COMPLETE IN CHRIST

… Christ + Nothing = The Key to Spirituality

A Devotional Commentary on the Book of Colossians

by Paul G. Apple, November 2000
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For each section:

- Thesis statement … to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline … to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions … to encourage life application
- Representative quotations … to stimulate deeper insight

Colossians 2:10 "*in Him you have been made complete*"

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BACKGROUND TO THE EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH AT COLOSSAE

PHYSICAL LOCATION: About 100 miles east of Ephesus; near Laodicea and Hierapolis (in modern Turkey)

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CITY: Declining commercial center; one of the least significant cities Paul addressed; Noted for 2 things:

- manufacturing – dye (especially purple); pasture land for the wool industry
- lovely resort town – located in a valley where 2 rivers meet

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH: Outgrowth from Paul's evangelistic efforts at Ephesus; Epaphras played a major role; Paul personally unfamiliar with most of the believers there; had never personally visited (cf. Acts 19)

OCCASION OF THE WRITING: Paul in prison at Rome; cf. other prison epistles: Ephesians (very similar in content); Philippians; Philemon (church at Colossae met in his home); Ephaphras had brought a report of conditions in the church (largely favorable) and pressures upon the church (some potential dangers – from false teaching within and philosophical and cultural pressures from without); 61 A.D.

WHY DID PAUL WRITE THE LETTER?

Wiersbe: "The message of this letter is greatly needed today. I hear too many voices telling me that I need something more than Jesus Christ – some exciting experience, some new doctrine, some addition to my Christian experience. But Paul affirms that what I need is appropriation of what I already have in Christ. '*And ye are complete in Him*.'

I also hear voices that want to judge me and rob me of the glorious liberty I have in Christ. How encouraging to hear Paul say: '*Let no man beguile you, let no man spoil you, let no man judge you*.' The fullness of Christ is all that I need, and man-made regulations and disciplines cannot replace the riches I have in God's Son."

7 Key Issues Paul Addresses –

R. C. Lucas: (note language Paul uses to combat these errors)

1) The new teachers offered a spiritual '*fullness*' not previously experienced. Introducing a new type of spirituality; offering to bring the believers to completeness; their original reception of the gospel left them as second class citizens apart from this experience of fullness.

2) They spoke of a new spiritual 'freedom' which those who followed them would enjoy. Paul called this a new form of '*slavery*'.

3) They claimed particular insight into the invisible powers of evil . . .offering privileges for just a select spiritual elite.

4) They were known for their impressive asceticism (fasting, etc.); but they had a poor track record in actually combating self-indulgence.

5) They offered a further initiation into a deeper '*knowledge*' of God and a greater experience of His power.

6) They were inclined to be superior to, even critical of, 'ordinary' believers.

7) They were divisive in their influence on the church; Paul combats this with a plea for Christian unity.

BACKGROUND NOTES

Hendriksen: "The rapid progress of the gospel in the early days has ever been the amazement of the historian. Justin Martyr, about the middle of the second century, wrote, 'There is no people, Greek or barbarian, or of any other race, by whatever appellation or manners they may be distinguished, however ignorant of arts or agriculture, whether they dwell in tents or wander about in covered wagons, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered in the name of the crucified Jesus to the Father and Creator of all things.' Half a century later Tertullian adds, 'We are but of yesterday, and yet we already fill your cities, islands, camps, your palace, senate, and forum. We have left you only your temples.' R. H. Glover (*The Progress of World-Wide Missions*, p. 39) states, 'On the basis of all the data available it has been estimated that by the close of the Apostolic Period the total number of Christian disciples had reached half a million.'"

Kent: Re Background:
"To those who were impressed by ritual, it offered the rites and ceremonies of Moses. To the mystically inclined it advocated angel worship. And to the philosophically minded, there was the religious appeal of asceticism, which suggests spirituality to many."

one of the 4 prison (captivity) epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon
delivered by Tychicus

companion epistle to Philemon; The church at Colosse apparently met in the house of Philemon, the owner of Onesimus

church apparently founded by Epaphras
bears a close relationship in content to Ephesians

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Wiersbe: Re background: "Paul was at that time a prisoner in Rome (Acts 21:17 – 28:31). He met a runaway slave named Onesimus, who belonged to Philemon, one of the leaders of the church in Colossae. Paul led Onesimus to Christ. He then wrote his letter to Philemon, asking his friend to forgive Onesimus and receive him back as a brother in Christ.

About the same time, Epaphras showed up in Rome because he needed Paul's help. Some new doctrines were being taught in Colossae and were invading the church and creating problems. So Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians in order to refute these heretical teachings and establish the truth of the Gospel."

Wiersbe: "Do we have any of this heresy today? Yes, we do; and it is just as deceptive and dangerous! When we make Jesus Christ and the Christian revelation only part of a total religious system or philosophy, we cease to give Him the preeminence. When we strive for 'spiritual perfection' or 'spiritual fullness' by means of formulas, disciplines, or rituals, we go backward instead of forward. Christian believers must beware of mixing their Christian faith with such alluring things as yoga, transcendental meditation, Oriental mysticism, and the like. We must also beware of 'deeper life' teachers who offer a system for victory and fullness that bypasses devotion to Jesus Christ. In all things, He must have the preeminence.!"

Wiersbe: Outline
Theme: Jesus Christ is Preeminent (1:18)

I. DOCTRINE: CHRIST'S PREEMINENCE DECLARED – CHAPTER 1
   1. In the Gospel message – 1:1-12
   2. In redemption – 1:13-14
   3. In Creation – 1:15-17
   4. In the church – 1:18-23
   5. In Paul's ministry – 1:24-29

II. DANGER: CHRIST'S PREEMINENCE DEFENDED – CHAPTER 2
   1. Beware of empty philosophies – 2:1-10
   2. Beware of religious legalism – 2:11-17
   3. Beware of man-made disciplines – 2:18-23

III. DUTY: CHRIST'S PREEMINENCE DEMONSTRATED – CHAPTERS 3-4
   1. In personal purity – 3:1-11
   2. In Christian fellowship – 3:12-17
   3. In the home – 3:18-21
   4. In daily work – 3:22-4:1
   5. In Christian witness – 4:2-6
   6. In Christian service – 4:7-18

Vaughan: "Colosse was a small town situated on the south bank of the Lycus River in the interior of the Roman province of Asian (an area included in modern Turkey). Located about a hundred miles east of Ephesus, its nearest neighbors were Laodicea (ten miles away) and Hierapolis (thirteen miles away). … In Paul's day it was only an insignificant market town. Lightfoot therefore speaks of the Colossian church as 'the least important to which any epistle of Paul is addressed.'"

Vaughan: Regarding Occasion:
"(1) It professed to be a 'philosophy,' but Paul, refusing to recognize it as genuine, called it a '*hollow and deceptive philosophy*' (2:8). Moulton characterizes it as a 'dabbling in the occult.'

(2) It placed much emphasis on ritual circumcision, dietary laws, and the observance of holy days (2:11, 14, 16, 17).
(3) Affirming the mediation of various supernatural powers in the creation of the world and the whole process of salvation, the false teaching insisted that these mysterious powers be placated and worshiped (2:15, 18, 19).
(4) Some of the errorists were ascetic (2:20-23), teaching that the body is evil and must be treated as an enemy.
(5) The advocates of this system claimed to be Christian teachers (cf. 2:3-10).

From these considerations we may conclude that the Colossian heresy was a syncretistic movement combining at least three separate elements. First, the insistence on legalism, ritualism, and the observance of holy days points to a Jewish element. …
Second, the system's 'philosophical' character, angelolatry, and perhaps ascetic tendencies point to a pagan element. This was probably an incipient form of what later became known as Gnosticism…Third, there was a Christian element… It did not deny Christ but it did dethrone Him. It gave Christ a place, but not the supreme place."

Vaughan: Theme: "absolute supremacy and sole sufficiency of Christ."

OVERVIEW OF BOOK OF COLOSSIANS – COMPLETE IN CHRIST
THE SUPREMACY AND SUFFICIENCY OF JESUS CHRIST

INTRODUCTION:

What is the key to Spirituality? To Sanctification and growth to Christian maturity? There are many heretical teachings and misguided perspectives that would undermine our growth towards Christlikeness. The Apostle Paul dealt with the error of the **Judaizers** in the book of Galatians as he taught that Justification was by faith in Jesus Christ alone apart from any works of the law. But what about sanctification? Here in Colossians Paul deals with a different theological error – one that impacts our spirituality as believers. You could call it **incipient Gnosticism** since the full-fledged form of the error did not fully develop until later.

The Common Thread of every false approach to spirituality can be summarized with the same formula: **Christ + Something Else**

- Christ + **works** – Performance based approach – you are burdened with guilt as you must constantly try harder to reform yourself – You fail to rest in the **grace** of God
- Christ + **rituals** – this assigns some magic infusion of grace and power to a wide variety of religious rites and practices – you could include long hours at prayer and consistent private devotions in this category of misplaced dependence
- Christ + **experiences** – Maybe you can reach a higher plane of spirituality by a second baptism of the Holy Spirit or special visions or speaking in tongues or some mountaintop retreat
- Christ + **secret knowledge** – you need to be initiated into this elite group of believers by false teachers who promote their own brand of esoteric doctrines that are available only to an enlightened few
- Christ + **self-denial** – this is especially attractive to the flesh – some type of ascetic denial that sets you apart from the less spiritual
- Christ + **church authority** – put your confidence in your church identity or loyalty to some charismatic spiritual leader
- Christ + **human wisdom and philosophy** – this could include a wide range of speculative rabbit trails and ivory tower contemplations
- Christ + **Self-Improvement** – this mindset may be the most popular error – Christ gets me started on the pathway to spirituality but then spiritual growth depends mainly on my effort

Christ + Something Else will always be the formula of those who would minimize the preeminence and sufficiency of the Person and Work of the only Savior that God has provided.

What was the **situation at Colossae** that Paul was addressing in this prison epistle written about 61 AD from his house arrest in Rome? (Bill McRae does a good job here)

Interesting that Colossae was not a major city at all or a strategic business or travel hub. It was a declining city in a triangle with Laodicea and Hierapolis (mentioned in 4:13) – about 100 miles east from Ephesus. Paul was not even responsible for planting the church there – he had apparently never seen these believers in person – he had only heard of their faith and love (**1:4** –

cf. **2:1**). How then had the church started? Probably Epaphras who had heard the gospel in Ephesus (**1:7**) and then traveled back to his home city. Paul's missionary methodology was always to go to the larger more strategic centers like Ephesus and then allow the converts to take the gospel into the more isolated and less populated areas. We might examine our own church planting models in light of such a strategic approach.

Anyway the occasion for the writing of the epistle is that Epaphras had visited Paul while he was in prison in Rome (**4:12**) and brought news of what we will call the **Colossian heresy**. There were some false doctrines spreading in the church that were undermining true spirituality. We can work backwards from identifying the truths that Paul felt compelled to emphasize in his correction to get a better picture of the error he was refuting.

- The heresy must have been detracting from the preeminence of Christ (**Chap. 1**)
- The heresy must have been fueled by Greek philosophy and speculation (**2:8**)
- The heresy must have included some legalistic and ascetic regulations that may have derived from Judaism – special dietary laws, observance of special days and feasts, the rite of circumcision, etc. – all of these areas Paul felt compelled to address (**2:11, 16**)
- The heresy involved the worship of some type of intermediary spiritual beings (**2:18**)
- The heresy must have involved secret knowledge and a sense of spiritual elitism

So those were some of the components of this system of false teaching which later developed into Gnosticsm. It included Theological aspects and Ethical aspects. It was a blend of 3 things:

- Jewish legalism
- Greek philosophy
- Oriental mysticism – worship of angels and secretive knowledge

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KEY VERSES:

Colossians 1:18 "*that Christ Himself will come to have first place in everything*"

This idea of Preeminence of Christ is the theme of the book – Does Christ have first place in every area of your life?

Colossians 2:10 "*In Him you have been made complete*" not Christ + something

Where is your dependence for spirituality?

Warren Wiersbe: "The message of this letter is greatly needed today. I hear too many voices telling me that I need something more than Jesus Christ – some exciting experience, some new doctrine, some addition to my Christian experience. But Paul affirms that what I need is appropriation of what I already have in Christ. '*And ye are complete in Him.*'

BIG IDEA

The Key to Spirituality Is Living Out Our Union with the Supreme and Sufficient Christ (Understanding that We Are Complete in Him Alone)

Paul's answer to the Colossian heresy was not primarily to attack the error.
His answer was to **exalt Christ.**
When counterfeit money is studied, experts spend most of their time examining the genuine article. Likewise, Paul presents the glory of Christ so clearly that false teaching becomes obvious.

The epistle moves from **Doctrine** to **Practice** in these short 4 chapters – the same pattern we saw in the book of Ephesians – two halves to the book. **Exposition** and then **Exhortation**.

(1:1-14) INTRODUCTION – STABILITY COMES FROM GROWTH
PAUL INTRODUCES HIS STABILIZING TEACHING TO THE COLOSSIANS WITH THANKSGIVING, A REMINDER, AND A PRAYER ON THEIR BEHALF

A. (:**1-2**) GREETING
"*Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother,* [2] *To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*"

B. **(:3-5)** THANKSGIVING FOR CORE CHRISTIAN COMPETENCIES:
2 Core Competency Activities: Giving Thanks / Prayer
3 Core Competency Character Traits: FAITH / LOVE / HOPE

Ask:
- Is my faith affecting my daily life?
- Is my love for believers growing?
- Is my hope fixed on eternity?

The theme of **thanksgiving** is woven throughout Colossians and serves as one of the practical evidences of spiritual maturity. Paul presents thanksgiving not merely as an occasional response but as a continual attitude that flows from understanding the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ.

1) Thanksgiving Is the Proper Response to God's Saving Grace (**1:3-5**)
2) Thanksgiving Flows from Understanding Our Spiritual Riches (**1:12-14**)
3) Thanksgiving Is a Mark of Spiritual Maturity (**2:6-7**)
4) Thanksgiving Guards Against False Teaching (**2:7**)
5) Thanksgiving Should Characterize Corporate Worship (**3:15-17**)
6) Thanksgiving Strengthens Prayer (**4:2**)

A thankful heart is one of the clearest indicators that a person truly believes the central message of Colossians: **Christ is all, and Christ is enough.**
Thanksgiving in Colossians is the heartbeat of the believer's life—an unending song of gratitude to the One who has delivered us from darkness and brought us into the kingdom of His beloved Son.

C. (:**5B-8**) REMINDER OF THEIR OBJECTIVE ANCHOR –
THE UNIVERSAL AND EFFICACIOUS (PRODUCTIVE) GOSPEL MESSAGE

The Gospel is the objective truth designed for the whole world = Foundational
Core of the gospel = **the grace of God** – Guard against legalism / ritualism / mysticism / intellectualism / elitism
Epaphras had faithfully communicated the gospel to those at Colossae

D. (:**9-14**) PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE LEADING TO OBEDIENCE AND MATURITY

"*so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord,*
to please Him in all respects"

Goal = Maturity in Ministry (Fruitfulness) / Knowledge / Power / Worship

Ministry -- "*bearing fruit in every good work*"
Knowledge -- "*increasing in the knowledge of God*"
Power -- "*strengthened with all power*"
Worship -- "*giving thanks to the Father*"

I. (1:15-23) THE SUPREMACY (PREEMINENCE) OF CHRIST DISPLAYS THE FULLNESS OF GOD
CHRIST DESERVES THE PREEMINENCE BY VIRTUE OF:
- HIS POSITION OF HEADSHIP
- AND HIS WORK OF RECONCILIATION
(WITH RESPECT TO ALL OF CREATION AND TO THE CHURCH)

(:18b) THESIS: "*so that He himself might come to have first place in everything*"

Illustration: As you walk up the stairs in our house to the top floor a portrait of Karen's Dad hangs on the wall. It is a very impressive painting … shows him in his full Air Force dress uniform with all of his medals and his distinctive stripes as Chief Master Sergeant … but not just any Chief Master Sergeant … for the Air Force has many of these … but the setting is in his Pentagon office with the flag of the United States of America and that of the Air Force … you see Dick Kisling for a period of time was **THE Chief Master Sergeant of the entire Air Force** – the one preeminent enlisted man – a position of tremendous respect and importance. He was appointed to that position by virtue of his accomplishments and the respect he had earned throughout his career. I look at that portrait and it makes me proud … the man who was the head of my wife's home rose through the ranks to be **first place** among all the enlisted men in the Air Force.

Christ stands in first place in all the things that **really count** – and He occupies that place at the top – the place of supreme authority and respect and power – for a very long time -- until the end comes that is talked about in **1 Cor. 15:25-28** when He turns around and subjects all things under the Father – somewhat of a divine mystery as to how they share the spotlight back and forth

You can refute almost any cult or false teaching by examining how they fail to give Christ His due in terms of His Deity or Sufficiency or Supremacy or Exclusivity–
Cults will always come up short in terms of **how they view Christ** ….
And they will always come up sho rt in terms of how they understand and portray the **grace of God**

A. (:**15-17**) CHRIST DESERVES THE PREEMINENCE BY VIRTUE OF HIS POSITION OF HEADSHIP OVER ALL CREATION
– THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD

1. Preeminent by Virtue of His Deity = "*the image of the invisible God*"

2. Preeminent as the Unique Son of God = "*the first-born of all creation*"

3. Preeminent as the Creator of all things – "*all things have been created by Him*"

4. Preeminent as the Goal of Creation -- "*all things have been created … for Him*"
The world does not revolve around us

5. Preeminent as the Precursor of Creation -- "*He is before all things*"

6. Preeminent as the Sustainer of Creation -- "*in Him all things hold together*"

John MacArthur: "Upholding" the earth or "maintaining." It's used in the present tense, implying continuous action. Everything in the universe is sustained at this moment by Jesus Christ.

a) Avoiding chaos -- Our lives depend on the constancy of physical laws.
b) Maintaining the cosmos -- The reason the universe is a cosmos and not chaos--an ordered and reliable system instead of an erratic and unpredictable muddle--is the upholding power of Jesus Christ.

B. (:**18-19**) CHRIST DESERVES THE PREEMINENCE BY VIRTUE OF HIS POSITION OF HEADSHIP OVER THE CHURCH
– THE EMBODIMENT OF ALL THE FULNESS OF GOD

1. Preeminent by Virtue of His Deity = "*all the fulness dwells in Him*"

Warren Wiersbe: "The word *filled* is a **key word** in Colossians. It was also a key word in the teachings of the false teachers who had invaded the Colossian church. Paul used it many times. (See **Col. 1:19, 25; 2:2, 9-10; 4:12, 17** [*Complete* = '*filled full'*]). The word carries the idea of being fully equipped. It was used to describe a ship that was ready for a voyage. The believer has in Christ all that he needs for the voyage of life. '*And you are complete in Him*' (**Col. 2:10**). '*And of His fullness have all we received*' (**John 1:16**)."

2. Preeminent by Virtue of His Headship over His Body = the Church
"*He is also head of the body, the church*"

3. Preeminent by Virtue of His Leadership in Resurrection
   "*He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead*"

C. (:**20)** CHRIST DESERVES THE PREEMINENCE BY VIRTUE OF HIS WORK OF RECONCILIATION – WITH RESPECT TO CREATION
   "*and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven*."

We don't talk about this cosmic scale of reconciliation very much
Everything is brought under submission to His will and made to serve His purposes – even the destiny of the wicked – not advocating for universal salvation here

D. (:**21-23**) CHRIST DESERVES THE PREEMINENCE BY VIRTUE OF HIS WORK OF RECONCILIATION – WITH RESPECT TO THE CHURCH
1. Need for Reconciliation (Scope = Gentile emphasis)
   a. Alienated by Position -- "*you were formerly alienated*"

   b. Alienated by Active Rebellion in Mind -- "*hostile in mind*"

   c. Alienated by Active Rebellion in Deed -- "*engaged in evil deeds*"

2. Nature of this Reconciliation -- "*He has now reconciled you*"

Illustration: Remember the old slogan: "**You've come a long way baby**" -- I think it was applied to women having the equal oppty with men to kill themselves with smoking the cancer sticks … Do we appreciate how far away from God each of us was and what a tremendous work of reconciliation Christ accomplished??

3. Means of Accomplishing this Reconciliation -- "*in His fleshly body through death*"

4. Goal of Reconciliation
   "*in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach*"

5. Human Responsibility: Perseverance in the Faith (:**23**)
   "*if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister*."
      What you once were (:**21**)
      Where you now stand (:**22**)
      How you must go on (:**23**)

Application:
A small Christ produces weak Christians.
A great Christ produces strong Christians.

II. (1:24-2:15) THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST MAKES US COMPLETE IN HIM

A. (**1:24-29**) CHRIST IS SUFFICIENT FOR THE GENTILES --
PAUL'S PASSION FOR PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST DROVE HIM TO
FULFILL HIS CALLING TO SACRIFICIALLY MINISTER TO THE GENTILES

1. (:**24**) THE MISERY OF PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES – SUFFERING PHYSICALLY FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

2. (:**25**) THE MINISTRY OF PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES – SERVING AS A FAITHFUL STEWARD OF THE GOSPEL

3. (:**26-27**) THE MYSTERY OF PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES – SHARING THE SECRET OF THE INCLUSION OF THE GENTILES ON AN EQUAL BASIS WITH THE JEWS

4. (:**28-29**) THE MISSION OF PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES – STRIVING FOR THE GOAL IN DEPENDENCE UPON THE POWER OF CHRIST

Ray Stedman: Let me summarize this passage, in closing. The apostle points out three stages of change.

- First, the new birth begins a process which is intended to perfect us, spirit, soul and body.
- To advance that process requires pain and commitment on the part of others on our behalf; and when we come to Christ we are to undertake that same pain and commitment on behalf of others.
- Finally, all progress occurs only by coming to understand and to practice the mystery of "*Christ in you, the hope of glory*."

B. (**2:1-7**) CHRIST IS SUFFICIENT FOR DEPTH AND STABILITY --
PAUL'S PASSION FOR PROTECTING THE SAINTS AGAINST DECEPTION
FOCUSED HIS MINISTRY ON ENCOURAGING DEPTH AND STABILITY
IN CHRIST

1. (**:1-3**) DEPTH AND STABILITY COME FROM A TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

> "*For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face,* [2] *that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself,* [3] *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*."

Everybody has a fascination around searching for **hidden treasure**. How passionate are we about searching out the depths of the hidden treasures of deeper knowledge of Christ – not to puff up our intellect but to enhance our spiritual growth and stability.

2. (:**4-5**) DEPTH AND STABILITY PROTECT AGAINST DECEPTION

"*I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument.* [5] *For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ*."

World is great at making persuasive arguments:

- cf. **Debate Clubs** in school – teach you to argue both sides of the question – doesn't matter where your personal conviction lies; teaching you rhetoric, logic, power of persuasion
- cf. our **legal system** – adversarial – prosecution against the defense – you might know your client is guilty but you still make the argument on his behalf; we have law schools to teach you how to make an argument

Faith in Christ provides the only solid footing and protection against the persuasive arguments of deceptive false teachers. That is why it is so important to give Christ the preeminence in everything. Any teaching that undermines the preeminence of Christ must be rejected.

3. (:**6-7**) DEPTH AND STABILITY COME FROM A CONSISTENT WALK OF FAITH IN CHRIST

"*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,* [7] *having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude*."

In seminary we had an assignment where we had to pick one key text that focused on the secret of sanctification and spiritual growth. I picked this text for my position paper. So many people understand that justification is by faith alone = the message of Galatians. But when it comes to sanctification, they switch gears and thinks it depends all on them. They substitute a works mentality, a performance-oriented lifestyle for living by grace thru faith.

Paul calls us to go back to our **Roots**: At conversion you understood:

- the seriousness of sin
- the bankruptcy of trusting in self
- your need for Christ
- your desire for a changed life
- the simplicity of child-like faith

How did we receive Christ? <u>Repentance and faith</u>
How should we continue on in our Christian walk? Repentance and faith
All in dependence on the **Grace of God.**

Christianity is not: "Trust Christ for salvation and yourself for sanctification."

Three guiding principles, each referring to a different aspect of Christian development, but similar in form:

1. *As you received … so live.* – godly living

2. *As you were rooted … be built up* – spiritual growth
3. *As you were taught … be established in truth.* – Christian understanding

Don Hutto -- **Six Snapshots of Growth**

1. The Image Of A Military Unit - (**v.5**) "*order and steadfastness*"

2. The Image Of A Pilgrim - (**v. 6**) "*so walk ye*"

3. The Image Of A Tree - (**v. 7**) "*rooted*"

4. The Image Of A Building - (**v. 7**) "*built up*"

5. The Image Of A School - (**v. 7**) "*taught* "

6. The Image Of A River - (**v. 7**) "*abounding*"

Once again we have that predominant tone of Thanksgiving.

C. (**2:8-15**) COMPLETE IN CHRIST --
THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST PROTECTS US AGAINST FALSE TEACHING

1. (:**8-9**) ALL TRUTH MUST BE MEASURED AGAINST THE STANDARD OF CHRIST = WHO IS GOD INCARNATE

2. (:**10**) CHRIST IS OUR SUFFICIENCY –
"*and in Him you have been made complete*"

3. (:**11-12**) OUR UNION WITH CHRIST IS PORTRAYED BY 2 SPIRITUAL ANALOGIES
   a. Circumcision – removal of the body of the flesh
   b. Baptism – united in burial and resurrection

4. (:**13-15**) THE VICTORY OF CHRIST HAS RESCUED US FROM DEATH, SIN AND ALL ENEMIES

III. (2:16-3:11) TRUE SPIRITUALITY = LIVING OUT OUR UNION WITH CHRIST

A. (**2:16-23**) FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE AND CONDEMNATION --
UNION WITH CHRIST HAS FREED US FROM THE BONDAGE AND CONDEMNATION OF THE FALSE ISMS
(WHICH CLAIM TO BE THE PATHWAY TO SPIRITUALITY)

1. (:**16-17**) FREEDOM FROM THE BONDAGE AND CONDEMNATION OF RITUALISM

Def. of **Ritualism**: adherence, insistence, dependence on the observance of prescribed religious acts and observances; almost like religious superstitions – I had better do things a certain way in order for God to be pleased with me; cf. praying with rosary beads
Cf. security of liturgical approach;

2. (:**18-19**) FREEDOM FROM THE BONDAGE AND CONDEMNATION OF MYSTICISM

Def. of **Mysticism**: Mysticism: the belief that a person can have an immediate experience with the spiritual world, completely apart from the Word of God or the Holy Spirit

Cf. the New Age Movement -- At the heart of it is this claim to seek the true Oneness of things. We are told that we are all part of the universe of created matter, and that we are united in Oneness with God. The claim is that this is the way to escape from being centered in oneself, and so move into the fullness of knowledge of the universe.

