed as laborers together in Christ. Religious organizations have managed to upstage the glorious distinctions that result from tasting of the good word of God and the powers of the world to come (Heb 6:5).

As we willingly expose our hearts and minds to this text, it is my prayer that you will be challenged to pursue this perspective of the people of God – whether on a congregational or personal level.

THE DIVINE MANNER

There are different ways in which the Spirit creates a framework for remembering people. Everyone is not remembered the same way. In these various remembrances, there is a certain spiritual knowledge that is being cultured. That is, the people themselves are not the point. Rather, they provide a sort of index to the way the Lord views men. A few examples will suffice.

Those Who Were First

There are individuals who began a new kind of era. The ultimate “first” people were Adam and Eve. Adam is referred to as “the first man” (1 Cor 15:45,47). Enos, son of Seth marked the time when men began to call on the name of the Lord (Gen 4:26). Enoch is the first man said to have “walked with God” (Gen 5:22), and the first person said to have prophesied (Jude 1:14). Abraham is the first man said to have “believed God” (Gen 15:6), and is thus referred to as the “father of all them that believe” (Rom 4:11). Later, Epaphroditus is said to have been “the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ” (Rom 16:5).

Those Who Were Wicked

Some people are remembered for their wickedness. Cain was a murderer (Gen 4:8), and was “of the wicked one” (1 John 3:12). Some were noted for being “sons” or “children” of Belial (1 Sam 2:12; Judges 10:22; 1 Kgs 21:10). Other wicked people include Jeroboam (1 Kgs 13:33), Ahab (1 Kgs 16:30), Jezebel (1 Kgs 18:4), Judas (John 6:70-71), and Alexander the coppersmith (2 Tim 4:14).

Known Only for Righteousness

There are some who are known only for their righteousness, and against whom no sin is recorded. This does not mean they were morally perfect, or did not require a Savior. It is, however, how God has chosen for us to remember them. Included among this number are Abel (Heb 11:4), Enoch (Gen 5:22-24), Noah (Gen 6:9), Joseph (Psa 105:17-22), Job (Job 1:1), Daniel (Dan 10:11), and John the Baptist (Matt 11:11).

Noted for Their Conversion

Some individuals are only noted for their conversion. We know little or nothing of them prior to their conversion and after their conversion. Included in this number are the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27-39), the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:30-34), Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7-12), honorable Grecian women (Acts 17:12), Dionysius the Aeropagite and Damaris (Acts 17:34), and Cripus, ruler of the synagogue (Acts 18:8).

Noted for Their Good Works

There are people in Scripture who are especially noted for their good works. They include “a certain centurion” (Luke 7:2-5), Dorcas (Acts 9:36), Timothy (Acts 16:1-2), Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2), and Priscilla and Aquila (Rom 16:3-4).

Noted for being Precious to God

There are also people who are especially noted for being close to the Lord. Abraham was “the friend of God” (James 2:23). God said David was a “man after Mine own heart” (Acts 13:22). Jesus referred to Antipas as “My faithful martyr” (Rev 2:13). Daniel was referred to as “greatly beloved” in heaven (Dan 9:23; 10:11,19).

Summation

While only introductory to the matters I will now discuss, the above references confirm the personal nature of our dealing with the Lord. There are things for which we can be particular known.

There is provision in Christ Jesus for this to be a great spiritual asset – both to you individually, those who know you, and those who hear of you. In a way, our reputation, or that for which we are known, is a stewardship vouchsafed to us. By the grace of God, we can make that stewardship a blessing, and a source of great kingdom benefits.

“ 4:7 All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord: 8 Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts.”

Tychicus is mentioned five times in Scripture. All of them are favorable, giving some indication of the good spirit of this brother.

- ACCOMPANIED PAUL INTO ASIA. “And there accompanied him [Paul] into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus” (Acts 20:4).
- FAITHFUL. “But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus , a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts. (Eph 6:21-22).

- TRUSTWORTHY. “All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord: whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts” (Col 4:7-8).
- A GOOD STEWARD. “And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus” (2 Tim 4:12).
- AVAILABLE. “When I shall send Artemas unto thee, or Tychicus , be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis: for I have determined there to winter” (Titus 3:12).

Here is a man of which we know nothing but good. We know nothing of his life prior to coming to Christ. The only thing we do know about him pertains to laboring in the vineyard of the Lord. There is no sin recorded against him, and no reference to his marital state. We only know he was “of Asia.” We do not where or how he was converted. That certainly would not look good on a resume.

Yet, from what is said of him, I feel that I know him, and he has proved to be a great comfort to my soul and challenge to my spirit.

ALL MY STATE

“All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you . . .” Other versions read, “all the news about me,” NKJV “all my affairs,” NASB “all that concerns me,” DARBY “all about my activities,” ESV “my whole state,” GENEVA and “how I am getting along.” NLT

Ponder someone making known all of your affairs to a congregation of believers. Consider who it is that you would trust to faithfully do this. That will give you some idea of the character and perception of Tychicus.

However, even then, we are speaking of conveying the affairs of Paul the Apostle, who “labored more abundantly than they all” (1 Cor 15:10). This is a man who received an “abundance of revelations” (1 Cor 12:7), and was appointed to go to the Gentiles and “open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in” Christ (Acts 26:18).

Elsewhere Paul sent laborers to inform the churches of both his manners and his labors. To the Corinthians he wrote, “For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church” (1 Cor 4:17). He also sent Tychicus to Ephesus to make known his “affairs” (Eph 6:21-22).

Making known the affairs of this man involves correlating his labors with his commission, and confirming his faithfulness. We are not speaking of a mere biography, or relating Paul's daily routines. This report had to do with kingdom matters and things that would edify.

BELOVED BROTHER

“ . . . who is a beloved brother. . . ” Other versions read, “ the beloved brother,” ASV “our dearest brother,” DOUAY “my beloved brother,” NAB and “a very dear brother.” NJB

Tychicus is one of three brethren who are referred to in this way. The other two are Onesimus (Col 4:9) and Peter's reference to Paul (2 Pet 3:15). Paul referred to Timothy as “my beloved son” (2 Tim 1:2), Philemon as “our dearly beloved” (Phile 1:1), and Amplias as “my beloved in the Lord” (Rom 16:9). He also referred to Stachys as “my beloved” (Rom 16:9), Persis as “beloved” (Rom 16:12) and Apphia as “our beloved” (Phil 2:1). Some churches were addressed as “dearly beloved.” They include Rome (Rom 12:9), Corinth (1 Cor 10:4), and Philippi (Phil 4:1).

The point is that not all believers are referred to in this manner. Further, this kind of reference did not reflect a fleshly preference. Rather, it distinguished those so referenced as excelling in spiritual virtues and kingdom labors. Tychicus ranked high in the kingdom of God. Jesus had more of him, and he responded with a diligence that excelled that of many others.

In my judgment, it is good to seek to be of note among key spiritual men and women – like Andronicus and Junia, who were “of note among the Apostles” (Rom 16:7). God's people must crucify the tendency to please their peers, and be well liked by

those who dwell far off from God.

It is important to not only consider what is said about us, but who is doing the saying. May God give you grace to live a life that can be reported with joy.

FAITHFUL MINISTER

“ . . . and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord . . . ” Other versions read, “faithful servant and fellow bond-servant,” NASB “true servant and helper in the word,” BBE

A “minister” is one who “executes the commands of another . . . a servant.” THAYER It also means, “one who renders helpful service, a servant, helper.” FRIBERG

A “faithful minister” is one who constantly and reliably carries out the will of another – in this case, the will of the Lord. This is someone who can be counted on to do the will of the Lord, thinking and acting in harmony with His will, and doing what he has been given to do.

Several people are noted in Scripture for being “faithful.” They include Moses (Num 12:7), Hananiah, Nehemiah’s brother (Neh 7:2), Abraham (Neh 9:8), Daniel (Dan 6:4), Timothy (1 Cor 4:17), Epaphras (Col 1:7), Onesimus (Col 4:9), and Silvanus (1 Pet 5:12).

Tychicus was a “minister” who was steadfast, and did not shrink back from his calling. If left to himself, he defaulted to the will of the Lord, and was always profitable to the people of God. May you be known as a “faithful minister” – one who can be counted on to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord!

