



Colossians
Bible Study
A 15 part Study

By
Norma Becker



About Norma Becker



Norma Becker:

Norma was born in Oregon in 1929. She received her BA in business and education from the University of Oregon. She and her husband Ed raised three children (have two now) and four grandchildren. They have travelled to over 30 countries sharing their spiritual journey with thousands of people.

Norma Becker
A true woman of God and God's word.



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- Inspire Christians to believe that God is Almighty
- Introduce people to Jesus Christ

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Part 1 - Background

We are going to study Colossians, but first let's get some background....

Who Wrote it?

Paul

Who was Paul?

Paul was a very religious Jew. He was born in the city of Tarsus about 10 AD. This makes him about the same age as Jesus.

Tarsus was a city in what was then the Roman Empire. The location now is in the country of Turkey.

His parents named him Saul after Israel's first King, the most glorious member of the Israelite tribe of Benjamin. His parents could trace their ancestry back to this tribe. His parents must have had some property and wealth and also some standing in the Gentile community since the book of Acts tells us that he was a citizen of Tarsus and also a citizen of Rome - which was quite significant then.

Paul was sent to Jerusalem to study Jewish law under the foremost rabbi of his day, the Pharisee Gamaliel. (Acts 22:3; Galatians 1:14)

The Hebrew word for Pharisees means (the separated ones) and they felt that God had set them apart to live and to teach in strict accordance with the Torah (the Law or Teaching of Moses; first five books of Bible.) They were the "religious of the religious."

Pharisees vs. the Jews

The Pharisees expected a Messiah who would deliver them from foreign oppression and rule with justice; however, this Jesus of Nazareth had angered the Pharisees by interpreting the Law differently than they did and by claiming a special relationship with God. Therefore, when some Jews began to proclaim Jesus as Messiah and Lord - this was a term usually reserved for God - the strict Pharisees opposed them. Saul was one of these Pharisees and he was active in the fight against those in Jerusalem who proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah.

There was one man in particular that we read about in Acts 6:8. The believers in Jesus began to be called "The Way." The persecution became so great that many were driven out and went to Damascus (now in Lebanon).

Saul Begins to See the Light

From then on, Saul's understanding of God and the Torah, the five books of Moses,



began to change dramatically. He joined those Jews who were urging other Jews to believe in Jesus. Read 9:20- 31.

After a few years, God called him to proclaim Jesus as Savior to the Gentiles also. Saul took the Greek name “Paul” when he turned to work among the Gentiles.

First Missionary Journey

In the letter to the Galatians, Paul tells more of his life. Read Galatians 1:11-2:1. He spent ten years in the Roman provinces of Cilicia and Syria, probably preaching alongside Jewish Christians who had fled Jerusalem during the persecution. Then a believer named Barnabas called Paul from Tarsus to Syrian Antioch where many Jews had converted to Christianity. After a while, the church in Antioch commissioned Paul and Barnabas to evangelize the provinces of Cyprus and Galatia. (Acts 13)

In all, Paul had what we call three missionary journeys. This was the first one.

Second Missionary Journey

He was anxious to revisit the churches that he had ministered to on his first trip so again he started out. (Acts 16-18:22) On this trip, he went all the way to Athens and then back to Antioch. After some time back in Antioch, he set off on his third journey.

Third Missionary Journey

On this trip he returned to Ephesus and spent over two years there. Acts 19:8-20 tells of what he did in Ephesus. After going on to Corinth, a short distance from Athens, he returned to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem he was accused falsely of bringing a Gentile into the temple area and was arrested. He was taken to Caesarea and was imprisoned there for a few years before he appealed to Caesar for justice. This meant he had to appear in Rome.

He was placed in the custody of a centurion and put on a ship along with a couple of Paul’s friends. They had a trip of several months that included a shipwreck and a long walk after they reached Italy. Read Acts 27.

Conclusion

The book of Acts concludes with Paul having resided in Rome for two years, under house arrest, without ever having had his case go to trial; however, while under arrest he stayed in his own rented house and used the time to preach to all who came to see him.

According to tradition, Paul was released from prison and continued to travel around the Mediterranean world. Again, according to tradition, he was arrested and





imprisoned about five or six years later, apparently during the persecution by Nero, then he was executed outside the walls of Rome.

If you want to know about all the trials and tribulations that Paul went through on his journeys, read Acts. It is a fascinating adventure story.



Part 2 - Colossians – The Beginning (Chapter 1)

Before 400 BC, Colossae was a thriving metropolis. It was located on a major trade route and historians report that it was a staging post on the march of armies. It is in the area that is now the country of Turkey.

It was a thriving city but as sometimes happens, someone, perhaps a Roman official (for now this was part of the Roman Empire) decided they needed a new six lane highway - and it bypassed Colossae.

Now the city of Laodicea, that wasn't founded until 260 BC, became the main city. Maybe Colossae was lucky because we know from the book of Revelation what the Lord thought of Laodicea. Revelations says, "they were rich and felt they didn't need anything - Christ said they were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." By the time Paul wrote this letter, Colossae was just a small town in the shadow of Laodicea and Hierapolis the other two cities in the Lycus Valley. It was devastated by an earthquake in 61 AD and was never rebuilt.

Let's See How Christianity Might Have Reached Colossae

Paul was very wise and seemed to plant the Gospel at places where it would flow down the main arteries of trade and communication.

Paul apparently never visited Colossae but since he spent a long time in Ephesus during his third missionary journey, we can assume that the Gospel was taken to Colossae from Ephesus. There were several people that are mentioned in the New Testament that were from Colossae.

We can assume that a good strong Gospel teaching had come to Colossae during this time but now, several years, later Paul is in prison (Acts 28:30) and a fellow believer named Epaphras, from Colossae, brings him a report about conditions in the church and Paul writes them this letter.

Who Were the People Who Contributed to the Spread of the Gospel?

Let's see what might have happened to the Gospel message in the intervening





years by looking at the cross section of population to better understand some of the ideas that had an influence on the people.

There was the **Jewish** element. They resettled there after the fall of the northern kingdom when they were defeated by the Assyrians. We learn from the Gospels that some of the complaints Jesus had against the Jews were: legalism, ritualism and the strict observance of holy days.

There were the **Romans** who worshipped the Caesars as gods and had their other gods and goddesses that they believed in. Then the other elements - there seemed to be an element that tried to combine the oriental ideas, the Greek philosophy and other various religious ideas that different people brought in.

All of these things seemed to lead to some false teaching. Some of these false teachings seemed to be the beginning of what later developed into Gnosticism.

This false teaching contained several characteristics:

1. It was Jewish - stressing the need for observing Old Testament laws and ceremonies.
2. It was philosophical (Greek) and emphasized some special or deeper knowledge.
3. It involved the worship of angels as mediators to God.
4. It was exclusive and it stressed the special privilege and “perfection” of those select few who belonged to this philosophical elite.
5. It denied the deity of Christ.

They were trying to adjust Christianity to fit their old beliefs. They didn’t deny Christ but they didn’t accept Him as God. They gave Christ a place but not the supreme place. Salvation was obtained by means of knowledge that was only available through special teaching, rituals, self-discovery or sacraments. And of course it was only available to a special few.

What does all of this remind you of in our day and age? Do you think they also had to pay to go to seminars to get this “knowledge?” This Christian facade made the Colossian error all the more dangerous. Just like the cults that use Christian words but don’t have the same meaning.

Here are five things we can look for when we read through:





1. It professed to be a philosophy. Paul said it was a hollow and deceptive philosophy - some say it was dabbling in the .
2. It placed emphasis on ritual: circumcision, dietary laws and observance of holy days.
3. It affirmed the mediation of various supernatural powers in the creation of the world and the whole process of salvation and insisted that these mysterious powers be placated and worshipped.
4. Some of the practicers were ascetic and taught that the body is evil and must be treated as an enemy.
5. And perhaps the worst and hardest to combat was the fact that the advocates of this system claimed to be Christian teachers.

If their problem was trying to push God and Christianity into their lifestyle rather than push their lifestyle into God and Christianity, why do you think the errors in the church were not spelled out fully? Alluded to rather than named? He uses words like “fine sounding arguments,” “hollow and deceptive philosophy,” “worship of angels,” “do not handle, do not taste, harsh treatment of the body.”

Imagine yourself as one of those new Christians in Colossae. You are crowded into a home waiting to hear what Paul has to say. With the background we have just had, you would know of the problems and maybe you would even be a little sympathetic to some of the ideas. What emotions do you think you would feel while you are waiting for the others to arrive?

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace and peace to you from God our Father” (Colossians 1:1-2).

What title did Paul use to introduce himself? What does the word mean? Who gave Paul this title? What does this verse tell you about where Paul got his orders?

Apostle: “someone sent an emissary, a delegated official entrusted with a mission - not simply a person who propagates a doctrine or devotes himself to a cause.

He was an Apostle “by the will of God.” Do you think the people were able to accept this? What impact would it have? What could be another word for faithful? Believing or loyal to Christ?