3. (:**20-23**) FREEDOM FROM THE BONDAGE AND CONDEMNATION OF LEGALISM

Def. of **Legalism**: Treating prescribed standards of conduct as regulations to be kept by our own power in order to earn God's favor – Moralism that is not on the basis of by grace thru faith

Summary: (**2:23**)
Contrast Between Appearance of Wisdom and Real Spiritual Value

1) Appearance of Wisdom
   "*These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom*"
   a) Worthless Religion -- "*in self-made religion*" – Self originated
   b) Worthless Humility -- "*and self-abasement*" – Self afflicted
   c) Worthless Asceticism -- "*and severe treatment of the body*" – Self destroyed
2) Real Spiritual Value
   "*but are of no value against fleshly indulgence*"

Summary Chart of How not to achieve True Spirituality:

FALSE ISM:	RITUALISM	MYSTICISM	LEGALISM
DEFINITION:	Dependence on observance of specific religious rites	Dependence on inner personal experience with the spirit world disconnected from the Word of God & Holy Spirit	Dependence on conformity to an external code of conduct in contradiction to the grace of God
ASPECTS:	Dietary Laws Religious Observances (Annual, monthly, weekly) Self Made Religion	Physical Self-Denial (False Humility) Spiritual Meditation Experience Oriented Self Made Religion	Emphasis on External Restrictions / "Do Not" The Letter kills / Spirit gives Life Human Laws vs. Divine Self Made Religion
WARNING:	*"let no one act as your judge"*	*"Let no one keep defrauding you"*	*"do not submit yourself to decrees"*
BONDAGE:	Insignificance / you can't grasp the substance	Introspection / you can't seem to connect	Insecurity / you can never do enough (or False Security)
HARMFUL LEADERSHIP:	Domineering *"let no one act as your judge"*	Inflated Pride *"inflated ... by his fleshly mind"*	False Wisdom *"the appearance of wisdom"*
CONDEMNED:	Worthless for Spiritual Victory	Worthless for Spiritual Victory	Worthless for Spiritual Victory
PROTECTION:	Substance over Shadow *"the substance belongs to Christ"*	Abide in Christ *"holding fast to the Head"*	Live the Resurrection Life *"If you have died with Christ"*
SPIRITUALITY TEST/REWARD:	Experiencing the Reality of Christ	Corporate Spiritual Growth	Victory over "*Fleshly Indulgence*"

B. (**3:1-11**) FOCUS AND FOLLOW THROUGH --
THE KEY TO SPIRITUALITY IS LIVING OUT OUR UNION WITH CHRIST

1. (:**1-4**) FOCUS ON OUR UNION WITH CHRIST – 2 EXHORTATIONS
   "*Seek* …" / "*Set* …"

2. (:**5-11**) FOLLOW THROUGH BY PUTTING OFF ALL THE SINFUL PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH THE OLD MAN

IV. (3:12-4:6) UNION WITH CHRIST MANIFESTS ITSELF IN GODLY RELATIONSHIPS AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

A. **(3:12-17**) GODLY RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH: THE PERFECT BOND OF UNITY -- THE KEY TO HARMONY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST IS:

- BEING CHRISTLIKE IN OUR CHARACTER AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER
- BEING PRODUCTIVE IN MINISTERING THE WORD TO ONE ANOTHER
- BEING MOTIVATED BY A DESIRE TO PLEASE HIM IN EVERYTHING
- (AND BEING THANKFUL THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE PROCESS)

1. (:**12-14**) PUT ON CHRISTLIKE ATTRIBUTES (ESPECIALLY LOVE) IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

2. (:**15**) PRACTICE CHRISTLIKE ATTITUDES (PEACE AND THANKFULNESS) IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

3. (:**16**) PASTOR ONE ANOTHER WITH THE RESOURCES OF THE WORD OF CHRIST

4. (:**17**) PERFORM EVERYTHING WE DO FROM THE MOTIVATION OF PLEASING CHRIST

B. (**3:18-21**) GODLY RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FAMILY –
(HOW TO BLOW UP YOUR HOME!)
UNION WITH CHRIST MANIFESTS ITSELF IN GODLY FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

1. **(:18**) WIVES ARE CHARGED WITH SUBMISSION

2. **(:19**) HUSBANDS ARE CHARGED WITH SACRIFICIAL LOVE

3. (:**20**) CHILDREN ARE CHARGED WITH OBEDIENCE

4. (:**21**) FATHERS ARE WARNED AGAINST ABUSE OF AUTHORITY

C. (**3:22 – 4:1**) GODLY RELATIONSHIPS IN THE WORKPLACE --
UNION WITH CHRIST MANIFESTS ITSELF IN GODLY WORK RELATIONSHIPS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

1. (**3:22-25**) ACCOUNTABILITY OF EMPLOYEES

Illustration: Every workplace becomes an opportunity to accomplish great things for God.
Three bricklayers were asked what they were doing.

- One said: "I'm laying bricks."
- Another said: "I'm building a wall."
- The third replied: "I'm building a cathedral."

The same work can have vastly different meaning depending on perspective.
Christ transforms our perspective.

2. (**4:1**) ACCOUNTABILITY OF EMPLOYERS – TO MASTER IN HEAVEN

D. (**4:2-6**) EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION --
UNION WITH CHRIST MANIFESTS ITSELF IN:

1. **(:2-3A**) CONSISTENT PRAYER

2. **(:3-4)** MISSIONARY FOCUS

3. (:**5**) OPPORTUNISTIC TESTIMONY

4. (:**6**) GRACIOUS SPEECH

(4:7-18) CLOSING GREETINGS
UNION WITH CHRIST MANIFESTS ITSELF IN PRECIOUS BONDS OF FELLOWSHIP WITH THOSE WHO LABOR WITH US IN THE GOSPEL MINISTRY

A. (:**7-9**) **INFORMATION**: MISSIONARIES MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO KEEP THEIR SUPPORTERS FULLY INFORMED

B. (:**10-14**) **INTIMACY:** THE INTIMACY OF PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL IS EXPRESSED VIA PERSONAL GREETINGS

C. (:**15-17**) **INVOLVEMENT**: THE RECIPIENTS OF THIS MISSIONARY REPORT MUST SHARE WITH OTHERS ITS GREETINGS AND EXHORTATIONS

D. **(:18) SIGNATURE AND CLOSING**

WHY STUDY THIS BOOK?
• We are reminded to continue on to maturity the same way we entered into our Christian walk = by Repentance + Faith.
• We are encouraged to live in the freedom from the shackles of sin and bondage that our union with Christ empowers us for.
• We are instructed regarding the person of God by focusing on the one who is the image of the invisible God.
• We are warned against turning to worldly philosophy, or mysticism, or asceticism, or legalism to try to gain spirituality.
• We are guided in practical ways to live out our union with Christ in our relationships with others

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1. "Jesus Paid It All"

"*Jesus paid it all,*
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow."

Connection to Colossians
The believer does not contribute to his salvation. Christ's work is complete and sufficient. Nothing can be added to the finished work of the cross.

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2. "Rock of Ages" (Augustus Toplady)

"*Nothing in my hand I bring,*
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace."

Connection to Colossians

This hymn rejects every form of legalism and self-righteousness. The believer comes to Christ empty-handed and finds in Him everything needed.

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3. "Complete in Thee" (Aaron R. Wolfe)

This hymn may be the closest hymn ever written to the theme of Colossians.

"*Complete in Thee! no work of mine*
May take, dear Lord, the place of Thine;
Thy blood hath pardon bought for me,
And I am now complete in Thee."

Later:

"*Complete in Thee! each want supplied,*
And no good thing to me denied."

Connection to Colossians

This hymn is essentially a poetic exposition of **Colossians 2:10**.

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4. "**In Christ Alone**" – This modern hymn by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend powerfully declares that all hope, strength, and righteousness are found in Christ alone. It affirms that salvation is fully accomplished through His death and resurrection, leaving nothing for us to add.

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My comforter, my all in all
Here, in the love of Christ, I stand

OUTLINE OF COLOSSIANS

THE KEY TO SPIRITUALITY IS LIVING OUT OUR UNION WITH THE SUPREME AND SUFFICIENT CHRIST (UNDERSTANDING THAT WE ARE COMPLETE IN HIM)

(1:1-14) INTRODUCTION – STABILITY COMES FROM GROWTH

PAUL INTRODUCES HIS STABILIZING TEACHING TO THE COLOSSIANS WITH THANKSGIVING, A REMINDER, AND A PRAYER ON THEIR BEHALF

(:1-2) GREETING

(:3-5) THANKSGIVING FOR CORE CHRISTIAN COMPETENCIES
FAITH / LOVE / HOPE

(:5B-8) REMINDER OF THEIR OBJECTIVE ANCHOR –
THE UNIVERSAL AND EFFICACIOUS GOSPEL MESSAGE

(:9-14) PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE, OBEDIENCE, AND MATURITY

I. (1:15-23) THE SUPREMACY (PREEMINENCE) OF CHRIST DISPLAYS THE FULLNESS OF GOD

CHRIST DESERVES THE PREEMINENCE BY VIRTUE OF:

- HIS POSITION OF HEADSHIP
- AND HIS WORK OF RECONCILIATION
(WITH RESPECT TO ALL OF CREATION AND TO THE CHURCH)

(:18b) THESIS: *"so that He himself might come to have first place in everything"*

A. (:15-17) CHRIST DESERVES THE PREEMINENCE BY VIRTUE OF HIS POSITION OF HEADSHIP OVER ALL CREATION
– THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD

B. (:18-19) CHRIST DESERVES THE PREEMINENCE BY VIRTUE OF HIS POSITION OF HEADSHIP OVER THE CHURCH
– THE EMBODIMENT OF ALL THE FULNESS OF GOD

C. (:20) CHRIST DESERVES THE PREEMINENCE BY VIRTUE OF HIS WORK OF RECONCILIATION – WITH RESPECT TO CREATION

D. (:21-23) CHRIST DESERVES THE PREEMINENCE BY VIRTUE OF HIS WORK OF RECONCILIATION – WITH RESPECT TO THE CHURCH

II. (1:24-2:15) THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST MAKES US COMPLETE IN HIM

A. (1:24-29) CHRIST IS SUFFICIENT FOR THE GENTILES --
PAUL'S PASSION FOR PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST DROVE HIM TO FULFILL HIS CALLING TO SACRIFICIALLY MINISTER TO THE GENTILES

1. (:24) THE MISERY OF PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES – SUFFERING PHYSICALLY FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST
2. (:25) THE MINISTRY OF PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES – SERVING AS A FAITHFUL STEWARD OF THE GOSPEL
3. (:26-27) THE MYSTERY OF PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES – SHARING THE SECRET OF THE INCLUSION OF THE GENTILES ON AN EQUAL BASIS WITH THE JEWS
4. (:28-29) THE MISSION OF PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES – STRIVING FOR THE GOAL IN DEPENDENCE UPON THE POWER OF CHRIST

B. (2:1-7) CHRIST IS SUFFICIENT FOR DEPTH AND STABILITY --
PAUL'S PASSION FOR PROTECTING THE SAINTS AGAINST DECEPTION FOCUSED HIS MINISTRY ON ENCOURAGING DEPTH AND STABILITY IN CHRIST

1. (:1-3) DEPTH AND STABILITY COME FROM A TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST
2. (:4-5) DEPTH AND STABILITY PROTECT AGAINST DECEPTION
3. (:6-7) DEPTH AND STABILITY COME FROM A CONSISTENT WALK OF FAITH IN CHRIST

C. (2:8-15) COMPLETE IN CHRIST --
THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST PROTECTS US AGAINST FALSE TEACHING

1. (:8-9) ALL TRUTH MUST BE MEASURED AGAINST THE STANDARD OF CHRIST = WHO IS GOD INCARNATE
2. (:10) CHRIST IS OUR SUFFICIENCY
3. (:11-12) OUR UNION WITH CHRIST IS PORTRAYED BY 2 SPIRITUAL ANALOGIES
4. (:13-15) THE VICTORY OF CHRIST HAS RESCUED US FROM DEATH, SIN AND ALL ENEMIES

III. (2:16-3:11) TRUE SPIRITUALITY = LIVING OUT OUR UNION WITH CHRIST

A. (2:16-23) FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE AND CONDEMNATION -- UNION WITH CHRIST HAS FREED US FROM THE BONDAGE AND CONDEMNATION OF THE FALSE ISMS
(WHICH CLAIM TO BE THE PATHWAY TO SPIRITUALITY)

1. (:16-17) FREEDOM FROM THE BONDAGE AND CONDEMNATION OF RITUALISM
2. (:18-19) FREEDOM FROM THE BONDAGE AND CONDEMNATION OF MYSTICISM
3. (:20-23) FREEDOM FROM THE BONDAGE AND CONDEMNATION OF LEGALISM

B. (3:1-11) FOCUS AND FOLLOW THROUGH --
THE KEY TO SPIRITUALITY IS LIVING OUT OUR UNION WITH CHRIST

1. (:1-4) FOCUS ON OUR UNION WITH CHRIST – 2 EXHORTATIONS
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2. (4:1) ACCOUNTABILITY OF EMPLOYERS – TO MASTER IN HEAVEN

D. (4:2-6) EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION --
UNION WITH CHRIST MANIFESTS ITSELF IN CONSISTENT PRAYER, MISSIONARY FOCUS, OPPORTUNISTIC TESTIMONY, AND GRACIOUS SPEECH

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(:18) SIGNATURE AND CLOSING

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

TITLE: INTRODUCTION TO BOOK OF COLOSSIANS:
STABILITY COMES FROM GROWTH

BIG IDEA:
PAUL INTRODUCES HIS STABILIZING TEACHING WITH:
- **THANKSGIVING FOR CORE COMPETENCIES**
- **REMINDER OF THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL**
- **PRAYER FOR CONTINUED GROWTH IN KNOWLEDGE, FRUITFULNESS, AND POWER**

INTRODUCTION:
Last week we talked about **Back to the Basics** – the fundamentals of the Christian life. What a perfect transition into this Introduction to the Book of Colossians … Remember the 5 W's we discussed – (hold up hand) -- so important I didn't wash all week – what did they stand for?

Warfare / Witness / Word / Worship / Wailing (Prayer)

How much of our energy this past week was devoted to those 5 fundamental areas?

We could study these first 14 verses in Colossians around the same 5 themes:
1) **Warfare** – Paul is writing from prison in Rome – this is one of his prison epistles – Paul knew a lot about spiritual warfare – not defeated by any means – using his time in prison to spread the gospel (remember our studies in Philippians) and now he uses his time to write an important letter to help stabilize the Colossians in their pursuit of the key to spirituality

2) **Witness** – We are going to see how Paul reminds them of the power of the gospel to change lives; as they think back on how they received the gospel and the impact it had on their lives they will be motivated to continue to proclaim that truth of God's grace and deliverance and redemption and forgiveness of sins to others

3) **Word** – The Word of Truth (vs. 5) -- Spiritual knowledge is essential for growth and stability and experiencing the power of God; Paul uses this tool as his primary weapon to combat the false teaching that has crept into the church at Colossae – we will be studying some of the false isms that Paul confronted and that we still fight against today – legalism; asceticism; mysticism; Gnosticism; elitism; you name it ism …

4) **Worship** – Paul expresses his heart of thanksgiving in these verses … he goes on to ascribe worth to both the Father who has delivered us and His beloved Son to whom we are united now in the kingdom of God in a very special and powerful way

5) **Wailing** – Heavy emphasis on Prayer in this opening section

So why did the Colossians need to go back to the Basics? Why do we need to go back to the Basics?
Interesting: how does a football team respond when it is in a slump and can't seem to execute properly? Heard Brian Billick talk on leadership this past week – excellent – the answer is not to add in a bunch of complicated gimmick plays to try to fool the opposition – No it is back to the fundamentals of blocking and tackling better; let's reduce the number of plays and get those right in terms of execution before we branch out

Paul was encouraged by good reports of the faith and love and hope of these believers … but he was also troubled by the unsettling influences that were starting to find a voice within the church
He wanted to reinforce their Stability – He knew that the key to Stability was continued Growth

Danger of going off the deep end … going down the tubes
Personal illustrations …

Paul is going to point us back to our Union with Christ – who alone is Supreme and Sufficient – to experience stability we need to grow in our experience of that Union with Christ

BIG IDEA:
PAUL INTRODUCES HIS STABILIZING TEACHING WITH:
- THANKSGIVING FOR CORE COMPETENCIES
(big word for = what we are supposed to be good at)
- REMINDER OF THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL
(Paul always wants us to be excited about the gospel and to focus on the person of our Lord Jesus Christ who is at the heart of the gospel)
- PRAYER FOR CONTINUED GROWTH IN KNOWLEDGE, FRUITFULNESS, AND POWER
(that's where we will see stability and maturity)

(:1-2) GREETING
covers Author / Recipients / Salutation

just notice one important phrase: *"in Christ"* – that shows where Paul is headed in this epistle –

Quick Overview of the Epistle:

THE KEY TO SPIRITUALITY IS LIVING OUT OUR UNION WITH THE SUPREME AND SUFFICIENT CHRIST

I. (1:15-23) THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST DISPLAYS THE FULLNESS OF GOD

- preeminence of Christ
- doctrinally rich section – some very deep theological truths

II. (1:24-2:15) THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST MAKES US COMPLETE IN HIM
- Is Christ really all that we need? Or are we looking for something else?
- Remember the hymn: "He is able to deliver thee … though by sin oppressed, go to him for rest …."
- or How about: "Complete in Him, O blessed thought …"

III. (2:16-3:11) TRUE SPIRITUALITY = LIVING OUT OUR UNION WITH CHRIST

Lots of attempts to define True Spirituality – here is Paul's best shot at it

IV. (3:12-4:6) UNION WITH CHRIST MANIFESTS ITSELF IN GODLY RELATIONSHIPS AND GODLY COMMUNICATION

How does this union affect our behavior at home, at work, in the church, in how we talk to one another??

"*in Christ*" – going to prove to be a very rich phrase in this book

I. (:3-5) THANKSGIVING FOR CORE CHRISTIAN COMPETENCIES FAITH / LOVE / HOPE

A. (:3) Two Core Competency Activities – Present Tense (ongoing activities)
1. *Giving Thanks – part of Worship*
2. *Praying* --

Note: we stand in the same relationship to God as Jesus does
Jesus = son by nature
us = sons by adoption

B. (:4-5a) Three Core Competency Character Traits
1. *Faith* in Christ – essential for spiritual life and for union with Christ
Answers all of our **internal problems** of Fear, Anxiety, Insecurity …
Focuses our Vision on Christ … not self – **Heb. 11**
Transforms us to make us more like Christ

2. *Love* for all the saints – supernatural agape love; sacrificial at its core; not just a feeling but taking action that is in the best eternal interest of the one loved

"*faith without works is dead*" – these two must be combined – James
it's great to step out in faith and exercise our spiritual gifts for ministry towards others … but we better do it in love or our efforts are wasted
1 Cor. 13

Answers all of our issues regarding **relationships**
Focuses our Vision on Others … not self
Motivates us to minister to others like Christ

3. *Hope* – presented here as the basis for Faith and Love = feeds and intensifies them; combination of desire and expectation
Answers all of our struggles about how to respond to our **circumstances**
Focuses our Vision on the Future and on the Unseen Realm; Promises of God
Encourages us to persevere and strive for the prize
1 Peter 1 – *"born again to a living hope"*

cf. business illustration – What are the **core competencies** of a company?"
Caterpillar does well when it focuses on building quality earthmoving machines
- engineering innovation
- parts and service support

Christians should be branded with **Faith, Hope, Love** … that is what people should see when they see us

Sometimes our branding message gets confused and the message doesn't really come across -- **cute story Jenny told us last night** -- kids, you will like this one ..… college students have their core competency defined to a large extent by their major … Jenny was asked by one family what she was studying … and she replied "Accounting" … their little 6 year old boy looked puzzled … "Counting"? he asked?? "No, Accounting" replied Jenny. The boy thought for a second and then the light went on inside his little head … "Oh, is that counting with really big numbers?"

(What do we learn here and elsewhere about the relationship among these three traits? Paul treats these together in other passages: Rom. 5:2-5; 1 Cor. 13:13; 1 Thess.1:3; 5:8)

What type of reputation do we have as a church in these key areas of Faith, Hope and Love? What can we do to make our message more clear?
What things distract us from growing in these areas?

Transition: :5b

II. (:5B-8) REMINDER OF THEIR OBJECTIVE ANCHOR – THE UNIVERSAL AND EFFICACIOUS (PRODUCTIVE) GOSPEL MESSAGE

Don't pull up anchor now and drift in a different direction; don't be blown about by every wind of doctrine
Go back to your gospel roots

A. The Gospel is the Word of Truth – Objective

- every teaching must be measured against this standard

Paul gets riled up against the false teachers in Galatia who were presenting false gospel ..

- truth is Foundational – everything starts here

- "*faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God*" – that word of truth

- the essence of the Gospel message = death, burial and resurrection of Christ --

Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the OT prophecies;
He rose again the third day having the victory over Satan and sin and Death;
He offers us new life as a free gift received by grace through faith;
He wants us to experience the freedom from sin that comes from being united to Him and following Him as the Lord of our life

B. The Gospel is Universal

"*unto you*"
"*just as in all the world*"

Because it is universal it is also exclusive – message of Gospel of John

Jesus: "*I am the way, the truth , and the life*"
"*I am the door of the sheep*" – you can't enter into a relationship with God any other way
"*I am the Good Shepherd and I know my sheep by name*"
"*I am the living bread of life that came down out of heaven*"
"*I am the water that springs up into life everlasting*"
"*I am the Word that became flesh and reveals the grace and truth of God to all mankind*"
"*I am the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*"
"*I am fully man and yet the perfect Son of God*" – the only mediator between man and God
"*I am the light of the world*"
"*I am the resurrection and the life*"

You can see the gospel has to be both universal and exclusive – there can be no other way to God; Jesus is not just some nice moral teacher … He is the only way to God

C. The Gospel is Efficacious (Productive) = Produces Results

Def. of efficacious: "having the power to produce the desired effect"

1. *Bearing fruit* – primarily the character of changed lives; continual fruit bearing

2. *Increasing* – continual growth
this is partly a mark of the gospel's authenticity

Rom 1:16 *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek"*

the gospel is "Good News" – let's be excited about it; let's have a passion to proclaim it

D. The Core of the Gospel is *the Grace of God*
Watch out for:
legalism
ritualism
mysticism
intellectualism

E. The Gospel was Faithfully Communicated to you by Epaphras
"just as you learned it from Epaphras" – nothing has changed

1. *"Our beloved fellow bond-servant"* – True partnership in the gospel

2. *"Faithful servant of Christ on our behalf"* – Faithful to Christ and to Paul

3. *"he also informed us of your love in the Spirit"* – Brought back initial Good Report

Remember our earlier phrase: *"in Christ"* … here we have similar phrase: *"in connection with the Spirit"*

Paul has given thanks for the good report of the Colossian believers – their good reputation in terms of the core competencies of Faith, Love and Hope
Paul has reminded the believers of the power of the gospel
Now he shares the contents of his prayer for them

III (:9-14) PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE, OBEDIENCE, AND MATURITY

Follows simple pattern of all of Paul's major Prayers:
- Request
- Reason
- Results

Morgan: his four main prayer passages are all found in prison epistles -- if he could not preach, he could increase his prayers

Especially impressive prayer since Paul had never visited this church

The simplicity of the gospel message and its liberating power with its emphasis on the grace of God is under attack by false teachers

A. Request: Prayer for Spiritual Knowledge – Understanding the Moral Will of God

"*that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding*"

(cf. "full gospel" movement – implying that we are missing out on something; concept of fullness in the epistle)

Paul combating the spiritual elite who laid claim to a more esoteric knowledge and a deeper, more mystical relationship with God and spiritual beings. You want to talk about knowledge … I'll talk about real spiritual knowledge – not something reserved for some spiritual elite … but something available to help every Christian grow and be fruitful

Wisdom that comes from the Spirit … different than the wisdom of the world
Understanding things from God's perspective

B. Reason: Obedience

"*so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects*"

Connection between obedience and worship – ascribing worth to the Lord; now having a worthy walk

Life will prove disappointing and frustrating if you have as your goal to please other people … just an impossible task … don't know how politicians live with themselves;
Very simple standard for knowing the will of God: What is pleasing to Jesus Christ? What is worthy of my union with Him?

C. Results: Maturity / Stability

1. In Ministry

"*bearing fruit in every good work*"

Fruit comes thru:

- death (John 12:24)
- abiding (John 15)

2. In Knowledge

"*increasing in the knowledge of God*"

3. In Power

"*strengthened with all power*"

Emphasis on power in the Christian life is not to perform miracles or special signs … but rather to manifest the fruit of the Holy Spirit in dealing with the difficult people or difficult circumstances that we face day to day …to put up with those things we cannot change

Stedman: When you are faced with irritating circumstances, or difficult people, it takes power to remain patient and longsuffering. Our natural tendency is to get upset, to scream in impatience, or to become resentful and angry. It takes power to resist these when you feel them rising within you. Every believer has that power, and the sign is that they lead quiet, cheerful lives, that hang in to the end. That is what is meant by endurance. The word is best translated "stick-to-it-iveness." People who have this quality don't quit. They hang in there with their relationships, despite the pressures of their work or their circumstances. Endurance is a word that relates primarily to circumstances. The second word, translated here "patience," is really "longsuffering," a willingness to wait and not pay back in kind. It has to do with willingness to forgive and refusing to take revenge.

Don't do all this with some type of stoic stiff upper lip … like a sour old Christian who just trying to hang in there until God calls Him home to glory … NO … attitude of joy and thanksgiving

4. In Worship
   "*giving thanks to the Father*"

What do we have to be thankful for:

a) Inheritance: We share in the *Inheritance* – by virtue of family identity
   no poverty; no hopelessness

b) Deliverance: "*Delivered us from the domain of darkness*"
   no bondage; no fear

c) Victory: "*Transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son*"
   no loneliness; no feeling like an outsider or unwanted or unloved

d) Redemption: = *Forgiveness of Sins*
   no beating up ourselves about our sins; no shame

cf. Images of the Christian life = images of stability:

- not a balance beam … where one slight nudge from false doctrine and you fall flat on your face
- not an emotional teeter totter – with drastic swings up and down

but rather:

- a tree – with deep roots

cf. our Christmas tree this past season – no roots in a dead tree … as long as we kept the stand filled with water and the tree fed, no problem … but when we stopped feeding the tree .. brilliant move – see that way we won't spill any water when we take it down … Problem: got 9 AM call at work from Julie (never good to get those calls at 9 AM) – Guess what, Dad? The tree fell over and broke a bunch of ornaments –
No roots, no stability

- a house built on a solid foundation

CONCLUSION:

- Are we committed to keep growing in the fundamental areas of Christian Core Competencies? Faith, hope, love

- Are we confident in the power of the gospel of truth – not only to change our life at salvation but to continue to change us and to bring about fruit in the lives of others?

- Are we concerned for ongoing growth in practical spiritual knowledge that will help us to experience the power of God?

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) To what extent is my life characterized by Faith, Love and Hope? Where have I seen growth recently in any of these areas? How is the gospel continuing to bear fruit in my life today?

2) What can we learn from the life of Epaphras to make us more effective servants of the Lord?

3) Am I consumed with a desire to know the will of God in all spiritual wisdom and understanding in order that I might practice it? How do I pray for and encourage others to this end?

4) Is God's power showing itself in my life in terms of patience towards external circumstances that I cannot change and longsuffering towards difficult people whom I cannot change?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kent: "Paul's appointment to his apostleship had come about by God's intention. It was not the result of personal ambition, a fine education, parental guidance, or encouragement from friends. Rather, it occurred by the will of God who had planned it from beginning to end (Gal. 1:1, 15)."

Kent: "Of special interest is the slightly different form of the word for 'bearing fruit' in 1:6 (a middle voice of the participle), compared to its use in 1:10 (an active voice). In 1:6 the term is used of the gospel which 'bears fruit of itself,' that is, out of its own inherent energy … In 1:10, however, the word describes believers, who do not bear fruit of themselves but by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus a form of the word is used which does not suggest 'of itself' or 'of themselves.'"

Kent: "This strengthening, however, is not for the purpose of enabling believers to work great miracles or perform stupendous feats before a skeptical world. It is rather for the production of spiritual fruit, particularly under trying circumstances. The display of patience (endurance under trial) and longsuffering (non-retaliation), coupled with joy, is not always easy to demonstrate. But when the believer is confronted with adversity, whether from harsh circumstances or hostile persons, and can respond as Paul here describes, it is good evidence that he has learned something of the will of God, and has drawn upon the resources of the Holy Spirit."

Wiersbe: "The word *filled* is a key word in Colossians. It was also a key word in the teachings of the false teachers who had invaded the Colossian church. Paul used it many times. (See Col. 1:19, 25; 2:2, 9-10; 4:12, 17 [*Complete* = '*filled full'*]). The word carries the idea of being fully equipped. It was used to describe a ship that was ready for a voyage. The believer has in Christ all that he needs for the voyage of life. '*And you are complete in Him'* (Col. 2:10). '*And of His fullness have all we received*' (John 1:16)."

Wiersbe: Re Patience – "Too many Christians have a tendency to quit when circumstances become difficult. The saintly Dr. V. Raymond Edman, late president of Wheaton College (Illinois), used to remind the students, 'It is always too soon to quit.'

I have often thought of that statement when I find myself in the midst of trying circumstances. It is not talent or training that guarantees victory: it is perseverance. 'By perseverance the snail reached the ark,' said Charles Spurgeon."

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

TITLE: THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST

BIG IDEA:
CHRIST DESERVES THE PREEMINENCE BY VIRTUE OF:
- HIS POSITION OF HEADSHIP
- AND HIS WORK OF RECONCILIATION
(WITH RESPECT TO ALL OF CREATION AND TO THE CHURCH)

INTRODUCTION:
As you walk up the stairs in our house to the top floor a portrait of Karen's Dad hangs on the wall. It is a very impressive painting … shows him in his full Air Force dress uniform with all of his medals and his distinctive stripes as Chief Master Sergeant … but not just any Chief Master Sergeant … for the Air Force has many of these … but the setting is in his Pentagon office with the flag of the United States of America and that of the Air Force … you see Dick Kisling for a period of time was THE Chief Master Sergeant of the entire Air Force – the one preeminent enlisted man – a position of tremendous respect and importance. He was appointed to that position by virtue of his accomplishments and the respect he had earned throughout his career. I look at that portrait and it makes me proud … the man who was the head of my wife's home rose through the ranks to be first place among all the enlisted men in the Air Force.