WHY HE WAS SENT

“ 8 Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose . . . ” From the standpoint of him going out from Paul, other versions read, “I am sending him to you for this very purpose.” NKJV From the standpoint of the Colossians receiving him, some versions read, “I have sent him to you for this very purpose.” NASB Whatever this purpose is , Tychicus will carry it out to the glory of God.

It is obvious from this reference that Tychicus was actually the bearer of the Epistle to the Colossians, faithfully delivering what Paul had written in prison.

Know Your Estate

“ . . . that he might know your estate . . .” Other versions read, “that he may know your circumstances,” NKJV and “that you may know our circumstances.” NASB Versions favoring Tychicus knowing the circumstances of the Colossians include the following: KJV, NKJV, DARBY, DOUAY, GENEVA, RWB, WEB, and YLT. Versions favoring the Colossians being informed about Paul’s circumstances include the following: NASB, NIV, NRSV, RSV, ASV, BBE, ESV, NAB, NAU, NJB, and NLT.

First, in my judgment, the nature of the Epistle requires that we see Paul sending Tychicus to learn more fully of the condition of the Colossians. They had been subjected to false teachers, as had been reported to Paul (2:18-23). Second, the mission of ministering comfort would be best accomplished when the condition of the Colossians was more fully known. Third, Paul has already affirmed that Tychicus would fully declare Paul’s condition, and that he had sent him to do that (4:7). It does not seem probable that Paul would reiterate this again, in the very same sentence. I therefore conclude that Tychicus has also been sent to more fully know the present condition of the Colossians. How had they weathered the doctrinal storms that had come against them?

This purpose was similar to that involving Timothy’s trip to Thessalonica. Of that trip Paul said, “For this cause, when I could

no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain” (1 Thess 3:5). This manner was also declared in the book of Acts. “And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do” (Acts 15:36).

In the institutionalized church of our day, there is much talk about starting churches, church planting ,etc. Although such efforts are not without merit, it is passingly strange that we rarely hear of any effort to see how the churches are actually doing. Perhaps men have taken too much for granted in assuming this does not need to be done.

Comfort Your Hearts

“ . . . and comfort your hearts.” Other versions read, “encourage your hearts,” NASB “give your hearts comfort,” BBE and “encourage you thoroughly.” NJB

To “comfort” means “to call to one’s side – to console, encourage and strengthen by consolation, to comfort.” **THAYER** “To relieve sorrow or distress, comfort, cheer up, encourage.” **FRIBERG**

Here is an aspect of spiritual life that is essential. It is necessitated by the very nature of living by faith. We are in a hostile world that can contribute nothing to our faith (1 John 2:16). We are daily faced with an adversary who walks about seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet 5:8). Many false prophets have gone out into the world, presenting a condition that makes for jeopardy (1 John 4:1). We have within us a competitive law that wars against the law of our mind (Rom 7:23). Those circumstances require encouragement, consolation, and comfort.

The history of the early church records seasons when comfort was ministered to the brethren (Acts 9:31). Barnabas “encouraged” the churches NKJV (Acts 11:23). Paul went over the whole region of Macedonia, encouraging the brethren NKJV (Acts 20:2). That was the manner of godly men.

Thus Paul sent Tychicus to Colossae to encourage them, insightfully cheering their hearts when he had learned of their state.

Those who are given to speaking much about “restoring” things, would do well to bring back the practice of strengthening, encouraging, and comforting those who are fighting the good fight of faith. Too often, the saints who are the front lines of battle are only being discouraged by the church.

“ 9 With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here.”

Just as Jesus sent out His disciples “two and two” (Mk 6:7; Lk 10:L1), so the early church, and Paul personally, often followed this practice. We read of “Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 13:43), “Paul and Silas” (Acts 16:19), and “Paul and Timotheus” (Phil 1:1). There was also “Judas and Silas” (Acts 15:32), “Timotheus and Erastus” (Acts 19:22), Titus and “a brother” (2 Cor 12:18), and “Silvanus and Timotheus” (1 Thess 1:1).

The nature of kingdom labors often requires congenial spirits working together. That is involved in being “the body of Christ” – a fellowship in the truth.

HE WAS WITH TYCHICUS

“With Onesimus . . .” Other versions read, “and with him Onesimus,” NASB “HE is coming with Onesimus,” NIV “together with Onesimus,” ASV “with him I am sending Onesimus,” NJB and “I am also sending Onesimus.” NLT

There are only two direct references to Onesimus in Scripture, yet we know considerable about him.

- He was the run away slave of Philemon, whom Paul was now returning to him (Phile 1:10-12).
- Paul converted him while in prison (Phile 1:9).
- Because of begetting Onesimus in Christ, Paul considered him his son (Phile 1:9).
- Paul would have preferred to keep Onesimus with him, to minister to him while he was in bonds (Phile 1:13).
- He was a “brother beloved,” especially to Paul (Phile 1:16).
- Any indebtedness that Onesimus owed to Philemon, Paul said he would personally pay (Phile 1:18).

Here is a man who confirms that in Christ there is “neither bond nor free” (Gal 3:28). His affiliation with Christ raised him to a higher domain where earthly distinctions are not valid.

A FAITHFUL AND BELOVED BROTHER

“ . . . a faithful and beloved brother . . .” Other versions read, “faithful and dear brother,” NIV “true and well beloved brother,” BBE “a most beloved and faithful brother,” DOUAY and “a trustworthy and beloved brother.” NAB

This is not a mere formal description of Onesimus – something that Christians simply say about one another. Rather,

this is an insightful remark that distinguishes Onesimus from the spiritually sluggish and unfaithful.

Although Onesimus was a slave, and a runaway slave at that, he had responded to the Gospel in the submission that is begotten by faith. His life was a thank offering to God, and a source of much joy and encouragement to Paul. The word “faithful” contrasts sharply with the idea of a runaway slave who was “unprofitable” to his master (Phile 1:11). He had received a new heart and a new spirit, and was now noted for the changes wrought by his transformation.

ONE OF YOU

“ . . . who is one of you . . . ” These words suggest that Onesimus was from Colossae, and thus was now considered to be part of the brethren there. All of this suggests that Philemon was also from Colossae, and that the church there may even be the one meeting in his house (Phile 1:2). Archippus is said to be in the church meeting in Philemon’s house (Phile 1:2). He is also addressed in this Epistle to the Colossians (Col 4:17).

Now, Onesimus is declared to be “one” of the brethren in Colossae. Since he was converted after leaving Philemon, we assume he was not a member of that fellowship prior to his conversion.

THEY SHALL MAKE KNOWN

“ . . . They shall make known unto you all things which are done here.” Other versions read, “all things which are happening here,” NKJV and “the whole situation here.” NASB

Tychicus and Onesimus would faithfully report everything that had been taking place in Rome, where Paul was finally imprisoned, after being taken captive at Caesarea (approximately

A.D. 58-62). A lot had happened during that lengthy imprisonment. Paul enjoyed some remarkable liberty during this time, even though he was a prisoner.

At the commencement of this captivity, a chief captain named Lycius “commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him” (Acts 24:23). He was allowed the freedom of staying in his own hired house for two whole years. During that time he “received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” (Acts 28:30-31).

Now Paul depends upon Tychicus and Onesimus giving a faithful report to the brethren. All of this presumes that a genuine interest in these things existed among the brethren in Colossae. They had a vested interest in the work of the kingdom, and knew it. Consider what kind of interest would be found in such things in our day. I fear the average church would rather attend a concert or have a family outing than hear what had been happening where kingdom laborers resided. Each of us can resolve to be more noted for an interest in kingdom matters, than the things pertaining to this world.

Also, think to yourself whom you would trust to give a faithful report of the activities in which you have involved yourself, where you have been residing.

“ 10 Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him.)”

Do not fail to pick up on the nature of these references. There is not so much as a syllable about the earthly qualifications of these brethren, or the size of their work, or the numbers of converts they had. It is not that such things are bad, and I am not for a moment suggesting that is the case. There is a sense of priorities that is being communicated in these references to certain brethren.

ARISTARCHUS

“Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you . . . ”

Aristarchus is mentioned a few times in Scripture. We do not know much of him, except that he was a devoted worker with Paul the Apostle.