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How do you feel when a friend tells you the specific things he or she notices and appreciates about you? It encourages you and makes you try harder.

Let's read Colossians 1:3-8:

"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints - the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is producing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit."

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Part 3 - Faith Not in Themselves

Faith, hope and love are the fundamental, enduring qualities of a Christian. Notice that Paul addresses his thanksgiving to God, recognizing that He is the one responsible for these traits. Their faith was in Jesus Christ - not in themselves, the church or their good works, but faith and trust in Christ who is the source as well as the object of our faith.

This faith "in" Christ showed itself by love for all fellow believers, not just their personal friends.

There are three types of love in Greek:

Eros

The passionate, lustful kind of love - the word erotic comes from that. This word is never used in the Bible.

Phileo

Friendship, brotherly kind of love - often used.

Agape

Genuine concern care consideration and compassion for another in spite of who or what they are. Desiring the best for them and being willing to help them achieve it.



In verse 4 it is agape love. If we don't love fellow believers, how will we love God? If we don't love God, how will we love fellow believers?

Need Help to Love Others?

If love is the fruit of faith and we define love as genuine concern, care, courtesy and consideration for others and it is the delight in and desire for the well being of the one loved, then let's think, is there anyone that you have trouble liking, let alone loving?

How can we apply this passage in our life? What motivates the faith and the love of the Colossians verse 5? Hope. Faith is the soul looking upward to God; Love looks outward to others - the hope we have looks forward to the future.

In verse 5 the hope they have is not the nebulous hope that we sometimes think about, but it is the absolute assurance of the eternal life we are promised. Their faith and love are based on the foundation of this hope that was promised in the gospel they heard.

In verse 5, Paul affirms two things about the hope of the Colossians. Why can they be assured about their hope?

It is securely stored up for them in heaven, like a treasure. Their hope is there because Christ, the essence of this hope, is there. Without Christ's ascension and His present intercession there on behalf of believers, they would have no hope.

“For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men” (1 Corinthians 15:16-19).

The Colossians' knowledge of hope came from hearing "the word of truth" which here is defined as the gospel that had come to them. Refers to the original proclamation of the gospel message that resulted in the Colossians' conversion. 1 Corinthians 15:1-6 is the message Paul preached to everyone:

“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the work I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to Scripture and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the





Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living....”

So the gospel is the fact that Christ died for our sins, was buried but rose again. Hearing and knowing this is what gave them the hope of eternal life.

What examples of faith, love and hope have you seen this week? Who in your circle of friends or people you meet could you encourage by telling them you thank God for demonstrating these qualities of faith, love and hope?

Let’s read through this passage once thinking about Paul writing to the Colossians and then you read through it again as though a spiritual encourager in your life had written it to you.

“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will though all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:9-14).

Let’s read it also in the Living Version:

“So ever since we first heard about you we have kept on praying and asking God to help you understand what he wants you to do; asking him to make you wise about spiritual thing; and asking that the way you live will always please the Lord and honor him, so that you will always be doing good, kind things for others, while all the time you are learning to know God better and better. We are praying, too, that you will be filled with his mighty, glorious strength so that you can keep going no matter what happens - always thankful to the Father who has made us fit to share all the wonderful things that belong to those who live in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us out of the darkness and gloom of Satan’s kingdom and brought us into the kingdom of his dear Son, who bought our freedom with his blood and forgave us all our sins” (Colossians 1:9-14).





Part 4 - Knowledge of His Will

Paul asked God to fill them with the knowledge of His will, with all the wisdom and understanding that His Spirit gives.

Applying this to us, how do we get this knowledge of His will? His will is not a secret, but it takes work on our part. We can't pick and choose how much of His will we want to follow. We can get this knowledge of His will by reading, hearing, meditating on as well as obeying what He says in His word. Then the Holy Spirit gives us the understanding and wisdom that is the practical know-how or the ability to apply this knowledge to problems in our every day life.

However, He won't continue to give us more wisdom and understanding if we aren't following what we already know. This all takes obedience.

Now look at verse 10. In what ways is God's will to be translated into practical, daily living?

- Live a life worthy of the Lord,
- May please him in every way and
- Bearing fruit in every good work.

These good works are the ones that He has prepared from the beginning for us to do according to Ephesians 2:10:

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

It talks of growing in the knowledge of God, do we live the way He wants? Do we really want to or only if it doesn't seem to require too much time or effort on our part?

- How do we know God's will for our life?
- How do we know if we are walking worthy of Him?
- Who or what is our standard?
- Will we know if we are out of His will? (If God has a will and we can know it, we can also know if we are out of His will and the consequences.)

Then he goes on,

"it pleases him to strengthen us with power."





Do you think this power is only given out according to our needs? It is not given but His abundant supply is there for the taking. How great is the power that is available? Power of His glorious might - literally the might of his glory, as much power as it took to raise Christ from the dead is available to us.

“By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also”(1 Corinthians 6:14).

What Does this Power do for us?

It gives us endurance and patience (see verse 11).

What Does He Mean by Endurance?

Endurance is the capacity to see things through. A lack of endurance often results in despondency or losing heart.

What is Patience?

In spite of injury or insult, does not retaliate. Lack of patience often leads to wrath or revenge.

Thankfulness and gratitude is the result of a fruitful Christian life. (see verse 12) Joyful thanksgiving, not thanks given begrudgingly. Thanks because He has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light (His children).It doesn't stop with the deliverance from the authority of darkness or sin, but He has brought us into the kingdom of the Son. It is like removing us from one country, where there is a lot of corruption and bad leadership, and resettling or re-establishing us in another country where Christ is the sovereign ruler.

Another way of putting it is that we are qualified to have a portion of the heritage belonging to God's people.

I am so impressed with the orderly progression of things Paul prays for. Let's see how he wants our Christian life to progress.

- **Knowing God's Will**
Starting in verse 9, the first thing he prays for is that we know God's will. We have to know His will so we can walk worthy of Him.
- **Walk and Mature in Our Faith**
The rest of the prayer is how to walk or mature in our faith. Of course our standard for walking worthy of the Lord is Christ Himself.

The decision has been made to follow the Lord and to do His will. The Holy Spirit will now make the wisdom of the Bible available to us. The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to have spiritual understanding. This gives us the desire to live the way God



wants us to and to do what pleases Him. It pleases Him for us to do the good works that He has planned for us and as we do this, we grow in knowledge of Him.

Tap Into His Resources

If we have done all these things we will be strong in His strength -

not in our own. We will have tapped into His resources. We can pray for the fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self control. When we have His resources, the fruit of the Spirit, then we are able to endure any circumstance that we encounter. We are able to endure with patience. Because of endurance and patience we can give thanks with joy through all things because we have that hope - salvation - that he has reserved for us.

So knowledge promotes service, service is repaid by strength and all is crowned with thanksgiving.

Can you recall an experience in your life that taught you how to draw on God's strength as mentioned in verse 11? Were you a new Christian or a more mature one at the time?

In verse 12, we give thanks to the Father because He has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. What is the kingdom of light? It is His kingdom. Another way of putting it is that we are qualified to have a portion of the heritage belonging to God's people and in the Son He loves, we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins.



Part 5 - Darkness and Light

In verse 13, who is responsible for rescuing people from one kingdom to another? Can we make the change ourselves? Why or why not? Proof that God has qualified us is that he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. The use of the metaphor of darkness and light could be Paul hitting at the Colossian heresy because in Ephesians 6:12 the principalities and powers to which the false teachers urged Christians to pay homage are designated by him "the powers of this dark world."

But, isn't it a great thought that it doesn't stop with the deliverance from the authority of darkness but he has brought us into the kingdom of the Son? It is like removing us from one country, where there is a lot of corruption and bad

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leadership, and resettling or re-establishing us in another country where Christ is the sovereign ruler. It is a believer's position and possession now. Our Canaan, or promised land, is now.

Redemption and the Forgiveness of Sins

Verse 14 goes on, "...in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Isn't it a great thought that we are delivered from the authority of darkness - which is the authority of sin - and have been brought into the kingdom of the Son.

Okay, this is a great thought but how do we know this is true? Why is Christ the one that can do this? What gives Him the authority? After all, don't we hear people say:

"All roads lead to God."

"Everyone is trying to get to the same place."

"That belief is fine for you, but I don't buy it for myself."

"The Muslims and the Buddhists also believe in God and think they know how to get to heaven."

"Only narrow minded people and bigots label belief true or false and think they have the only way to God."

How would you answer people who say these things?

As we learned in the beginning of our study, the Colossians were also hearing, "You can worship Jesus, but not exclusively. Jesus is just one spirit among many to be worshipped." Let's see how Paul handles these assertions....

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:15-17).

He is the image of the invisible God. Invisible means something can't be seen with the natural eye. In the New Testament, God revealed Himself through Christ. Christ isn't a substitute but a visible likeness of God in order to reveal what God is like and how we can know Him.