This week probably many of us saw our Commander-In-Chief President George W. Bush as he answered questions at a televised news conference about the possibility of having to go to war to disarm Iraq. Whatever you might think of his policies, isn't it nice to have at the head of our country a man who is deserving of our respect not just on the basis of his position alone, but also on the basis of his character. A man who sincerely desires and appreciates the prayers of all those who would lift him up before the Lord – a man who seems to truly want to submit to the Lord's guidance.

Today we are going to focus on the ideas of **preeminence** and **supremacy**. But we are going to look at one who is exalted far above any created being – far above President George Bush and even far above any of the angelic beings. We are going to look at the Preeminence of the very Creator Himself -- our Lord Jesus Christ

CHRIST DESERVES THE PREEMINENCE BY VIRTUE OF:
- HIS POSITION OF HEADSHIP
- AND HIS WORK OF RECONCILIATION
- WITH RESPECT TO ALL OF CREATION
- AND WITH RESPECT TO THE CHURCH

easy to see where we get the 4 main points

(Read the passage 1:15-23)

(:18b) THESIS: *"so that He himself might come to have first place **in everything**"*
Both in the first creation (the entire cosmos) and in the new creation (the church), Christ occupies the first place.
Some Definitions of "*preeminence*":
- "having top rank, dignity, or importance; outstanding, supreme"
- "high status and importance owing to marked superiority"
- "superior to or notable above all others"
In other words, to be preeminent is to be "more" or "better" than anything else.

Look at how much effort people invest to be a world champion at anything … to be able to receive the gold medal and know that at least for that moment in time you were the best at that particular event. Kids, you understand what first place is all about… Our family watched Star Search Friday night because a little 10 year old girl was competing as a singer – a girl that Julie has done a number of shows with – we were hoping for a first place … what a difference between first place and also ran …

Christ stands in first place in all the things that **really count** – and He occupies that place at the top – the place of supreme authority and respect and power – for a very long time -- until the end comes that is talked about in **1 Cor. 15:25-28** when He turns around and subjects all things under the Father – somewhat of a divine mystery as to how they share the spotlight back and forth

Col. 1 – very important text for studying the person of Christ –
- ranks up there with **Hebrews 1** – showing the superiority of Christ over all previous revelation through the prophets, over all created beings – even the angels;

- ranks up there with **Philippians 2** – the kenosis passage; remember how much we learned about humility and servanthood from the example of Christ

You can refute almost any cult or false teaching by examining how they fail to give Christ His due in terms of His Deity or Sufficiency or Supremacy or Exclusivity – Cults will always come up short in terms of **how they view Christ** ….
And they will always come up short in terms of how they understand and portray the **grace of God**
Get to know Christ better and you will have confidence facing the smokescreen of specific questions that are launched against you – remember, it is not an intellectual battle that we are fighting – it is a battle over who has the preeminence in your heart

I. (:15-17) CHRIST DESERVES THE PREEMINENCE BY VIRTUE OF HIS POSITION OF HEADSHIP OVER ALL CREATION – THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD

A. Preeminent by Virtue of His Deity = "*the image of the invisible God*"
Sounds like a contradiction that we can see the image of that which is invisible

(cf. John 1:18 *"No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him*."
Heb. 1:3 *"and He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power*.")

Emphasis here on Jesus as the one revealing God; not just a representation but a complete manifestation – the only way through whom we can know God!
God's ultimate true revelation of Himself
God cannot be seen with the naked eye; God is veiled to us; His majesty and glory beyond us; yet God wants us to comprehend Him; He wants us to know Him . . .
The mystery of the incarnation and the two natures of full humanity and full deity

- Charles Wesley's wonderful phrase from "Hark, The Herald Angels Sing,"
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail the Incarnate Deity

B. Preeminent as the Unique Son of God = "*the first-born of **all creation***"
This description has been twisted by the cults to try to prove a subordinate role for Christ … it does not require that He be a part of creation and thus "born" in contradiction to His eternal existence
stressing instead His special place of privilege and power; the one who inherits all the rights of the first-born – as the owner … the possessor (Stedman)
first in honor and rank; first-born got double inheritance
ranks above all creation; but also the source of creation as the passage continues

(Stedman: But (and this is the important point) there are other meanings of the word. It is most frequently translated "firstborn" in the sense of **heir, the owner, the possessor of creation**. This is certainly the meaning it conveys here. I found myself recently standing next to Dr. Carl Henry, whom I regard as the greatest theologian alive today. Since I knew I would be preaching on this passage I took the occasion to ask him how he would translate this phrase. This was his answer: "It should be translated," he said, '"the Primeval Creator of all created things."' Jesus is the one who possesses, as heir or owner, all other things.)

(Piper: Verse 16 clearly teaches that Christ is the "first-born of all creation" not in the sense that he is part of creation but in the sense that he is OVER all creation. "Without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3).)

C. Preeminent as the Creator of all things – "*all things have been created by Him*"
"in the heavens" "on the earth"
"invisible" "visible"

includes all types of angels and spiritual beings
"*whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities*"
We don't seem to really understand all that is going on behind the scenes of human govt.

Important to understand something about **the error of the Colossians**:

They were confusing the importance and the role of angels with the importance and role of Christ … they held to this dichotomy between God who is holy and matter which is inherently evil … therefore, God could not directly create matter … therefore they theorized that the realm of invisible angelic beings was somehow a series of middle ground links (emanations) to make possible this connection between God and the creation of matter … Jesus was a very important element in this whole structure … but **not true God** existing from all eternity and **not the uniquely preeminent one** who had created all other things

This is the tactic that cults take … yes, Christ is important … yes He is a great Prophet … but He just doesn't measure up to Jehovah God in some aspects …. I.e. He is not who He said He was
I like to go back to the Liar, Lunatic or Lord Argument – don't let them off the hook but expose how negatively they have treated Christ

Going to be the same situation in later weeks when we switch gears and talk about the Sufficiency of Christ … Yes, his death was important … but you also need to rely on X , Y and Z – you need to observe the feasts … you need to practice asceticism … you need this special knowledge that will make you one of the elite ….

D. Preeminent as the Goal of Creation

*"**all things** have been created … for Him"*

Ron Steele: He's the point and we are not – big problem: we think everything should revolve around us; we become control freaks; life doesn't work when we try to play God

Here is where we see how important it is not to give any ground to the humanistic error of **evolution** …. Christ is the center of the universe …. You deny that and you eliminate all accountability … no possibility of some type of compromise with evolution – 2 very diverse systems in terms of explaining both the origin and the goal of the universe

E. Preeminent as the Precursor of Creation

"*He is before **all things***" (in the sense of time)

F. Preeminent as the Sustainer of Creation

"*in Him **all things** hold together*"

Discuss some of the scientific questions and confusion regarding this issue; Points to God as the one who sustains the ordered cosmos which He has designed and created

MacArthur:

“Upholding” the earth or "maintaining." It's used in the present tense, implying continuous action. Everything in the universe is sustained at this moment by Jesus Christ.

a) Avoiding chaos

Our lives depend on the constancy of physical laws. When an earthquake occurs and shifts things a bit, that's cause for concern or panic, depending on the severity of the quake. Can you imagine what would happen if Jesus Christ relinquished His sustaining power to the laws of the earth and the universe? We would go out of existence. Even if He simply stopped holding the law of gravity where it is we would all die. If the laws of science varied, we couldn't exist. The food you eat could turn to poison. You wouldn't be able to stay on the earth--you'd fall off, if you weren't drowned by the ocean first!

Consider what would happen if things changed. The sun has a surface temperature of twelve thousand degrees Fahrenheit. If it were any closer to earth, we’d burn; and if it were any further, we'd freeze. Our globe is tilted on an exact angle of 23 degrees, which enables us to have four seasons. If it weren't tilted, vapors from the ocean would move north and south, eventually piling up monstrous continents of ice. If the moon did not remain a specific distance from the earth, the ocean tide would completely inundate the land twice a day. If the ocean floor merely slipped a few feet deeper, the carbon dioxide and oxygen balance in the earth's atmosphere would be completely upset, and no vegetable or animal life could exist on earth. If our atmosphere suddenly thinned out, many of the meteors that now harmlessly burn up when they hit our atmosphere would constantly bombard us.

b) Maintaining the cosmos

Things don't happen in our universe by accident. Jesus Christ sustains the universe. He is the principle of cohesion. He is not the deist's watchmaker creator who made the world, set it in motion, and hasn't bothered with it since. The reason the universe is a cosmos and not chaos--an ordered and reliable system instead of an erratic and unpredictable muddle--is the upholding power of Jesus Christ.

Scientists who think they are discovering great truths are doing nothing more than discovering the sustaining laws that Christ uses to control the world. No scientist--no mathematician, astronomer, or nuclear physicist--could do anything without the upholding power of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ monitors and sustains the movements and developments of the universe, for the entire universe hangs on the arm of Jesus. His unsearchable wisdom and boundless power are manifested in the governing of the universe. And He upholds it all by the word of His power.

II. (:18-19) CHRIST DESERVES THE PREEMINENCE BY VIRTUE OF HIS POSITION OF HEADSHIP OVER THE CHURCH – THE EMBODIMENT OF ALL THE FULNESS OF GOD

(Wiersbe: switches focus from the old natural creation to His new spiritual creation") To understand the church and how it should function, think about your own body and how it functions.

Not spend a lot of time here … we have had a lot of teaching on this … understand this pretty well …

A. Preeminent by Virtue of His Deity = "***all the fulness*** *dwells in Him*"
consistent with *"the Father's good pleasure"*

Kent: "'*Fullness'* (*pleroma*) was a term used in Gnostic literature to denote the totality of the divine powers and attributes. These were considered to be distributed among various aeons or emanations (i.e., actual beings who mediated between God and men). The entire series of aeons was known as the *pleroma*. In Paul's day (a century before full-flowered Gnosticism), the term apparently referred to the totality of the divine attributes, as indicated by Paul's clarifying phrase in 2:9, '*all the fulness of Deity*' (NASB). Hence, in contrast to the heretical teaching which would share divine honors with angelic beings (2:18), Paul affirms that all the divine powers reside in Christ. There are no other mediating agents. Furthermore, this fullness which Christ possesses is a permanent possession (*katoikesai*)."

B. Preeminent by Virtue of His Headship over His Body = the Church
"*He is also head of the body, the church*"

C. Preeminent by Virtue of His Leadership in Resurrection
"*He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead*"

Stedman: Paul says, Jesus is "*the firstborn from among the dead*." Many take that to mean he is the first one ever to be resurrected. That is certainly true. The resurrection of Jesus is the only resurrection that has ever occurred on this earth. Lazarus, and all the others who came back from the dead, were simply resuscitated: they came back to the same life they had left. We may even feel a bit sorry for them because they had to come back to take it up again. But Jesus was truly resurrected. He was given a glorified life: he came from the grave at a far higher level than he went in. He returned in a glorified body, subject to different laws and governed by different principles. But that is not what is meant here. That is what Paul calls "the first-fruits of them that slept." But here "firstborn" means what it does in verse 15. We have already seen that it means the owner, the possessor, of the old creation. Here then it means the **owner, possessor, of the new creation**. He is the One who alone possesses the resurrection life that he gives to each of us. That is what John is saying in his first letter, in chapter 5, verse 11: "This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life [deathless life, resurrection life], and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." He may be moral, he may be a nice

person, but he does not yet possess the life of eternity, the resurrection life of Jesus, because that life comes from Jesus alone.

Lots of **practical applications** when it comes to the local church … for that is the only place we really participate in the full experience of the connected body … with qualified elders with participation in the Lord's Supper … with the proper, healthy exercise of church discipline … with the structure that can best help us grow and reproduce …

I would love to spend 2 hours here sharing my deep convictions about how this truth touches the necessity for a fully functioning model of plurality of elder leadership … I tried to refrain entirely from mentioning this application …. But I just couldn't shut up here… so here is my quick 2 cents worth and then we will move on:
you see **3 John** says that Diotrophes got the model all wrong … his problem is described as *"he loves to be first among them"* – What's the problem … he's probably a very gifted, very charismatic leader with a powerful personality who can really get things done … the problem is that **Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church** … He is the Chief Shepherd … He is the One who is to have the preeminence … God doesn't present that as spiritual idealism or holier than thou platitudes …. He wants us to function that way as a practical reality!
That is why we don't have just one undershepherd … in other words when people ask you: Who's the pastor over at Open Door … I hope you take the time to shake them out of their traditional world and explain: Right now we have 2 pastors who are serving the flock as a team … Pastor Brian Racer and Pastor Paul Bowman … Or you could even take the bolder approach and try to explain the practical aspects of the shepherding work of Jesus Christ over His body at Open Door – but there you'd better be ready for some real raised eyebrows … you see today's Christian church wants to be able to point to one dynamic leader and label that person as THE PASTOR and take security in the fact that they know and can physically see and others can physically see who is running the ship …
But I won't get sidetracked down this trail because we have to move on …

III. (:20) CHRIST DESERVES THE PREEMINENCE BY VIRTUE OF HIS WORK OF RECONCILIATION – WITH RESPECT TO CREATION

Here is an aspect of Christ's work on a cosmic scale that we don't seem to talk about much: so you can expect some complexity here and some aspect of mystery that is difficult for us to fully comprehend

A. Emphasis = "*through Him*" = Christ
   Note the word order in the Greek and the repetition of this phrase

B. Universal Scope of Reconciliation – "***all things***"
   1. "*things on earth*"

2. *"things in heaven"*

Now some would take this to just refer to all believers … but I think the reference must be taken in the widest possible sense …
How can this be? Are we preaching **Universalism** … where everyone has been brought into a relationship of peace with God??

Herries: all things to be brought under His will and made to serve His purposes

Now with respect to unbelievers … this reconciliation so that they are made to serve God's purpose will involve judgment and condemnation and eternal punishment in hell … not the type of peace that we normally think of with respect to reconciliation … but necessary for the removal of sin and for their to be the enjoyment of righteousness on any scale…

Romans 8:18 ff addresses this important topic …
"the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God …" but what about the unsaved … keep reading … **Romans 9:21-22** "does not the potter have a right over the clay …"

Lenski: The cross affects "*all creation*." Each part of it is not affected in the identical way but according to the nature, the condition, and the relation of each part to the whole.
That is saying a mouthful right there … these things are not all supposed to be simple … We are talking about the Plan of the Sovereign God here

C. Nature of this Reconciliation
1. Directed towards God the Father – "*to Himself*"

2. *"having made peace"*

D. Means of Accomplishing this Reconciliation
"through the blood of His cross"

Again, much more could be said … but let's touch on the last point:

IV. (:21-23) CHRIST DESERVES THE PREEMINENCE BY VIRTUE OF HIS WORK OF RECONCILIATION – WITH RESPECT TO THE CHURCH

A. Need for Reconciliation (Scope = Gentile emphasis)
1. Alienated by Position
"you were formerly alienated"

2. Alienated by Active Rebellion in Mind
"hostile in mind"

3. Alienated by Active Rebellion in Deed
"engaged in evil deeds"

Remember the old slogan: "**You've come a long way baby**" -- I think it was applied to women having the equal oppty with men to kill themselves with smoking the cancer sticks … Do we appreciate how far away from God each of us was and what a tremendous work of reconciliation Christ accomplished??

B. Nature of this Reconciliation
"*He has now reconciled you*"

C. Means of Accomplishing this Reconciliation
"*in His fleshly body through death*"

D. Goal of Reconciliation
"*in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach*"
Is God's Goal your goal? Or do you want to flirt with sin?? Do you want to be Like the world so you don't have to bear the reproach of the cross … do you want just enough holiness to ease your conscience a little …

E. Human Responsibility: Perseverance in the Faith (:23)

1. Perseverance = Necessary Confirmation of the Genuineness of our Faith
"*if indeed you continue in the faith*"

Touched on this some last week in the Sunday School hour …
Very important topic that deserves a lot of preaching … because we don't understand it … we haven't been taught this in our circles …. Why do you think other denominations are so popular … cf the PCA – excellent churches – stress some doctrines that we have not traditionally done a very good job with .. Does that mean I agree with everything … NO but I appreciate most things … and am coming more and more to question whether I am right about certain areas …nothing wrong with that …

Important quote about the need for us to exercise more critical thinking and not just passively receive everything ….

I had a conversation many moons ago with someone at Open Door … in one of my former lives …. I felt things were too regimented … too legalistic and that there was some amount of pressure to get everybody to think alike on everything … this person maybe didn't understand the gist of my question .. but his response was: "Yes, we all do think alike at Open Door" …. That is fine to some extent …
But I came across a quote this past week from General George Patton:

"If everyone is thinking alike, then someone isn't thinking"

I think we need a lot more growth in wisdom and maturity to help us differentiate between the fundamentals and those areas where we should be open to entertaining some diversity ..

Kent:
the evidence that Christ's reconciling work has been truly received by the one who claims to believe is his continuance in the faith. 'If you continue' states the test whereby one may examine himself to see whether he really has appropriated Christ's work on his behalf. To continue in the faith is to remain steadfast in one's commitment to Christ, without falling prey to the religious fads that periodically capture the attention of the church. One is not saved by his own efforts to please God; neither is he kept secure by human determination and perseverance. But the saved person will persevere because he has been made a new creation in Christ (II Cor. 5:17), and the new life implanted by Christ will be developed by the Spirit and brought to completion (Phil. 1:6). He whose 'faith' does not continue with appropriate evidences reveals that he never had true saving faith at all (James 2:14, 17; 1 John 2:19).

2. Three Components of Perseverance
    a. "*firmly established*"

    b. "*steadfast*"

    c. "*not moved away*"

3. Benchmark of Perseverance = "*the hope of the gospel*"

takes us back to last week's emphasis on the gospel of truth – the objective anchor
the universal and efficacious gospel message

Piper: The gospel is not merely a proclamation of good news. It is the power of God to save. It comes not only in word but in power and in the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:5). It is the instrument of God's effectual call (2 Thessalonians 2:14). It is the occasion of his regenerating power (1 Peter 1:23. . .). It accomplishes what God sends it forth to do.

a. Message to the Church at Colossae
    "*that you have heard*"

b. Consistent with the Message to all of Creation
    "*which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven*"

Piper: Literally we could translate the last part of verse 23, "the Gospel which you heard, the one preached in all creation under heaven." This wouldn't imply that the job is done. It would simply imply that it is the gospel's destiny to be preached everywhere, and that this is in fact happening. Verse 6 suggests that this is what Paul means. He refers to the gospel "which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing." The point in both texts is that the gospel is not for just one group, but for the world; and that it is in fact making great headway through the world.

c. Consistent with the Ministry of the Apostle Paul

"of which I , Paul, was made a minister"

CONCLUSION:

As we continue in this study of Colossians in the coming weeks we will find that Christ is **Sufficient** and therefore living out our **Union with Him** is the key to **Spirituality**. But none of that means anything unless we first understand who Christ really is … the *image of the invisible God*, the *fullness of God* – the one who deserves **First Place** – the **Preeminence** – the Head over the first creation and the new creation – the one who has reconciled all things to Himself and most importantly … through His death on the cross has brought us into right relationship with our God.

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SUNDAY SCHOOL:

Practical ways we can give Jesus Christ the Preeminence – put Him in First Place

1) Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness – Matt. 6:33 not our careers

2) 2 Cor. 8:5 First gave their own selves to the Lord – give of our first fruits, not leftovers; living sacrifice Rom. 12

3) What is the First Commandment according to Christ – Mark 12:30

4) Priority of Reconciliation – even over public worship – Matt. 5:24
first be reconciled to thy brother

5) Priority of judging sin in your own life – not going around trying to find fault with others – Matt 7:5

6) Priority of following Christ directly and immediately – over any type of human high level responsibility – Matt 8:21

7) Priority of preaching the gospel Mark 13:10

8) Priority of suffering before entering into glory – Are we greater than our master? Luke 17:25

9) Priority of Prayer – 1 Tim. 2:12 – for all men … and especially those in authority

10) Don't leave our first love – Rev. 2:4

11) Rev. 2:5 Repent and do the deeds you did at first = works of faith

12) Don't take credit or glory for what Christ has accomplished .. He does not want to share His glory

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What have been the practical outworkings of Christ having the *"first place"* in our affections? time? resources? plans? etc. What things tend to compete with Christ having that special supreme place of lordship in your life?

2) What (if anything) is different about the fact that we have been made in the "*image of God*" and Christ is *"the image of the invisible God"*?

3) We don't often think of the invisible realm of angels in terms of *"thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities"* – why is Paul addressing this here?

4) What type of general reconciliation of *"all things"* has Christ accomplished? Why was this necessary? What does it involve and why do I care?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: The fourfold relation of Jesus Christ to creation:
1) He existed before creation
2) He created all things
3) All things exist for him

"Paul's use of three different prepositions is one way of refuting the philosophy of the false teachers. For centuries, the Greek philosophers had taught that everything needed a primary cause, an instrumental cause, and a final cause. The primary cause is the plan, the instrumental cause the power, and the final cause the purpose. When it comes to creation, Jesus Christ is the primary cause (He planned it), the instrumental cause (He produced it), and the final cause (He did it for His own pleasure)."

4) He holds all things together

Kent: "Man is said to be *made* in the image of God. Thus he is a finite image, and subject to all the limitations of that plane of existence. Christ, however, *is* the image. He is the unoriginated, eternal, infinite image of God, on a far higher plane of existence. He not only shared certain God-like qualities as finite man does, but He is the image of God on the same eternal level as the Father Himself (John 1:1). Thus to call Christ the image of God is to identify Him with the eternal Logos, and to equate Him with God."

Carson: "He is not only the agent, but the very goal of their creation. They exist with a view to His glory, and so are subservient to His eternal purpose."

Wiersbe: "Note the verb tenses (in vs. 16) – The contemporary universe is not the result of an ongoing creative process; rather, it is the permanent result of a past creative act."

Vincent: "The passage is aimed at the angel-worship of the Colossians, showing that while they have been discussing the various grades of angels which fill the space

between God and men … they have degraded Christ who is above all and is the sole mediator."

Bruce: "Everything in the universe has been subjected to Christ even as everything was created for Him. By His reconciling work, the host of the high ones on high and sinful men on earth have been decisively subdued to the will of God, and can but subserve His purpose, whether they please or not. (cf. Phil. 2:11)"

Bruce: "The Incarnation of the Son of God was real and necessary for the vindication of God's righteousness in the bestowal of His peace on sinful men."

Carson: Re vs. 23 – "Such a glorious prospect must not lull them into any spirit of complacency or slackness. God who has ordained the end has also ordained the means, which is their continuing faithfulness."

Lightfoot:
:15 Person of Christ described first in relation to Deity and then in relation to Creation

the fundamental conception of the Logos involves the idea of Mediation between God and creation; correcting a false view of that mediation

"the image"
1) Representation – a copy of an archetype; nature derived from its prototype; word alone does not necessarily connote perfection
2) Manifestation – making the invisible visible

"first-born of all creation"
    the eldest son
    title for the Messiah
priority to all creation – before all creation (not part of God's creation)
    stated that He created all things
    stated in context that He was before all things
sovereignty over all creation – the natural ruler
right to full inheritance

:17 "he is the principle of cohesion in the universe. He impresses upon creation that unity and solidarity which makes it a cosmos instead of a chaos.

:18 he is the source and the beginning of the life of the church

concept of the "head" – the inspiring, ruling, guiding, sustaining power, the mainspring of its activity, the centre of its unity, and the seat of its life

Lucas:
Supremacy and sufficiency of Christ presented as the safeguard against false teaching

What was happening in Colossae was that the Christians seemed ready to deny the sufficiency of Christ for all their spiritual needs, and therefore, in practice, to deny the supremacy of Christ to which they were already committed.

the new teachers were claiming too much authority. They evidently wished to 'head-up' the work at Colossae and be the unchallenged fount of wisdom and instruction. Authoritarian leadership of this kind is always dangerous for the churches; it can too easily mean that they lose their hold on their heavenly leader.

What you once were (:21)
Where you now stand (:22)
How you must go on (:23)

Laurin: vs. 18 *all fullness dwell*
Whatever necessity would arise in the church would be met by the sufficiency of its Head, Jesus Christ, for in him dwelt all fulness. This meant that every member of this body had available to him the unlimited power of its head. It meant a complete fitness for life. It meant a practical union of life in which man's need could be met by God's power.

Stedman: The most astonishing phenomenon today is to see men who work with this physical universe, who intimately observe the beauty, order, and power inherent in the natural world as well as in the world of humanity, yet who fail to see the Power behind it all; the ordered Intelligence that possesses and originates all these things. I do not understand how a man like Carl Sagan can work in the field of astronomy, knowing of the great secrets that are now coming to light in the universe, and yet go on breathing air which God has supplied, eating the food with which God has stocked this earth, and relying moment by moment on a heartbeat whose continuation rests in the will of Someone other than himself, yet can busy himself telling us that only man matters! It is a phenomenon beyond my understanding.

Stedman: Re Reconciliation
The basic meaning of this word is "to remove all impediments to peace" so that harmony prevails.

What does it mean, then, that Jesus shall "reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven"? It means a day is coming when the hostility of evil against righteousness will be brought to a sudden halt. Evil men and angels will find themselves unable to function in their enmity against God. They will be subdued, and will cease their rebellion. It does not mean their punishment ends; it is their active hostility that will cease. Then, at last, the terrible question that every one of us has asked at times, "Why does God permit evil?" will be answered. There is coming a day, according to this verse, when all will be explained to us: Why do the good suffer? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why does injustice reign triumphant at times?

Piper: emphasis on "the hope of the gospel"

Zeisler: people trying to find God
Now, you may have read of or even known someone who went on a pilgrimage to find God. History gives us many accounts of those who have done extraordinary things---they went off into the desert for decades at a time by themselves, lived with barely adequate clothing, climbed the mountains of Tibet, made pilgrimages to Mecca, and went through all sorts of deprivation---so deep was their longing to know God, to find their origin, to answer the problem raised in Ecclesiastes that life is meaningless, circular, and that nothing amounts to anything. They must find God if they are to find meaning. I even think when adults go on quests to find parents from whom they have been estranged, trying to put together what was broken or find what has been lost in relationships with relatives, that these are ways of looking back to foundations to try to find meaning. They mirror the greater hunger to ultimately find our purpose in our creator. And yet he is not far away. He has made himself known in Christ, the image of the invisible God.

Morgan: DEFILED UNIVERSE AND ALIENATED MANKIND RECONCILED TO GOD BY JESUS CHRIST (this is the answer to the Gnostic heresy)

NATURE OF RECONCILIATION -- "having made peace" -- to bind together
(things that were going in opposite direction)

II. NEED FOR RECONCILIATION
A. Things in heaven need to be reconciled (Heb. 9:23-24) -- pattern of heavens needs to be purified

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 1:24-29

TITLE: PASSION FOR PROCLAIMING CHRIST --
HOW TO BE A HERO IN SERVING CHRIST

BIG IDEA:
PAUL'S PASSION FOR PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST DROVE HIM TO FULFILL HIS CALLING TO SACRIFICIALLY MINISTER TO THE GENTILES

INTRODUCTION
I am going to present each of you with a special opportunity this morning … an opportunity to be **a hero** in serving Jesus Christ. We just read a passage that talks about Paul's Passion for Proclaiming Jesus Christ … if ever there was a hero in Christian service it was the Apostle Paul. We all know what a hero is **… kids** … what makes someone a hero …

- someone who fulfills a difficult mission
- requiring great courage
- in overcoming great dangers
- in order to benefit others

(Acts 9:4-6;15-16) – What was Paul's ordained ministry? His Calling? His special role in the Body of Christ? Paul's reflection back on how he has lived out this special calling:

- remembers the personal involvement of Christ in persecutions directed against His body
  "*Why are you persecuting me*?"
- remembers the privilege of intimacy with Christ involved with suffering for the cause of the gospel
  "*for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake*"

Paul's passion to fulfill his calling drove him to overcome all obstacles and endure any degree of hardship.