- He was from Macedoncia, the Grecian part of the world, and was known as one of “Paul’s companions in travel” (Acts 19:29).
- He was among a company of seven who accompanied Paul to Asia (Acts 20:4).
- He accompanied Paul to Rome, where Paul was carried by boat as a prisoner (Acts 27:2).
- He is known for being one of Paul’s “fellowlaborers” (Phile 1:24).

This text informs us that Aristarchus was also imprisoned with Paul, and was probably with Paul when he wrote this Epistle.

Even though Aristarchus had been seized in a tumult in Ephesus and treated maliciously (Acts 19:29), he faithfully continued with Paul in his troubles and afflictions. What a noble and consistent soul he was!

MARCUS

“ . . . and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas.” Other versions read , “Mark the cousin of Barnabas,” NKJV and “Barnabas’ cousin.” NIV

We know considerable about this brother. He surfaces rather early in the history of the church. He is John, whose surname was Mark (i.e. “John Mark”).

- When the early church was praying for imprisoned Peter, they were in the house of John Mark’s mother (Acts 12:12).
- When Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, they “took with them John, whose surname was Mark” (Acts 12:25).
- When Barnabas and Saul preached the Word in the synagogues of the Jews in Salamis, Mark was their minister, helper, and assistant (Acts 13:5).
- When Paul and company came to Perga in Pamphylia, Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13).
- When Barnabas and Paul determined to go and visit the brethren in every city, Barnabas wanted to take Mark. Paul, however, did not think it wise, since Mark had “departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.” This occasioned the separation of Paul and Barnaba (Acts 15:37-40).
- Some time later, Mark became more trustworthy. Paul then said he was “profitable” to him “for the ministry” (2 Tim 4:11).
- Peter refers to Mark as “my son” (1 Pet 5:13). We gather he was Peter’s son in the faith.
- Since the middle of the second century, it has been generally assumed that this “Mark,” or “Marcus” (the Greek form) was the writer of the Gospel of Mark.

Receive Him

“ . . . (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him.)” Other

versions read, “about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him,” NKJV “You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him,” NIV

Here is a disciple who recovered from being undependable, becoming profitable to Paul himself, and faithful in the work of the Lord. He stands as a noble example of overcoming the fleshly inclination to quit. He came to a point where he was highly valued.

“ 11 And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.”

JESUS, WHICH IS CALLED JUSTUS

“ And Jesus, which is called Justus . . . ”

The name “Jesus” is the Greek form of the name “Joshua,” and means “Jehovah is salvation.” In Stephen’s defense of the faith, when referring to Joshua, the KJV uses the word “Jesus” (Acts 7:45). The book of Hebrews also refers to Joshua as “Jesus” (Heb 4:8). The same name is used in Luke 3:29, in the genealogy of our Lord. There the KJV uses the word “Joses,” the ASV and BBE use “Jesus,” while the other versions use “Joshua.” In all three of these cases, the Greek word used is **Ἰησοῦς** (ee-ay-sooce), the same name ascribed to our Lord and Savior (Matt 1:21). In a sense, that could be very intimidating.

This brother was also called “Justus,” which is a Latin name meaning “just” or “righteous.” This would have been his Roman name. Other men identified with two names include “Thomas” (“which is called Didymus” (John 11:16), “John” (“whose surname was Mark” (Acts 12:12), “Judas” (“surnamed Iscariot,” Lk 22:3), “Joseph” (“called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus” (Acts 1:23), and “Simon” (“whose surname was Peter,” Acts 10:5). The term “surnamed,” used in the KJV, means “was called,” and is so translated in most other versions.

It is generally understood that this name was common among the Jews until the time of the Lord Jesus, at which time it was generally discontinued because of the sanctity given to the name by the Savior. The name is considered to imply devotion to the Law of God.

We know nothing else of this brother. The only two things that are presently known of him are in this text: (1) He was a Jew (“of the circumcision”). (2) He labored with Paul (“fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God”). (3) He comforted Paul (“which have been a comfort unto me”). What a marvelous thing to be noted for only those three things! He was of the fleshly lineage of Abraham, as was the Savior. His work was for the kingdom of God. He was one who ministered comfort and encouragement to Paul himself.

OF THE CIRCUMCISION

“ who are of the circumcision . . . ” This description applies to a list of persons including Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus, “which is called Justus.” They were Jews, who are frequently called “the circumcision” (Acts 10:45; 11:2; Rom 3:30; 4:9,12; 15:8; Gal 2:7,8,9,12; Eph 2:11; Tit 1:10). However, these were not merely Jews, but were among that holy remnant who are, in the true spiritual sense , “THE circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3).

A considerable number of the Jews had become opponents of the Gospel (Acts 15:1,24; Gal 2:4; 5:1-4; Phil 3:2; 2 Cor 11:24; 1 Thess 2:14-15; Tit 1:10). However, here was a holy cluster of elect ones, numbered among the holy remnant, who were Jews “inwardly,” and were also circumcised in their hearts, and in the spirits (Rom 2:29). We must be able to comprehend the magnitude of Divine grace that is evidenced in this group of people. It is possible for a few godly to be found amongst a mass of ungodly – like Lot in Sodom, Joseph in Egypt, Nehemiah in Persia, and Daniel in Babylon.

THE ONLY ONES

“These only are my fellow workers.” Other versions read , “my only fellow workers,” NKJV “These are the only Jews among my fellow workers,” NIV “These are the only men of the circumcision,” RSV “these only are my helpers,” DOUAY “Of all those who have come over from the circumcision, these are the only ones actually working with me,” NJB “These are the only Jewish Christians among my coworkers.” NLT

Here is a most remarkable circumstance – particularly when you consider how many Jews had been converted. On the day of Pentecost, a harvest of three thousand devout Jews was realized (Acts 2:41). A short time later, many more Jews believed, “and the number of the men was about five thousand” (Acts 4:14). Within a short time “a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). When Dorcas was raised from the dead in Joppa, “many believed in the Lord” (Acts 9:42). In a synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, a “multitude” of Jews believed (Acts 14:1). Later in the book of Acts, James pointed out to Paul, “Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law” (Acts 21:20).

Yet, from this mass of Jewish believers, there were only three who were laboring with Paul at that time: Aristarchus, Mark, and “Jesus, which is called Justus.” This was, then, a time during Paul’s ministry when personal fellowship from his “kinsmen according to the flesh” was especially sparse. Yet, his spirit was buoyant, his heart full, and his ministry flourishing.

The effect of godly brethren is not dependent upon how many there are of them, but how faithful they are. It is “good and pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity,” even if it is “two of three” (Matt 18:20).

UNTO THE KINGDOM

“ . . . unto the kingdom of God. . . ” Other versions read, “for the kingdom of God,” NKJV “in the kingdom of God,” DOUAY “to the kingdom of God,” RWB and “for the reign of God.” YLT

What does it mean to be “fellow workers unto the kingdom of God?” The word “unto” means “into, towards, for, or among.” THAYER “Motion toward a place . . . with as view to, for this reason.” FRIBERG The

Kingdom of God is what they preached – that is, the focus and result of God’s working. Their labors had to do with focusing upon what the God had purposed, and what He was doing. They joined with Paul in his labors, of whom it is said, “he expounded and testified the kingdom of God , persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23). And again, “And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God , and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” (Acts 28:31).

These men were promoting the honor and interest of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were not promoting Jewry or some Christian sect. They were not advancing a human agenda, or swelling the numbers or fame of a particular sectarian group.

Righteousness, Peace, and Joy

The Spirit molds our thinking by this expression concerning the Kingdom of God: “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit ” (Rom 14:17). Those who are working “unto the Kingdom of God” are promoting these inner spiritual qualities. They are bringing them within the reach of the people, and advancing them in those who believe.

You cannot proceduralize righteousness, peace, and joy. You cannot build them with worldly wisdom, or develop a routine that promotes them. They are “in the Holy Spirit” – i.e. only He can administer and culture these virtues. Neither, indeed, do any of them contribute to institutionalism. You cannot build a name on them, or found an organization upon them. They do not blend with the wisdom of this world, nor can any person capitalize upon them for personal advantage. Yet, these have to do with the Kingdom of God. Where they are found, God’s Kingdom is being made known, and is among the people.