The Bible is talking of the character and "person image" of God - the identical mirror image of the attributes and identity of God - for Christ is Himself God.



His Thoughts are MUCH Higher

We might as well be honest and admit that our finite minds can't explain or comprehend the doctrine of the Trinity any more than we can understand eternity or infinity or the sovereignty of God. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts and His ways higher than our ways.

Here are a few other verses that might help. There are also others - explore the Scriptures on your own.

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:3).

John says in different places,

“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

“For no one has ever seen God, but God the only Son has made Him known” (John 1:18).

“The Father and I are one” (John 10:30).

The result of the incarnation is that the invisible God has become visible in the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Christ Created First or Above All Created Things?

Verse 15 goes on, “...*the firstborn over all creation.*”

This is taken by some to mean that Christ was the first one to be created and because of this, belongs to the created order. Apparently the false teachers at Colossae thought of Christ as a created being and this teaching also popped up again in the 4th century. It is also prevalent today in the teaching of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Jewish culture would have understood that it meant more than born first but it rather signified position and Christ’s position was superior to all created things.

He was not a created being, for he existed from the beginning as verse 16 says:

“For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.”

Here are more Scripture references to back that up:



“Yet there is for us only one God, the Father, who is the Creator of all things and for whom we live; and there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were created and through whom we live” (1 Corinthians 8:6).

“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3).

“But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (Hebrews 1:2).

In what realms are the “*thrones, powers, rulers or authorities* in verse 16 heavenly? He also created spiritual powers so can we ask, “Why did the Lord create Satan when He knew he would be such a problem?” Maybe we should also ask, “Why did He create me, when He knew I would be such a problem?” When we get to heaven, we’ll understand.

“He is before all things and in him all things hold together” (1 Colossians 1:17).

What does this mean to you? What would the universe be like without Jesus’ power? What about the physical laws of nature: gravity, light, ice (perhaps the only substance that when frozen becomes lighter - if it didn’t what would happen to the world?)

How do discoveries through microscopes and telescopes add to your appreciation of Jesus’ supremacy over nature?

Let’s look at verses 15-17 again and then find the reasons why Christ is supreme:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Why is He supreme?

- He is the image of the Creator - likeness of God.
- Firstborn over all creation - superior to all creation.
- Agent of creation of visible world of invisible world.
- Existed before all things.

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- He is the means of cohesion/unity - all things have their proper place because of Him.

Remember, we are answering the question of why Christ is the only way to salvation. Back in the first part of the chapter it talked of the gospel they had heard. Paul has established Christ’s lordship over the world in His pre-incarnate past - before his birth - now he goes on to the incarnate Son and establishes Christ’s lordship over the church - his mission on earth.

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Part 6 - Direction and Guidance

Just as man’s physical body needs direction and guidance from the head, so does the church.

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:18-20).

The Church

What would you say the church is? The church is a people and not a place, a body of believers and not a building. It is the invisible or universal church into which all believers are baptized by the Holy Spirit the moment they believe in Christ.

“Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. In the same way,

all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit” (I Corinthians 12:12-13).

“And God has put all things under his feet and made him supreme Head of the church, which is his body...” (Ephesians 1:22-23).

The church wasn’t known in the Old Testament. It didn’t start until Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to indwell the believers. Pentecost was a feast celebrated by the Jews 50 days after the Passover feast. If you have read Acts, you might remember that from chapter 1:



“During the forty days after his crucifixion he appeared to the apostles from time to time. In one of these meetings he told them not to leave Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them in fulfillment of the Father’s promise.... John baptized you with water, he reminded them, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit in just a few days.”

Then in Acts 2:1, seven weeks (50 days) had gone by since Jesus’ death and resurrection and the Day of Pentecost had now arrived.

“As the believers met together that day, suddenly there was a sound like the roaring of a mighty windstorm in the skies above them and it filled the house where they were meeting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on their heads. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Colossians 1:18 goes on to say:

“He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”

Christ was in the beginning and was also the first one to rise in an immortal body. It marked His triumph over death.

First Place

This is the place that Christ has in heaven now and will have in eternity and that is the place He should have here on earth. This is a question you can ask others if you are talking about spiritual things: “Do you think you are going to heaven or do you want to go to heaven?” Then in a kind way, explain to them that in heaven Christ will have first place in everything and if He does not have first place in their life for the 90 or so years here on earth, why would they want to go to heaven where he would have first place for eternity.

Colossians 1:19:

“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.”

Another verse that stresses the deity of Christ, that he is God is verse 20:

“...and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”

Reconciliation

Reconciliation means making friends with an enemy. God is not man’s enemy so



he is not reconciled to man. People are reconciled to God; man is the one who is hostile and needs to accept the free gift that is offered.

Even the earth needs reconciling.

“For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation

itself will be liberated from its to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the . We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Romans 8:20-22).

There are some you might talk to that have a problem with Romans 3:23:

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

They will say, “I don’t see why I’m a sinner. I’m as good as anybody else.” We can agree and say, “Yes, you probably are, but everybody else is a sinner too.”

There ARE Absolutes

For God there are absolutes. It is like you can’t be just a little bit pregnant. For God there is no “just a little bit of sin/wrongdoing.” If you have ever done anything that you are sorry about or feel guilty about, you have sinned. God is holy and can’t abide sin so that would bar you from heaven.

Let’s look at it this way:

God looked out and saw a bunch of rebellious people. His holiness and justice had to say, “Punish the sinner.” But then his love said, “Pardon the sinner.” These two opposing ideas had only one solution. God passed the maximum sentence that was consistent with his righteous character - death and eternal separation from Him. Then, to satisfy the demands of His love, God said, “I’ll die in their place and they can go free.” Then, all people will have to do is come to me and say, “Thank you, I’ll let you take my punishment.” Then God says to the person, “From now on, I look at you through that blood that was shed and I will see you as holy. Now you are worthy to enter my kingdom forever.”

Then you have to tell that person you are talking to that God doesn’t keep anyone out of heaven - which means spending eternity separated from God and that is what the Bible calls hell - people choose not to go to heaven. The peace that is made through his blood shed on the cross is salvation.

This verse is again what we have talked about before. As the Old Testament says,



“Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin.”

When we accept the fact that Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for OUR sin and our desire to run our own lives, then we have peace with God and eternal life.



Part 7 - Why Did God Send His Son for Us?

Paul has established Christ’s supremacy in heaven and then on earth and now in verse 21 and 22 he expands on why and how

God did it. Read Colossians 1:21-23:

“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation-”

In verse 21 Paul is telling the Colossians that they too had sinned and had fallen short of God’s glory but that now they had accepted what he did for them and they were now holy in God’s sight.

Blameless; Without Blemish

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians he told them also in 1:4:

“He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.”

It says without blemish. Blemish was a sacrificial term used of animals that were without flaws and therefore worthy of being offered to God. Why should they be without blemish? It is a foreshadow of what is necessary for us.

Do you think Paul was thinking of our personal conduct when he said we would be presented without blemish? When he says, “without blemish” he wasn’t talking about our personal conduct but about our position in Christ. There has never been, nor will there ever be, a life that is without blemish in actual conduct.

God didn’t die for us to make us happy; He died to make us holy. What we do is not as important as why we do it. Why do we go to church? Why do we do good works? Are we God concerned or are we self concerned?



But by means of the physical death of His Son, we are now God's friends. The ultimate aim of this reconciliation is that we will be presented before Him in holiness. This is the final purpose - not the present attainment. This is the beginning, but the perfecting lies ahead. Because of our accepting what Christ did for us, we will be able to stand in the holy presence of God.

Verse 23:

God has also provided the means for this perfecting; it is continued faithfulness. This firm and sure foundation is, of course, Christ the rock. This can and has been twisted to "If God loves me, I can do what I want and He will still love me."

Suffering for the Gospel

The fact that we are loved, God wants fellowship with us, and has provided a way, does not give us the freedom to do as we like - it gives us the obligation to be worthy of that love. That can be hard too and leads to guilt. With God, what we do is not as important as why we do it. Time, thoughts, talents and treasure - are we God concerned or self centered?

Have you ever had a goal in your life, besides losing weight, which has been compelling enough to make you willing to suffer to reach it? Now we will learn about Paul's struggle for a goal that had been put before him.

"Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness - the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:24-29).

Remember back in verse 11 when Paul prayed that the Colossians might endure all things with joyfulness? He is now saying that this is his own experience.

Paul was suffering because he was preaching Christ. In verses 21-23 he said they were once far away from God but they heard the gospel and, because of Christ's death, they were now holy and pure in the sight of God. Paul became a servant of this gospel and he was being persecuted for it.

Paul didn't rejoice in suffering for suffering's sake. This wasn't a self-inflicted penance or pain to gain acceptance with God. This was the suffering that came because of his stand for Christ. He was suffering so that others might be saved.



There is some modern day preaching that says Christ’s suffering wasn’t sufficient for our salvation - there has to be more than just accepting what He did. Paul is saying he realized he lacked in suffering compared to Christ, and that he could never catch up, no matter how much he endured or worked. He was willing to suffer, if need be, to show his gratitude to Christ as well as to be a witness to others.