One of our problems is that the Christian church today is all mixed up when it comes to understanding the concept of **the calling of God**. First, we think in grandiose terms of :

- the calling of God to **Moses** from the burning bush
  "*I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people out of Egypt*"
  And by the way, here are some impressive signs to confirm your calling …
- the calling of **Gideon** – the angel of the Lord coming:
  "*The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior* (a little tongue in cheek)
  Go and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian." And by the way here are some impressive signs to confirm your calling
- the calling of **Jeremiah**
  "*before I formed you in the womb I knew you* (certainly could be said about us as well); *And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations*"
  But, Jeremiah, don't be surprised when no one listens to you and appreciates your ministry
- and as we have already mentioned the dramatic calling of **Paul** on road to Damascus

Have you ever been called like that?? I don't think so. I think our calling is primarily the outworking of our understanding of how God has gifted us spiritually. Then we are seeking His guidance as to the circumstances for the deployment of that gifted ministry. The end result is our sense of God's calling to us personally. Why do I say this is a problem? 2 extreme wrong reactions:

- We excuse ourselves from ministry, from missionary work overseas, from the difficulty and the suffering and the hardship – "I was never called like that" – passivity
- We respond on an emotional basis out of presumption and set ourselves up for failure

But we add to our confusion by associating the concept of **full-time Christian service** with this important concept of calling …. Nothing wrong with us freeing up Pastor Brian to labor full-time … that is a good thing … but I want to clarify some things with respect to this concept of **calling.** You see the primary focus of Paul's calling **was not** that he had been called to full-time Christian service … the aspect of money and support depended on a whole complex series of factors… factors that changed depending on Paul's circumstances … but it was not **intrinsic** to his sense of God's calling. Sometimes he was supported (whether being content with much or content with almost nothing) … sometimes he made tents and supported himself … sometimes he supported others in the ministry … but his passion for ministry and sense of calling never changed. What this artificial dichotomy (between those who have been called to full-time service and those who have not) creates is a two-tiered class system within the body of Christ – a wrong sense of entitlement – a diminishing of the ministry burden on the laity (who are distinguished from the professional clergy) – a lot of bad things come out of this confusion. The money should come to Christian workers by virtue of their proven giftedness and effectiveness and because of our desire to free them up for more ministry .. not as an **entitlement** on the basis of their sense of calling to full-time ministry. Have to leave this and go on …. Someone needs to write a book about the Biblical doctrine of calling ….

What is our **passion in life**? We **each** better have one and it had better relate to:

- God's program for today = the church and the fulfillment of the Great Commission
- our spiritual giftedness – sad when you see people preaching because they have a conviction they have been called into full-time Christian ministry in the context of the church … and the one who makes the money doing that = the one doing the preaching … so that is what they end up spending their time at when they are gifted in another area!

cf. the language of quest or adventure … such as the movie: Raiders of the Lost Ark where "the hero sets off on an extraordinary challenge, questing for something that is of great value, suffering and being deprived, but extending himself because the challenge is so worthy of the effort" – Zeisler

We can identify with what Paul is saying here if we have some sense of our passion and our calling and the sacrifices we are making to pursue those .. then we have the chance to become a hero in serving Christ

PAUL'S PASSION FOR PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST DROVE HIM TO FULFILL HIS CALLING TO SACRIFICIALLY MINISTER TO THE GENTILES

I. (:24) THE MISERY? OF PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES – PAUL'S PASSION DROVE HIM TO SUFFER PHYSICALLY FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

SUFFERING PHYSICALLY

Hymn: "Must I be carried to the skies in flowery beds of ease,
while others fought to win the prize and sailed thru bloody seas."

A. Physical Suffering – "*in my flesh*" 2 Cor. 11 – catalog of Paul's sufferings
   1. "*sufferings*"
   2. "*afflictions*"

What do I know about SUFFERING for the cause of Christ? I might know plenty about suffering for my own stupidity … just have to pull up my 401k numbers ….
I might hurt inside for a couple of hours when the Terps get unceremoniously knocked out of the ACC tournament … I might be a miserable recluse and feel sorry for myself when I am laid up with some type of sickness … But can we really identify with what Paul is talking about here?

Our church in the United States is one of Prosperity rather than suffering … but there are many types of suffering that go beyond physical persecution … if you truly have a testimony of having been faithful to your calling, you won't lack for examples of how it has cost you and what you have been called to suffer

B. Spiritual Joy – "*Now I rejoice*" – so he didn't look at it as Misery
   What gave him cause for such surprising joy?
   Didn't love to get beat; but rejoices in his sufferings because they are purposeful
      cf. in house arrest at Rome so he had oppty to write letters such as this
      giving up his physical life so that others might have the privilege of spiritual life
   "*Now*" is emphatic by position

C. Unselfish Orientation
   1. "*for your sake*" (repeatedly emphasized in this passage)
   2. "*I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church)*"

D. Fellowship with Christ – "*in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions*"
   How could anything be lacking in Christ's sufferings? Difficult concept
   1. Privilege of suffering for the cause of Christ
   2. Distinction between Christ's suffering for our sins on the Cross and His sufferings for righteousness sake by virtue of His identification with the Father;
      Difficult phrase here – the word "*lacking*" does not refer to something negative, but rather to the concept of quantity – there is some sum total of suffering for the sake of righteousness which has yet to be completed; call it a predestined amount of suffering until we reach the culmination … just as there is a predetermined number of the elect that will eventually be saved
   3. Contrast between physical body of Christ and spiritual body of Christ

Piper:

I think the context that we just looked at suggests that Paul's sufferings fill up Christ's not by adding anything to their worth, but by extending them to the people they were meant to bless. What is lacking in the afflictions of Christ is not that they are deficient in worth or merit, as though they could not sufficiently cover the sins of all who believe. What is lacking is that the infinite value of Christ's afflictions are not known in the world. They are still a mystery (hidden) to most peoples. And God's intention is that the mystery be revealed, extended to all the Gentiles. So the afflictions are lacking in the sense that they are not seen and known among the nations. They must be carried by ministers of the word. And those ministers of the word fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ by extending them to others.

There is a strong confirmation of this in the use of similar words in Philippians 2:30. There was a man named Epaphroditus in the church at Philippi. When the church there gathered support for Paul (perhaps money or supplies or books), they decided to send them to Paul in Rome by the hand of Epaphroditus. In his travels with this supply Epaphroditus almost loses his life. Verse 27 says he was sick to the point of death, but God spared him.

Then in verse 29 Paul tells the church in Philippi to honor Epaphroditus when he comes back, and he gives his reason in verse 30 which has words very similar to Colossians 1:24. "Because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete (i.e. fill up) what was deficient (i.e. lacking) in your service to me." Now in the original the phrase "completing what was deficient" in your service to me is almost the same as "filling up what is lacking" in Christ's afflictions in Colossians 1:24.

In what sense then was the service of the Philippians to Paul "lacking" and in what sense did Epaphroditus "fill up" what was lacking in their service? A hundred years ago a commentator, Marvin Vincent, I think gets it exactly right.

The gift to Paul was a gift of the church as a body. It was a sacrificial offering of love. What was lacking, and what would have been grateful to Paul and to the church alike, was the church's presentation of this offering in person. This was impossible, and Paul represents Epaphroditus as supplying this lack by his affectionate and zealous ministry. (I.C.C., Epistle to the Philippians and to Philemon, p. 78)

I think that is exactly what the words mean in Colossians 1:24 as well. Christ has prepared a love offering for the world by suffering and dying for sinners. It is full and lacking in nothing--except one thing, a personal presentation by Christ himself to the nations of the world and the people of your work place. God's answer to this lack is to call the people of Christ (people like Paul) to present the afflictions of Christ to the world--to carry them from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

In doing this we "fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ." We finish what they were designed for, namely, a personal presentation to the world of people who do not know about their infinite worth.

But notice how Paul says this in verse 24: He says that it is in his sufferings and in his flesh--that is, his actual, suffering body that he does his share in filling up the afflictions of Christ. So Paul sees a very close connection between his sufferings and Christ's afflictions. What this means, I think, is that God intends for the afflictions of Christ to be presented to the world through the afflictions of his people. God really means for the body of Christ, the church, to experience some of the suffering he experienced so that when we offer the Christ of the cross to people, they see the Christ of the cross in us. We are to make the afflictions of Christ real for people by the afflictions we experience

in offering him to them, and living the life of love he lived.

"I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake . . . filling up that which is lacking in the afflictions of Christ." Christ wills to have a personal presentation of his sufferings to the world. And the way he means to offer himself as a sufferer for the world to the world is through his people who, like him, are willing to suffer for the world. His sufferings are completed in our sufferings because in ours the world sees his , and they have their appointed effect. The suffering love of Christ for sinners is seen in the suffering love of his people for sinners.

I think what we see in Colossians 1:24 is the living out of Jesus' words in Mark 8:35, "Whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's shall save it." The pathway of salvation is the pathway of "losing one's life for the sake of the gospel." The point is that taking the gospel to people (across the office or across the ocean) ordinarily requires sacrifice and suffering, a losing of life or a denying of self. This is the way Christ means for his saving sufferings to be taken to the world, through the sufferings of his people.

Message of **1 Peter** – We must embrace suffering

BY THE GRACE OF GOD, THE PERSECUTED CHURCH FINDS VINDICATION AND VICTORY THRU LIVING FOR ETERNITY, MAINTAINING COMMENDABLE CONDUCT, AND ACCEPTING SUFFERING AS THE WILL OF GOD

II. (:25) THE MINISTRY OF PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES – PAUL'S PASSION DROVE HIM TO SERVE AS A FAITHFUL STEWARD OF THE GOSPEL

SERVING AS A FAITHFUL STEWARD

(**vs. 23** had called himself a *minister of the gospel* – to make the word of God fully known … here a *minister of Christ's church* – to make the people of God fully mature -- Lucas)

A. Ministry Characterized by:
   1. Servanthood – *"of this church I was made a minister"*
      NT concept of *"deacon"* vs. how Christendom has applied the term *"minister"* to that of a special office of church leadership; Should one man be called "the minister" of a specific local church?
      one who gives up his rights and take a subordinate position to benefit others
      (not one who asserts his rights and takes the highest position to benefit himself)
   2. Stewardship – *"according to the stewardship from God"*

B. Ministry Fulfilled by:
   1. Divine Calling and Giftedness – *"bestowed on me for your benefit"* (cf. spiritual gifts)
      freely we have received, we need to freely give

2. Human Responsibility – *"that I might fully carry out"* (human initiative and follow thru)

C. Ministry Focused Around:
the Proclamation of the Word of God -- *"the preaching of the word of God"*
cf. Acts 20:27 – Paul proclaimed the entire counsel of God; did not pick and choose certain sections and neglect others

Easy for the church to get distracted from its mission

III. (:26-27) THE MYSTERY OF PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES – PAUL'S PASSION DROVE HIM TO SHARE THE SECRET OF THE INCLUSION OF THE GENTILES (ON AN EQUAL BASIS WITH THE JEWS) IN THE BLESSING OF THE INDWELLING CHRIST
SHARING THE SECRET

A. Definition of Term – "*Mystery*"
not something that we try to figure out by searching thru all the clues and reaching a brilliant conclusion
Not a mystery because it is beyond our understanding …

B. When was it Hidden and Why?
"hidden from the past ages and generations"

C. When was it Revealed and Why and to Whom?
"but has now been manifested to His saints"
"to whom God willed to make known"

Zeisler:
Note that saints are not exalted people. Modern use of the word saint, especially in the Catholic church, suggests that it is the highest level of believer. It is exactly the opposite in the New Testament. Saint is the most ordinary term for everybody in the kingdom. You're a saint if you belong to Christ at all, brand-new and knowing nothing. It is the most inclusive of terms.

D. Substance of the Mystery –
"*Christ in you [Gentiles], the hope of glory*"

Remember: this is the same Christ we talked about last week who has the Preeminence … who is Supreme over the world and head over the church

Cf. message of Ecclesiastes – world is a place of futility apart from Christ

Trace **concept of HOPE** in Colossians 1

Lucas: "it seems that the walk of faith was being disparaged and something more immediate demanded. Did the new teachers offer something more dynamic, centred not at God's right hand in heaven but in the human heart?
It seems very likely that they were the forerunners of those who have made a false, and

ultimately fatal, distinction between God's work for us and in us. To Paul these were two sides of the same work of grace. He may have feared a new outlook where activity of 'God in us' was a further work of grace not irrevocably linked with his activity 'for us'. In that case justification and sanctification, forgiveness and life, would develop into separate gifts of God…
in this letter, where Paul might normally have spoken of the Holy Spirit, he substitutes the name of Christ"

cf. Harry Ironside's disillusionment with pursuing the "second blessing" …
Lucas: "Such must always be the end of that road for an honest person. If we claim to receive what God has not promised, the result must ultimately be disillusionment.
How different is Paul's gospel! The experience of Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith gives not the possession but the promise of full salvation. The greatest gift of Christ in the present is hope for the future. Since he is in heaven our hopes are inevitably centred there. For this life, grace is sufficient. Glory (Paul's 'second blessing') belongs to the age to come."

Stedman:
There is the great mystery. It is the greatest truth taught in the Bible, and yet it is the most seriously missing element in many churches today. Most Christians in our churches understand that Christ died for the forgiveness of their sins---they believed that and came to Christ because of that---but that is where most of them stop. Relatively few, it seems, ever go on to grasp the fact that Jesus died for them that he might live in them. It is his life in them that is the source of power, change and deliverance, and the ability to resist temptation. That is how loneliness is met and Companionship provided. It is not enough to know that Christ died in order that we might go to heaven. We are also to know, understand, and practice Christ actually living in us now!

E. Richness of the Mystery –
"the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles"

IV. (:28-29) THE MISSION OF PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES – PAUL'S PASSION DROVE HIM TO STRIVE FOR THE GOAL IN DEPENDENCE UPON THE POWER OF CHRIST
STRIVING FOR THE GOAL
A. Focus of Proclamation – *"And we proclaim Him"*
a person; not a system of thought
how much of our preaching centers around Christ?

* * * *
Illustration of a true Christian Hero when it comes to proclaiming Christ:
One of the least likely men to attend the Itinerant Evangelists' Conference in Amsterdam sponsored by the Billy Graham Association was a **Masai Warrior named Joseph**. But his story won him a hearing with Dr. Graham himself. The story is told by Michael Card.

One day Joseph, who was walking along one of these hot, dirty African roads, met someone who shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with him. Then and there he accepted

Jesus as his Lord and Savior. The power of the Spirit began transforming his life; he was filled with such excitement and joy that the first thing he wanted to do was return to his own village and share that same Good News with the members of his local tribe.

Joseph began going from door-to-door, telling everyone he met about the Cross [suffering!] of Jesus and the salvation it offered, expecting to see their faces light up the way his had. To his amazement the villagers not only didn't care, they became violent. The men of the village seized him and held him to the ground while the women beat him with strands of barbed wire. He was dragged from the village and left to die alone in the bush.

Joseph somehow managed to crawl to a water hole, and there, after days of passing in and out of consciousness, found the strength to get up. He wondered about the hostile reception he had received from people he had known all his life. He decided he must have left something out or told the story of Jesus incorrectly. After rehearsing the message he had first heard, he decided to go back and share his faith once more.

Joseph limped into the circle of huts and began to proclaim Jesus. "He died for you, so that you might find forgiveness and come to know the living God" he pleaded. Again he was grabbed by the men of the village and held while the women beat him reopening wounds that had just begun to heal. Once more they dragged him unconscious from the village and left him to die.

To have survived the first beating was truly remarkable. To live through the second was a miracle. Again, days later, Joseph awoke in the wilderness, bruised, scarred--and determined to go back.

He returned to the small village and this time, they attacked him before he had a chance to open his mouth. As they flogged him for the third and probably the last time, he again spoke to them of Jesus Christ, the Lord. Before he passed out, the last thing he saw was that the women who were beating him began to weep.

This time he awoke in his own bed. The ones who had so severely beaten him were now trying to save his life and nurse him back to health. The entire village had come to Christ.

This is one vivid example of what Paul meant when he said, "I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body."

* * * *

B. Two Methods of Proclamation

1. "*Admonishing every man*" – more personal; application-oriented (like counseling) warning unbelievers of judgment to come and challenging believers to apply the truth to practical areas in their life

Jay Adams – nouthetic counseling

Personal Hour approach

2. *"Teaching every man"* – more general; systematic; public and private teaching

contrast between the emphasis of Paul and the emphasis of the false teachers
"*every man*" mentioned 3 times
not just a message for the elite (like the Gnostic teaching)

Zeisler:
Don't miss the fact that in verse 28 everyone is mentioned three times: Teaching every man, admonishing every man, and presenting every man mature in Christ. It's not just for the elite. The deceivers who were attacking the Colossians would create an elite in-crowd of advanced folks looking down on the ordinary riffraff. But Paul will have none of that. It's no good unless everyone is included.

C. Insight of Proclamation – "*with all wisdom*"

D. Goal of Proclamation –
"*that we may present every man complete in Christ*"
"Be all you can be" theme
Theme of Maturity / Stability
cf. desire of parents to see their children function as mature, capable adults – would not be right for us always to act as children; obedient fulfillment of the divine will
mature believers will have caught Paul's passion and be consumed in their own ministry

E. Energy of Proclamation --
1. Maximum expenditure of wearisome human effort
"*and for this purpose also I labor, striving*"
- image from workplace – grow weary in toiling
- image from sports – giving 100% effort
2. Maximum dependence on mighty divine power
"*according to His power, which mightily works within me*"
word used only of supernatural power – whether of God or the devil;
Kent: "always denoted effective power – power which was able to accomplish whatever task it undertook"

CONCLUSION:
PAUL'S PASSION FOR PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST DROVE HIM TO FULFILL HIS CALLING TO SACRIFICIALLY MINISTER TO THE GENTILES
SUFFERING PHYSICALLY
SERVING AS A FAITHFUL STEWARD
SHARING THE SECRET
STRIVING FOR THE GOAL

When we depart this earth and are welcomed into the presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ … I hope that you have the same goal as I … to be given a hero's welcome for having fulfilled our calling (whatever that might be) and embraced the suffering that came with it in

order to fully proclaim Christ to benefit others.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Are we doing *"our share"* in terms of using our spiritual giftedness for the benefit of the body of Christ?

2) What type of **passion** do we have for proclaiming Christ? How would others see evidence of that passion?

3) Do we experience the reality of *"Christ in you, the hope of glory"*? Are we able to look beyond the circumstances of the present to future glory?

4) Is our goal to strive for personal maturity in ourselves and in others so that we might be found to be *"complete in Christ"*?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wuest: *"'The afflictions of Christ'* here do not refer to His expiatory sufferings on the Cross, but to His sufferings endured in His humiliation prior to that event, sufferings for righteousness' sake, sufferings incurred through exhausting service, earth-sufferings due to the opposition of sinners, sufferings which were the result of persecution …"

Kent: Regarding the significance of Paul's imprisonment to his explanation of rejoicing in suffering – "The reader might well wonder whether the gospel which Paul claimed to be supernatural was not somehow compromised if it could not protect its ministers from suffering."

Wiersbe: -- "Paul's enemies made much of the fact that the great apostle was a prisoner of Rome. The false teachers in Colossae probably ridiculed Paul and used this as a weapon to fight the truth of the Gospel. But Paul turned this weapon around and used it to defeat his enemies and to build a closer relationship with the church in Colossae."

Kent: Re *"mystery"* – "In the Greek world the term was used in the plural to denote the secret rites of pagan cults which were revealed only to the initiates. Thus the ideas of secrecy and concealment were prominent in the concept."

Lightfoot: Re emphasis on *"every man"* in vs. 28 – "three times repeated for the sake of emphasizing the universality of the gospel. This great truth for which Paul gave his life, was now again endangered by the doctrine of an intellectual exclusiveness taught by the Gnosticizers at Colossae, as before it had been endangered by the doctrine of a ceremonial exclusiveness taught by the Judaizers in Galatia."

Hendriksen: Re *"in Christ"* – "in the closest possible union with him, a union which is brought about by the Holy Spirit, and which is kept alive by the exercise of a faith that is not only God-given but is in its every expression being constantly sustained by God."

Piper:

> While I was working on the missions book in May, I had an opportunity to hear J. Oswald Sanders speak. His message touched deeply on suffering. He is 89 years old and still travels and speaks around the world. He has written a book a year since he turned 70! I mention that only to exult in the utter dedication of a life poured out for the gospel without thought of coasting in self-indulgence from sixty-five to the grave.
>
> He told the story of an indigenous missionary who walked barefoot from village to village preaching the gospel in India. His hardships were many. After a long day of many miles and much discouragement he came to a certain village and tried to speak the gospel but was driven out of town and rejected. So he went to the edge of the village dejected and lay down under a tree and slept from exhaustion.
>
> When he awoke people were hovering over him, and the whole town was gathered around to hear him speak. The head man of the village explained that they came to look him over while he was sleeping. When they saw his blistered feet they concluded that he must be a holy man, and that they had been evil to reject him. They were sorry and wanted to hear the message that he was willing to suffer so much to bring them.
>
> So the evangelist filled up the afflictions of Jesus with his beautiful blistered feet.

Stedman:

Let me summarize this passage, in closing. The apostle points out three stages of change. First, the new birth begins a process which is intended to perfect us, spirit, soul and body. To advance that process requires pain and commitment on the part of others on our behalf; and when we come to Christ we are to undertake that same pain and commitment on behalf of others. Finally, all progress occurs only by coming to understand and to practice the mystery of "Christ in you, the hope of glory." That is how to stop the terrible downward slide of any human life!

Zeisler:

Paul says, "I do my part in filling up what remains of the afflictions of the Lord, and so I rejoice. I'm not going to fight back against the assignment I've been given. I'm going to take the hardship of the quest." The quest, the challenge by definition must have difficulty in it. To go wherever he sends us, to labor at great length because we choose to, to suffer with joy because there is no avoiding it, is the language of the challenge. It would be true in any story. Even Indiana Jones, a made-up story, is filled with danger, deprivation, and difficulty.

Zeisler:

But in addition, Paul will say farther on in this paragraph, divine strength is what energizes him. He is struggling, laboring with, enduring sleeplessness and difficulty; he spends full nights in prayer; and through longings, chains and all that he is going through, it is the power of Christ

that sustains him. That's what he says in verse 29: "...striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." So while the message "Christ in you" is about the future, it is also about the present. It's about all that we have to face and how we will face it right now---by the power of the Lord of all, who has taken up residence in us. He will meet our need, whether it is for endurance, courage, wisdom, or love for people we can't love. Whatever the power requirement in our life is right now, his power is mightily at work within us because Christ is in us.

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 2:1-7

TITLE: DEEP AND STRONG

BIG IDEA:
PAUL'S PASSION FOR PROTECTING THE SAINTS AGAINST DECEPTION FOCUSED HIS MINISTRY ON ENCOURAGING DEPTH AND STABILITY IN CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

Unfortunately we know what it is to live in **dangerous times**. Since 9/11 we have been on alert against further terrorist attacks. We have a new Dept of Homeland Security to focus on protecting our citizens. This past week we launched a war against Iraq that has as its primary focus that of protecting our own borders. Imagine that … what one ruthless regime is doing over in a little country in the Near East has the potential to cause us harm. We have always felt so secure … an attack on Pearl Harbor way out in the Pacific is as close as we could imagine the enemy touching us … But all that has changed.

Kids, can you imagine the air raid sirens going off and you have 9 seconds to put on your gas mask and hustle into a protected room to escape the possibility of a chemical attack? That's what the kids in Israel have learned to accept as just a part of life.

This climate of **danger and war** … this **increasing need for protection** … should help us to identify with Paul's concerns as he writes to the Colossians. For he has a warfare in mind that is every bit as real …. But one that is far more dangerous than whatever conflict we see in the physical realm. The spiritual warfare that Satan was waging against the believers in Paul's day and is waging right now against the believers today is very real and it is very dangerous. Satan is a master at deception and argumentation in counterfeiting the truth … in trying to corrupt the doctrine of grace … in trying to distract people from simply trusting in Jesus Christ alone for salvation from sin. What is at stake is not just the temporary physical protection of a nation … What is at stake is our very soul and eternal destiny. What is at stake is our ability to walk by faith and to draw closer to Christ. What is at stake is our whole orientation regarding how to live a spiritual life.

Unfortunately there are a lot of Christians who are sleepwalking today when they should be alert to the danger of the enemy. They have allowed themselves to be deceived in a lot of little ways that set them up for some big-time deception. They are satisfied with a very shallow Christian life – one that has very shallow roots and very little foundation. They can be easily blown about by every wind of doctrine – in fact they have become persuaded that doctrine is a harsh, divisive word that is at odds with their concept of Christian love. They are easily confused by persuasive arguments that are not anchored in the truth of Scripture. They quickly respond to emotional appeals that don't require the work of engaging their intellect. They are driven by a lust for entertainment and personal satisfaction that cannot bear the type of disciplined perseverance called for in a day by day walk of faith in Jesus Christ.

How deep is our relationship with the Lord?
How stable and strong are we in the faith?
Are we growing in our understanding of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of Christ?
Are we continuing on in our walk with Christ with the same focus of childlike faith that marked our conversion?

The Greek mindset was more attracted to **philosophy** while today people are more easily influenced by **experience** – in either case, the sufficiency of Christ is the antidote. Somebody comes along and says they have a magic shortcut to experiencing the deeper Christian life … to really getting in touch with the Holy Spirit … to really live on a higher moral plateau … to experience deeper communion with God in a more mystical sense .. Paul writes to bring us back to our roots in Christ ….

PAUL'S PASSION FOR PROTECTING THE SAINTS AGAINST DECEPTION FOCUSED HIS MINISTRY ON ENCOURAGING DEPTH AND STABILITY IN CHRIST

(Read the text)

I. (:1-3) DEPTH AND STABILITY COME FROM A TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

A. (:1) The Impact of Concerned Spiritual Leaders – Focused In Communication

1. Importance of Instruction – "*For I want you to know*" – Horizontal Communication
   Remember from last week – end of Chap 1 – how hard Paul worked -- driven by a **passion to fulfill his calling** and bring the gospel message to the Gentiles … "*I labor, striving*" – why was he so concerned to communicate his pastoral concern to these believers whom he had never met?

2. Importance of Prayer – "*how great a struggle I have*" – Vertical Communication
   part of the struggle due to his being physically absent and unable to see them; part of the overall struggle of unseen spiritual warfare

   Some of you are doing an especially good job in this area of spiritual warfare – really fighting on the front lines by spending time struggling in prayer -- struggling in communicating

   How hard do parents struggle to see that their kids receive the proper instruction and are protected against temptation?

   What spiritual leaders have struggled mightily on our behalf to encourage us to grow in Christ? Nobody ever said spiritual ministry was going to be easy.

3. Impartiality of Love
   "*on your behalf*" (Colossae) small city 100 miles East of Ephesus
   "*and for those who are at Laodicea*" – city 10 miles to the West – (Columbia)
   "*and for all those who have not personally seen my face*" – not a third group … but a characterization of these 2 groups

Gromacki: "teacher must not only love *what* he is teaching but *whom* he is teaching"
Zeisler: Paul loved these people more in absence than the deceivers did who were present with them.

B. (:2) The Encouragement of Loving Fellowship – Focused Around Truth

1. Goal of Encouragement – *"that their hearts may be encouraged"*

Paul always building others up in the Lord, encouraging others … not sitting around in prison concerned with how he could have an easier life and enjoy all the comforts of this life

Kids: I am concerned with how we joke around in our culture – in terms of making a game out of tearing others down … you need to see your God-given role as one who should be encouraging others

2. Synergy of Unified Love – *"having been knit together in love"*

Holy Spirit accomplishes this; but requires practical exercise of love on our part;
The false teaching was threatening to compromise the unity of the body

Kids – Have you ever had any **broken bones**? Your body doesn't work too well, does it … lots of pain … you can't do the things you were created to do … like play soccer … right, Caleb …. But the doctor is able to knit those bones back together so you heal back up and can function again … Love is the spiritual glue that holds the body of Christ together and enables us to carry out the functions of worship and evangelism and edification that we were created to do … Sometimes if you repair a chair (like I should be doing at home) .. you can use too much glue and you have to wipe it off … gets messy … can never use too much love, too much spiritual glue in the body of Christ

Piper: "the riches of assured understanding and knowledge of God's mystery, and the treasures of Christ's wisdom come into the heads of those whose hearts are knit together in love. Theology is a holy science, and its riches are hidden from unholy people. If you want to know God better, love your enemy."

3. Richness of Attainable Understanding – *"and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding"*

How do we measure wealth? What do we truly value?