It should not surprise you that such men are even more rare today than they were during the time of this text. For some, these words are most confusing. Such have grown so accustomed to institutional agendas and human interpretations that they cannot even think in terms of “the kingdom of God.” That is too generic for them, and does not narrow matters down fine enough. What they forget is that there are really only two kingdoms . The one that is being governed by the exalted Christ, and the one over which Satan presides.

A COMFORT UNTO ME

“ . . . which have been a comfort unto me.” Other versions read, “they have proved to be a comfort to me,” NKJV “they have proved to be an encouragement to me,” NASB “who have been a consolation to me,” DARBY “And what a comfort they have been,” NLT and “who did become a comfort to me.” YLT

People are comforted when they are made stronger in the Lord, gaining strength to finish the

race that has been placed before them (Heb 12:2). Thus the debilitating effects of spiritual warfare are decidedly neutralized, and the heart is encouraged. Determination, confidence, and assurance, grow when a person is comforted. The enemy becomes smaller, and circumstances are less threatening. Whatever trials may loom before the person who is comforted he feels equal to them, and is not intimidated by them.

It is tragic, yet true, that many professing Christians are nothing more than sources of discouragement and concern. They cause “heaviness of and continual sorrow of heart,” as Israel did to Paul (Rom 9:2). When Paul confronted the church at Corinthian, he had to determine within himself not to come to them again “in heaviness” (2 Cor 2:1). For a while, their condition was more of a weight to Paul than an encouragement. On one occasion he wrote to them, “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor 11:3).

Ponder the effects of the Galatian church upon Paul. “I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain” (Gal 4:11).

O, the blessing of comforters, who leave us stronger, encouraged, and more determined to dwell forever in the courts of the Lord! May you be one who is a comfort to those who are laboring “unto the kingdom of God” – whose interests have been shaped in the crucible of Divine fellowship, not the halls of sectarianism and institutionalism! Such people are jewels in the eyes of the Lord.

“ 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea and them in Hierapolis.”

EPHAPHRAS

“Epaphras . . .” The name Epaphras means “lovely,” and that is certainly an appropriate description of this dear brother. He is mentioned by this name three times in Scripture, and with the most wonderful associations.

- Colossians 1:7 – OUR DEAR FELLOW SERVANT: “As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant.”
- Colossians 1:7 – A FAITHFUL MINISTER OF CHRIST: “. . . who is for you a faithful minister of Christ.”
- Colossians 4:12 – A SERVANT OF CHRIST: “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ.”
- Colossians 4:12 – LABORING FERVENTLY IN PRAYERS: “always laboring fervently for you in prayers.”
- Colossians 4:13 – ZEALOUS: “For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea and them in Hierapolis.”
- Philemon 1:23 – FELLOW PRISONER: “There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus.”

We learn from this man that disciples can be distinguished for their faithfulness and labors. That distinction, however, requires extraordinary effort and faith. That is precisely why such souls are given special recognition in the inspired writings.

ONE OF YOU

“. . . who is one of you . . .” This same thing was said of Onesimus, and indicates that Epaphras also labored among the Colossian brethren. Some have objected to forming an identity with a particular group of people, saying that such identity is not necessary. It is sufficient, they say, to be part of the church at large. Such reasoning is flawed to the core, and does not reflect sound thinking or speaking.

When Saul of Tarsus was converted, he came to Jerusalem and “tried to join the disciples” NKJV (Acts 9:26). Onesimus and Epaphras were particularly part of the Colossian fellowship (Col 4:9, 12). There are a number of brethren mentioned in Scripture who had churches in their houses (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phile 1:2). Corinth was told to expel from among themselves those brethren who were immoral (1 Cor 5:2-11). They were also challenged to consider if there was a wise man among them (1 Cor 6:5). There were those among the Galatians who especially ministered in the power of the Spirit (Gal 3:5). The Thessalonians had some among them who were walking disorderly (2 Thess 3:11).

All of these references presume some form of regular identity with the people. This identity is reflected in most intimate language: “members one of another” (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:25). A local congregation is body of people that relate to one another in both faith and ministry. Those who shun such relationships are conducting their lives in contradiction of the very nature of the Kingdom.

Epaphras was “one” of the Colossian brethren by regular association, not by an impersonal or formal identity. This will become apparent when Paul refers to what he did.

A SERVANT OF CHRIST

“ . . . a servant of Christ, saluteth you . . . ” Other versions read, “a bondservant of Christ,” NKJV “a bonds slave of Jesus Christ.” NASB

Serving Christ involves doing His bidding, and joining Him as a co-laborer. It means Christ’s agenda is adopted, and the individual enters into a life that is pleasing to the Lord. Jesus said of those who serve Him: “If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will My Father honor” (John 12:26).

One of the strategies of the devil has been to distort the vocabulary of the Spirit. If he cannot promote his own vocabulary as a substitute, he will attempt to corrupt the meaning of words used by the Holy Spirit. One expression he has targeted is “servant of Christ.” In the Spirit, a “servant of Christ” is a

voluntary bondsman – one who is bound to do the will of his Master. He is like the servant of Exodus 21:1-6, who chose to remain with His master, doing his bidding instead of pursuing personal interests. Everyone is a servant to someone, for “to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness” (Rom 6:16). A “servant of Christ” is someone who has been “made free from sin,” has now “become servants to God,” has “fruit unto holiness,” and in the end will have “eternal life” (Rom 6:22).

Satan has promoted the idea that serving a religious institution, doing its bidding, and promoting its agenda, is “serving Christ.” Such a view has no regard for “righteous, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Nor, indeed, does it rely upon the leading and administration of the Spirit (Gal 5:18; 1 Cor 12:4-6), learning Christ (Eph 4:20), or hearing Christ’s voice (John 10:27).

ALWAYS LABORING FERVENTLY FOR YOU

“ . . . always laboring fervently for you in prayers . . . ” Other versions read, “always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers,” NASB “He is always wrestling in prayer for you,” NIV “always remembering you earnestly in his prayers,” RSV “always combating earnestly for you in prayers,” DARBY “always struggling on your behalf in his prayers,” ESV and “never stops battling for you.” NJB

The expression “laboring fervently” is unusually strong. The single word translated “laboring fervently” is **avgwnizo,menoj** (ag-on-idz-omen-os). It means “to enter a contest, contend with adversaries, fight, and endeavor with strenuous zeal, strive to obtain something.” THAYER “Strive earnestly, make every effort, try very hard.” FRIBERG “Struggle, fight, do one’s best, compete.” UBS “To engage in intense struggle, involving physical or nonphysical force against strong opposition – to struggle, to fight.” LOUW-NIDA “To contend for victory.” LIDDELL-SCOTT This is a term that describes intense inner activity.

Epaphras, then, was engaged in a battle for the Colossians, and the arena in which he was

fighting the battle was prayer. This is the very thing that is depicted in the book of Ephesians, where the brethren are admonished to “put on the whole armor of God,” because we are wrestling “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:12). After identifying that armor, the Spirit says, “ Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints ” (Eph 6:18). This is exactly what Epaphras is not only doing, but doing “always” – consistently and faithfully.

We will see now the objective of these militant prayers. There is a certain focus in them that will elude those who walk in the flesh rather than in the Spirit.

PERFECT AND COMPLETE

“ . . . that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” Other versions read, “perfect and fully assured in all the will of God,” NASB “that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured,” NIV “stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills,” NRSV “complete and fully certain of all the purpose of God,” BBE “that you will never lapse but always hold perfectly and securely to the will of **God**,” NJB and “asking God to make you strong and perfect, fully confident of the whole will of God.” NLT

Observe that Epaphras does not pray that the Colossian church would flourish numerically – for there is every indication they were relatively small, perhaps even meeting in the house of Philemon (Phile 1:2). He does not pray that they will have successful programs, or that they will reach their community, or that their missions programs will be successful. None of these things are wrong, and that is not the point. If the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is to do the will of God, it is going to have to stand “perfect and complete” in that will. An immature church trying to do the will of the Lord is like a toddler trying to cut down a tree with a chain saw.