Verses 25-26:

“I have become its (the church) servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness. The message which is the secret he hid though all past ages from all mankind but has now revealed to his people”(Colossians 1:25-26).

Hidden Word

The message was hidden in the complex rituals of the tabernacle and temple worship, which were types of the coming Lamb of God. Why do you think it was hidden? Could it have been that God had to work with a group of people to show His power before He could/would be accepted? Jews were chosen so God would have a people through whom the Messiah would come, through whom the Word would come, and a people through whom He could show what and how He could work - if they would obey and follow Him.

The church was unknown in the Old Testament. It was hidden. Since the church is Christ’s body - which resulted from His death on the cross - it couldn’t have existed in the Old Testament, it was only foreshadowed by things in the Old Testament.



Part 8 - The Mystery

In the city of Colossae (verse 25, 26), the Colossian heresy boasted of a ‘fullness’ of knowledge possible only through their al experience. But Paul declared that the fullness of the mystery is found only in Christ.

In verse 26 he is saying the Christian mystery is not secret knowledge for a few. It is a revelation of divine truths - once hidden but now openly proclaimed. This contrasted with the Colossian heretics’ notion that a mystery was a secret teaching known only to an exclusive group and unknown to the masses.

The ‘mystery’ of the church, however, does not mean that Gentile salvation and blessing was unforeseen before Christ. (Isaiah 49:6; Luke 2:29-32)



In Isaiah 49:6 God is talking to the pre human (pre incarnate) Messiah and says:

“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”

In other words, God was not concerned just for the Jews but for the whole world, which included the Gentiles.

Then in the New Testament, there was a man in Jerusalem that received a promise from God that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah. This was fulfilled when Jesus was presented in the temple when he was eight days old. Read Luke 2:29-32:

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

The mystery was not that Gentiles would be saved but how they could be fellow heirs on the same level as Jews.

“This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 3:6).

Revelation of Blessing

While the Old Testament revealed something of God’s coming blessing for Gentiles as well as Israelites, the method by which they would be accomplished was a mystery first revealed to Paul.

This special union in which there “is neither Jew nor Greek” was nonexistent before Christ died and the Spirit descended to baptize all believers into this new body.

Verse 27 says:

“God’s plan is to make known his secret to his people, this rich and glorious secret which he has for all peoples. And the secret is that Christ is in you, which means that you will share in the glory of God.”

1 Corinthians 3:16 says:



“Surely you know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you.”

Taking those two together - would you say then that the essential feature of a Christian is to have Christ and the Spirit in them?

Born Again

The Jews have always been called the but then in John 1:11-13 it says:

“He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become . Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

Again, this is the idea of “being born again.” God isn’t in a persons’ life until He is asked to enter and He also doesn’t force His way into your life - it is a free choice. That is why you are on firm ground and not being judgmental if someone says they are a Christian and you ask them if or when they have asked Christ into their life and they say, “No but they are a good person they don’t have to,” or some of the other things they say. You can be sure they don’t have eternal life.

What is the first thing you want to do when you move into a new home? Clean and change things around, right? When you asked Christ and His Spirit into your life, don’t you think that is what Christ wanted to do too? Did you let Him? It is easy to say, “Come in but let me lead my own life because I don’t want to change this or that.” A person like this is often called a carnal Christian. There is no happy disobedient Christian.

When Christ enters the life of a person, it both solves problems and creates problems because we have more of a conscience and others expect more of us.

The nature of Christ’s Spirit and our own spirit are opposites. They have different appetites. One has a hunger for God and desires to please Him. The other has a hunger for worldly things and wants to please self. Because these two natures are different there is conflict.

Does this help to explain why it is so hard to lead a “holy life”? How can you help a new Christian realize that neither does life suddenly become a bed of roses, nor do we automatically become Christ-like. He lives in us, but His Spirit will not override our own spirit. We must choose moment by moment which spirit we will obey. As long as we live, we will possess these two natures and will have to make choices. The satisfaction and joy we get out of life depends on our choices day by day.



Admonishing and Teaching

Verse 28:

Now back to Paul...so because Christ is in him, what does he do in verse 28a?

“We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone.”

Everywhere Paul and Timothy went, they brought the Good News to all who would listen. He is saying that an effective presentation of the gospel or the Good News, includes admonishing or warning and teaching. The warning is that without Christ, people are doomed to eternal separation from God. The teaching is that salvation is available through faith in Christ.

“With all possible wisdom” (Colossians 1:28b)

This isn't just knowledge about Christ, but wisdom that comes from above. This wisdom is the practical application of divinely given knowledge. Remember we talked earlier when Paul prayed for the Colossians that they might have knowledge of His will, with all the wisdom and understanding that his Spirit gives. The goal of this is to “present everyone perfect in Christ.”

As I have mentioned, the word “perfect” here means mature or complete, not flawless or sinless, because we know that Christ is the only one that is sinless. Paul wanted to see each believer mature spiritually. He wanted them mature individuals - not still babes - as he told the Corinthians:

“I had to feed you with milk, not solid food, because you were not ready for it...because you still live as the people of this world live” (Corinthians 3:2).

We all struggle with maturity - it doesn't come overnight. Even a new Christian can be a spiritual Christian - this doesn't take maturity - only willingness! The real battle we have is with self and often indifference or procrastination.

Motivated to Learn and Grow

We can learn and grow daily but we must be motivated by love, not fear. We also have to know that God gives us the energy and power to do it.

In verse 29 he says:

“To get this done I toil and struggle, using the mighty strength which Christ supplies and which is at work in me.”

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Getting a job done takes hard, persistent work. Notice though, that he did not do it on his own power and God doesn't expect us, or want us to try to do it that way either. The power came from the mighty strength that Christ provides. The Lord does not call us to do anything that He is not willing and able to provide the ability to do the task.

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Part 9 - Colossians Chapter 2

Paul goes on in chapter 2 to speak of his work. Read verses 1-3:

"I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

How do you think he worked and struggled for them? By preaching, teaching and praying. He worked as though the success depended on him, but he prayed knowing the success of his work depended completely upon God.

From this, we can learn that service for God that counts - costs. It requires sacrifice of time and self.

Paul's Goals

Verse 2: Let's look and see the specific goals he wanted to accomplish. He wanted them to be:

- encouraged in heart and
- united in love
- so they would have the full riches of complete understanding....

Understanding of the mystery of God - namely Christ - which means having the full meaning of who He is and what He has done. Verse 3: Paul is saying that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ - it doesn't mean hidden so it can't be found - but something that is there to be found by those with the right key. And that key is accepting Christ and having the Spirit in you.

"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot



understand them, because they are spiritually discerned' (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Does that answers our question of, "How come I can tell someone about Christ, but they don't accept?" The false teachers were saying that because of their special revelations, they had a higher knowledge than that possessed by ordinary believers. Paul says, no, all wisdom and knowledge are in Christ and that it is accessible to every believer. It is laid up or stored away as a treasure for them.

Wisdom and Knowledge

Even today we have to be aware there are those who teach they have a special revelation from God and they write their special interpretation of what the Bible says. When you read a Christian book, hear a sermon, or listen to a Bible teacher, do as the people in Berea did when they heard Paul preach:

"Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11).

Make sure what you hear can be backed up by Scripture not by man's ideas. Then we can ask, "Who is going to help me do that?"

"But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26).

Also read John 16:13:

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth."

Have you noticed how often he mentions wisdom and knowledge? Knowledge is the gathering of truth; wisdom is its application of it to our lives. Knowledge is prudent judgement; wisdom is prudent action.

Verses 4-5: He goes on....

"I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine sounding arguments. For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is."

So he tells them how happy he is to see how their faith in and reliance on Christ is unshaken.



This concludes the reasoning he started in Colossians 1:15 of why Christ is the only way:

- Christ embodies all the attributes of God. (1:15-20)
- In Christ we find reconciliation with God. (1:21-23)
- Is the revelation of the secret that Christ is in us. (1:24-27)
- Our perfection or maturity is found in Christ. (1:28-29)
- In Christ is found God’s wisdom and knowledge. (2:1-5)

Verses 6-7:

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and over-flowing with thankfulness.”

Again, the idea that has been taught before - the fact that something is offered and has to be received - they at one time made a decision to accept Christ as Lord.

How do you answer when people ask, “How do you know that Christ is in you?” Christ enters the life of a person who invites Him, but there is no physical awareness of the fact. You can’t see Him come in; however, sometimes there is an emotional reaction: tears, a sense of relief, joy, peace. If there is no physical or emotional awareness, we can know for sure that it really happened because the Bible says so. We can’t base it on feelings alone. This is where faith enters the picture.

Since you have accepted Him, continue to live in union with him. Keep your roots in Him, build your lives on Him and become stronger in your faith. And be filled with thanksgiving.