Cf. all the verses in Ephesians and Colossians that speak to this abundant wealth that we have in Christ; all the riches that are ours

Problem of boredom – solved by focusing on our wealth

4. Centrality of True Knowledge of Christ – "*resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself*"

Morgan: calls this section: The Christ-Centered Life

C. (3) The Hidden Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge – Focused In Christ
"*in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*"

(Study Proverbs 8)
Kids, Do you like to **hunt for Treasure** –
- cf. metal detectors on beach – looking for coins and valuable rings
- cf. sunken treasure on boats – lots of money invested on expeditions to hunt for this treasure
- cf. the gold rush – prospectors hunting for that hidden treasure that would put them on easy street

something that fascinates us about hidden treasure
let's not look somewhere else for wisdom and knowledge
Why do we drink from other founts? Is. 55:1-2; Jer. 2:13

When we spend time in the Scriptures … **what are we looking for**? Some type of special knowledge that will puff us up and make us feel important because we now understand something that others don't … or are we looking for the type of wisdom and knowledge that centers on the person of Christ … that helps us to get to know Him better … to appreciate our Union with Him … to live in closer fellowship with Christ …
It is only this type of True Knowledge of Christ that will help to build Depth and Stability into our Christian life so that we grow and mature …. And are thus protected against Deception

II. (:4-5) DEPTH AND STABILITY PROTECT AGAINST DECEPTION

A. (:4) Real Danger of Deception

Stedman: "Truth and error look almost the same, but one is a counterfeit. In these days when we have so many counterfeit and imitation things around we are used to be being deceived and do not feel alarmed about it any more. Plastic looks like metal. Flowers are made of silk. We are daily touching things that are but imitations of the real thing. But imitations have obvious limitations. If you start regarding them as real you are in trouble"

Kids: cf different types of mushrooms – some poisonous, some fine to eat; same thing with wild berries; or how about snakes – might look pretty much the same to those who aren't experts – most are harmless, some can really do you harm

1. Confronting the Error – "*I say this*"
needs to be actively combated – Paul always took the initiative to speak when necessary

2. Exposing the Methodology – *"that no one may delude you with persuasive argument"*
   Shallowness would make you vulnerable;
   eloquence and skill of communication was obscuring the deviation from the truth in content;
   Our powers of reasoning must be submitted to the supremacy of revelation

World is great at making an argument

- cf. **Debate Clubs** in school – teach you to argue both sides of the question – doesn't matter where your personal conviction lies; teaching you rhetoric, logic, power of persuasion
- cf. our **legal system** – adversarial – prosecution against the defense – you might know your client is guilty but you still make the argument on his behalf; we have law schools to teach you how to make an argument

cf. Dangers of Land **Mines** in the Iraq war

B. (:5) Real Joy of Stability

1. Pastoral Concern Reiterated – *"For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit"*
   Remember Paul felt a burden for all the churches

2. Stability Brings Joy – *"rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of"*
   a. Order vs. disarray, lack of unity
   b. Strength
      cf. Acts 3:7,16 – referring to making weak ankle bones strong thru healing

Herries: "*steadfastness*" -- military word; solid front in attack and defense; disciplined
Morgan: the soldier who has good soldiers beside him is the safest

3. Faith in Christ is the Key – *"your faith in Christ"*
   The goal of increasing in our knowledge of Christ is to increase in our faith in Christ

Why do we require of our **elders** a certain level of maturity in the faith – they cannot be a novice … a new convert … no matter how impressive their testimony …. Because the depth and stability of maturity require a certain amount of time to put down roots … can't happen overnight …. Maturity is what helps to guard against the deception of error

Zeisler:
"I want to invite you to do a very difficult thing this morning: Imagine me to be the glib, air-headed host of the television game show **Let's Make a Deal**, grinning with capped teeth and filled with phony enthusiasm and good will. This is the game show where people get all sorts of goodies---for instance, $10,000, a trip to Europe, a new car. Then I invite them to trade in everything they have just won for what is behind the door on the stage behind me. Time after time they make the trade. The door opens and there's a bale of alfalfa or some equally terrible

surprise. They give up true riches and real advantages and come away with nothing in their place.

Why would anyone do that? With the range of riches they have in their possession, what would ever make them want to trade these advantages for what's behind the door? Well, that phenomenon takes place in settings other than this game show. Men and women over the centuries have been tempted time and again to give up riches in Christ and gain nothing in return. They have listened to the glib patter of deceivers who deny the first place that Christ deserves in our lives, thinking, and worship; who offer them some phony alternative and take away everything they have."

III. (:6-7) DEPTH AND STABILITY COME FROM A CONSISTENT WALK OF FAITH IN CHRIST

A. (:6) Our Walk Should Be Consistent With Our Conversion

Gal. 3:1-5

Illustration of **Seminary Paper** – pick 1 verse that you think is the best key to describing the process of sanctification or the key to spirituality or how to walk in the Christian life -- lots of good choices …

1. Characterized by **Genuine Repentance** and **Childlike Faith**
   "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus"

Paul calls us to go back to our Roots: At conversion you understood:
- the seriousness of sin
- the bankruptcy of trusting in self
- your need for Christ
- your desire for a changed life
- the simplicity of child-like faith

Obstacles to Repentance = pride, independence, self-reliance
have to realize you are headed the wrong direction; conversion involves turning around (not some minor adjustments)
Not a work … but a change of mind that leads to a change in action

2. Submitting to the Lordship of Christ – *"the Lord"*
   cf. whole issue of **Lordship salvation** – try to address this issue again …
   cf. His supremacy over all of Creation and over the Church discussed earlier

3. Intimately United with Jesus Christ – *"so walk in Him"*

B. (:7A) Two Pictures of Depth and Stability – we covered these in an earlier message

1. Picture of a Tree – *"having been firmly rooted"*

Contrast Perfect and Present Tenses in this verse

2. Picture of a Building
   a. *"now being built up in Him"*

   b. *"and established in your faith"*

Key: No shortcuts! There is a **process of growth** involved and you cannot just short circuit the process, jump on some promising bandwagon and arrive!

C. (:7B) Consistent with Former Instruction – *"just as you were taught"*
Tradition can be good or bad

D. (:7C) Characteristic Mark of a Growing Believer = *"overflowing with gratitude"*
this will protect against the enticing words of those who promise a "fuller" gospel

Herries: overflowing like a river
Piper: Guard Yourself with Gratitude
Cf. present military operation – dangers all around – what if there were some secret song you could sing that would keep the enemy away – song of gratitude

CONCLUSION:

I. (:1-3) DEPTH AND STABILITY COME FROM A TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST
II. (:4-5) DEPTH AND STABILITY PROTECT AGAINST DECEPTION
III. (:6-7) DEPTH AND STABILITY COME FROM A CONSISTENT WALK OF FAITH IN CHRIST

What does it mean to be a solid Christian …

Zeisler: "What is always at the heart of delusion or false religion is the promise that you don't really have to learn to trust the Lord; our faith doesn't have to grow over time. You don't have to learn to deal with the flesh with all its memories and deceptions. You can leap from childhood to maturity overnight. You can instantly become everything that you want to be – a person of stature, authority, power, and winsomeness. Just take what's behind the door on the stage. Yet Paul is saying. 'As you have received the Lord, learn to walk a day at a time, a step at a time. Grow in the Lord. We're in a process that's going to end in glory; we're sure of the hope that is before us. We have the intimacy of Christ with us right here every day; he is our companion everywhere we go. Our roots go down into what is really valuable soil, and the

growth is taking place. Don't let the process be disrupted by the promise of something that in the long run will make you a slave and take everything away from you.'"

Piper: "Sacrificial struggle leads to love. Love leads to assured understanding of God. Assured understanding leads to strong encouragement. And encouragement guards from delusion."

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How hard do we *"struggle"* on behalf of believers who are not part of our immediate family? Who are not even a part of our local church? In what ways do we struggle for the benefit of the body of Christ? What sorts of enticing false teaching are prevalent today? What steps are we taking to guard ourselves and others against these perversions of the truth?

2) What should be the relationship between unity and love and truth? When have we seen the theme of unity preached to cover up for failures in the area of love and truth? How powerful a force is love to knit our hearts together? Does our local church model that sense of hearts knit together? How can I reach out more to others?

3) Do we desire to mine the riches of the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of Christ or are we satisfied with a superficial knowledge of the Lord? Meditate on Proverbs 8. Why doesn't God make all of these riches abundantly clear to every Christian without the need for such searching? What are we doing to dig deeper in our Christian walk?

4) What parallels do you see between how you entered into the Christian life and how you should continue to walk and grow?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ellis: "… several words here – *mystery, wisdom, knowledge, head* (v. 10), dear to the Gnostics, are turned into effective instruments of Christian truth. This transition section moves from a presentation of Christ's Lordship to an attack upon the insidious doctrines which were endangering that Lordship in the Colossian church."

Gromacki: Re vs. 1 -- "Parents have natural concern when their children are still living at home, but parental anxiety increases when the children are miles away without any possibility of direct help or supervision."

Vaughan: Re vs. 1 – "The particular struggle Paul had in mind appears to have been that of prayer. At the time he wrote these words he could not move beyond the walls of his '*rented house*' (Acts 28:30), being continuously held by the chain linking him to a Roman soldier. But even under these circumstances he could engage in the combat of prayer and so exert himself strenuously in behalf of his readers."

Kent: Re vs. 2 -- "The more that Christians understand of the person and work of Christ, the more able they are to recognize and refute religious error that is often superficially attractive… As against all those who tried to intellectualize the Christian faith, speaking of knowledge (*gnosis*) as if it were an end in itself, Paul emphasizes that the revelation of God cannot be properly known apart from the cultivation of brotherly love within the Christian community."

Hendriksen: Re vv.2-3 "The *heart* of all true pastoral activity is to be an instrument in God's hand to bring the *hearts* of those entrusted to one's care to the *heart* of Christ. The reason is this: once a man's heart has been thoroughly won over and established in grace, the entire person has become the object of God's marvelous transforming power, for the heart is the fulcrum of feeling and faith as well as the mainspring of words and actions."

Carson: Re vs. 3 – "treasures in a mine which has already been opened, and from which by diligent search a constant supply of precious stones may be extracted."

Vaughan: Re vs. 3 – "the treasures of wisdom are in Christ in a hidden way. '*Hidden*' does not, however, mean that they are concealed but rather that they are laid up or stored away as a treasure."

Kent: Re vs. 5 – "Each believer was still in his place (*taxin*) and collectively the church was maintaining a solid front (*stereoma*) against the foe. No one had broken ranks or defected; the church was not tottering."

Wiersbe: Re vs. 7 – "Christians are not to be tumbleweeds that have no roots and are blown about '*by every wind of doctrine*' (Eph. 4:14). Nor are they '*transplants*' that are repeatedly moved from soil to soil."

Vaughan: Re vs. 7 – "…those who lack a deep sense of thankfulness to God are especially vulnerable to doubt and spiritual delusion."

Moule: "what was the *manner* of Paul's prayers, not as they are recorded but as they were uttered? It was the manner of a conflict …; it was a wrestle.

I cannot doubt that this meant often an importunity which expressed itself in urgent visible action. It must have made the Praetorian wonder to see this extraordinary prisoner at his prayers; to watch his agitation of look and bearing, to hear his voice labouring to utter his hear, in tones half suppressed sometimes, but sometimes not suppressed at all; to mark the falling tears, or the kindling smiles, as the direction of the supplication changed. May we not be sure that it was often so? And would not these scenes often be *prolonged*? If St Paul's metaphor of the wrestle is true to itself, the prayer would be no brief crisis of devotion."

Moule: Re importance of actively giving thanks in vs. 7 – "There is a great and profoundly reasonable power in holy thanksgiving to bring home to the soul the reality of the Treasure for which the thanks are given…

Let classical legend for once contribute its comment and illustration to divine truth. The Sirens, by the sweetness of their magic songs, decoyed upon the rocks the mariners who sailed past their isles, and the shores were white with human bones. Ulysses with his crew, and

Orpheus, by different means escaped the danger. Ulysses stopped the ears of his men with wax, and (wishing himself to hear the song, and to hear it in safety) caused himself to be fast bound to the mast. Orpheus took another method; he raised his voice to the harp in loud and long praises of the immortal Gods, and thus overcame the charm of the Sirens with another and a better charm."

Lucas: Re vs. 6-7 –
"Paul gives the Colossians three guiding principles, each referring to a different aspect of Christian development, but similar in form:
1. *As you received … so live.* – godly living
   live out the Christian life in the sense of 1:10, a lifestyle worthy of the Lord
2. *As you were rooted … be built up* – spiritual growth
   the building up of young Christians was a major concern of the apostle's
3. *As you were taught … be established in truth.* – Christian understanding
   Without the full truth, and a mature understanding of it, there cannot be a satisfying Christianity or a stable church."

Stedman: "These are all passive participles, meaning these things have been done to you."

Don Hutto -- Six Snapshots of Growth
A. The Image Of A Military Unit - (v.5) *"order and steadfastness"*
The picture we see here is that of competent men and women who know their job and are prepared to do it. The word steadfast gives us the image of soldiers who stand their ground in the face of the enemy.

B. The Image Of A Pilgrim - (v. 6) *"so walk ye"*
Every pilgrim on his journey to Jerusalem knew exactly what he needed to take with him. Pack the essentials and take them with you on the trip, but leave the nonessentials behind.

C. The Image Of A Tree - (v. 7) *"rooted"*
This is an agricultural term for a plant that is permanently rooted. Some plants are continually in need of transplanting, but the rooted plant will grow strong and healthy.

D. The Image Of A Building - (v. 7) *"built up"*
Dr. Rex Horne, pastor of Immanuel Baptist in Little Rock, AR, tells us that this word carries the idea of a building under construction. We all know the importance of a solid foundation to build on. Paul said, *"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ*," (1 Cor. 3:11).

E. The Image Of A School - (v. 7) *"taught"*
If the Christian lifestyle can be taught, then we must be prepared to learn it. Our "primer" is God's Word and our example is God's Son.

F. The Image Of A River - (v. 7) *"abounding"*
Again, Dr. Horne tells us that the word for abounding is used of a river that has overflowed it banks. Our thankfulness to God cannot be confined and it, too, overflows.

Andy Atkins – snake oil salesmen

The snake oil salesmen stupefy their audiences with whirlwind quick-fixes and enthusiastic testimonials. They discredit the credible, promote the impossible, and make the buyer who misses their opportunity appear foolish for passing up such an offer.

The sad fact is that these same tactics travel under the banner of Christianity as well. Well-dressed men and women claiming to be Bible teachers stand up and talk about a Gospel foreign to the Scriptures, binding spirits of poverty and releasing the power of wealth. They work the crowds into a frenzy while promising to lay hands on those who desire “the anointing.” They carry a Bible but rarely open or refer to it, all the while describing a God who does not even vaguely resemble the God of the Scriptures. And multiplied thousands of people watch them daily and weekly, sending in donations and trying to apply the principles espoused by these so-called teachers.

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 2:8-15

TITLE: COMPLETE IN CHRIST (CHRIST PLUS NOTHING)

BIG IDEA:
THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST PROTECTS US AGAINST FALSE TEACHING

INTRODUCTION
Have we truly grasped the concept that we are complete in Christ?
That He is sufficient for everything we will ever need?
Why should we ever be attracted by empty philosophies that attempt to add something else on to the person and work of Jesus Christ?

"Complete in Thee! no work of mine May take, dear Lord, the place of Thine;
Thy blood hath pardon bought for me, And I am now complete in Thee.

Yea, justified! O blessed thought! And sanctified! Salvation wrought!
Thy blood hath pardon bought for me, And glorified, I too, shall be!"

Key = There are no Short Cuts to spirituality

I. (:8-9) ALL TRUTH MUST BE MEASURED AGAINST THE STANDARD OF CHRIST = WHO IS GOD INCARNATE

A. Spiritual Discernment Requires Spiritual Alertness
"See to it that no one takes you captive"
Kidnap, take hostage
Need to be constantly on the look out with eyes wide open; Pres. Tense
Guard your spiritual freedom and don't allow anyone to take you captive
Rob you of your life, hope, energy, joy

Gromacki: "The heretical teacher, therefore, is like a slave trader. He wants to steal the believer away from his spiritual family and sell him as a slave into false doctrine."

B. Spiritual Discernment Recognizes Deception
cf. the false siren in ancient Greek mythology

3 things that characterize false philosophy:
1. False Wisdom -- "*philosophy and empty deception*"
Vincent: Greeks held philosophy in highest regard; used here in the sense of vain speculation
Empty in the sense of void of truth; fruitless; like the inside of a ping pong ball
Morgan: "Sounds good, intellectual, plausible"
Stedman: "hollow – no real content, no actual basis in reality"

2. False Authority -- "*according to the tradition of men*"

Stedman: "They arise out of the thinking of men, find a foothold in society, and then are passed along from genertion to generation so as to appear popular and widely supported." cf. theory of evolution
"An attempt is always made to make it appear that biblical Christianity is a minority fatih, held by only a few ill-educated, almost mentally deficient people, who have no basis in scholarship for what they believe."

no basis in divine revelation

3. False Logic -- "*according to the elementary principles of the world*"
Gromacki: "elementary" used of anything which appeared in a row or series; thus, it came to refer to the letters of the alphabet, to the basic notes of music, and to the fundamental components of the material universe;
just dealing with the A,B,Cs of this fallen world

Alternative view: reference to an army of soldiers lined up in a row, in ranks, as in a hierarchy = reference to fallen angels

no grasp of the complexity of the fullness of spiritual truth

C. Spiritual Discernment Regards Christ as the Ultimate Standard
"*rather than according to Christ*"
Truth sets you free rather than enslaves you
Stedman: "Every cult attacks the person or work of Jesus—or both"

D. KEY: Christ is God Incarnate
"*For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form*"
lives as a permanent resident rather than as transients
Note Present Tense – Christ continues to possess all the fulness of Deity even in His glorified state (Kent)
embodied, given concrete expression, fully realized in Him

II. (:10) CHRIST IS OUR SUFFICIENCY

A. We are Complete in Him
"*and in Him you have been made complete*"

B. We Own No Other Master
We do not need Other Mediators or Rulers (even if they are spiritual and powerful)
"*and He is the head over all rule and authority*"

You will be able to differentiate genuine spiritual leadership from heretical imposters by their servant attitude

III. (:11-12) OUR UNION WITH CHRIST IS PORTRAYED BY 2 SPIRITUAL ANALOGIES

Deliverance from the Power of the Old nature

Stedman: "Many scholars equate circumcision with baptism, holding that Christian baptism has taken the place of the old Testament rite of circumcision. But if you look carefully at this verse it is clear that this is not true. If we are Chrsitians, says Paul, we have been both circumcised and baptized. Thus, they are not the same thing…

Circumcision symbolizes the death of Jesus and our death with him, our dying to sin, as Romans 5 and 6 argues. But baptism stands for our new life with him. When someone is immersed in the waters of baptism he is not left there, he is brought out again to a new life. That is what baptism reflects: the work of the Spirit in imparting new life from Christ, a new humanity, the human spirit made alive. It is the difference between a true Christian and merely professing Christian. The true Christian has been made alive in Christ. He has a whole new basis for living."

cf. doctrine of infant baptism

A. (:11) The Spiritual Analogy of Circumcision (cf. outline by Wuest here)

1. Its Character: Internal not External
   "*and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands*"
   Note emphasis on "*in Him*" throughout this passage

2. Its Extent: Total not Partial
   "*in the removal of the body of the flesh*"

3. Its Author: Christ not Moses
   "*by the circumcison of Christ*"

B. (:12) The Spiritual Analogy of Baptism

1. United in Burial
   "*having been buried with Him in baptism*"

2. United in Resurrection
   "*in which you were also raised up with Him*"

3. KEY: Faith in the Working of God
   "*through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead*"

IV. (:13-15) THE VICTORY OF CHRIST HAS RESCUED US FROM DEATH, SIN AND ALL ENEMIES

A. (:13A) Imparting Life in Rescuing us from the Dead

1. State of Death – "*and when you were dead*"

a. "*in your transgressions*"

b. "*and the uncircumcision of your flesh*"

2. Miracle of Resurrection – "*He made you alive together with Him*"

B. (:13B – 14) Imparting Forgiveness in Canceling out our Sin = Deliverance from Guilt

1. Completeness of Forgiveness – "*having forgiven us all our transgressions*"

2. Righteous Canceling of Our Debt – "*having canceled out the certificate of debt*"
Herries: "Blotted out, not just crossed out (where you can still see the writing under the X)"

a. Its Content -- "*consisting of decrees against us*"

b. Its Effect -- "*and which was hostile to us*"

3. Finality of the Process

a. "*He has taken it out of the way*"

b. "*having nailed it to the cross*"
Herries: "When a criminal was crucified his charge was nailed to his cross to show it was no longer against him but had also been put to death", paid for, done away with

C. (:15) Imparting Victory in Disarming and Defeating our Enemies = Satan and his power

1. Disarming –
"*When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities*"

2. Defeating –
"*He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him*"

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What type of pursuit of philosophy is dangerous? What are some of the erroneous humanistic philosophies to which I have been exposed?

2) What have I learned about the "*fulness of Deity*" from the mystery of the Incarnation?

3) What type of incompleteness has Christ resolved by rendering me *complete* in Him?

4) In what sense did we participate in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? How do we participate in the fruits of His victory right now?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gromacki: "Nature reveals God as He acts, but Christ revealed God as He is (John 1:18). Since God is a personal being, He cannot be known personally through things. The natural creation can show that God exists and that he is intelligent and powerful, but only Christ could manifest the fact that God is loving, merciful, and forgiving. A person can learn about God through nature, but he can know God only through the incarnate Son (John 14:9)."

Wuest: "The fulness of God communicated to the saints does not consist of the divine essence which is alone possessed by Deity, but of such qualities as holiness, righteousness, and the like."

Moule: "He, on that Cross, achieved overwhelming and eternal victory over the dark personal powers of evil, His enemies and ours. Would we have peace? Would we have purity? Would we have inexhaustible resource for life and holiness? Would we have strength for victory, triumphing over the devil, the world, and the flesh? The answer is still the same. Christ is the Secret of God."

Laurin: "The chief fault of all philosophies is that they are '*not after Christ*.' They are propounded on the theory that the culture of the mind is sufficient. They have no place for sin. Their contest is only with ignorance. But education without salvation is a blind alley. Education implies the accumulation of knowledge. Christianity insists that knowledge is not enough."

Lucas: Notes 3 warnings in chapter 2:
1. Don't let anyone kidnap you! (verse 8).
2. Don't let anyone condemn you! (verse 16).
3. Don't let anyone disqualify you! (verse 18).

He also notes Paul's contribution to the doctrine of what it means to be "*in Christ*":

1. Verses 9 and 10	Fullness in Christ
2. Verses 11 and 12	Fellowship with Christ
3. Verses 13-15	Freedom through Christ

Stedman: Re circumcison – "I will never forget an incident that occurred a number of years ago here at the church. A young man came to my office carrying a thick Bible under his arm, which he had been reading. Looking at me very earnestly, he said to me, 'Would you circumcise me?' After I had picked myself up from the floor, I explained to him why, one, he did not need physical circumcision, and, two, what circumcision meant. I pointed out that it was an eloquent symbol when it was properly understood…

At birth the male organ is covered with a loose cap of flesh…

when our Lord was crucified, the sin that he assumed on our behalf was removed—that is the

point. It is what Scripture calls the '*circumcison of the heart*.' … The foreskin of the flesh is a symbol of the fallen nature, the flesh, within us. When we become a Christian it is revealed for what it truly is, worthless in God's sight! It does not advance us or help us in any way in his sight. To be proud and independent and sinfully selfish will never help us or find value in God's sight."

Zeisler: Re elementary principles – "Probably what Paul is referring to here is ancient, dark, and invisible powers. The ancient people believed that theworld was made up of four elements – earth, wind, fire and water – and that these had powers that went beyond just their physical manifestation. They were somehow the elemental organizing principals of everything that is. The idea was that there were personalities and deep undergirdings to the earth and power that flowed in mysterious ways. This power often could be entered into only by some kind of dark, religious, and mysterious encounter with somebody who had special knowledge. The whole business of dealing with demons at times and with fairy stories at other times made people vulnerable; they had a longing to know, to be in touch with sources of mysterious power. That too can be a phony religion."

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 2:16-23

TITLE: FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE AND CONDEMNATION

BIG IDEA:
UNION WITH CHRIST HAS FREED US FROM THE BONDAGE AND CONDEMNATION OF THE FALSE ISMS
(WHICH CLAIM TO BE THE PATHWAY TO SPIRITUALITY)

INTRODUCTION

Follows along with theme introduced in vs. 16 -- *"See to it that no one takes you captive"*

"*Therefore*" – points to what has been covered in the previous verses where the basis for our freedom has been shown to be all that Christ has provided for us in His death and Resurrection:

- forgiveness of sins
- resurrection life
- victory over our enemies

Christ's complete sufficiency; The gospel is Christ + nothing

I. (:16-17) FREEDOM FROM THE BONDAGE AND CONDEMNATION OF RITUALISM

Def. of Ritualism: adherence, insistence, dependence on the observance of prescribed religious acts and observances; almost like religious superstitions – I had better do things a certain way in order for God to be pleased with me
Cf. security of liturgical approach; called high church; observe the proper days, etc.
How about maintaining the same order of service

Our society is so freedom-oriented and "anything goes" that we don't see much ritualism;
cf. the importance of the sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church

cf. prayer with the rosary beads – female soldier in Iraq concerned that she not forget her rosary beads

Catholics starting every morning with mass; how about our starting every day with devotions

A. Bondage of Condemnation

"*let no one act as your judge*"

Truly it is a bondage:

- "*a yoke upon the neck*" – Acts 15:10
- "*Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage*" – Gal. 5:1

B. Particulars of Ritualism – most of these have an OT Jewish flavor (difficult for us to identify with)

1. Dietary Laws – clean vs. unclean – Do's vs Don'ts – Rules and Regulations
    a. Eating
    b. Drinking
    (some crossover with asceticism and legalism here)

2. Religious Observances – structured around the calendar
    a. Annual: festival (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles)
    b. Monthly: new moon
    c. Weekly: Sabbath day

- Jewish legalism involved here – false teachers urging the believers to go back and submit themselves to the OT law in various areas; but these prohibitions go beyond the Jewish law in some regards
- external regulations vs. internal
- promote self-righteousness and pride

C. Contrast Between Shadow and Substance – between Type and Reality
Not intended to be contradictory – like a person of substance vs. show …

1. Shadow – "*things which are a mere shadow of what is to come*"
    Gal. 3:24-25
    What were these rituals foreshadowing? How did Christ constitute the reality?

2. Substance – *"but the substance is Christ"*
    cf. the Book of Hebrews for good commentary here
    "*the law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming*" – Heb. 10:1

II. (:18-19) FREEDOM FROM THE BONDAGE AND CONDEMNATION OF MYSTICISM

Mysticism: "the belief that a person can have an immediate experience with the spiritual world, completely apart from the Word of God or the Holy Spirit" – Wiersbe

Stedman: Any kind of religious performance that is done without meaning or personal significance falls into the category Paul is describing.

A. Bondage of Condemnation
"*Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize*"

Athletic image – like a soccer ref giving you a red card and disqualifying you from the competition for breaking the rules of the game
2 Possibilities:
- Christian losing his reward
- false professor of Christianity being exposed for not even having saving faith and being disqualified from the prize of eternal life

Vaughan: "Let no one deny your claim to be Christians."

B. Particulars of Mysticism

1. Physical Self-Denial -- *"Delighting in self-abasement"* (or false humility)

   Vaughan: "the heretics probably insisted that their worship of angels rather than the supreme God was an expression of humility on their part"

2. Spiritual Meditation -- *"worship of angels"*

   are these first 2 viewed as 2 different items or as a combined unit?

3. Experience Oriented – *"taking his stand on visions he has seen"*

Stedman: The key characteristics here are "false humility and worship of angels." Those are two invariable elements of false teaching in this context. In Colossae there was an ancient teaching (later called "gnosticism," meaning knowledge) which held that there is a hierarchy of angels between all human beings and God which must be placated and acknowledged, and that one's knowledge, which began in virtual ignorance, increased with such contact until at last one entered into the fullness of understanding of the Oneness of all things.

That ancient heresy appears widely today under the name of the New Age Movement. At the heart of it is this claim to seek the true Oneness of things. We are told that we are all part of the universe of created matter, and that we are united in Oneness with God. The claim is that this is the way to escape from being centered in oneself, and so move into the fullness of knowledge of the universe. That is why Paul refers to it here as a "false humility." It claims to move you beyond self, but in actual practice, if you examine teachings like this, you discover that they focus on self; that the real goal is to develop all your self powers. That is why it is called the human potential movement---the idea that everything is already there inside of you, and all you need to do is bring it out and develop your possibilities and full potential. I saw a motto on a wall that said, "The Light you seek is in your own lantern." That is the idea. You already have it all---now discover it. Numerous groups today offer to help in this: Esalen, Eckankar, est, Transpersonal Psychology, Transactional Analysis, etc.