The words “perfect and complete” are the Spirit’s way of referring to maturity, or growing up into Christ “in all things” (Eph 4:15). It is when the saints are “men” in their “understanding” (1 Cor 14:20). This is when believers are “stablished in the Lord” (Col 2:7), and are no longer “unstable” in all their ways (James 1:8). A mature believer is one who

possesses “the full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22), “the full assurance of hope” (Heb 6:11), and “the full assurance of understanding” (Col 2:2).

It is no wonder Epaphras did spiritual battle in his prayers, struggling against principalities and powers who were fighting to restrain such supplications! Ponder the magnitude of these expressions: “perfect and complete,” “all the will of God,” “fully assured,” “stand firm,” “mature,” “fully certain,” “never lapse,” “hold perfectly,” “fully confident,” and “the whole will of God.”

Consider how many people you personally know who can be described in those words. There are large and impressive congregations who, at the very best, have only a few souls who could be described in this way. When have you ever heard of someone praying that the people of God would be like this? Or, better yet, how many have you heard suggest that they can and should be like this?

Salvation Produces These Things

First, salvation is calculated to produce these results: spiritual maturity and confidence in “all the will of God.” So far as this world is concerned, that is the targeted outcome of “the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10). If this does not happen, nothing else really counts. There is nothing – absolutely nothing – that can compensate for a failure to grow up and have confidence in all the will of God. What is even more, where these are lacking, people are vulnerable to the “old serpent.” The further a person is from spiritual maturity and the full assurance that comes with it, the closer they are to the precipice of eternal ruin. If that seems strong, believe me when I say it is not strong enough. That is precisely why Epaphras labored fervently in prayers for the Colossians.

The Intercession of Christ and the Holy Spirit

The Word of God affirms we have an Intercessor at the right hand of God, and One within as well. “Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). This is a reference to the exalted Christ, for we are coming to God “by Him.” He is saving His people “to the uttermost,” or completely, by making intercession for them.

From within, the Spirit is working in our behalf also. “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God ” (Rom 8:27). The Holy Spirit is interceding for us “according to the will of God.” That is, He is working to bring us into conformity with that will, that we might stand “perfect and complete” in all of it.

The prayers of Epaphras were in perfect accord with the intercession of Jesus, and the intercession of the Holy Spirit. It is especially in this sense that he was a “servant of Christ,” serving the interests and objectives of the Lord.

Summary Thought

Behold with what great difficulty spiritual maturity is obtained. It requires the hearty effort of the saints themselves (2 Pet 3:18). It requires the prayers of the saints around them (Eph 6:18). The intercession of Jesus is essential (Heb 7:25). The intercession of the Holy Spirit is required as well (Rom 8:26-27).

It is not possible for a child of God to grow up in a realm of casualness, or where one is exposed to the good things of God infrequently. Those who have championed convenient, brief, and infrequent religion have cut off the hands and feet of the people of God. Those who flood the church with extracurricular activities do the same. Such people betray their abysmal ignorance of the very nature of spiritual life.

Given the religious environment in which we are living, we could well do with an army of Epaphras's, who will do spiritual battle in their prayers for the maturity and stabilization of the saints of the Living God. How sorely spiritual adulthood is needed in the American church! However, it is not apt to happen on any measurable scale until those who see the need for the church growing up into Christ begin wrestling in prayer for that to take place.

There are staggering forces aligned against the church, and they love the froth to which she has given herself. However, where there are insightful souls willing to do battle for the body of Christ, genuine progress will be made.

A GREAT ZEAL

“ 13 For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea and them in Hierapolis.”

I bear him record

Other versions read, “I bear him witness,” NKJV “I vouch for him,” NIV “I testify for him,” NRSV and “I can assure you.” NLT

Paul had witnessed the conduct of Epaphras first hand, and thus confirms the truth of what he now says. Solomon wisely said, “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips” (Prov 27:2). That is precisely what we have in this text. Paul is bearing witness to the excellent qualities and practices of Epaphras.

He hath a great zeal for you

Other versions read, “he has a deep concern for you,” NASB “he is working hard for you,” NIV “he has undergone much trouble for you,” BBE “he labors much for you,” DARBY and “he has agonized for you.” NLT

The word “zeal” means “excitement of mind, ardour, fervor of spirit.” Some versions place the emphasis upon the result of the zeal rather the zeal itself: i.e. “working hard,” and “labors much.” This slight variation is owing to the presence of two differing Greek texts. For those with an interest in such things, one employs the phrase **zh/lon polu.n** , which is translated “great zeal.” The other Greek text uses the phrase **polu.n po,non** , which is translated “hard work.” Doctrinally, there is no difference in the meaning of the text. The zeal is what Epaphras had, the labor is how he employed it.

The real point of Paul’s commendation is that Epaphras was aggressive in seeking the welfare of the Colossian brethren. He toiled in prayer, seeking for them to “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

Zeal

Like our blessed Savior, he was consumed with the zeal of the Lord. When the disciples saw the aggressiveness with which the Lord cleansed the Temple, they “remembered that it was written, ‘The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up’” (John 2:17; Psa 69:9). Speaking of the coming Messiah, Isaiah prophesied, “For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak ” (Isa 59:17). The zeal of Epaphras confirmed that he had a lot of Jesus, and was abiding in Him.

Those at Laodicea and Hierapolis

Together with Colossae, these cities formed a sort of tri-city complex, with Colossae being situated between them.

Laodicea

This was the capital of Phrygia, and not far from Colossae. Early in this Epistle, Paul mentioned the church at Laodicea. “For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea , and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh” (Col 2:1). Later he will charge the brethren in Colossae to have their Epistle read to the Laodiceans, and to see to it that they read the Epistle sent to the Laodiceans: “And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans ; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea” (Col 4:16).

Several years after this Epistle was written, the Lord Jesus had John deliver a special word to the church at Laodicea. At that time, it was the only church, concerning which, Jesus had nothing good to say. In fact, he told them, because of their lukewarmness, He was about to spue them out of His mouth (Rev 3:14;16). Their condition was inexcusable! Paul had written a letter to them. They had heard the reading of the Epistle send to the Colossians. Additionally, they had in Epaphras a noble man who travailed in prayer for them, seeking that they stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

Sin is a terrible thing, seeing it can so dull the heart and conscience that such hearty efforts are all in vain – efforts expended by godly men.

Hierapolis

This city was also in Phrygia, and was not far from Colossae and Laodicea. It was a city given to idolatry, with Apollo, Diana, Aesculpius, and Hygeia being their chief gods. CLARKE The city contained numerous temples to all of these “vanities.”

This is the only mention of this church in Scripture – a body of believers for whom a godly man travailed in prayer for their perfection and stability. That is reason enough to spark our interest.

One last note

This special commendation of Epaphras is no doubt owing to the fact that this was the man who had apprised Paul of the conditions at Colossae. Perhaps some of the brethren were tempted to regard Epaphras with some contempt, seeing that he had blown the whistle on them, so to speak. However, Epaphras was not seeking his own benefit in his report and his labors. Rather, he was seeking the growth and maturity of the people of God. In that desire, he was a laborer together with God.

“ 14 Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.”

LUKE

“Luke, the beloved physician . . .” We know from Paul’s previous reference to the “only” Jews

who were laboring with him, that Luke was a Gentile – not reckoned among “the circumcision.”

We know nothing of Luke’s conversion, or of his past life. He did write two of the larger books of the New Covenant writings: Luke (24 chapters) and Acts (28 chapters). Out of the 260 chapters of Matthew through Revelation, 52 of them were written by Luke – a staggering 20%. It appears that he is also the only Gentile who wrote Scripture.

Both of his books were written to Theophilus. There is no record of him. We assume that Luke’s reference to him as “most excellent Theophilus” suggests he occupied some high political office. However, that is only conjecture.

What Luke Says About Himself

Being a man of integrity and insight, it will be profitable to know what Luke said about himself. We have only one testimony from him.

- In the Gospel Luke that wrote, he affirmed he was not an eye witness of Christ’s ministry, yet he had a “perfect understanding of all things from the very first” – that is, of the things pertaining relating to what Jesus “began both to do and teach” (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1).

References in the Book of Acts

There are some things we can conclude about Luke from the book of Acts.