That is Quite a Job Description

Live in union with Him, or walk as He walked. How did Christ walk? What did He do?

- He loved.
- He gave of Himself.
- He prayed.
- He spent time in his Father’s house regularly.
- He knew and used the Scriptures.
- He was baptized.
- He was holy.



In order to do this, we are to keep our roots deep in Him. Like a tree, the deeper the roots are, the higher the tree can rise. The higher the tree rises, the further the branches reach out. If the roots or foundation are deep and secure, we can keep building and not worry about drying up or toppling over. As your roots go deeper, your faith will grow stronger.

As we are more rooted in Him, we are more overflowing with thankfulness. If we are full of gratefulness and thanksgiving we will be less vulnerable to doubt and also less open to the false philosophies.

Then comes a warning as he goes on to condemn the Colossian heresy that was diverting them from Christ.

Verse 8:

“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.”

The Phillips translations puts it in modern terms when it says:

“Be careful that nobody spoils your faith through intellectualism or high sounding nonsense. Such stuff is at best founded on men's ideas of the nature of the world and disregards Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

He is not condemning philosophy as such, he was a gifted philosopher and could debate with the best of them. He is condemning teaching that credits humanity, not Christ, with being the answer to life’s problems. This starts back in verse 4 where, after talking about how hard he has worked to tell them that Christ is the key that opens all of God’s wisdom and knowledge, he says:

“Don’t let anyone fool them with false arguments - no matter how good they seem” (Colossians 2:4).

Since they have accepted Christ, they were to keep growing in their faith that is based on the truth and not on false teaching. Now they were to make sure that no one tried to confuse them or draw them away with teachings based on only human thought or arguments.

Learn to be Discerning

We are to learn to be discerning in what we hear or read. Human reasoning can often sound good and right, but if it downgrades Christ and what He did on the cross, don’t fall for it. Everyone has a faith in something - we have to be sure our faith is in the right thing.



1 John 4:1-6 has good advice:

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.”

Know What You Believe and Why

Think of some of the things you believe - are they God’s ideas or man’s ideas? Can they be backed up by the Word of God?

Like today, both Christ’s deity and humanity were challenged by the early Gnostics so Paul continues his teaching that he first started in 1:19 where he says:

“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.”

Note: verse 9 goes on:

“For in Christ all the fullness of Deity lives in bodily form and you (meaning we) have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.”

If someone asks what verse 9 really says and means, we can say that Christ is God in bodily form. Both Christ’s deity and humanity were challenged by the early Gnostic-like heresy. They diminished Christ to an angel whose “body” was only apparent, not real. Paul is affirming here that Christ is both fully God and truly man.

This correlates with the gospel of John that says:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

and John 1:14:



"The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Being Made Full in Christ

Back to Colossians - verse 10 says:

"and you have been given fullness in Christ..."

We have mind, body and spirit; let's see how they are made full in Christ and how we can answer someone who asks: "What do you have that I don't have?"

When he says, "You have been given fullness in Christ," this statement crowns Paul's argument. Because Christ is fully God and fully man, believers, in union with Him, are made full - or share in His fullness. We are filled with God when we are in union with Christ. Those who don't have Christ are spiritually incomplete because they are out of touch with God.

"Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Sons' sacrificial death on the cross and brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven. At one time you were far away from God and were his enemies because of the evil things you did and thought" (Colossians 1:20-21).

Those without Christ are morally incomplete because, although they may be very good, they lack the final standard of conduct and the ability or desire to chose what is right in all things.

Morally Complete

In union with Him, we are morally complete, not in the sense of being perfect, but in God's eyes we are seen as perfect and we now have the Holy Spirit within us to give us the desire and ability to know and do the will of God.

Without Christ, they are mentally incomplete because they are blind to spiritual truths and to the fact that they are spiritually and morally incomplete. As believers, we don't have all knowledge, but with help from the Holy Spirit, we can discern spiritual truths, which according to the Bible, is foolishness to the unbeliever.

Again, that doesn't mean that Christ's perfection is given to us or that we are, or can be, like God. It doesn't mean that we are little gods ourselves, as some teach, but that in Him, there are resources we can draw on so that we may be filled and nothing will be lacking in us.



In other words, in union with Christ, all of our spiritual needs will be fully met. We no longer have to search for “the meaning of life” or ask “Why are we here?” We are spiritually complete.

Since the Colossians had Christ, there was no need for them to turn to the “philosophy” of the false teachers. He is head or sovereign Lord over all.



Part 10- Christ’s Sufficiency

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3).

The false teachers’ preaching was full of theological errors. They were also preaching the error of legalism. So, the idea of Christ’s sufficiency is explained further by mentioning three things Christ has done for us:

1. Spiritual Circumcision

“In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ” (Colossians 2:11).

In Paul’s time there was the problem that many of the Christian Jews still thought that Gentile converts had to become Jews if they were to be counted as Christians - that is, they had to follow the Jewish laws because it was a commandment to Abraham and his descendants. This ceremony showed that they belonged to the chosen race. They had a special relationship to God.

Here in Colossians, the rite of circumcision is used as an illustration of spiritual truth. In Abraham’s time, it was a physical operation that was performed with human hands. Here it is salvation that is an operation of God on hearts of believers. It takes a heart that has repented and cuts away the old life that does things on their own strength. In Him, in union with Christ, believers have true circumcision - that is, they have found in Him the reality symbolized by Mosaic circumcision. Again, the Old Testament symbolizes things that would be explained in the New Testament.

2. Baptism



Verse 12 goes on to talk of baptism. When you receive Christ as Savior, you receive, or are baptized, with the Holy Spirit. Then there is a believer's baptism that is just a picture of salvation. In the New Testament, water baptism followed conversion; it was not a means of salvation but a picture of death to the old way of life, burial with Christ, and coming out of the water depicts the resurrection by the power of God to live a new life.

“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:38).

“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:4).

Just as circumcision was symbolized in the Old Testament, so was water baptism.

“...God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also - not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God” (1 Peter 3:20-21).

This was during a time when the world was so corrupt that God was sorry He created man. He sent a flood to destroy everyone but Noah and his family. This “going through water” was a symbol of leaving the old life and starting a new life.

3. Cancel the Written Code

Just as when the Israelites gathered to finally cross the Jordan into the new land - the Promised Land - they crossed water in going from their old life of to their new life of promise.

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross” (Colossians 2:13-14).

Before we accepted Christ, we had our backs turned to God. Even at our best, we did not love Him with all our heart, soul and mind. We were spiritually dead and separated from God because of our sin - our sin of wanting to do things our own way.



Now we are spiritually alive with Christ. This new life came when God forgave all our sins. Verses to back this up are:

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved” (Ephesians 2:1-4).

“You Gentiles by birth - called the uncircumcised by the Jews, who call themselves the circumcised (which refers to what men do to their bodies) -remember what you were in the past. At that time you were apart from Christ. You were foreigners and did not belong to God’s chosen people. You had no part in the covenants, which were based on God’s promises to his people, and you lived in this world without hope and without God. But now, in union with Christ Jesus, you who used to be far away have been brought near by the sacrificial death of Christ” (Ephesians 2:11-13).

Colossians 2:14 goes on:

“...having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.”

This written code was the legal demands of the Old Testament law.

“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather through the law we become conscious of sin” (Romans 1:20).

In the Old Testament, the people knew that they could not keep all the laws that God had set out; because of the laws, they just knew where they had failed. That is why God had the provision of the Day of Atonement where once a year the people would offer a special sacrifice for their own sins and also the high priest would offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people and the nation.

In New Testament time, when a person was crucified, they would nail a plaque to the cross that said what that person was accused of. Christ’s plaque said, “King of the Jews”; the ones over the two others probably said, “thief” or whatever else they were accused of.



This written code with its regulations was like a certificate of debt or a bill of indebtedness that we all have. As we read on a lot of billboards, “The wages of sin is death.” (spiritual death) There is no way we can buy or work our way out of this indebtedness. So Christ took this bill of indebtedness and nailed it to his cross. So instead of, “King of the Jews,” His plaque should have read, “Sins of the whole world.” He was saying that all of our sins were now His sins and He would die for them. Now the debt was paid.

Selfish Desires

When I talk of the sins of mankind, or our sins, I am referring to our self-centeredness; our wanting to run our lives our way and not God’s way; our having our backs turned from God; not loving Him with all our heart, soul and mind.

Christ’s death completely satisfies God’s demand that spiritual death is the result of sin. When God forgives our sins, our record is wiped clean. This is also talked about in Romans 3:21-25:

“But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.”

Romans 3:19-20 says:

“Now we know that everything in the Law applies to those who live under the Law, in order to stop all human excuses and bring the whole world under God’s judgement. For no one is put right in God’s sight by doing what the Law requires...”

Colossians 2:13-14:

Let’s look at the Living Bible for a translation that is a little easier to understand:

“You were dead in sins, and your sinful desires were not yet cut away. Then he gave you a share in the very life of Christ, for he forgave all your sins, and blotted out the charges proved against you, the list of his commandments which you had not obeyed. He took this list of sins and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ’s cross.”



spoke to him a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.'