C. Contrast Between Personal Prideful Intellectualism and Corporate Spiritual Growth

1. Personal Prideful Intellectualism

   "inflated without cause by his fleshly mind"

2. Corporate Spiritual Growth

   a. Submission to the Head

      "and not holding fast to the head"

   b. Corporate Body Life

      "from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments"

   c. Spiritual Growth from God

      "grows with a growth which is from God"

III. (:20-23) FREEDOM FROM THE BONDAGE AND CONDEMNATION OF LEGALISM

Legalism: "a spirit which fails to recognize that God's grace has made us acceptable to Him, and human works have no part in it" – Kent

Piper:
First,

> legalism means treating Biblical standards of conduct as regulations to be kept by our own power in order to earn God's favor. In other words legalism will be present wherever a person is trying to be ethical in his own strength, that is, without relying on the merciful help of God in Christ. Simply put, moral behavior that is not from faith is legalism. The legalist is always a very moral person. In fact the majority of moral people are legalists because their so-called Judeo-Christian morality inherited from their forefathers does not grow out of a humble, contrite reliance on the merciful enabling of God. On the contrary, for the legalist, morality serves the same function that immorality does for the antinomian, the free-thinker, the progressive, namely, it serves as an expression of self-reliance and self-assertion. The reason some Pharisees tithed and fasted was the same reason some German university students take off their clothes and lie around naked in the park in downtown Munich. The moral legalist is always the elder brother of the immoral prodigal. They are blood brothers in God's sight because both reject the sovereign mercy of God in Christ as a means to righteousness and use either morality or immorality as a means of expressing their independence and self-sufficiency and self-determination. And it is clear from the N.T. that both will result in a tragic loss of eternal life. So the first meaning of legalism is the terrible mistake of treating Biblical standards of conduct as regulations to be kept by our own power in order to earn God's favor. It is a danger we must guard against in our own hearts every day. And please know that my old self is just as prone to it as anyone.
>
> The second meaning of legalism is this: the erecting of specific requirements of conduct beyond the teaching of Scripture and making adherence to them the means by which a person is qualified for full participation in the local family of God, the church. This in where unbiblical exclusivism arises. There is no getting around the fact

that the church does not include everyone. We do exclude people from membership because we believe worship should imply commitment to the Lordship of Christ the Head of the church. But exclusion of people from the church should never be taken lightly. It is a very serious matter. Schools and clubs and societies can set up any human regulations they wish in order to keep certain people out and preserve by rule a particular atmosphere. But the church is not man's institution. It belongs to Christ. He is the Head of the Body, and he alone should set the entrance requirements. That is very important!

Legalism is a more dangerous disease than alcoholism because it doesn't look like one. Alcoholism makes men fail; legalism helps them succeed in the world. Alcoholism makes men depend on the bottle; legalism makes them self-sufficient, depending on no one. Alcoholism destroys moral resolve; legalism gives it strength. Alcoholics don't feel welcome in church; legalists love to hear their morality extolled in church. Therefore, what we need in this church is not front end regulations to try to keep ourselves pure. We need to preach and pray and believe that "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, neither teetotalism nor social drinking, neither legalism nor alcoholism is of any avail with God, but only a new creation (a new heart)" (Gal. 6:15; 5:6). The enemy is sending against us every day the Sherman tank of the flesh with its cannons of self-reliance and self-sufficiency. If we try to defend ourselves or our church with peashooter regulations we will be defeated even in our apparent success. The only defense is to "be rooted and built up in Christ and established in faith" (Col. 2:6); "Strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy" (Col. 1:11); "holding fast to the Head from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together … grows with a growth that is from God" (Col. 2:19). From God! From God! And not from ourselves.

. . .

Their theology is wrong because all the fullness of deity dwells in Christ (2:9) not angels. And their ascetic regulations regarding food and drink are useless because they are only shadows of reality and lead to being puffed up.

A. Bondage of Condemnation

1. Live as those who have died with Christ

   "*If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world*"

   Vaughan: "to order life by ascetic rules is to revert to an inferior state supposedly abandoned at the time of conversion."

2. Live as those who are no longer of this world

   "*why, as if you were living in the world*"

3. Live as those who have been freed from the law

   "*do you submit yourselves to decrees*"

B. Particulars of Legalism

1. Itemized (as relating to the physical senses): Externals (not Spiritual)
   a. "*Do not handle*"

   b. "*Do not taste*"

   c. "*Do not touch*"

2. Characterized (as relating to their final destiny): Perishables (not Imperishable)

   "*(which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)*"

3. Identified (as relating to their source and authority): Human (not Divine)

   "*in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men*"

C. Contrast Between Appearance of Wisdom and Real Spiritual Value

1. Appearance of Wisdom

   "*These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom*"

   a. Worthless Religion -- "*in self-made religion*" – Self originated

   b. Worthless Humility -- "*and self-abasement*" – Self afflicted

   c. Worthless Asceticism -- "*and severe treatment of the body*" – Self destroyed

2. Real Spiritual Value

   "*but are of no value against fleshly indulgence*"

   How is real holiness achieved? How do we get closer to God and grow in spirituality? Not by the bondage and condemnation of the ISMs

Conclusion:

Piper:
wherever authentic, joyful, confidence in Christ diminishes, regulations are brought in to preserve what the power of Christ once created. If you erect enough regulations and build a big enough endowment, an institution can endure for decades after the spiritual dynamic that brought it into existence is gone.

Letter from Piper's Dad:
So, while the problem is surely not a simple one, I think if I had a church and wrote my own constitution, I would word it positively, perhaps saying, 'It is expected that all members will abstain from habits and life styles that fail to honor Christ and will seek to perfect holiness in the fear of God doing everything in word and deed to His honor and glory.' Something like that, anyhow. And then leave it to the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the word to effect the right results…"

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are the implications of this passage for Christian "sabbath-keeping"? Is the Lord's Day to be set aside and observed in a special sense in a way parallel to the Jewish sabbath?

2) How can some "good" Christian practices (devotions, Bible memorization, attendance at services, etc.) degenerate into legalistic exercises? What is the spirit of our Christian fellowship – oriented around grace or legalism?

3) What is the secret to combating "fleshly indulgence"? If ritualism, mysticism, ascetism (and legalism) all fail, how does our union with Christ provide the power to live according to our new nature?

4) How should we respond to others who try to judge and condemn us in these doubtful areas of food, drink, religious observances, etc.?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Laurin: Re vs. 17 -- "Heralds precede the coming of a king. Watchers thrill at the blasts and rejoice in the fanfare because they know the king is coming. But when the king has come the heralds retire and the people no longer regard them but rejoice in the presence and person of the king. It is identically so with these things which heralded the coming of Christ. Now that he has come and has finished the work of redemption and is available to the realization of our faith, we need no longer regard these rites and ceremonies as essential to either our faith or life. They are fulfilled and consequently empty and meaningless observances."

Robertson: Re vs 18 – "This clause has long been an exegetical enigma, but it seems now to be cleared up by an inscription in the sanctuary of Apollos at Claros where the verb is used of an initiate entering into the mysteries of the god; this was discovered by Sir W. M. Ramsay. Paul uses it of one of these Gnostic devotees who has been initiated and who dwells on the secret visions which he has imagined or seen."

Martin: Re vs. 19 – "Human limbs are meant to be an integral part of the human frame. Once they become detached, they lose that vital contact with the source of life and nourishment. Paul is saying: the false teacher who ceases to depend on the head, ceases to belong to the body. He who cuts himself off from Christ cuts himself free from the church."

Wiersbe: Re asceticism and legalism in vs. 20-23 – "An ascetic practices rigorous self-denial and even self-mortification in order to become more spiritual… The power of Christ in the life of the believer does more than merely restrain the desires of the flesh: *it puts new desires within him*. Nature determines appetite. The Christian has the very nature of God within (2 Peter 1:4), and this means he has godly ambitions and desires. He does not need *law* on the outside to control his appetites because he has *life* on the inside!"

Hendriksen: "Why regard as indispensable ordinances as to eating, when the One foreshadowed by Israel's manna is offering himself as the Bread of Life (John 6:35, 48)? How can the observance of the Passover (cf. Ex. 12) be considered a means unto spiritual perfection when 'our Passover has been sacrificed, even Christ' (1 Cor. 5:7)? What justification could there be for imposing upon converts from the Gentile world the observance of the Jewish sabbath, when the Bringer of eternal rest is urging every one to come unto him (Matt. 11:28, 29; cf. Heb. 4:8, 14)?"

Thomas: Re summary of Chap. 2 and the protection against the dangers elucidated here – "But the protection is made as clear as the peril, and this is found all through the section to be simply union with Christ, our head. This union contains wisdom for us, conveys grace and power to us, controls our lives, and enables us to do God's will. This is the force of the prayer in 1:9-11, where wisdom, strength, and the knowledge of the divine will are all included in the apostle's petition. The more we are enabled to realize this assured union with our Lord Jesus Christ, and the more we yield ourselves by faith and surrender to His Lordship as our head, the more effective will be our practical Christian life, both in opposition to what is evil and in furtherance of what is good."

Vaughan: “Elsewhere Paul insists that under some circumstances Christian freedom should be voluntarily limited by one’s respect for the tender conscience of a weaker brother (cf. Rom 14:1ff.; 1 Cor 8:1ff.). This caution is necessary for those inclined to assert their liberty regardless of the damage their actions might bring to another person. But ‘at Colosse it is precisely Christian liberty that requires to be asserted in the face of specious attempts to undermine it’ (Bruce, p. 243).”

Vaughan: “His final appraisal is that asceticism is a dismal failure. On the surface it may appear to be the way to spiritual victory, but it actually is not. Christianity is not a religion of prescriptions but of a living relationship with Jesus Christ. This, of course, does not mean that once we are in Christ everything is permissible. That would amount to moral and spiritual anarchy, a thing contrary to the very nature of the new life in Christ. It does mean that the controls of the Christian life spring from within, that genuine piety grows out of inward conviction generated by a consciousness of union with Christ. Indwelt by the Spirit, we walk by the Spirit and thus avoid carrying out the desires of the lower nature (Gal. 5:16). Maclaren says it with characteristic force: ‘There is only one thing that will put the collar on the neck of the animal within us, and that is the power of the indwelling Christ’ (p. 255).”

Piper: Last week we saw that Christmas is the replacement of shadows with the Reality that casts the shadow. Remember from Hebrews 8:5 that the priests serve a copy and a shadow of heavenly things. The tabernacle and temple were a shadow; the official priesthood was a shadow; the animal sacrifices were a shadow; the feasts and dietary laws were a shadow. And when Christ came, the shadows began to fall away, because Christ himself is the Reality. He is our temple and tabernacle, our focus and place of worship. He is our High Priest and Mediator and Intercessor. He is our atoning sacrifice. He is our Passover feast and spiritual food. He is our purity and holiness that sets us off from other people.

And we saw last week that there's a reason why the worship and focus of the New Testament is so radically spiritual, rather than ritualistic and traditionalistic. The reason is that Christianity is a missionary faith. That is, the message of the New Testament is meant to be preached to all peoples, and the radical worship of the New Testament is meant to be incarnated in all cultures. That was impossible in the Old Testament. The tabernacle, priesthood, sacrifices, feasts and dietary laws could not be transferred to other peoples and cultures. It was a come-see religion. Christianity is a go-tell religion. That is why Christianity is radically spiritual. Radically internal. Radically personal. And we could add radically ethical, lest anyone misunderstand "internal" to mean "private." It is meant for all peoples, tribes, tongues and nations. So almost all the mandated ritualistic, formal, external aspects of worship life are gone. What remains is a radically spiritual, internal, personal joyful dependence on all that God is for us in Jesus, and the outworking of love and justice in community.

What Was the Flaw in the Old Covenant?

What was wrong? What was the flaw? There are two ways to answer that question. From the human side and from God's side. From the human side the problem was

unbelief and hard-heartedness (Hebrews 3:8,15,19; 4:7). From God's side the problem was that God withheld the sovereign enablement of his Spirit.

So you can see the new covenant is exactly what we need if God is going to replace shadows with Reality. If God's will is that we be free from externalism and formalism and ritualism and traditionalism, so that our faith and our corporate worship and our life can be radically spiritual and personal and internal, then we need more than the blowing away of the shadows of the Old Testament. We need for God to write his will on our hearts. We need for him to assert himself powerfully in our lives as our God. We need for him to see to it not just that he is knowable, but that we know him.

What's new about it is that it does not leave us in our bondage to sin. It does not leave us in our so-called free will -- which is only a code word for slavery to self and sin. The new covenant does not leave us in our vaunted self-determination and death. It sovereignly overcomes our rebellion and resistance and frees us to delight in God and in the will of God written on our hearts.

We can cut ourselves, or throw our children in the sacred river, or give a million dollars to the United Way, or serve in a soup kitchen at Thanksgiving, or a hundred forms of penance and self-injury, and the result will be the same: the stain remains and death terrifies. We know that our conscience is defiled -- not with external things like touching a corpse, a dirty diaper, or a piece of pork. Jesus said it is what comes out of a man that defiles, not what goes in (Mark 7:15-23). We are defiled by attitudes like pride and self-pity and bitterness and lust and envy and jealousy and covetousness and apathy and fear. Verse 14 says that these are "dead works" -- that is, they have no spiritual life in them. They don't come from new life; they come from death and they lead to death. That is why they make us feel hopeless in our consciences.

APTAT: A - Acknowledge your inability to do good on your own. P - Pray for divine enablement. T - Trust the promises of God for help and strength and guidance. A - Act in obedience to God's word. T - Thank God for whatever good comes.

Stedman: I carry with me pictures of my wife, my children and my grandchildren. I take them along in order to be ready for people who try to show their pictures to me! I value these photographs and look at them occasionally when I am away from home. But what would you think if I propped up these pictures all over my house and talked to them and tried to relate to them? You would think I had lost my mind---and I probably would have. But, more than that, I would certainly soon lose touch with the very people whose pictures I treasure. They would feel ignored and would probably ultimately leave me and all relationship would cease.

That is what Paul says is wrong with shadows. If you still place primary value on a shadow after the reality has come you destroy your participation in the value of that reality. Now the reality, here, is Jesus! He is the center of all life and the source of excitement in a Christian's experience. He is the One who accompanies us through life, to comfort in times of need and strengthen when we are being tempted. He is a place of refuge to run to when we are troubled or uncertain about

life. To lose him is to lose all source of excitement and vitality in life. That is the danger in observing shadows. That is why this paragraph begins with the word "therefore." The previous section pointed out all that Christ is to us now. Thus Paul is saying, "Having him, therefore, do not let anyone spoil you by involving you in a mechanical performance that will cancel out the reality."

Stedman: If you would like some additional insight on the New Age Movement, which is so prevalent in our area today, I would recommend Unmasking the New Age, by Douglas Groothuis, a very thorough, well documented book, examining the teachings of the New Age in all its forms. Another book that is helpful (although a bit more alarmist), is David Hunt's The Seduction of Christianity.

HOW NOT TO ACHIEVE TRUE SPIRITUALITY? 4/6/03

UNION WITH CHRIST HAS FREED US FROM THE BONDAGE AND CONDEMNATION OF THE FALSE ISMS (WHICH CLAIM TO BE THE PATHWAY TO SPIRITUALITY)

PARAGRAPH:	2:16-17	2:18-19	2:20-23
FALSE ISM:	RITUALISM	MYSTICISM	LEGALISM
DEFINITION:	Dependence on observance of specific religious rites	Dependence on inner personal experience with the spirit world disconnected from the Word of God & Holy Spirit	Dependence on conformity to an external code of conduct in contradiction to the grace of God
ASPECTS:	Dietary Laws Religious Observances (Annual, monthly, weekly) Self Made Religion	Physical Self-Denial (False Humility) Spiritual Meditation Experience Oriented Self Made Religion	Emphasis on External Restrictions / "Do Not" The Letter kills / Spirit gives Life Human Laws vs. Divine Self Made Religion
WARNING:	"*let no one act as your judge*"	"*Let no one keep defrauding you*"	"*do not submit yourself to decrees*"
BONDAGE:	Insignificance / you can't grasp the substance	Introspection / you can't seem to connect	Insecurity / you can never do enough (or False Security)
HARMFUL LEADERSHIP:	Domineering "*let no one act as your judge*"	Inflated Pride "*inflated … by his fleshly mind*"	False Wisdom "*the appearance of wisdom*"
CONDEMNED:	Worthless for Spiritual Victory	Worthless for Spiritual Victory	Worthless for Spiritual Victory
PROTECTION:	Substance over Shadow "*the substance belongs to Christ*"	Abide in Christ "*holding fast to the Head*"	Live the Resurrection Life "*If you have died with Christ*"
SPIRITUALITY TEST/REWARD:	Experiencing the Reality of Christ	Corporate Spiritual Growth	Victory over "*Fleshly Indulgence*"

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 3:1-11

TITLE: FOCUS AND FOLLOW THROUGH

BIG IDEA:
THE KEY TO SPIRITUALITY IS LIVING OUT OUR UNION WITH CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

Today we come to a **very exciting section** of the Book of Colossians and yet **a very humbling section**. **It is exciting** because Paul is ready to unfold for us the **True Key to Spirituality**. He is making the transition from the more doctrinal section of Chapters 1-2 where he had been teaching the Supremacy and Sufficiency of Christ and warning against false approaches to spirituality to the more practical section of Chapters 3-4. **It is humbling** because we are brought face to face with the simplicity of the Christian life and feel exposed by the large gap between our positional sanctification and our practical sanctification … between how God views us in Christ and how consistently we are actually living.

You see it is very easy for us to marvel at the **Supremacy of Christ …**

He is head over all of creation

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation . . .
For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him

He is head over His new creation … the church

He is also head of the body, the church and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything

- We are not insignificant; we are in a personal relationship with the Head of the Universe
- But does He really have first place in everything in our lives?

You see it is very easy for us to accept in theory that **Christ is Sufficient** and that we are Complete in Christ

- We have no grounds for fear or anxiety or worry or feeling inadequate
- But do we really live in the confidence of that realization and tap into those incredible resources?

It is very easy for us to expose the errors in man's futile attempts at spirituality:

- whether through **Ritualism**… or through **Mysticism**… or through **Legalism**
- or through **Asceticism** which runs through them all …

We can study with a certain smugness the false religious systems:

Of **Gnosticism** – and see how it impacts Christianity today

Of present day **Judaism** – and see where they missed the mark in terms of recognizing the Messiah

Of the current hot topic of the day: **Islam** – and certainly appreciate how the decadence of our Western culture must be confusing if they associate that with Christianity

But when we come face to face with the simplicity of True Spirituality in terms of living out our Union with Christ in His death and His resurrection we are exposed and humbled . . . and yet excited at the same time

- We are already positionally sanctified
- We are destined for glory – no doubt about it
- We have the opportunity today to live out the life of Christ within us

But we are in the midst of a constant Struggle that Requires **Focus** and **Follow Through**
It requires a Putting off of the old man and a Putting on of the New

(Read the first half of Text **3:1-4**)

Kids: Sports analogies: the need to **Focus** and **Follow Through**; cf. kicking a soccer ball
Golf/Basketball/Soccer/Pitching and Batting in Baseball/Tennis
Even true in Business – Establishing our Strategic Business Plan for next 3 years so we
Can focus on critical success factors and follow through

I. (:1-4) FOCUS ON OUR UNION WITH CHRIST – 2 EXHORTATIONS

"*Seek* …" / "*Set* …" Always good to look at the **commands** in the passage – what are we commanded or challenged or encouraged to do?

A. (:1) Focus Our Interests and Effort – "Seek" – in terms of Striving for something

1. Motivation based on History – Union with Christ in His Resurrection

"*If then you have been raised up **with Christ***"
Particle of a fulfilled condition – Better translation:
"*In view of the fact, therefore …*"; "*Since …*"
cf. **2:12-13** with the emphasis on the resurrection and forgiveness of sins
What new resources we have in conjunction with the resurrection power of Christ
We truly are a new creation
Power of sin and death has been broken; no more bondage
Guilt of sin has been removed; no more condemnation

Not just raised up so that we have resurrection life …. But ***With Christ***!

2. Exhortation for the Present – "*keep seeking the things above*" Involves striving

What are the "things above"? heavenly things; positional truths
How do we go about seeking them?
Hendriksen: "implies persevering effort … more than a *seeking to discover*. It is a *seeking to obtain*"

Why do we live aimlessly??

Doud: "Seek" means to pursue, search for, endeavor to obtain, desire to possess. If a legalist were writing this he would write "Don't ...." but Paul writes "Seek . . .

Talk about a **true Seeker Service**: not a bunch of lost, dead, sinners separated from God with no inclination towards God unless in His grace and mercy He sovereignly draws them to Himself … No we believers are here today in the true Seeker Service: those with the life of Christ within us seeking to lay hands in our experience on those precious spiritual truths and relationships that we have full rights to by virtue of our resurrection with Christ

Lucas: "It has been customary to speak of the concerned unbeliever as a 'seeker'. But the normal biblical perspective is to see unbelievers, in relation to the things of God as characteristically seeking after either 'wisdom', or 'signs', as means of establishing their own righteousness before God. These searches are not likely to succeed! In biblical teaching there is no human 'search for God'; the story is, from the beginning, that of a divine search for those who hide from their Maker. When men and women begin their search for God and his forgiveness, it is evidence of a prior work of God."
I believe that! That is why we praise God for His mercy and grace and love in reaching out to us

3. Encouragement based on Union with Christ in the Present – Christ is Glorified – "*seated at the right hand of God*"
   Position of majesty, authority, power
   Our Forerunner – He has gone before and shown us where we not only will end up but by virtue of our union with Him … where we are right now!

Answer to Boredom and Insignificance and Apathy

B. (:2-4) Focus Our Minds – "Set" – Requires Concentration; shutting out distractions
1. Motivation based on History – Union with Christ in His Death
   "*For you have died and your life is hidden **with Christ** in God*"
   a. Cause – you have died (in the past)
   b. Effect – your life is hidden (right now)
      - Protected, safe, secure – eternal security
      - We function in the invisible, spiritual realm – just as real …
      - Unobserved by ourselves and others – No surprise that the world does not pat us on the back for our dedication to holiness
      - United with Christ in God

Warren Doud : The false teachers of Colosse were pushing subjective mysticism. Paul condemned that in 2:20-23. God wants us to think about **God's objective provisions**

Vaughan: "The Christian life is a life *'hidden with Christ in God,'* but it is still, Paul explains, a life lived out on earth."

Warren Doud: God sees things differently than we do. God's viewpoint here is positional truth. God views us as already both dead (2:20), buried (2:12) and raised in Christ. God sees better than we do but he expects us to see what he has done in Christ with the eye of faith. This has nothing to do with our feelings. We cannot taste, feel or smell positional truth

2. Exhortation for the Present – *"Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth"* Phil. 4:8 – good list to meditate on
The mind is a very important spiritual battleground
We must take every thought captive to obedience

Matter of Perspective – Interview with players on Loyola's women's lacrosse team – ranked #1 n nation – just beat MD a week ago – their coach is battling cancer – players have gained a new perspective: "Don't sweat the small stuff" – they can deal with any minor adversity they face in the game of lacrosse
We should have perspective: "Don't sweat the earthly stuff" --

3. Encouragement based on Union with Christ in the Future– Our Glory is Coming
*"When Christ … is revealed, then you also will be revealed **with Him** in glory"*

Are we looking forward to this? The best lies ahead!

I John 2:28 – 3:3 I take a different interpretation than what you might be used to … Every Christian **abides in Christ** – is united to Christ – matter of degrees for sure – exhortation is to live out that union more consistently, more intimately – but message of John here and in John 15 – famous chapter on the vine and the branches – those who don't abide, the branches who are gathered up and burned; those who shrink back in fear at Christ's coming … because of the wrath of God … those are unbelievers like Judas who might have been pretenders or professors of faith in Christ but had no vital union with Him

Answer to Fear and Anxiety and Worry

C. (:4b) Key: Christ is our life – *"Christ, who is our life"* – both Now and in the Future
Wiersbe: "Eternal life is not some heavenly substance that God imparts when we, as sinners, trust the Saviour. Eternal life is Jesus Christ Himself."

Wuest: "not just the Giver of our eternal life but the Essence of that life"

What defines Who I am?? Not my job, my education, even my family background … the most important things about who I am are invisible – a complex set of emotions about how I think and how I view myself – at the center of that complex mix should be this settled reality: that Christ is truly my life

Brian talked about Vision last week – If Christ is truly our life … if we are seeking those things above, where Christ is … certainly our passion must be tied in to the Great Commission …. We must have some sense of driving urgency to fulfill the role that Christ wants us to play in the church – His program for reaching out to the lost world

II. (:5-11) FOLLOW THROUGH BY PUTTING OFF ALL THE SINFUL PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH THE OLD MAN = EVERYTHING THAT IS THE OPPOSITE OF LOVE

People talk a lot about the importance of **Self Control** – Paul chooses to pick on 2 key topics where **control** is the primary issue:

Sexual Sins – How we respond to the temptation to lust instead of love

Social Sins – How we channel our emotions and use our tongue in terms of our relationships with others in the body of Christ as well as outside the church

But it is not Self Control that we are after – It is the **Spirit's control** as we live out our Union with Christ

A. (:5-7) Reckon Ourselves Dead to All Sexual (Sensual) Sin – Dead to Selfish Lust

all of these sins affect our vertical relationship with God and bring His judgment

Dangerous business – playing with fire … impossible not to get burned … Proverbs has a lot of warnings regarding this common pitfall – Proverbs 2, 5 … passages go on … Death and Destruction await … this is a destructive sin against your own body

"Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body" (I Cor. 6:18). "Flee" means to become a fugitive. Run away from fornication. Don't play with it. This is a warning to the saints.

The world has totally bought into Satan's deception here; Sex is a play toy that only some prudish Puritans …

- cf. advertising – both print and TV
- cf. TV sit-coms
- cf. internet – What companies have made money off the internet??

Put to death = refuse to obey these passions; deprive these things of their power; destroy their strength; reckon that Christ has set us free from these things

Doud: We died with Christ (3:3). How can kill what is already dead?
The members of our body are not evil in themselves as the Gnostics believed.
Verses 5-12 describe how we are to deal with the engine in us that produces sin: v. 5, "put to death" the capacity to sin; v. 9, strip off the old man; and in vv. 10 and 12, put on the new man in order to represent the life of Christ. The imagery moves from death to takes clothes on and off.
God wants us to put out of commission the strength of sin in our lives.
God charges us with a mandate to radically deny the self-centered life.

1. (:5) List of Sexual Sins – piling up a bunch of words to make sure everything is covered – Lust as opposed to Love

Western culture actually makes a profitable industry out of all of these

a. "*Immorality*" – Mainly illicit sexual intercourse (sex outside of marriage) (fornication, adultery)

Doud "Fornication" is both an attitude and an overt sin. Cf Jimmy Carter's famous and honest expression of confessing to struggling with the attitude of lust; compared to President Clinton's blatant indiscretions ….

b. *"Impurity"* – Word for "uncleanness" – perverted forms of sex
Stedman: "homosexuality, child abuse, and various strange and kinky sexual practices"
cf. present day discovery of how prevalent child abuse has been among the Roman Catholic priests -- shocking

c. *"Passion"* – Lust; pornography; allowing visual images to arouse one sexually

d. *"Evil Desire"* – closely associated with c; mental aspect; cf. looking at a woman in a way that you are lusting after her in your heart

e. *"Greed, which amounts to idolatry"* – greedy desire to have more – could refer to either things or pleasures; talking in this context about coveting the body of another in a sexual sense; cf. having an affair;
the other person becomes so important in your life that they usurp the rightful place of God in some sense;

Tozer: "when we (strongly desire to) *own* a thing, it actually owns a part of us"

Connection between Purity and Power

2. (:6) These things Worthy of the Inescapable Wrath of God
"*For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come*"
Present Tense – it is coming; it is already on the way
cf. the wrath of God coming in the days of Noah; so it is in these last days (orgies lead to orge); cf. Sight and Sound theatre production of Noah
Hendriksen: "These sins attract God's displeasure like a magnet attracts iron or like a high steeple on an isolated hill draws lightning."

3. (:7) These Things Characteristic of Pre-Conversion Days for Everyone
"*and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them*."