- In his narrative of the book of Acts, Luke first associates himself with Paul in Acts 16:10-11, when the Spirit led Paul to Macedonia.
- He again associates himself with Paul in Acts 20:5-6, when they sailed from Philippi to Troas.
- He appears to have been Paul’s constant companion from their reunion in Phillipi and during his journey to Jerusalem (Acts 20:6-21:18).
- He sailed with Paul to Rome (Acts 27:1).
- He was shipwrecked with Paul on the isle called Melita (Acts 28:1-2).
- He traveled with Paul by Syracuse and Puteoli to Rome (Acts 28:12-16).

- It appears that he remained with Paul in Rome (Col 4:14; Phile 1:24).

Paul's Reference to Timothy

- At one point when Paul was imprisoned, “only Luke” was with him (2 Tim 4:11).

Our Text

In our text we learn something additional about Luke. He was a physician – not merely a physician, but a “beloved physician.” Other versions read, “Luke the doctor,” NIV “well-loved medical friend,” BBE and “Doctor Luke.” NLT The definite article is in the text, so that it properly reads, “THE beloved physician,” or “our dear friend Luke, THE doctor.” Luke, then, excelled in two areas. First, as beloved, or very precious, in the Lord – an unusual disciple. Second, as a physician – THE physician, or one who was surpassing in that profession. Further, the word used here indicates that he was a surgeon, physician, and dispenser of medicines. CLARKE

Throughout church history, there have been those who have denigrated doctors as though, in Christ Jesus, health was guaranteed. Those who have embraced this teaching declare that healing is in the atonement, and that Jesus on the cross, had our sicknesses laid upon Him. This is a fine point of their doctrine, coupled together with Isaiah's expression, “with His stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5; 1 Pet 2:24).

It is especially important to be clear on this matter, for the death of Christ is one of the pivotal declarations of Scripture. We cannot afford to be wrong about the purpose and impact of that death. If, in fact, there is bodily healing “in the atonement,” it will clearly stated in Scripture. This cannot be a teaching that is derived by human reasoning. There is no such thing as a valid doctrine that is only supported by human reasoning. Truth is undergirded by Divine affirmation, not supposition, conjecture, or logical hypotheses.

There are several things about this view that do not mesh with Apostolic doctrine concerning the death of Christ.

- First, If healing is, in fact, in the atonement, and bodily health is guaranteed in Jesus, I cannot conceive of a physician being called “ beloved physician” by the one who most clearly articulated the significance of Christ's death. A physician uses medicine, which conflicts with healing being in the atonement.
- Second, Christ's death is said to have been “for the ungodly” (Rom 5:6), “for our sins” (1 Cor 15:3), and “for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament” (Heb 9:15). Never is it said to have been for our sicknesses.
- Third, the Spirit applied the Scripture concerning Jesus bearing our sicknesses to His earthly ministry, not His death on the cross. Following the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, it is written,

“When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick” (Matt 8:16). This was not only a magnificent display of Divine power, but of mercy and love as well. In providing an explanation for this magnanimous work, the Spirit said, “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (Matt 8:17).

- Fourth, there is nothing about sickness that alienates a person from God. It requires no atoning death. Sickness does not necessitate a reconciliation, and is nowhere so represented.
- Fifth, the redemption the body is categorically said to take place at the resurrection, not at the cross (Rom 8:23; Eph 12:14).
- Sixth, the stripes by which we are healed are not those administered by the order of Pilate. Rather, it is what God did to Jesus that delivered us. He was “smitten of God and afflicted” (Isa 53:4). It was God who “delivered Him up” (Rom 8:32), making Him “to be sin” (2 Cor 5:21), and a “curse” as well (Gal 3:13). There is a single reference to the scourging of Jesus by Pilate in Scripture. It is found in John 19:1: “Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged Him.” Jesus Himself foretold that He would be “scourged” (Matt 20:19; Mk 10:34; Lk 18:33). There is no question about the severity of that scourging, which fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy, “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting” (Isa 50:6). Isaiah also said, “As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men” (Isa 52:14). Yet, neither the prophets, Jesus, nor the Apostles clearly connected that scourging with the healing of the body.
- Seventh, no person was ever rebuked for being sick. There are instances where people were made sick because of their sin, such as in the case of the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:30).
- Eighth, Paul indicates that Timothy, an unusually godly young man, was chronically ill. “No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments” NASB (1 Tim 5:23). If healing is in the atonement, Timothy’s condition would be evidence of unbelief. Yet Paul said of him, “For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state” (Phil 2:20).
- Ninth, rather than sickness being a curse for which Jesus had to die, the Galatians received the Gospel because of Paul’s infirmity: “but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time” NASB (Gal 4:13).

I therefore am persuaded that Luke was a “beloved physician” because he used his occupation to especially minister to Paul himself. I also affirm that such a designation could not be possible if Jesus died to give us soundness of bodily health.

Thus Paul says that Luke sends greetings to the brethren at Colossae – beloved Luke, who accompanied Paul on his second and third missionary journeys, accompanied him to Rome, and remained there with him until he was released (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:8; 27:1-28:16). He was also with

Paul during his second imprisonment in Rome (2 Tim 4:11). Truly, one of the Apostle's most trusted and beneficial companions.

DEMAS

“ . . . and Demas, greet you.”

We know very little about Demas. He was with Paul during the time Colossians and Philemon were written (Phile 1:24). At that time, he was apparently faithfully serving the Lord.

The other reference to Demas puts him in sharp contrast with faithful Luke: “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world , and is departed unto Thessalonica” (2 Tim 4:10). Like John Mark much earlier, Demas “went not with them to the work” (Acts 15:38). Rather, Paul tells Timothy, he “loved this present world,” preferring it to laboring in the Kingdom. Perhaps Demas could not stand the dangers that attended Paul's ministry. He is the only person about whom Paul had nothing more to say. He said something more about Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus who is called Justus, Epaphrase, and Luke. Perhaps there were already indications of Demas' instability. However, that is all conjecture. It is enough to observe that Demas represents the kind of disciple you do not want to be. He was with Paul, but nothing more is said about the occasion. It is assumed that he fell from a steadfast state.

“ 15 Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house.”

Those who are in Christ Jesus are members of “the whole family in heaven and earth,” which is named after Christ (Eph 3:15). They are “members every one of another” (Rom 12:5), and are “brethren” (1 Pet 1:22). There is a very real and effectual association that is realized when one is translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13). It is more than a formal connection. There is a sharing of both joys and sorrows (Rom 12:15). There is also mutual edification in which the various members assist one another (1 Thess 5:11).

This is why Paul is careful to send greetings from himself and those with him to the brethren in Colossae – a practice in which he was consistent (Rom 16:5-21; 1 Cor 16:19-20; 2 Cor 13:13; Phil 4:21,22; 1 Thess 5:26; 2 Tim 4:19; Tit 3:15; Phile 1:23).

BRETHREN IN LAODICEA

“Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea . . .” This is also a congregation about which we know very little. Its origin is not known. It is only mentioned in the books of Colossians and the Revelation. In Colossians, the references are as follows.

- Paul was having a great inner struggle for this church, as well as the one in Colossae (2:1). He was traveling for them (Gal 4:19). We conclude, therefore that at that time they were encountering some of the same challenges.
- Epaphras had a great zeal for this church (4:13).
- Paul sent his greetings to the brethren in Laodicea (4:15).
- They were to have the Epistle to the Colossians read to them (4:16).
- Paul had also written them an Epistle (4:16).

The “brethren in Laodicea,” therefore, had every reason to excel. Paul was wrestling for them. Epaphras was zealous for them. Paul had written a special letter to them. The Epistle to the Colossians was read to them. Those all provided an excellent incentive for them to grow up into Christ in all things.

However, this is not what happened. About 30-35 years after Colossians was written, the glorified Christ sent a message to this church. Its condition at that time was anything but admirable. In the time between the writing of the Epistle to the Colossians and the writing of the Revelation, this

church had so degenerated that nothing good could be said about it. Jesus provided the true assessment of “the church of the Laodiceans.”

- They were neither cold nor hot (Rev 3:15).
- They were lukewarm (Rev 3:16a).
- Because of their condition, Jesus was going to spue them out of His mouth (3:16b).
- They said they were rich, increased with goods, and had need of nothing (Rev 3:17a).
- They did not know they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked (Rev 3:17b).
- Jesus counseled them to buy true gold from Him so they would be rich (Rev 3:18a).
- Jesus counseled them to obtain white raiment from Him so they would be clothed, and their shameful nakedness would not appear (Rev 3:18b).
- Jesus counseled them anoint their eyes with eyesalve so they could see (Rev 3:18c).
- Jesus told them to be zealous, and repent (3:19).
- Jesus stood outside of their church, knocking, and searching for a single person who would hear His voice (Rev 3:20).