Food Sacrificed to Idols

In 1 Timothy, Paul is talking about those who say we need to abstain from certain foods:

"For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" (1 Timothy 4:4).

However, there are times when we might give up eating or drinking something. In the New Testament time, there was a problem of eating meat that had been offered to idols. The would offer meat to an idol in one of their ceremonies and then would offer it for sale in the market. Believers were having a hard time knowing whether they should buy this meat or not.

In Romans and Corinthians Paul talks about the fact that there is freedom in Christ; however, Romans 14:13-21 says:

"Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your bother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall."

1 Corinthians 10:23-33:

"Everything is permissible - but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible - but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others."

Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it.

If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, 'This



about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow” (Colossians 2:18-19).

The false teachers were claiming that God was far away and could only be approached through various levels of angels. They were proud of their humility. This false humility brought attention and praise to themselves rather than to God.

These people had a self-made religion. At that time in Colossae, the false teachers were trying to deny the significance, or reality of the body, by saying that it was evil, but their desire for attention from others showed that, in reality, they were quite obsessed with their physical self.

If certain individuals - whether pastor, priest, author or lay person - set themselves up as spiritually elite by claiming to have a special access to God because of visions, revelations, prophecies etc, they are putting themselves above others who cannot make such claims.

At Colossae, as sometimes happens now, this took the form of judgment or condemnation. Paul says don’t allow yourselves to be condemned by these people. If you hear someone who seems to delight in or be proud of their humility, you can be sure they are all puffed up by their own human way of thinking.

Have you heard of the fellow who wrote the book, Humility and How I Obtained It ? If you truly have it, you don’t realize it.

He says that these people are relying on their own human way of thinking and have stopped holding on to Christ. True humility means seeing ourselves as we really are from God’s perspective and then acting accordingly.

As in verse 19, this type of person has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Man-Made Rules

These false teachers were not connected to Christ, the head of the body of believers. Christ is the true head of the church - and us - we are the ligaments and sinews - and under His control the entire body is nourished and held together - in unity - and that is the way God wants it to grow.

“Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: ‘Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!’? These are all destined to perish



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Christian freedom doesn't come from restraining desires by rules and regulations but from the death of wrong desires and bringing to life good desires by means of Christ being in you and you being in Christ.

Christianity is not attained by what we do, but by what Christ has done.

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Part 11- Colossians Chapter 3

"Since then, (all of the things they have heard in the first two chapters) you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."(Colossians 3:1-4).

Again we have this comparison to baptism. Back in Colossians 2:12 it first talked of:

"when you were baptized you were buried with Christ and then raised with Christ and now have a new life in Christ." Then in verse 20, it again says, "you have died with Christ..."

Set Your Hearts

Now in Colossians 3:2:

"They have been raised with Christ, so set their hearts on heavenly things."

Have you seen pictures of marathon runners? Concentration and determination seem to ooze from every pore. These people set their hearts and minds on one thing: Finish this race. They focus on the next step, the next checkpoint, until the race is complete. They shed pounds, unnecessary clothing or anything else that might slow them down. Attach their official number and they are ready to run. As Christians, we are to live like marathon runners. We are to take off anything that slows us down and set our hearts and minds on the finish line.

To illustrate further, as a child, how did setting your heart on a certain toy or gift affect how you acted and what you thought about? Paul is saying, "If they were raised to a new life, then they were a different person." So for now, if we are a different person, then our life should show that difference.



“So set your hearts on things above.”

He isn't saying that a Christian should be other worldly where He withdraws from all the work and activities of this world and only sits and contemplates eternity. We know this because the rest of chapter 3 sets out ethical principles for living in this world.

Priorities and Values

We are to put heaven's priorities into daily practice. We change our behavior by letting Christ live in us, so that He can shape us into what we should be. Now we should look at everything against the background of eternity and no longer live as if this world is all that matters.

This will obviously give us a new set of values. Things the world thinks are important will no longer worry us.

In making these lifestyle changes our thoughts might change to wanting to forgive rather than avenge, give rather get, and serve rather than rule. In addition, our material values will change - they will be God's values, not man's values.

Colossians 3:1 says, *“...set your hearts on things above...”* and now verse 2 says, *“...set your minds on things above...”* The difference between *“heart”* and *“mind”* comes when you have your heart or affection set on something. When we truly desire something, we work for it, strive for it and are willing to give up things for it - like an Olympic trainee. We concentrate with our minds.

In the Good News Translation, 2 Corinthians 4:18 reads:

“For we fix our attention, not on things that are seen, but on things that are unseen. What can be seen lasts only for a time, but what cannot be seen lasts forever. Concentrate on the eternal rather than the temporal. Look at things from God's perspective and seek what He desires.”

That is not to say that all earthly things are evil - some of them are, and some become bad because of misuse. Even things harmless in themselves become harmful if they are permitted to take the place that should be reserved for the things above. Some examples of earthly things would include: wealth, worldly honor, power and pleasures such as sex. To make these things the goal of your life, the subject of your preoccupation, and your full focus, is to give them the wrong place in the life of someone who has been raised with Christ. Our values and goals should change and when these are changed then our daily thoughts and actions will gradually come under the control of Christ.

Safe in Christ



*“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God”
(Colossians 3:3).*

Paul again states that we have died, stressing what he said in Colossians 2:11:

“In union with Christ...we are freed from the power of this sinful self.”

Read Romans 6:6-8:

“And know that our old being has been put to death with Christ on his cross, in order that the power of this sinful self might be destroyed, so that we should no longer be the slaves of sin. For when a person dies, he is set free from the power of sin. Since we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”

If something is hidden, it is concealed, safe and secure. We are safe in Christ; free from the power of sin and safe in Christ and that is a pretty good place to be!

Colossians 3:4:

“When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Christ gives us power to live for Him now, and He gives us hope for the future - He will return.

“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

He will come again and we will share His glory. We should use this to encourage the people around us.

“Dear friends, now we are , and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he really is” (1 John 3:2).

Back in Colossians 1:27 Paul said:

“...and the secret is that Christ is in you, which means that you will share in the glory of God.”





Free Will and Choices

Now after setting the foundation Paul, spends the rest of his letter explaining how Christians should act now in order to be prepared for Christ’s return.

The first two chapters tell us how His characteristics become ours when we have Him -when we are in Christ. If we allow Him to, He lives His Christ-like life in us; however, our spirit, which lives by feeling, is still in us and is at odds with God’s spirit. There is always a constant struggle between these two natures in us. Since we have free will, we have to constantly make choices as to which spirit we will obey.

Jesus taught the disciples that their love for Him would cause them to obey Him. He also said the Helper whom He would send - the Holy Spirit - would live in them to help them. When we love someone, we do things we do not want to do because we want to please the one we love. I’m sure you can all think of examples when you have done that.

The more we love God the more we will obey. The more we obey the more we will be aware of the reality of Christ in our lives. The more we are aware of Christ in our lives, the more victory we will experience. The more victory we experience, the less difficult the choices are and the less conflict we have within ourselves.

If we aren’t having victory in our life, we need to go back to the first item: The more we love God the more we will obey. It is a maturing process so don’t be discouraged.

The Holy Spirit that Jesus promised to send is the power within us that gives us the strength to do what seems impossible. Just like a straw that is too weak to be driven into a board, when that straw is yielded to the wind of a tornado, it is possible for it to be driven through a four-inch beam. His power supplies what we need for holy living: The power to obey God’s will.

How a Christian Should Act

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived” (Colossians 3:5-7).

He starts with a list of activities that come from man’s earthly nature. In case his readers might treat these sins lightly, he reminds them of God’s anger on those who disobey. When we are tempted to sin, we must remember that we too must one day stand before God.



“For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person...has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient”(Ephesians 5:5-6).

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (John 3:36).

But we know there is a remedy to God’s wrath:

“They tell us how you 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 - Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath”(1 Thessalonians 1:10b).

Now he goes on with more things that might hit a little closer to home - things that we are to rid our lives of.

“But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator”(Colossians 3:8-10).

It is interesting how the Bible often connects clothing with righteousness and nakedness with depravity. It talks about being clothed with Christ’s righteousness. When you have finished a hard day of dirty work digging ditches, you don’t just put clean clothes on over the filthy ones you have worked in all day. Likewise, we can’t put a new life on over an old one. We have to take off the “old self” before we can have the “new self.”

Have you ever tried to put new wallpaper on over old wallpaper? Sooner or later the old grease and grime will soak through and spoil the new.

Many try to put on the outside appearance of a new self, but their old self keeps asserting itself. Some people may be convinced and deceived, but God isn’t. He tells them that before they came to know Christ, when they still had on their old clothes, they used to live one way but now they are to get rid of that way of responding - the way that came from their old self.