B. (:8-9) Put Off All Social Sins = Mistreating others
1. (:8-9A) List of Social Sins = Uncontrolled Malicious Expression Against Others
all of these sins would have a negative impact on the unity of the body of believers (our horizontal relationship with one another)

a. Sins of Temper -- Emotion / Disposition / Attitude
1) *"Anger"* – seething anger

2) *"Wrath"* – explosion of anger; violent outburst; no self control
(maybe not much distinction here)

3) *"Malice"* – involves ill-will; desire to injure another

Example of Christ is impressive in this regard
- Teaching about Turning the Other Cheek
- Story of the Good Samaritan to teach us how to love our enemies
- Teaching about the unlimited extent of Forgiveness
- Living out that truth when on the cross: Praying for the forgiveness of those putting him to death rather than seeking vengeance on them

b. Sins of the Tongue

1) *"Slander"* – speaking ill of another in a way that harms their reputation; word used is *blasphemy* (usually directed against God)

2) *"Abusive speech from your mouth*" – foul speaking

3) Lying, Dishonesty -- *"Do not lie to one another"* – **Kids** – no tolerance for lies – very important that you see the importance that God puts on honesty
Separated out for special treatment – fundamentally important

2. (:9B) These Things Characteristic of the Old Self
"since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices"

Morgan: **Spiritual clothing** is an important figure in the Bible. You must always take off the old dirty clothes before putting on the new clean clothes.

a) Adam and Eve – made for themselves coverings of fig leaves
b) God clothed them with skins (animals were killed to get these skins) – picture of the righteousness of God
c) Ezekiel 16:10 – speaking of the nation of Israel; Zech. 3:3-4
d) Prodigal Son
e) Parable of the wedding banquet (Matt. 22) – the king can recognize inappropriate clothing
f) Isaiah 64:6; Rev. 7:14
g) Clothing for the Christian walk and service: the armor of God – Ephes. 6
h) Importance of putting on Christ

Illustration of Weeding – you don't just cut off the tips of the weeds; you dig them out by their roots so they don't keep popping up

C. (:10-11A) Remember that Your Experience is Maturing to Match Your Position

1. You have already put on the new self

"*and have put on the new self* "

2. That new self in your experience is being Renewed and Matured

"*who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him*"

3. There is no room for mistreating others on the basis of mere human distinctions

"*a renewal in which there is no distinction between*":

a. "*Greek and Jew*" – huge distinction being made by the Jews

b. "*circumcised and uncircumcised*"

c. "*barbarian, Scythian*" – not the refined, sophisticated social elite

d. "*slave and freeman*" – common theme: Prince and the Pauper …

Hendriksen: "All racial bigotry, chauvinism, and snobbery is condemned here."

What type of prejudice and bigotry do we fall into?

D. (:11B) Key to Spirituality: "*Christ is all and in all*"

CONCLUSION:

We have been talking about living out our Union with Christ.

Zeisler: Union with Christ is the greatest truth imaginable, but it is one that we have to choose to believe and act on because it can't be seen.

What are we going to do this week to FOCUS on our union with Christ?

- requires putting forth the effort to seek those things that are above
- requires concentrating our mind and shutting out distractions and rejecting temptations

What are we going to do this week to FOLLOW THROUGH on putting off the old man and putting on the new?

- make sure that we check ourselves honestly in the area of sexual temptations and lust
- make sure we are submitted to the Spirit's control over our emotions and tongue

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are some of the things which are "*above*" which we are supposed to keep seeking and set our mind upon? What are some of the things which are "*on earth*" that consume too much of our seeking and our mindset?

2) In what sense are the members of our body *"**dead** to immorality, impurity* … anger, wrath," etc.? Why do we struggle so much with temptation in these areas? How does our culture and the media put additional pressure on us in these areas?

3) What aspects of our old life, our pre-conversion life, have we decisively put behind us?

4) What does Paul mean when he says that *"Christ is all and in all"*?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Lucas: Re Outline of Chaps 3-4 --
The Christian and Christ, 3:1-8
The Christian and the local church, 3:9-17
The Christian and his family, 3:18-21
The Christian and his daily work, 3:22 – 4:1
The Christian and the outsider, 4:2-6

Vaughan: Re vs 4 – "'*Appears*,' a reference to the return of Christ, translates one of several Greek terms used in the NT for this event: *parousia* (often rendered 'coming') speaks specifically of Christ's (future) presence with his people; *epiphaneia* ('manifestation,' 'appearance'; cf. 'epiphany') relates to the visibility and splendor of his coming; *apokalypis* ('revelation') denotes the inner meaning of the event. *Phaneroo*, the word Paul used here, emphasizes the open display of Christ at his coming. Paul's teaching is that when Christ is thus manifested, believers also '*will appear with him in glory*.'"

Lightfoot: "The veil which now shrouds your higher life from others, will then be withdrawn. The world which now persecutes, despises, ignores now, will then be blinded with the dazzling glory of the revelation."

Lightfoot: "Christ has dispossessed and obliterated all distinctions of religious prerogative and intellectual preeminence and social caste: Christ has substituted Himself for all these."

Stedman: "…Paul is saying that we are to continually remember who we are now, who we once were (but no longer are), and who we will be when Christ returns. That is the true basis for living a Christian life. Scirpture calls it '*walking with the Lord*.'"

Zeisler: "In our study we're going to talk a bit about the most important invisible thing that is true of Christians: We are united with Jesus Christ. We have died and have been raised with Christ, our lives are hidden with him in God. These realities cannot be proved by how you look; nothing you can measure, touch, and show other people. Union with Christ is the greatest truth imaginable, but it is one that we have to choose to believe and act on because it can't be seen."

Thomas: "Because their life was hidden with Christ, the Colossian Christians were to carry out in it certain spiritual results. The wrong way of living had already been summed up in 2:23, but since these believers had died with Christ (2:20; 3:3), they were to 'make dead' or 'put to death' their sinful earthly members, also in union with Christ , who is at once the Christian's power and pattern (Rom. 7:4; 8:13). They had died to sin judicially (v.3), and now they were to die to sin practically (v. 5)…. Paganism says, 'Become what you ought to be'; Christianity says, 'Become what you are.' Our spiritual condition thus is made to agree with our position in Christ (1:27, 28; 2:6, 10). We are to accept this position as a fact and then live in the power of it. When the soul is conscious that not only did Christ die for its salvation, but that it has been united with Him in His death, there comes a power that enables it to live to God's praise and glory."

Laurin: "There is such thing in Christian experience as the nautical term of dead reckoning. In navigation dead reckoning is the computation of the ship's position from the records of its movements made in the log without making astronomical observations. The Christian makes his dead reckoning from that log-book which is the Bible. Here he gets the exact position of his standing and location from what is recorded. He need not consult his feelings or make any circumstantial observations."

Martin: Re vs. 11 -- "The visible demonstration of Christ's exaltation and lordship is seen in His people's communal lives which form a new society. This is nothing less than a new beginning to humanity in which all the old divisions, hatreds and stratifications have lost their bitterness and meaning."

Ellis: Re vs. 11 – "In Christ all distinctions are transcended; at the foot of the cross the ground is level. … It is not a uniformity of status in the present world order, but a change in attitude by which the stigma of being different is loved away. It is a unity in diversity, a unity which transcends differences and works within them, but never a unity which ignores or denies differences or necessarily seeks to erase them."

Martindale: Re 4 laws operating in the life of a believer:
1) Law of God = revelation of His will
2) Law of our Mind = our resolve to do His will (cf. Rom. 7)
3) Law of our Old Nature – its dominion has been broken; we no longer have to submit
4) Law of our New Nature – energized by the Holy Spirit

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

TITLE: THE PERFECT BOND OF UNITY

BIG IDEA:
THE KEY TO HARMONY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST IS:
- BEING CHRISTLIKE IN OUR CHARACTER AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER
- BEING PRODUCTIVE IN MINISTERING THE WORD TO ONE ANOTHER
- BEING MOTIVATED BY A DESIRE TO PLEASE HIM IN EVERYTHING
(AND BEING THANKFUL THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE PROCESS)

INTRODUCTION
I have a busy day today … I won't be able to stay and make sure Karen's steak is cooked well-done because I have to pack and catch a flight to Peoria for some Caterpillar meetings. We will be sharing ideas on how to make our dealer internet sites more productive and more attractive for our customers. One of the buzz words that is sure to come up is How to make our web site more **"sticky"!** Seems like a strange term for a high tech medium like the internet … we're not talking about peanut butter and jelly here or even Super Glue … But we are talking about how to keep customers on our website once they visit and try it out. **Websites** need to be sticky to be successful.

Families need to be sticky as well. It is sad when then are no close ties in a family and everyone is happy to take off as soon as they reach the age of independence and have very little future contact with their parents or siblings. We want our families to stick close together … despite whatever challenges we face in terms of distance or personalities. That's why the Apple family is so delighted to have Jenny back living with us for now after her graduation from Richmond.

Today we are going to talk about that same ingredient of stickiness … but in the larger family context of the Body of Christ and more practically within our own local church. We are a diverse group … remember the end of last week's message: 3:11
"*there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman*" – What do you mean "**No Distinction**"?? We certainly all have different social and economic backgrounds … we have different ethnic backgrounds -- Midwestern country folks like the Splitters and lifelong East Coast suburbanites like the Apples … or high tech gurus like Desi vs low tech whoever …. To say nothing of the huge differences in personality and preferences and tastes … Some of you might like your steak medium rare … some might like it cooked to death …

How in the world can there be "No Distinction"?? How can we ever get along and all pull together toward the same objectives?? How can we avoid the messiness of ticking one another off … of holding grudges against one another … of fractured relationships? Paul gives the answer in his key Perspective Summary at the end of vs. 11 – When we look at one another in the body of Christ, what do we see? We see that "*Christ is all, and in all.*"
The same types of attitudes of love and rule of peace that make for harmony in our family is needed in the family of God (Read 3:9-17) Review Big Idea

I. (:12-14) PUT ON CHRISTLIKE ATTRIBUTES (ESPECIALLY LOVE) IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

A. Understand What Makes Christians **So Special** – Paul uses 3 terms (*chosen, holy* and *beloved)* that have their background in God's Election of Israel – in fact that is where we should go to learn about this difficult concept of Election – study Romans Chapter 9 – explaining on what basis did God choose Jacob and not Esau?

"for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls."

1. *Elect* (Chosen) of God

In what sense did God choose us? Not looking ahead and seeing who would choose to believe … has nothing to do with any merit or works or decision making on our part; We chose Him because He first chose us and drew us to Himself – something that God has not done equally with everyone … Is this fair?? Read Romans 9 and get God's perspective on this issue of fairness

But the point here is that doctrine does have practical significance … People that say .."Oh, who cares .. why all this fuss about Election … it's just some theoretical doctrine … who cares what you believe in this area …. Let's move on to the important things like loving one another in the body of Christ …"

God's point is that we need to understand and believe this precious truth in order to be effective in loving one another! We are special because God has chosen us … He hasn't chosen everyone! This is part of our high calling and part of our motivation to consider one another as special and precious.

We don't get to pick the personality of our children … God chooses that! But we know that each one is a precious gift from God and we love each one dearly

Let's appreciate this doctrine of election rather than resist it and let's respond accordingly ..

Same thing with the term *"Holy"*

2. *Holy* – set apart from a sinful world and dedicated to God
   God is the one who accomplished this – true of us positionally; becoming true in our experience; will be our nature forever

Do you have anything that is so special in your household that it is set apart for a specific purpose and only used on that occasion? How about some very valuable china or silverware … That's how God views us – we are special

3. *Beloved* – objects of God's matchless agape love

1 John 4:19 "*We love, because He first loved us*" not just loving God but loving the brethren as well – important theme of 1 John

Application: Catch a vision or our high calling … of how God views us … then view other believers the same way and treat them as special

B. Take Action = *Put On*

this is not a passive activity; does not happen automatically; takes purposeful action on our part; looked last week at the things to Put Off – Sexual sins; sins of the temper; sins of the tongue …
Negatives must be replaced by positives …

not some things that we are to put on just temporarily (like an outfit for the evening), but put on permanently

C. Specific Christlike Attributes: (Expressions of Love)
Contrast **Example of Christ** with **Example of the Pharisees**; of the Judaizers; of the false teachers in Colossae – those who swore allegiance to the letter of the law but did not have the life and power of the Spirit of God

1. *heart of compassion* – opposite of insensitivity, callousness; **mercy of God**

sensitivity to those who are suffering or in need
a heart of pity and tenderness

Look at how Christ responded in his heart and emotions to those in need:

- those in **physical need** – He healed the lame and the blind; He interrupted His busy schedule to take time for ones when His disciples just wanted to press on
- those in **emotional need** – how many times do you think He turned to people and said: "*Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*"
- those blinded **in the spirit** and dead in their sins – "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling*"

Contrast how the Pharisees responded … they needed the lesson of the Good Samaritan to expose their insensitivity and callousness to the needs of others

Depersonalization in today's culture:

No longer a family doctor who cares about you, but an HMO who shuffles you through like branding cattle; take a number please

No longer a personal teller who knows you, but an ATM with a PIN number

No longer using your resources to directly help meet the needs of others, but writing a check (just a piece of paper) and mailing it off to some agency … or if that is too much direct involvement… how about just payroll deduction

2. *kindness* – opposite of harshness and severity; manifestation of **the goodness of God**
   one's attitude and actions towards others; sweetness of disposition
   Stedman: "Kindness is action that reveals compassion, action that arises out of a sense of sympathy. It can take many different forms—a smile, a kind word a pat on the shoulder, an invitation to lunch, an offer of help."

The Example of Christ: started off His ministry turning water to wine for the marriage festival
The Pharisees had to be chastized for their rigid view of the Sabbath that forbid any acts of mercy or meeting the practical needs of others under the guise of spirituality

Many of you have excelled in this area – how you took care of Sheldon and his needs; how we show kindness in bringing meals down to the families at the hospital

3. *humility* – opposite of arrogance and pride; appreciation of **the grace of God**
   one's attitude towards self; not belittling yourself …
   But don't consider yourself to be superior to others

The Example of Christ: washing the feet of His disciples; cf. Philippians 2; servant attitude
Vs the Pharisees: demanding to sit in the places of prominence; commanding titles of respect; tooting their own horn about giving money or about praying

4. *gentleness* – opposite of rough and ungracious; meekness; fruit of the Spirit
   "meekness under control"
   Stedman: "It is real strength, but it does not have to display itself or show off how strong it is"
   Vaughan: "delicate consideration for the rights and feelings of others"
   Moule: "willingness to make concessions"

The Example of Christ; introduced as the Lamb of God; entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey
Vs. the Pharisees and their domineering approach to leadership

5. *patience* – opposite of revenge or anger
   Stedman: "the enduring of another's exasperating conduct without flying into a rage" = the negative side of the equation

The Example of Christ – look at how patient He was with the disciples – corrects them about the same error … but doesn't give up on them; encouraging for us; How patient are we with our kids??

   a. "*bearing with one another*" – the positive side of the equation
      encourage and support each other; associated with Hope

ability to put up with things for a long time
rather than demanding that everyone be just like me

b. *"forgiving one another"*

Scope: *"whoever has a complaint against anyone"*

Standard: *"just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you"*

Doesn't mean condoning unrighteousness – look at the Woes Christ proclaimed against the Pharisees in Matt. 23
But also doesn't mean going around as a fruit inspector trying to take the spec out of our brother's eye while not addressing the log that is in our own eye

How are we doing in this area of bearing with one another and forgiving one another – key to a successful marriage – some things are going to get under our skin and rub us the wrong way; some things have to be addressed … there needs to be some loving, gracious confrontation … but most things fall into the category of "love covers a multitude of sins" so Peter writes: *"Keep fervent in your love for one another"*
Key to a harmonious church as well

6. *love*
   most important attribute
   "perfect bond of unity" = theme Paul is driving at in this section

Thomas: "Love is regarded as the means of uniting and holding together all the elements of the true believer's life, the various Christian graces already mentioned; and it will lead to the ripeness or maturity which is the invariable meaning of the New Testament word for perfection. Love is thus recognized as supreme, related as it is to everything else in the Christian life."

II. (:15) PRACTICE CHRISTLIKE ATTITUDES (PEACE AND THANKFULNESS) IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

A. We should be characterized by Peace (The Rule of Peace – Vaughan)
   1. Nature and Source of this Peace = *"peace of Christ"*

Talking mainly about conflict in relationships in this context – not so much about dealing with inner anxiety and fears

Some people are always **on the warpath** – upset about this or that; can't wait to get you stirred up by sharing some gossip about why so-and-so is such a problem; sowing discord among brethren is a serious offense

Peace is much more than just the absence of conflict … study the Biblical concept of being at Rest; learn what it means to Wait upon God; to turn over things to the Lord to deal with rather than trying to take responsibility for things we don't control in our circumstances and how others treat us

What did it cost Christ to make peace on the cross?? To knock down the wall of division separating Jews from Gentiles?? To bring us all into one body –think of His work of reconciliation and then take seriously our charge to be His ambassadors in carrying out this ministry of reconciliation – context of 2 Cor. 5 – has a lot to do with reconciliation and peace within the body of Christ – need to look more at that whole book – look at how he finishes up in 12:20 – concerned for them that they have not fully put on the new man … their conduct shows too many vestiges of the old man

2. Function and Benefit of this Peace – let it *"rule in your hearts'*
   "act as umpire"
   settle the issue so it doesn't keep rearing its ugly head
   need resolution in our own heart so that we don't keep rehashing everything

What qualities define a **Good Umpire**?

- Be in the proper position to see the play – Peace of Christ gives us proper perspective
- Good Vision – sees the truth; gets the call right; take your time … don't rush the call
- Keep the game Under Control – takes into account the bigger picture =
  Great Commission – we are still here as pilgrims on this earth to have a testimony to the unsaved and to go fishing – can't be fighting among ourselves

like Charles Barclay's commentary on NBA playoffs .. when a team is knocked out = **time to go fishing** = recreation; forget about your intense mission …
going fishing is just the opposite for us = serious business; that's what we are here for!

- Fair and Objective and Impartial

3. Unifying Purpose and Effect of this Peace – *"to which indeed you were called in one body"* – gets back to our divine calling as the elect of God – can't get away from this fundamental theme

B. We should be characterized by Thankfulness – *"and be thankful"*
dominant attitude that pervades this section – Read through this epistle just picking up on this emphasis
There is something about a spirit of thanksgiving that sets the proper tone for everything we do and protects us from a multitude of errors

If our heart is set on Pleasing Christ – we can never go wrong giving Thanks …
What parent ever hears enough of thanksgiving and appreciation from his kids … when do you have to turn to them and say … OK, that's enough …. I'm tired of hearing how appreciative you are; that is one sure way to turn ourselves around when we detect a bad attitude … start our own little thanksgiving service …

III. (:16) PASTOR ONE ANOTHER WITH THE RESOURCES OF THE WORD OF CHRIST

A. The Resource Itself = "*the word of Christ*"

Nothing like having unlimited resources – how deep is the Word of God … how rich … how powerful … how encouraging … how challenging … how practical …

B. The Prerequisite to Mutual Ministry = let it "*richly dwell within you*"

you must have something to offer others; you must first internalize it and experience its benefits; requires meditation; time to take root and grow; honesty and openness so that you don't shut off certain rooms in your heart to the light of the Word of Christ

C. The Activity of Mutual Ministry

"*with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another*"

Richison: PRINCIPLE: God has designed the Christian life in a way that we need others to help us apply Scripture to our experience.

Why doesn't this take place more than it does?
Function of what type of time we spend with one another – quantity and quality
This is why small group interaction is so important …

What type of admonishing is taking place??

Goal is not to prove how right we are … but to help others grow

D. The Accompaniment of Mutual Ministry

"*with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*"

Importance of ministry through music – key verse for understanding ministry of music

Importance of 2 components:

both content/understanding -- not just a good beat
and heart involvement

Misunderstanding:

- some churches have only allowed the specific words of the Scripture to be sung
- some churches have not allowed any musical accompaniment

OT gives us some perspective here – quite a variety; certainly the emotions were fully engaged; dancing and physical expressions of praise were common

E. The Attitude Pervading Mutual Ministry

"*singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God*"

IV. (:17) PERFORM EVERYTHING WE DO FROM THE MOTIVATION OF PLEASING CHRIST

A. No Hidden Locked Closets

"*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all*"

Paul does not lay down a whole system of rules and case law, but rather a fundamental principle that should guide all of our conduct

B. Conformity to Christ and Pleasing Him is the Ultimate Goal

"*in the name of the Lord Jesus*"

only then can we invoke His authority

His is the name that unites us all

Everything we do should be related to the Lordship of Jesus Christ

The "name of the Lord Jesus" means under the authority and approval of Jesus

Hendriksen: "in vital relation with him, that is, in harmony with his revealed will, in subjection to his authority, in dependence on his power"

C. Thanksgiving is the Pervasive Attitude

"*giving thanks through Him to God the Father*"

CONCLUSION:

How committed are we to remaining **STICKY** in the body of Christ? Is that even important to us … or do we take the attitude: I can stick close to Christ without making the effort to maintain the bond of unity among the brethren ????

How are we doing in *putting on the new man and being renewed to a true knowledge* … are we more like the Gnostics and the Judaizers who take pride in our own philosophies and are puffed up with some type of mystical elitism or do we **practice love** like we see Christ respond to others in the Gospel accounts? Are we like the Pharisees in isolating ourselves from others or are we truly expressing the love of Christ in being *compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient* towards others – especially towards those who differ from us the most and might tend to rub us the wrong way? Have we truly *put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity*?

Do we have to be the Umpire in every dispute and enforce our concept of right and wrong and demand that everyone conform to our way of doing things or do we allow *the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts* and in our relationships and in our church?

Do we minister the Word of Christ to build up one another and express our worship and praise to God in a context of thanksgiving and a desire to please Christ in everything so that our perspective truly is that "*Christ is all, and in all.*"

If we do these things … only then are we truly living up to our high calling as those who *have been chosen of God, holy and beloved*.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Why was harmony in the body of Christ such an important theme for the Apostle Paul? How should believers deal with disagreements among themselves?

2) In what sense did God *choose* believers and not choose everyone in the world? Is this fair?

3) What motives for Christian living are presented here? Think of times when you have done the right thing, but from wrong motivation.

4) Take each of the character qualities mentioned in this passage and find both an OT example of how God demonstrated that trait and an example from the gospels of the life of Christ. If believers have already been raised up with Christ (3:1), why do we still need to *"put on"* all of these character traits?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Lucas: "Long ago God had chosen Israel to be 'a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth', and 'set his love upon' them for no other reason than that 'the Lord loves you'. In so singling them out, God called Israel to be "a holy nation'. Now Paul can take the characteristic titles of Israel, the 'chosen', 'holy', and 'beloved' people and boldly give them to the local community of Christians in Colossae…

All the five terms that describe the new man's conduct are used in other passages to designate acts of God or of Christ."

Lucas: "Once again *thankfulness* is Paul's chief prophylactic against the spiritual ills that followed in the wake of the visitors… The wisdom of this Pauline advice is easily verified. Those Christians who exercise themselves in thanksgiving soon come to possess a much vaster appreciation of the great salvation that is theirs in Christ. And this must also draw them into more appreciative fellowship with all those for whom Christ is the centre of all their hopes."

Martin: "The call to '*put on*' the new nature may well have sounded too idealistic and ethereal for Paul's first readers. The apostle therefore proceeds to make his appeal more specific and practical as well as more positive. He moves from a list of affirmative virtues to be cultivated (v. 12) through a statement of how the believer will react to certain human situations when his equilibrium is disturbed (v. 13) to a reminder that his distinctive badge is one of love (v. 14). Christ's peace will act as an arbiter when choices have to be made (v. 15). The church's worship will serve a dual purpose of aiding his growth in Christian knowledge and fellowship with his brethren, and of giving him an outlet for praise (v. 16). Indeed, the whole of life is to be brought under the aegis of his discipleship as he performs his tasks in the spirit of devotion to Jesus Christ (v. 17)."

Wiersbe: "The Word will transform our lives if we will but permit it to 'dwell' in us richly. The word 'dwell' means 'to feel at home.' If we have experienced the grace and the peace of Christ, then the Word of Christ will feel at home in our hearts. We will discover how rich the Word is with spiritual treasures that give value to our lives."

Wiersbe: "… we must be spiritually motivated. Because we have experienced the grace of Christ, we want to live for him. Because we have enjoyed the peace of Christ, we want to obey Him. We have been enriched by the Word of Christ, and ennobled by the name of Christ; therefore, we want to honor and glorify Him. Can we desire any higher motivation?

Kent: Re vs. 17 – "Our realization of who the Lord Jesus is, our identification with Him, His authority over us, and a recognition of His will for us should govern all Christian thought and activity."

Stedman: Re forgiveness – "It does not mean that we are not to air a grievance we may feel. We are told in Scripture that if we have something against another to '*go to the other and tell him his or her fault between you and him alone*.' We do not have to repress every feeling of injustice or unfairness that we feel. We are to say how we feel, but, having done that—this is the point—having gotten it out, forget it. Forgive it. Put it away. No longer let yourself think about it…

3 Aspects:
1) we are not to bring up to the person whom we have forgiven the thing we forgave …
2) we do not tell anybody else about the matter that is forgiven …
3) you do not remind yourself of what has been forgiven…"

Stedman: Re vs. 12 – "Do not miss the basis for all of this, given in verse 12 … That is something God did for us. We did not make ourselves holy. We did not elect ourselves into the kingdom of God. Jesus said once to his disciples, '*You have not chosen me but I chose you and appointed you that you should bear much fruit*.' Though we needed to make a decision for Christ, we soon came to understand that we would never have made that decision had we not been drawn to him and chosen of him. It is his choice of us that enabled us to choose him."

Hendriksen: Re gratitude – "It is worthy of note how frequently in this brief epistle the apostle refers to the privilege and duty of being thankful (1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:15, 16, 17; 4:2). Gratitude makes for peace and excellent public relations."

Bruce: "When the twentieth-century Christian is confronted by a moral issue, he may not find in the Bible any explicit word of Christ relating to its particular details. But he can ask himself: What is the Christian thing to do here? Can I do this without compromising my Christian confession? Can I do it (that is to say) '*in the name of the Lord Jesus*'? (For His reputation is at stake in the lives and conduct of his known followers.) And can I thank God the Father through Him that He has given me the opportunity of doing this thing? … Questions like these, honestly asked, will commonly provide surer ethical guidance than special regulations may do."

Richison: "Election" is a doctrine many people dislike and some even hate. Can you imagine a Christian hating a Christian doctrine! This is because man is so proud. He wants to totally

understand all of God's working. He hates mystery. He refuses to grant God the privilege of selection. The Bible teaches election as plain as our face (as disconcerting as that may be)!. It makes no difference whether we understand election or not, the Bible teaches it. Whether we can harmonize or synchronize election with free will is irrelevant, inconsequential and insignificant; it is true just the same. If we knew everything about anything God teaches then we would be as smart as God

Richison: The world is heartless today. It has become indifferent to suffering and hurt. We have become mechanical in our dealing with others.

We are a number in the information age. Computers do not deal with my name but my number. A computer cannot tell how I feel. I cannot tell the computer that it has made a mistake. It simply sends me a notice of billing and I pay it.

Richison: Despair, bitterness or cynicism does not drive the longsuffering person. He does not succumb under duress. He holds self-restraint in the face of provocation. He withholds retaliation and is not prompt to punish others. Longsuffering is patience through long sequential stages of trial.

There is no forbearance when there is no love. Where people are rigid and do not give an inch, there is no love. God has not appointed us to remake others. They are not going to change. We must lovingly bear with their personalities or their lack of it. We lovingly put up with idiosyncrasies. They have a few queer quirks but so do we.

If we do not love them there will be nothing but friction. It is the principle that obtains between husbands and wives. They lovingly put up with one another. Certain things get on each other's nerves but love provides the lubrication so that they are able to grant latitude. They overlook great many things because there is love between them. If there is no love, friction will become so abrasive that the marriage will split apart.

Lucas: “Paul is not speaking here of an inner sense of peace as God’s gift to those who are in his will: this would make little sense of the second half of the sentence which must control the interpretation, especially if this interpretation is to be kept in line with the context… It is inconceivable that those who share with one another the benefits of that great peace-making work of the cross (1:20) should live with any hatred or contempt for each other in their hearts.”

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 3:18-21

TITLE: GODLY FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS – OR
HOW TO BLOW UP YOUR HOME!

BIG IDEA:
UNION WITH CHRIST MANIFESTS ITSELF IN GODLY FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

INTRODUCTION
I just want you to know that when I was out at Peoria last week for a discussion of the Caterpillar internet initiatives, the keynote speaker did talk about the concept of "**Stickiness**"! Of course that tickled me because last week we made Stickiness the theme of our message about Love being the perfect bond of unity in our relationships in the Body of Christ.