The “church of the Laodiceans” would probably be featured in the religious magazines of our day. They had all of the marks of a successful organization, seeing themselves as having no need. However, several decades before Jesus said He was going to disown them, the seeds of moral and spiritual corruption were already at work. Paul sensed it and carried a great burden for them. Epaphras saw it, and was zealous for their advancement. It appears as though their labor was in vain – a circumstance that Paul feared (2 Cor 11:3; Gal 4:11).

When the Spirit speaks of spiritual leaders who “watch for your souls,” He is speaking of men like Paul and Epaphras, who behold the beginnings of iniquity, and set themselves to stop its spread. These are men who have been made overseers by the Holy Spirit, “to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). This text is a sterling example of that kind of care and nurture.

“ . . . and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house.” This is the only mentioning of Nymphas in the Scriptures. And even here, we only know one thing about this person: a body of believers was meeting in his house. That is, however, a most excellent recommendation, setting him apart from most others.

Some have surmised that all of the brethren in Laodicea met in the house of Nymphas. Others understand him to have lived on the outskirts of the city, while Philemon was the most prominent among them, with his house being the main place of meeting. All of this is of no real consequence. The fact of the matter is that some brethren were assembling in the house of Nymphas, for the word “church” means “assembly.”

Something to Note

Here is something to be noted: the early church was not at all what people now conceive a church to be. Today's impression ranks high on the religious scale: An educated staff, an impressive structure, a glittering program, an effective outreach, extracurricular activities, etc. A “church” meeting in a “house” is nearly held in disdain. There are several people in Scripture who are noted for having churches in their homes: Priscilla and Aquilla (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19), Nymphas (Col 4:15), and Philemon.

The presence of these groups confirms the seriousness of early disciples. They saw a need for assembling together, edifying

one another, and expressing their faith. Too, Paul, the premier Apostle with a superior understanding of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, recognized these house gatherings. They were worthy of comfort, exhortation, and edification.

That, of course, is the very manner in which our blessed Lord thinks. The Kingdom of God does not focus upon impressive organizations, but upon those who are joined to the Lord – those who are growing up into Christ in all things.

“ 16 And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.”

Among the people of God, the Word of God carries a certain priority. The words of a person inspired by God are seen as a vehicle for grace and truth that will yield edification, exhortation, and comfort (1 Cor 14:3).

READ AMONG YOU

“And when this epistle is read among you . . . ”

Paul is counting on this Epistle being read to the whole church – young and old. He does not send a special messenger to the youth, married, single, senior, etc. Truth is not tailored for certain ages, but for those who have faith. While this is a matter of particular concern to me, I will say this one word. We are living in a time when undue attention is being given to young people. They are, we are told, “the church of tomorrow,” even though no such thing is taught or insinuated in the Word of God . Christian young people are part of the church of today! They are to be “an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12). At some point, they must be able to sit and hear what the Apostle says to the whole church. That is how it was in Colossae, and that is how it is to be today.

In the days of Jehosaphat, the people gathered together “to ask help of the Lord.” The children of Moab and the children of Ammon had come up against them, and it did not look good. Jehosaphat “feared, and set himself to seek the Lord.” The people all rallied, coming together to obtain help from God. It is written, “And all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children” (2 Chron 20:13). As they stood before the Lord, in the middle of the congregation, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, “a Levite of the sons of Asaph.” He then delivered a weighty prophesy to “all Judah . . . with their little ones, their wives, and their children” (2 Chron 20:1-17).

That is the sort of circumstance that is before us. Tychicus brings this Epistle from Paul, and reading it “among” the brethren is the first thing to be done.

For those who champion the watering down of truth so as to make it more palatable, consider what Paul has affirmed in this Epistle. These are things to which all the brethren were to be exposed.

- The commendation of their faith in Christ and love for the brethren (1:4).
- A prayer for them to be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding (1:9).
- A prayer that they will walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God (1:10).
- A prayer that they would be strengthened with all might according to God’s glorious power unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness (1:11).
- An affirmation that God has qualified us to partake of the inheritance of the saints in light (1:12).
- A declaration that God has delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son, redeeming and forgiving us (1:13-14).
- A powerful declaration of the nature, work, and exaltation of the Lord Jesus (1:15-19).
- A delineation of the involvements of being reconciled to God (1:20-24).1
- A declaration of the mystery that had been hidden from the foundation of the world (1:25-29).
- An affirmation of the completeness that is realized in Christ (2:1-10).

- A exposition of what occurred when we were baptized into Christ (2:11-15).
- A warning not to allow anyone to judge us in regard to things that are only a shadow of what is possessed in Christ (2:16-17).
- A warning about the possibility of being deceived by a form, of religion that has no power (2:18-23).
- A summons to bring our lives into conformity with the will of God (3:1-4:6). This included the management of our preferences and affection. It also involved the subordination of fleshly tendencies, and the culturing of spiritual virtues. The Word of Christ is to dwell in us richly, and everything we do is to be done in the name of the Lord.

Today there are whole generations of believers who are never submitted to such teaching. The manner of teaching that they receive has caused the truth to have a strange sound to such people.

Progress in the faith begins with exposure to the mind of the Lord. That exposure comes exclusively through the Word of God by which we live. As it is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Mat 4:4). Only the Word can penetrate the citadel of the human spirit and make manifest the counsels of the heart. Thus it is written, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12). If ever the saints of God are going to be equipped to live for and be used by God, they must be exposed to His Word. As it is written, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:16-17).

This, and much more, is why Paul had his letters read to the brethren. They were not sent to the leaders alone, but to the brethren. They were not directives to “the minister,” but to the whole congregation. This is a kingdom manner. In my judgment, as soon as a ministry is limited to a segment of the body of Christ, it at once becomes irrelevant.

CAUSE IT TO BE READ ALSO

“ . . . cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans . . . ” Other versions read, “see that it is read also,” NKJV “have it also read,” NASB and “let the same be done.” BBE

Paul does not suggest that they inquire of the Laodicean

brethren if they would like to read what Paul wrote to the Colossians. Rather, they were to see to it that the letter was read to those brethren.

There are several things that are assumed in this admonition.

- That there was some association of the brethren in Colossae and the brethren in Laodicea.
- That the brethren were accustomed to meeting together.
- That what Paul wrote applied to both groups.
- That we can profit by what the Lord says to other people.
- That there is blessing in cooperation and unity.
- That all believers have things pertaining to salvation in common.

Truth is something designed for all the saints of God. Its nature is to liberate and make free (John 8:32). When it is spoken “in love,” it makes for spiritual growth and stability (Eph 4:15). Since the church is, in fact, “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15), that is to be its specialty. That is why the Laodiceans would profit from hearing the Epistle to the Colossians.

READ THE OTHER EPISTLE

“ . . . and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.”

The wording of this verse has produced all manner of interpretations, most of which lack the power to edify. Note that the Apostle does not say “read the epistle TO Laodicea,” but “read the epistle FROM Laodicea.” This has led some to affirm this was a letter written by the Laodiceans – perhaps to Paul. This, however, is a foolish conjecture, and does not blend with the rest of this text. Why would Paul tell the Colossians to see to it that HIS letter to them was read by the Laodiceans, and that THEIR letter to him was to be read by the Colossians?

The meaning is that someone was bringing a letter sent to the Laodiceans to Colossae, and the brethren there were to read it. In other words, they were to exchange letters, realizing profit from both of them. The NASB projects this meaning. “And 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.” NASB

On one occasion, Paul shared the perception that some had of his letters. “For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful” (2 Cor 10:10). Indeed, there are few students of Scripture who have not made this same observation at some time. His expositions of inner warfare (Rom 7:14-23), justification (Rom 4), the humiliation of Jesus (Phil 2:5-8), his personal objectives (Phil 3:7-14), and the High Priesthood of Jesus (Heb 5-10), are lofty in every sense of the word.