Anger, Rage and Malice

Bad habits like anger, rage, malice (or hateful feelings), slander (or insults), filthy language and lying do not suit a Christian. They are unbecoming to believers. You can commit these first three, and no one but God will ever know it. Others will still



think you are great. You can be angry with someone and have an ongoing attitude of smouldering hatred. Rage is an outburst of anger, but that can be done in private. Malice, or hateful feelings, can certainly be done within.

The others are more apparent because they have to be verbalized. For an antidote we can go to Ephesians 4:29:

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

They are to get rid of these things because, verse 9 says:

“You have taken off the old self with its habits and have put on the new self. This is the new being which God, its Creator, is constantly reshaping, in order to bring you to a full knowledge of himself” (Colossians 3:9).

To “*put on the new self*” means your conduct should match your faith. If you are a Christian, you should act like it. This means more than just making good resolutions and having good intentions; it means making the right decisions.

Never Stop Learning and Obeying

Do we always honor Him with our time, talent and treasure? When we are born again, we are a new being. God takes this new being and constantly renews it in His own image. God continues to work on us because every Christian is a ‘continuing education program’ - He wants to bring us to a full knowledge of Himself.

The more we know of Christ and His work, the more we are being changed to be like Him. Because this process is lifelong, we must never stop learning and obeying. It takes practice, ongoing review, patience and concentration to keep in line with His will.

This renewal of our new self will come as we have a deep personal knowledge of Christ. The goal is to be like Him for as Ephesians 4:24 says, we are,

“...to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Created in His Image

According to Genesis, Adam was created in the image of God, which included a moral and intellectual likeness to God. This image was not erased but was only marred by the fall. It was corrupted and needs to be repaired and renewed.

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Christians become increasingly like the Lord as they yield to the Holy Spirit and choose to obey God.

Then at the resurrection, as 1 Corinthians 15:49 says about believers:

“Just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.”

Then we will truly know what it means to be made in His image. Then 1 John 3:2 says,

“...but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

Think of it like an outfit - you put on a new one when you accept Christ. It is a very plain one, and as you mature, He continues to add new things to it: a collar, belt, pocket, tuck etc, making your new self more like Him.

The final tuck won't be until He comes again. But when we accept the Lord, we all have a new self or spiritual outfit. This still needs to be worked on and added to.

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Part 12 - No Distinctions or Favourites

“Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Colossians 3:11).

There should be no distinction racially between Gentiles and Jews, between religious denominations, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian or Scythian, (The Greeks thought anyone who did not follow the Greek culture was a barbarian.) slave or free.

The Christian church shouldn't have any barriers of nationality, race, education level, social standing, wealth, gender, religion or power. Christ breaks down all barriers and accepts all people who come to Him. No one is more important in the eyes of God than the next person.

It is saying that ultimately, all of these distinctions are of no importance once we see that Christ is everything and that He dwells in each one of His people no matter of their race or background. This is not saying that we are equal intellectually,



physically, economically or socially, but all who are in these different categories are equal spiritually. All have God’s Spirit in them - but again, also different levels of spiritual maturity.

The work in a church and the church offices should be open equally to the church janitor as it is to a president of a large corporation - if they both qualify spiritually.

In the last few verses, these vices were of the old self and were to be shed. Now, we are to clothe ourselves with virtues - our new self - again, the idea of not putting new clothes on over old ones. God’s standards don’t get any easier.

God’s Chosen People

Colossians 3:12:

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

Again, to back this up:

“And you also became God’s people when you heard the true message, the Good News that brought you salvation. You believed in Christ, and God put his stamp of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit he had promised” (Ephesians 1:13 Good News).

We are chosen and holy:

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will” (Ephesians 1:4).

Notice, He chose us - all we had to do was respond to his choosing - He chose us while we were still sinners by choosing our own way.

Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Gentleness and Patience

Back to Colossians 3:12. We all know John 3:16: *“For God so loved the world...”* He has chosen us to be part of his family so we are to clothe ourselves, not put these things on our old self but now with the help of the Holy Spirit, with these new forms of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Compassion is genuine concern for the feelings of others. We can comfort because we have been comforted. (2 Corinthians 1:4)



“You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trust in you”(Isaiah 26:3).

Are you always at peace? With God, with yourself, with others? Why or why not?

God gives us an inward peace that provides calmness regardless of circumstances; contentment with what you have, even if it isn't what you want; lack of worry; lack of fear. We can receive that peace through obedience and acceptance of that peace.

True Thankfulness

Then verse 15 says, “And be thankful.” Anytime we look to God with thanksgiving, it promotes humility - which focuses our attention on God rather than ourselves.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 says:

“Be thankful in all circumstances. This is what God wants from you in your life in union with Christ Jesus.”

Also back in Colossians 1:12 it says for us to give thanks with joy to the Father.

We have to remember that these letters, and thus this advice or counsel, is for actions and reactions among fellow believers. Is there a difference in the way you respond to a non-believer? Does this response always work? What do you do when it doesn't? What do you do when it doesn't work with a believer?

Hope, Wisdom and Understanding

Verse 16:

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

In verse 15 he said, “*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts*” and now he says, “*Let the WORD of Christ dwell in you.*”

The Word of Christ is the Gospel message and the hope that we have. When what has been said by or about Christ indwells us, then we are equipped to teach and instruct each other with wisdom and understanding.

It's interesting how the idea of wisdom carries through Paul's letter:

- Paul prays for their spiritual wisdom in doing God's will. (in Colossians 1:9)



you represent Christ at all times - wherever you go and whatever you say. In other words, the best testimony of a new life is an obedient life.

Grateful Thanksgiving

Finally, “Give thanks to God the Father through him.” We are not to live our lives in obedience to Christ as a duty, but in freedom and with thanksgiving. All of this is in contrast to the enslaving rules and regulations of the false teachers.

Once again, Paul reminds them that Christ is the only mediator to God - not saints, pastors or priests. Notice how, in the last three verses, he has said we are to be thankful or grateful.

Here are some things that will help us live for God day by day:

- Imitate Christ’s compassionate, forgiving attitude. (Colossians 3:12-13)
- Let love guide our life. (verse 14)
- Let the peace of Christ rule in our heart. (verse 15)
- Always be thankful. (verse 15)
- Keep God’s Word in us at all times. (verse 16)
- Live as Jesus’ representative. (verse 17)

Hindrances to Watch For

We’ve been talking about setting our hearts on things that are in heaven and not things here on earth. So we are to put to death the earthly desires in us, to rid ourselves of things that hindered our relationship to God, such as: immorality, indecency, lust, evil passions and greed.

Then there are the things that hinder our relationship with ourselves, such as: anger, rage and hateful feelings. These emotions are harder on ourselves than they are on the person we are angry with.

Then the things that hinder our relationships with others, such as: insults, obscene talk or lying.

You may not have problems with some of these things but maybe you can help someone else who does. We can all have more of the things we are to put on in place of the things we were to rid ourselves of - such as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, helpfulness and forgiveness. To all of these we are to add love, which binds all things together in perfect unity. Not uniformity but unity.

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Everything we do or say is to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus. That is, with the power of the Holy Spirit and for the glory of God.

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Part 13 - Leadership Qualities

Now this application becomes even more practical and specific. It talks about everyday relationships. It talks about living with our family and working with people. These things may not apply to you but you may be able to help a child, a friend or a co-worker deal with a relationship by using Christian principles.

Qualities of a good leader are: showing compassion, leading by example, caring and showing concern, being a servant, encouraging in private and in public. Who puts forth the most effort - the leader or the follower? Who sets the example first? In all relationships, is the responsibility on the leader or the follower? Keep these questions in mind as we go through these next verses. Also think about how radical this teaching was for the time it was written.

*“Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism. Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven”
(Colossians 3:18-25; 4:1).*

Reciprocal Obligation

The first thing about this new Christian ethic was that it talked about reciprocal obligation. The duties are never just on one side. Husbands had as great an obligation as wives; parents had just as binding a duty as children; masters had their responsibilities as much as slaves. This was entirely new thinking.

Under Jewish law, a woman was a thing. She was the possession of her husband. She had no legal rights whatsoever. In Greek society, a respectable woman lived in seclusion. She was to serve and be faithful to her husband. On the other hand, her

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husband was free to do whatever he chose to do. Under both Jewish and Greek laws and custom, all the privileges belonged to the husband, and all the duties to the wife.

In that time, children were under the domination of their parents. The father could sell his children into slavery or make a slave of them for himself. All the rights were with the parents, and the duties with the child.

Most of all this was true for the slave. The slave was a thing in the eyes of the law - even more so than with the wife. There was no such thing as a code of working conditions. Even the children of a slave belonged to the master. Again, all the rights belonged to the master and all the duties to the slave.

Here comes this Christian ethic of mutual obligation - mutual responsibility. It is not "what do others owe to me?" but rather "what do I owe to others?"

In the Lord

The really new thing about these new Christian thoughts was that all relationships are "in the Lord." The whole Christian life is lived in Christ. The wife is loved as Christ loved the church. Children are treated as God treats his sons and daughters. For master and servant, the relationship is that both are servants of one and the same master - Jesus Christ.