However, as this Epistle suggests, such things are not to be

ignored because they are “weighty,” or “deep.” In fact, that is all the more reason why we are to be exposed to such things. You cannot produce mature and stable believers with rudiments and theological simplicity.

May God hasten the day when the cry for spiritual meat rises from the church – when men are no longer content to be “unskillful in the word or righteousness” (Heb 5:13). In the meantime, laboring in prayer is in order.

“ 17 And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.”

Here Paul goes further than a mere salutation or greeting. He has a personal word that is to be delivered to Archippus. Paul refers to him as “our fellowsoldier” in his letter to Philemon. Some suppose that he was Philemon’s son, while Apphia was Philemon’s wife (Phile 1:2). At any rate, the reference to Archippus in the book of Philemon is the only other reference to him. It is obvious in both references that he was involved in the work of the Lord.

TAKE HEED

“ And say to Archippus, Take heed . . . ” Other versions read, “See to it that you,” NIV “See that you,” RSV and “be sure to carry out.” NLT

This is the way heaven speaks to stewards – those who have been given something to do. The words “take heed” come from a single Greek word – **Blēpe** (ble-pee). It means “to see, discern, have the power of seeing, understand, discover, to contemplate, and to look into.” THAYER “To become aware of, to notice.” LOUW-NIDA In this text it means to find out, discover, and be conscious of.

Archippus is being challenged to consider something, to have an understanding of it, and perceive it and devote himself to it. He is not to be ignorant in this area, or address it in a slovenly manner. Others uses of this word confirms this is the meaning.

- “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon” (1 Cor 3:10).
- “But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak” (1 Cor 8:9).
- “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor 10:12).
- “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another” (Gal 5:15).

This has to do with understanding and perception, key elements in the life of faith. The Greek word from which “take heed” is taken is translated in a number of different ways. All of them accent this matter of perception. Here are some of the translations of that word. “ I see another law” (Rom 7:23), “ ye see your calling” (1 Cor 1:26), “ Behold Israel after the flesh,” 1 Cor 10:18), “ beware of dogs” (Phil 3:2), “ beholding your order,” Col 2:5).

The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of light, and those within it are “children of light” (Eph 5:8). They have come into a realm of understanding , and have received an anointing by which they “know all things,” having access to “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” that are “hid in Christ” (1 John 2:20-27, Col 2:3). Here, then, is something that Archippus is to understand, and to which he is to devote himself.

TO THE MINISTRY

“ . . . to the ministry which thou hast received . . . ” Other versions read, “the work you have received,” NIV “the task that you received,” NRSV and “the ministration that thou didst receive.” YLT

Jesus spoke of His kingdom in this manner. “For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch” (Mark 13:34-37). The expression “to every man his work” equates with the “ministry” to which Archippus was to take heed.

“Ministry” is an area of kingdom responsibility. It has to do with carrying out the will of the Lord in a specific area.

Archippus is being challenged to comprehend what he has been given to do – to look into it, perceive it, and throw himself into it.

RECEIVED IN THE LORD

“ . . . in the Lord.” Other versions read, “the Lord has given you to do,” BBE and “the Lord assigned to you.” NJB

“The ministry” is, in fact, the work that Jesus had given Archippus to do. It had to do with where the Lord had placed him in the body (1 Cor 12:18). In Christ Jesus members of the body are given assignments by the Head of the body. This is the meaning of First Corinthians 12:5-6: “And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all” (1 Cor 12:6).

FULFILL IT

“ . . . that thou fulfil it.” Other versions read, “complete the work,” NIV “do the work,” BBE and “carry out.” NLT

Archippus is not only admonished to see and comprehend what Jesus had given him to do. He was to “fulfill,” or “complete” it. We are not told why Paul delivered this word to Archippus. Perhaps he had grown weary, or was being distracted to other things. Whatever the reason, the word from heaven was to “fulfill” the work he had been given to do.

When Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, exited from the arena of warfare, He cried out, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). A few hours before that, He fervently prayed to the Father in the behalf of His disciples. In that prayer He confessed, “I have **FINISHED** the work Thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4). In this,

he set the tone for all who labor in the vineyard of the Lord. They are to complete what they have been given to do.

When Paul readied himself to be offered up to God in a final sacrifice of love, he said, “I have finished my course” (2 Tim 4:7).

That is the norm for all who work for the Lord. Finish the work he has given you to do! God is not glorified by abandoned labors! Rest assured, every steward will be called to account for his stewardship, and every laborer for his labor. Jesus will honor those who do His will heartily and thoroughly before the Father, the holy angels, and the assembled universe. Until then, let every believer see to it that they perceive their ministry, consider it in faith, and then put their might into fulfilling it.

“ 18 The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen.”

The Epistle was probably written by Tychicus, Paul’s amanuensis, or stenographer, as the Apostle dictated to him. But now Paul takes the quill from the writer and personally writes on the manuscript.

BY THE HAND OF ME

“ 18 The salutation by the hand of me Paul.” Other versions read, “I, Paul, write this greeting.”
NASB/NIV

This was a special token of the authenticity of this Epistle, as was his custom. Thus he wrote to the Thessalonians, “The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle : so I write” (2 Thess 3:17). His personal signature was to his letters what the king’s signet was to his proclamations. Thus other versions read, “which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters.”

You may recall that erroneous letters had gone out to several brethren, representing themselves as being from Paul. Some appear to have sent out false teachings concerning the coming of the Lord, putting Paul’s name on them. Thus he wrote to the Thessalonians, “That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us , as that the day of Christ is at hand” (2 Thess 2:2). Others had said that Paul was saying “Let us do evil, that good may come” (Rom 3:8). However, when the distinguishing teaching of the Apostle was joined to his personal signature, it served to assure the brethren.

See with what care the Apostle guards what he says, ensuring the brethren that this has really come from him. The very fact that he did this shows the faithfulness and integrity of the Apostle.

REMEMBER BY BONDS

“Remember my bonds.” Other versions read, “Remember my chains,” NKJV “Remember my imprisonment,” NASB “Remember my fetters.” RSV In another Epistle he added, “but the Word of God is not bound” (2 Tim 2:9).

Earlier Paul had told the Colossians that he was suffering on their account: “Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you , and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church” (Col 1:24). That is, the truth was being brought to the Colossians at a great personal cost on the part of Paul. He had written while in chains, and asked them to remember that fact. The Spirit speaks to us on such matters: “Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body” (Heb 13:3).

GRACE BE WITH YOU

“Grace be with you.” This was frequently the final word of Paul to his readers (Rom 16:20,24; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 13:14; Phil 4:23; 1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess 3:18; 2 Tim 4:22; Tit 3:15; Heb 13:25). For that matter, the very last words of the Bible are, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” (Rev 22:21).

A fitting conclusion, indeed. We “believed through grace” (Acts 18:27). Justification is “of faith, that it might be by grace” (Rom 4:16). The gift of righteousness is “by grace” (Rom 5:15). It is “by grace” that we are “saved” (Eph 2:5,8). God has given us “everlasting consolation and good hope through grace” (2 Thess 2:16). If grace is with us, so is everything that brings. Praise the Lord!

AMEN

“Amen.” Later versions omit this word. NASB/NIV/NRSV However, the word is an appropriate one. It means “so be it,” affirming that what has been said is fully trustworthy.

During the reading of the curses of the Law, the people were required to say “Amen,” after the reading of each one (Deut 27:15-26). The Psalms frequently contain the expression, “Amen and Amen” (Psa 41:13; 72:19; 89:52). Paul spoke of the assembly of the righteous saying “Amen at the giving of thanks” (1 Cor 14:16). There are frequent Apostolic affirmations that are followed by an “Amen” (Rom 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; Gal 1:5; Eph 3:21; Phil 4:20; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:16; 2 Tim 4:18; Heb 13:21; 1 Pet 4:11; ; 5:11; 2 Pet 3:18; Jude 1:25).

“Amen” is the language of acquiescence. There is agreement in it, together with a note of satisfaction and finality. It reflects spiritual accord. An appropriate ending, indeed!

Thus we come to the end of this most excellent Epistle. It has been filled with Kingdom, perspectives that have lifted our souls, challenged our hearts, and stabilized our spirits. “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). May you experience the power and benefit of the truth that has been declared in this wonderful letter.