Since Christ is to be in all personal relationships, the slave must be a conscientious worker. Christianity must make him a better and more efficient slave. Christianity didn't offer him an escape from hard work or from difficult situations, it just enabled him to meet them better.

Under Roman law a slave could not possess any property, but here he is being promised the inheritance of God and that the time will come when the balance sheet will be adjusted. Any wrongs will be corrected and faithfulness will be rewarded.

All the work must be done as if doing it for Christ; however, the master has to remember that he too has a master - Christ. He is answerable to God, just as the workman is answerable to him. The master is only a steward of God's business. God is in charge and the master is responsible to Him. This teaching doesn't seem radical to us - it just seems like the right things to do.

Submission and Respect for Each Other

One verse that has always caused discussion - even outrage among women is Colossians 3:18:

"Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."



Many women cannot see themselves submitting to anyone and on the other hand, many husbands use this verse as an excuse or justification for tyranny or abuse. No one seems to read the next verse and connect it with the first:

“Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them” (Colossians 3:19).

They say, *“Sure, I love my wife, I married her didn't I?”* They don't take into account that this word for love is “agape.” This is the Christ-like kind of love that is willing to give totally of themselves for the good of the other - and ask nothing in return.

The context shows that the wife's attitude is prompted and warranted by her husband's unselfish love. The submission is to be voluntary. The wife's submission is never forced on her. Submission does not mean inferiority; it simply means that the husband, not the wife, has the responsibility for the home and family life. When there is a choice, someone has to make the final decision and then take the responsibility for the carrying out or the consequences of the decision. If both partners are truly going to live by Biblical principles, I would much rather be a wife than a husband.

However, there are moral limits to this submission. It says, *“as is fitting in the Lord.”* In other words, a wife is not obligated to follow her husband's leadership if it conflicts with specific scriptural commands.

Again, this is not the only place these principles are taught:

“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” (Ephesians 5:22).

But then it goes on in verse 25:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy.”

Then verse 28 & 29:

“Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church.”

Then verse 33:

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"...each on of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."

Christ Gave His Life for the Church

According to this Ephesians passage, the wives are to submit and to respect their husbands. Husbands are to love their wives - to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Christ loved the church so much that he gave His life for it.

There are husbands who say, *"Sure, I'm willing to die for you, but don't ask me to give up something I want to do or to do something for you."*

Christ said He didn't come to be served, but to serve. So a husband should be willing to sacrifice himself for her; he should make her well being and self esteem of primary importance; he should care for her as he cares for his own body. God did not give authority to the husband so he could order anyone to serve him.

The word "husband" means, *"band to hold the house together."* The husband is the God ordained caretaker who is to lead, to provide for and to love his family. In other words, a man has no right to ask for submission if he is not willing to abide by the Biblical commands to him.

Both partners have to have this same understanding of their roles in a Christian marriage. That is why God commands that a Christian not marry a non-Christian. (2 Corinthians 6:14) God wants to save his children a lot of heartache.

Now on to Children

Verse 20:

"Children obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord."

To go along with this:

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother -- which is the first commandment with a promise -- that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth"(Ephesians 6:1-3).

What is a child's responsibility to his/her parents? How will this affect his/her relationship to God? How is this pattern for a child a good preparation for life? What is likely to happen to a young person who has never learned to respect and respond to authority?

Now on to Parents

Verse 21:



“Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.”

See also:

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

What obligation does this requirement that children obey their parents in everything, place on parents? Obedience is to be complete - in everything. As with husbands, there is taken for granted that there will be the correct Christian attitude and behavior by the parents. Parents should deserve rather than demand obedience. The purpose of parental discipline is to help children grow, not to exasperate or provoke them to anger or discouragement.

Slaves and Slavery

This next section is about slaves and masters so we can ask, “Isn’t slavery wrong?” What about slavery in the New Testament? From passages in the Bible you can see that it was not condemned nor was there an attempt to abolish it. Do you think Paul - and Jesus - were wrong in not denouncing slavery? Why do you think this was?

The apostles, were not social reformers; they were first and foremost bringers of the good news of salvation in Christ. They were a small minority in the Roman world, and there was no hope that their stand on the matter of slavery would influence Roman policies. They would have been quickly put down by Rome.

In fact, in the book of Acts, Paul points out to the authorities that Christianity has not been involved in treasonous activity and should not be accused of that. Also, believers are told to obey their rulers and to accept the legal order of things even though it might not be satisfactory in many ways.

Their economic, social and monetary systems were not like ours today. What would have happened if, all of a sudden, a large proportion of people were set free...without jobs, food or shelter, and no way of making a living?

Rather than trying to exercise revolutionary power, Christians taught a transforming power. As this transforming power took over and slaves and masters begin to see themselves as brothers and that each was made in the image of God - the divisions couldn’t continue.

Bringing About Amazing Grace

Newton - the one who wrote Amazing Grace - was a slave. When he became a Christian he realized that it was wrong to continue that trade - so he quit. Becoming



a Christian did not release them from their though. God had promised them a new Spirit, not a new social order.

This is why Paul neither condemns nor condones slavery. Instead, he tells masters and slaves how to live together in Christian households. Masters and slaves were appropriate for that time and culture, but now we can substitute employer and employee. There is always going to be differences in social status, even though all believers are in Christ.

Verse 22-25:

“Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favouritism.”

In our day, these instructions can be for the employer and the employee - whether in households or in the work place.

Let’s look over verses 22-25 and see what principles for the work place we can find.

A new attitude. The motive for work is to come from the heart - rather than the outward need for recognition and praise. Apparently as non-believers their desire was for human approval. Reverence for the Lord is to be the motivating factor.

They were to have a new center of reference. Paul is saying, “In spite of your position, you are serving Christ and not men.” Work should no longer be a drudgery done without enthusiasm - but done as if you were doing it for the Lord.

Look back at verse 17:

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” While working for any employer, whom are we really serving?

They now have a new reward and that will come from the Lord. What difference should these principles make in the quality of their work? In their attitudes to unfair treatment?

Masters and Overseers

Then comes Colossians 4:1 and the instructions to the overseer or boss:





“Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.”

Christian masters should be different people because of their relationship with the Lord. They too have a new center of reference and because of this are called upon to demonstrate fairness and justice toward those who serve them. They too have a Master in heaven.



Part 14 - Characteristics of the New Christian Life

In chapter three Paul talked of the new Christian life and some of the characteristics we are to have as Christians. Then he got down to some practical applications for our daily lives - in our homes, and in the working place. Now he will continue the thoughts and ideas he left off with in Colossians 3:16, 17 where it says,

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Prayer and Thanksgiving

Now in 4:2 he says:

“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”

Another translations says:

“Be persistent in prayer, and keep alert as you pray, with thanks to God.”

This is the seventh time that thanksgiving is mentioned in the letter. Paul followed the pattern of prayer and thanksgiving when he thanked God for the Colossians and then prayed specifically for them - in the beginning of the letter.

Prayer is not an option - it is an essential for Christian growth. Just like breathing, it should be continual. When we quit breathing we die physically. When we quit praying we die spiritually.



Our actions and conversation with unbelievers is to be governed by wisdom. Where do we get that wisdom? Go back to Colossians 2:3:

“He is the key that opens all the hidden treasures of God’s wisdom and knowledge.”

Motivation to Share

What should motivate us to share our knowledge of Christ? 1 John 4:19 says we should be motivated to share our knowledge of Christ because...

“...we love because God first loved us.”

Our actions and conversation should be such an example that others would want to follow our example and become Christians too. 1 Peter 3:15 says:

“But have reverence for Christ in your hearts, and honor him as Lord. Be ready at all time to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect.”

What is this hope? Are you sure enough of it that you can tell others? Is it possible to be a silent obedient Christian?

2 Corinthians 4:13 says,

“‘I spoke because I believed.’ In the same spirit of faith we also speak because we believe.”

1 John 1:3:

“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”

2 Timothy 4:1:

“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and because he is coming to rule as King, I solemnly urge you to preach the message, to insist upon proclaiming it (whether the time is right or not), to convince, reproach, and encourage, as you teach with all patience.”
(GNB)

In our daily life we should pray that we take advantage of every opportunity to share our faith and that we will do it with knowledge, wisdom and compassion.



Coming to the End

Now Paul comes to the end of his letter to the church in Colossae that was under pressure from the false teachers who were destroying faith in Christ by undermining Christ’s humanity and divinity.

He told them that Christ alone is the source for their spiritual life - the head of the body of believers. Christ is Lord of both the physical and spiritual worlds. He let them know that the way to deeper spiritual life was not through religious duties, special knowledge or secrets; it was only through a close connection with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Just as he said in the beginning, “*May God our Father give you grace and peace*” the letter ends with a prayer for grace, “*May God’s grace be with you.*”

Only God’s grace could strengthen them against the false teaching and keep them true to the gospel they had received.

It is the same way with us.