Today we are going to look at the very specific relationships within the context of the Christian home – Wives and Husbands; Children and Fathers. (and we can include mothers in that parenting role) Next week we will look at relationships in the workplace. Paul follows a consistent pattern: always dealing first with the subordinate member in the relationship and then offering a balancing admonition to the other party who is in the position of authority. In a culture that looked down on women, had little concern for the protection of children, and had no recourse for the mistreatment of slaves … Paul spoke a message with a powerful social impact.

If you are in the **Construction** business like I am, you are also equally familiar with the flip side: **Destruction** – in fact which is easier and faster?? Takes less skill … Destruction – don't you like those video clips where they dynamite an old stadium or an apartment complex in the projects and drop it to mounds of rubble in a few seconds ….

Paul doesn't try to give a two week seminar in each of these areas … he just picks on one key point in each family relationship – where the cost of failure is extremely destructive … and that destruction can take place slowly over time or actually quite quickly. He doesn't want us to lose sight of his primary objective: helping us to live out our union with Christ so that we maintain our perspective of *Christ being all and in all*; so that we avoid anger and dishonesty, so that we bear with one another and forgive one another, so that we truly maintain the stickiness of love and so that we let the peace of Christ rule in our relationships. We are still talking about True Spirituality … and we are still keeping our focus on our union with Christ.

Since it is a holiday weekend and I don't want to exasperate such a gracious audience, I will cut you a break today and be relatively short … nothing very complicated here this morning … but very important to our quality of life and the effectiveness of our ministry.

Text: 3:17-21

I. (:18) WIVES ARE CHARGED WITH SUBMISSION

A. What is Involved in Submission?

You can look over the notes on the handout here … I am going to spend my time on what failure looks like in each of these areas (Point D under each section – that's where you have some writing to do) – we can all identify with the wrong approach – that's one of the best ways to learn the positive side …
I remember a message I heard back in my college days: "What is Satan's will for your life" … We went through the Book of Numbers and looked at all of the ways that the children of Israel messed up … that's the approach I am going to take … We are going to look at a whole grocery list of ways to fail in these areas

A 1998 Gallup Poll showed that 69% of the public disagreed with the statement that "wives should graciously submit to the servant leadership of their husbands." I wonder what the stat would be today … definitely heading the wrong direction. The fact that a teaching is not popular is no reason to discard it.

Stedman: "This word '*submit*' has become the focus of the feminist movement and is probably the most hated word among women today. The meaning has been grossly distorted. Many wrong things have been done in the name of submission. Perhaps the first thing that needs to be said about submission is that it does not cancel out equality."

1. It does not mean:
   - a lesser degree of worth or value
   - never expressing your opinion
   - slavery

2. It does mean: (more than just "*mutual submission*" – Ephes. 5:21)
   - military expression = "to rank under"
     "put yourself under, arrange yourself under someone" = voluntary
   - loyalty; support of the husband's role of leader of the household
   - being willing to give way to the decisions of your husband even when you disagree – But: Important for husband to take into account the wise counsel of his help-meet

3. Scope of this Submission – "*to your husbands*"
   not saying that all women should be subject to all men

B. Why is it so Essential? -- it is "*fitting to the Lord*"
   represents God's sense of order in relationships – even if it is unpopular in today's culture; Gen. 2:18; 1 Tim. 2:12-15

C. Example of the Church as the Bride of Christ – submitting to her Head – Eph. 5:24

D. What Does a Failure of Submission on the Part of the Wife Look Like??
Wives, Here is a Crash Course on how to Not be Submissive:

1) When you always have to have the last word in a discussion or an argument; insisting on your own way

Need to look at rules of communication for fighting fairly; Conflicts will arise … need The right approach to conflict resolution

2) When you show public disrespect for your husband – we might be idiots, but we prefer to be corrected privately – actually more of an attitude – How you do it -- than Where you do it -- public vs. private

3) When you nag your husband to get your agenda accomplished

"If you treat your wife like a thoroughbred, you'll never end up with a nag"

4) "I told you so" type of attitude when things don't work out the best

5) Bossing your husband around – he has the God-given position of headship in the home … but he would even be out of line to boss you around in that fashion

6) Undermining the Father's authority with the kids

7) Independent spirit – some people have separate everything – no unity and trust and mutuality – everything has to be legally doled out – "This is your money and this is my money" – "This is my night out when I get to do whatever I want and this is your night out …"

Wedding illustration: Bride receiving instructions from the pastor as they went thru rehearsals … she was extremely nervous … he gave her some simple advice to help her focus

- when you start the procession … concentrate on the aisle … don't look at all the people in the pews; then when you get halfway down … look up at the altar and focus on the wedding party … then as you get close … just focus your eyes on the groom and lock eyes with him … People were a little alarmed when the ceremony started and the bride entered and she could be heard repeating to herself: aisle / altar / him …. Aisle / altar / him …

Not sure how much success she had changing her spouse … but submission is the way to go in God's program …

(I stole that one – Brian Bill)

II. (:19) HUSBANDS ARE CHARGED WITH SACRIFICIAL LOVE

A. What is Involved in Sacrificial Love?

Essential ingredient of loving leadership and headship in the home;

Seen in acts of sacrifice and concern for her welfare;

Stedman: "honor, value, respect, guard, protect, show delight in your wife"

B. Why is it so Essential? protects against resentment / bitterness –

"*and do not be embittered against them*"

Wives have special needs; husband had certain limitations (restrictions) which he did not have as a single man; the pressure to meet these needs may lead to resentment or bitterness

Temptations for Husband to become bitter or resentful against his wife:

- Feeling that there is a lack of appreciation or encouragement from the wife
- Feeling that the wife has failed to act submissively or to show proper respect for the leadership or provision of the husband

Kent: "The verb is used of water which has been made bitter (Rev. 8:11). It is also used of an incensed and angry attitude, when one is mastered by a bitter spirit. Perhaps Paul had in mind instances where a husband might develop a continuing resentment because of a wife's lack of submissiveness."

Morgan: "Don't act harshly, unkindly, roughly"

Zeisler: "Impatience is frequently the source of anger and bitter feelings. 'Doggone it, I want a solution! Let's get on with it. This love business takes forever.' Love keeps men connected longer than they naturally want to be, and the typical response of men is to get impatient. But that's exactly what we are forbidden to do. We must not start tapping our feet, growling, and getting tired of the process. We must live with the process. And similarly, Paul modifies his directive to wives by adding that it is fitting in the Lord that they have limits set on them by submitting to their husbands. Jesus' sacrificial love for us and joyful submission to his Father are models for both husband and wife."

C. Example of Christ – How He sacrificially gave Himself for the Church – Eph. 5:25 ff

D. What does a Failure to Sacrificially Love your Wife look like?
What does bitterness or resentment towards your wife look like?

1) Unwilling to spend the necessary time to communicate fully with his wife – men just want the decision without the process … "Do we have to discuss this again??"

2) Insensitive to the emotional nature of the wife and the different way in which she responds to problems and situations (concept of "*weaker vessel*" – 1 Pet. 3:7)

3) Unwilling to adjust his habits of life to accommodate her different preferences and priorities

4) Taking her for granted – No appreciation; Not valuing her input on the decisions that affect the family – Why do you think God gave you this helper?

5) Not valuing her as precious and as God's gift – "*fellow heir of the grace of life*"

6) Not Looking for ways to show love in a concrete and practical fashion
Importance of servant model of leadership

7) Neglecting to nurture her spiritual life and your prayers together ….

8) Turning to someone else for that emotional connection you should be enjoying with your wife – very dangerous

* * * * *
[Wife Taken for Granted Too Long, Citation: Robert Leslie Holmes, *God's Man* (Kregel, 1998)]
A man accompanied his friend home for dinner and was impressed by the way he entered his house, asked his wife how her day went, and told her she looked pretty.
Then, after they embraced, she served dinner.
After they ate, the husband complimented his wife on the meal and thanked her for it. When the two fellows were alone, the visitor asked, "Why do you treat your wife so well?"

"Because she deserves it, and it makes our marriage happier," replied the host.

Impressed, the visitor decided to adopt the idea.
Arriving home, he embraced his wife and said, "You look wonderful!"
For good measure he added, "Sweetheart, I'm the luckiest guy in the world."
His wife burst into tears.

Bewildered, he asked her, "What in the world's the matter?"

She wept, "What a day! Billy fought at school. The refrigerator quit and spoiled the groceries. And now you've come home drunk!"
Has your wife been neglected and mistreated for so long that you would be thought drunk if you tried this?
* * * * *

III. (:20) CHILDREN ARE CHARGED WITH OBEDIENCE

A. What is Involved in Obedience?
Vaughan: "implies a readiness to hear and carry out orders; the child is to listen to and carry out the instructions of his parents. The verb is in the present tense, indicating that such action is to be habitual."

Scope of this Obedience – "*in all things*"

B. Why is it so Essential? – "*this is well-pleasing to the Lord*"
Preserves peace in the home

C. Example of Christ in Obeying His Heavenly Father
Heb. 5:8

D. What Does a Failure of Obedience Look Like? Obvious outright rebellion – "I'm not doing that!" is easy to see … but other forms of disobedience are more subtle

1) Attitudes are every bit as important as Actions – Body Language of disrespect or grumbling or opposition says a lot more than your actions
Obedience is a matter of the heart
Rolling the eyes; shrugging the shoulders; stomping off; banging doors; …

2) Backtalk – used to be called "sassing" / Argumentation / Justification / Rationalization ….
"But Jimmy's Mom doesn't make him do that …"

3) Sneaking around, hoping you won't get caught in your disobedience/ Deceit / Dishonest

4) Neglecting the spirit of the command by looking for loopholes in the language
Talked about this some last week

5) Partial Obedience is Total Disobedience –cf. example of Saul in 1 Samuel
Clean the kitchen … OK, Mom … then you do a half-baked job and take off

6) Delayed Obedience is Rebellious Disobedience
"I'll do it later" – leave for the authority figure to establish the timeframe … if they choose to leave it open-ended or give you some parameters, fine
Interesting: At work, I don't get to tell Jamie Alban: "I'll do it later"
You better learn this lesson now

7) Failure to take Responsibility for your chores; lack of faithfulness; always need to be reminded – poor stewardship – should be learning to be faithful in small things so you can be entrusted with higher level responsibility; Neglect – not placing a high enough priority on the instructions of your parents

IV. (:21) FATHERS ARE WARNED AGAINST EXASPERATING THEIR CHILDREN

(Mothers can take note as well)

A. What is Involved in Patient and Consistent Nurturing?
"*do not exasperate your children*"

B. Why is it so Essential? -- "*that they may not lose heart*"
leads to resentment, bitterness, sullenness

C. Example of Christ in Patiently and Consistently Nurturing the Disciples

D. What Does Exasperating Your Children Look Like?

1) Make promises that you don't keep / Change your mind without a good reason
(Even using the "maybe" word can confuse your children who automatically assume that you have made a commitment)

2) Failure to show proper appreciation; to give them credit for the good things they do
Need to unconditionally love them and accept them

3) Nag them to death; always finding fault

4) Micromanage them – want to oversee every little detail of their life

5) Have unrealistic expectations that they can never meet … Or keep adding on additional expectations as they finish various tasks – "Sam, would you please mow the back yard … he comes in … Oh yes, and would you also weed under the bushes along the back fence …"

6) Show partiality in how you treat your different children / Play Favorites
Or just blow up at all of them when some infraction by one of them pushes your over the edge … Better watch out, Mom is on the warpath now … barking out instructions …. Out of frustration

7) Be inconsistent in your enforcing of rules and exercise of discipline
"You let Johnny do that when he was 8, why can't I do that?"

8) Design punishments that far exceed the nature of the infraction

9) Ignore them; Fail to spend time with them in activities of their choosing
Or the opposite: Indulge them … to try to make up for not being there for them and spending time with them

CONCLUSION:
Listen; if you want harmony in your home, understand that your - relationship with Christ is the - key - it's the foundation; it's the starting point.. it's the very lifeblood of all meaningful relationship. That's what we have been talking about – **Living out our Union with Christ**.

Picture a triangle with three points … write Christ at the top and then the other two parties of the relationship at the other points … Husband / Wife Parents / Children
"What happens when both the husband and the wife (and you could substitute any relationship there) what happens when they grow closer to Christ? >>>> They grow closer together...
(Steve Malone)

How peaceful is your home situation today? Are we truly pleasing the Lord in how we fulfill our responsibilities and relate to one another? Is our home in the process of being built up or torn down? Just a few simple verses from Colossians but a tremendous depth of impact on our lives.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Will submission (of wives to husbands) look different in today's culture than it did in the days of the apostle Paul? Will obedience (of children to parents) look different?

2) How should you handle abusive situations in the home in the light of these verses as well as in the light of the message of 1 Peter 2:18-25?

3) Husbands, what situations have the potential for you to feel the spring of bitterness and resentment rising in your heart? Wives, what situations are the most challenging to your efforts at submission? What sort of communication do you have as husband and wife about these situations?

4) What are some positive things parents can do to encourage the hearts of their children and build up their spirits?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kent: "The danger is that ceaseless irritating of the children may create a sullen, listless, discouraged disposition. A child who experiences continual criticism and rarely any love will be scarred for life. Christian practice in the home will display the balance which creates a wholesome climate and well-adjusted children."

Lucas: Re Submission – "Indeed, so far from being an antiquated barrier to the development of mature human relationships, it is part of the divine order within the Blessed Trinity, where Christ who is equal with the Father is for ever subject to him."

Lucas: "…women and slaves are first addressed, and that with urgency, just because the gospel has already brought them an unique measure of liberation! It is imperative that this wonderful new spiritual freedom should not be misused to the scandalizing of their society and the detriment of the gospel witness. It is precisely because, in Christ, the Christian wife has been set free from the age-old downgrading of her kind in pagan societies, now to enjoy equality with her husband as '*joint heirs of the grace of life*' that she must take special care in her behaviour not to cause unnecessary and harmful reactions among her non-Christian neighbours."

Laurin: "Any attempt to maintain equality in the sexes is foolish and unnatural. They are not equal. They are complementary and not supplementary. It is therefore not a question of who is superior—the husband or the wife. The fact is they are both superior because the man is superior in his God-given place, and the woman is superior in her God-given place. It is not a question of similarity but variety. The woman was meant for one purpose, and she has qualities of body, mind and disposition that fit her for that purpose. The man was meant for another purpose, and he likewise has qualities of body, mind and disposition that fit him for that purpose."

Robertson: Re "*stop irritating*" – "… here it means irritation as the result of nervous explosion on the part of the father. It is terrible when the father is no longer a hero to the child. The father may sometimes '*irritate*' by exacting demands and perpetual fault-finding and interference for interference's sake (Peake). The result of this bad habit is that the child's spirit is broken. The

child loses heart and becomes spiritless. Bengel puts it thus: *Tractus animus pestis juventutis*. Indeed, a broken spirit is sometimes the plague of youth. If the child is given an inferiority complex, he will have difficulty in overcoming it and taking his true place in the world as a leader of men and a servant of God."

Vaughan: "The one duty Paul enjoins on the wife is submission, an attitude that recognizes the rights of authority. His main thought is that the wife is to defer to, that is , be willing to take second place to, her husband. Yet we should never interpret this as if it implies that the husband may be a domestic despot, ruling his family with a rod of iron. It does imply, however, that the husband has an authority the wife must forego exercising. In areas where one must yield … the primary submission devolves upon the wife.

Three things may be said about a wife's subjection to here husband. First, the context shows that the wife's attitude is prompted and warranted by her husband's unselfish love. Second, the form of the verb (… middle voice) shows that the submission is to be voluntary. The wife's submission is never to be forced on her by a demanding husband; it is the deference that a loving wife, conscious that her home (just as any other institution) must have a head, gladly shows to a worthy and devoted husband. Third, such submission is said to be '*fitting in the Lord*.' The verb has in it the thought of what is becoming and proper. The phrase '*in the Lord*' indicates that wifely submission is proper not only in the natural order but also in the Christian order. The whole thing then, is lifted to a new and higher level."

Zeisler: Re whether these injunctions to submission and obedience apply in homes where there is a pattern of abusive behavior – "there are homes which have significant areas of resistance to the Lord; destructive, abusive behavior. An example that comes most immediately to mind is a child who is being severely abused by a parent. The arrangements for harmony in the home that begin in Colossians 3:18 are not the needed word from the Lord in such a case. What must come first is the command given in Colossians 3:8 – '*put aside*' abusive speech etc. Homes in which the gospel message has been allowed to produce a degree of emotional health are ready for the directives given in the passage we are considering here.

A person with a malignant tumor doesn't give first attention to questions of diet and exercise. It's very important to eat nutritiously and exercise regularly in order to stay healthy. But if you have a cancer inside, the first order of business is to remove it; then when ordinary health is restored, you find information about diet and exercise useful. The sad fact is that there are Christian homes with patterns of behavior, spiritual cancers, that are an affront to Christ. These directives to submission and obedience … must not be used to buttress evil behavior."

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 3:22 – 4:1

TITLE: GOD'S PERSPECTIVE ON LABOR UNIONS

BIG IDEA:
UNION WITH CHRIST MANIFESTS ITSELF IN GODLY WORK RELATIONSHIPS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

INTRODUCTION
cf. Eph. 6:5-9; 1 Tim. 6:1,2; Titus 2:9

Last week we talked about **Godly Family Relationships** … Hopefully we lived out what we studied regarding husbands and wives and children and parents -- This week we turn our attention to slaves and masters … looking in our culture at the workplace: How do employees relate to their supervisors and vice versa … although back in Paul's day slaves were very much a part of the household. We want to be thinking about our own **work ethic** … no question that our country is in **deep trouble here** – We have turned aside from our legacy a strong work ethic.

(cf. book by Chuck Colson and Jack Eckerd of the Eckerd drugstore chain: *Why America Doesn't Work – How the Decline of the Work Ethic Is Hurting Your Family and Future – and What You Can Do*)

… Not surprising that the hard goods are made in every country except the good ole USA … we have to come to grips with where we have gotten off track and take our responsibility to implement some change .. It has to start in our own heart and life … **Kids**, the time to learn these lessons is when you are young … this message could help you your whole life …

(Read text: Col. 3:22 – 4:1)

How powerful a message this must have been with slaves and masters seated right in the same room … worshiping the Lord together … In our culture, the Christians from our workplace are scattered across a variety of different churches … but the principles and the impact should be the same

The obvious question to deal with up front is what about this **Slavery business**? How could Paul avoid advocating Social Revolution and coming up with his own Emancipation Proclamation? Is Christianity somehow pro-slavery??

- When we think of slavery in the context of American history, it has strong **racial overtones** … but it was not that way back in Paul's day – the slaves were usually the ones who had been conquered as the Roman Empire spread its wings or ones who had defaulted on some debt … not a huge racial distinction … but there was a definite class distinction – despite that fact that some were educated (even doctors and teachers) and some not … a distinction that Paul said was not to involve favoritism when it came to being one in the body of Christ … so this is not primarily an issue about racial prejudice and bigotry … it is very much an economic and political issue … and there were a huge number of slaves at the time so it was an important issue – had no rights = key

- No question that the **whole spectrum** of situations was represented … from terrible abuse where the dignity of individuals was trampled upon … where physical abuse was involved … all the way to the other end of the spectrum where the slaves were treated as family members and actually better off than if they had been left to fend for themselves . . . slaves basically made up the work force at that time …

- Just as Jesus recognized the **priority of the eternal spiritual kingdom** over the temporal deficiencies of the immediate political and social situation, Paul chose to address those individual responsibilities that would have the greatest eternal impact …
that should not be interpreted as an endorsement of slavery … but you could also argue that the gradual improvement in labor relationships from implementing the principles we are going to discuss might have been much more effective long-term in the overall social reformation than any type of immediate revolution … as we all see in our day from studying what is taking place in Russia … you just can't jump from Communism to Capitalism overnight without some major upheaval ..

Enough said … these principles apply to us in our workplace today … so let's dive in …

I. (:22-25) ACCOUNTABILITY OF EMPLOYEES (spend most of time here)

A. (:22) Accountable to Master on Earth

Important concept in our culture of **entitlement** – My company owes me this … they owe me that … the focus should be on what type of work commitment we owe our company

1. Scope: *"in all things"*

not all things regardless of the law of God – cf. Acts 5:29 *"We must obey God rather than men"* – but this will be the rare exception –

That doesn't mean that it is always easy for me to obey and submit at work – far from it …
Lots of struggles especially recently ..

but even in those areas where you personally disagree or areas you find unpleasant

Peter gave the same instruction: *"Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh*." (I Peter 2:18). I think the application for us today is that we are to be obedient, hard-working employees, even when our employer is at times unreasonable – even harsh.

2. Primary Responsibility: *obey* / submit
   - not question and complain and argue
   - not bad mouth our superiors behind their back and disrespect them
   - not make excuses

- not cut corners
- certainly no room for laziness or goofing off

Bottom Line: Get the job done – maybe not the message that the slaves wanted to hear . . . but the balancing perspective will come soon
"A honest day's work for an honest day's wage"

3. Motivation
    a) Negative
        1) *"not with external service"*

Sounds like Christ berating the Pharisees for their emphasis on the externals instead of the proper heart attitude

We all know what **eye service** means … does the quality of our work vary depending on whether or not the boss is watching?

Stedman: a missionary to Africa told me that he was responsible for getting the nationals in his area to do certain jobs. He discovered that they were all rather lazy and would only perform while he was actually watching them. When he left they would stop work and do nothing until he returned. This man had a glass eye, and one day when his eye was irritating him he took it out and put it on a stump. When he returned he found that everybody was still working because the "eye," as they thought, was watching them all the while he was away. That is what the apostle means here: eye-service! Working only when the boss is watching. This man thought he had found a great way to free himself, until one day he returned to discover that one of the workers had sneaked around from behind and put his hat over the eye, and everyone was lounging around, enjoying themselves. That is eye-service!

Cf. **watching the clock** – can't wait for the time to tick off so I can flee this prison of a job and get back to whatever I do in my leisure time – Shows that we have the completely wrong perspective of work

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Need to have a **Theology of Work** – What is God's Perspective? Do I have a conviction that my work matters to God??
- Because we are made in the image of God, Work is intrinsic to our nature – work itself is not part of the curse – God worked 6 days and rested on the seventh – we need to be involved in creative pursuits that use the talents and abilities God has blessed us with; our goal should not be **Work Avoidance** or **Work Minimization** … but **Work Optimization** – let's spend time doing those things that God has equipped us to do

- Because of the Fall and now are sinful nature, work has taken on additional challenges
"Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread…"
    - more difficult and challenging

- more frustrating and painful and laborious

- Still we are commanded to exercise dominion and subdue the earth
think of all the inventions and the progress that has been made down through the centuries by men and women who dreamed big dreams because their faith was in a Big God

- We need to work to provide for ourselves and our families – Private Property = great motivator
if a man doesn't work he shouldn't be allowed to eat – basic principle
Somewhere our Prison system needs to get back in touch with this fundamental –
Nothing worse than enforcing idleness and then expecting some type of reformation of behavior – not going to happen

- We need to lay up as much as possible to meet the needs of others
not trying to accumulate the most toys for our own pleasure
not just What's in it for me attitude

- We need to follow the example of Christ the carpenter and Paul the tentmaker – the pursuit of excellence in whatever we do has been lost – they had the right perspective of seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and yet not making any false dichotomy between serving God and working with their hands
Jews: He who does not teach his son a trade teaches him to steal …

* * * * * * *

2) "*as those who merely please men*"

We all are familiar with Politics in the workplace – we have a much higher calling than merely trying to please our earthly boss

b) Positive
1) "*but with sincerity of heart*"

similar to what Paul instructed the Corinthians about how they should give their money – "*not grudgingly or of necessity because God loves a cheerful giver*"

2) "*fearing the Lord*"

B. (:23) Accountable to Master in Heaven

1. Scope: "*Whatever you do*"

(Concept of Calling – Developed in Colson's book and by Os Guinness – too complicated to go into much detail here … I still would like to do more thinking in this area …)

Bottom line from this passage … God is not so concerned with What our job/career is but rather How we do it and Why we do it

2. Primary Responsibility: Work your Hardest with all your heart
   "do your work heartily"

Concept of **taking pride** in your work

Cf. the craftsmen who put in just as much time finishing the back and the bottom of their chairs – it all matters – cf. woodworking factory we visited on vacation in Vermont one year; custom made and signed pieces – great pride in their work

Can we take pride in those repetitive jobs – mopping the kitchen floor, doing the laundry, cleaning the bathroom … Are we doing it heartily …

3. Motivation
   a) Positive – *"as for the Lord"*

Stedman: We are to work "*as unto the Lord*." That is to be our motivation. It is the Lord Christ we are serving. Every employee ought to write that down and put it somewhere where he can see it during working hours. "It is the Lord Christ I am serving." Do not ever work for anyone else, as a believer. Work only for the Lord. Your employer may pay your salary, but it is the Lord for whom you are working. If you do that both the quality and the quantity of your work will improve, because you are working out of gratitude and love to the Lord. Love, of course, is the greatest driving force in life. What a change this will make in your job!

   b) Negative – *"rather than for men"*

C. (:24-25) Priority of Eternal Wages over Temporal Wages – KEY FOCUS

1. Certainty of Eternal Reward
   a) Confidence based on Knowledge – *"knowing"*

   b) Confidence based on Faithfulness of the Lord
      "from the Lord you will receive"

   c) Confidence based on the eternal nature of the reward
      "the reward of the inheritance"

you can't take it with you but you can sure send it ahead!

Concept of laying up treasure in heaven where it won't decay or be lost … a lot more secure than 401K plan

Lack of appreciation on the part of an unfair and harsh master is no excuse for lowering your work standards … the ultimate reward is what you are really seeking

2. Conviction of Who is Our Ultimate Master
   "It is the Lord Christ whom you serve"

3. Certainty of Consequences for Disobedience in this area
    a) Nature of the Disobedience – *"he who does wrong"*

    b) Principle of reaping what you sow
        "will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done"

    c) Principle of Impartiality – *"and that without partiality"*

Simpson and Bruce: "The judgment on disobedience is as certain as the reward for faithfulness. While salvation in the Bible is according to grace, judgment is always according to works, whether good or bad, for unbeliever and believer alike. It is to believers that Paul writes elsewhere: 'we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad.'"

The universal principle of sowing and reaping

II. (4:1) ACCOUNTABILITY OF EMPLOYERS – TO MASTER IN HEAVEN

Principle: Power Corrupts and Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely

A. Primary Responsibility – Treat employees with *"justice and fairness"*

Clarifying our corporate values … interesting exercise … easy to say we treat employees in a certain way … but difficult to put into practice … that is why there is so much cynicism

What are some of the **common abuses** of employers? **Exploitation** in a variety of ways:
- failing to provide adequate and safe working conditions
- failing to pay a reasonable wage for the work performed
    especially when compared to the excessive bonuses and perks for the executives
- failing to live up to their commitments; changing the rules arbitrarily; lack of integrity
- playing favorites rather than rewarding performance
- demanding too much time and commitment without regard to the welfare of the employee and his family
- unreasonable expectations and demands
- domineering management style; lording it over the employees; harsh in style
- no open lines of communication; no recourse for appeals or for a fair hearing
- failure to show respect for the value of each individual

B. Principle of Accountability – *"knowing that you too have a Master in heaven"*

Look at how much evil has been perpetuated by high level executives who are so full of themselves and their own power that they think they are above the law
    Cf. the whole Enron debacle – cook the books – nobody will ever know

- On the positive side: what about employers who have gone the extra mile to do what is right … at a cost to the bottom line and their own profits … they will be rewarded

Looks like they are getting away with a lot of injustices … but the final accounting is not yet in … they will have to stand before the Lord one day and answer for their exploitation and abuse

Basically: the application of the Golden Rule in how you treat one another

CONCLUSION

We don't preach a "social gospel", but we do preach a gospel with social implications …

Labor Unions are by nature adversarial … (no expert in history – would be interesting to study this phenomena in more depth … its origins … development … etc. – not always the voice of the poor and downtrodden as it has been portrayed; certainly management has its share of abuses as we have looked at earlier) –
Employees lobby for reduced work loads, more benefits, better working conditions …
Employers try to put the squeeze on for more productivity and greater profits . . .

- based on a negotiation process that pits both parties against each other
- fighting for your own interests rather than for what's best for the company
- tries to treat everyone as equals – (cf. parable of the talents)
  end up penalizing excellence and rewarding mediocrity
- holding out the weapon of strike and disruption of services
  historically things have often escalated into ugly situations of physical threats, aggressive picket lines, even violence
- establishing an additional level of bureaucratic union management that must be funded by mandatory employee dues – similar to extortion

Having said all that it is a complicated issue for situations where Christians find themselves needing to belong to a union … I am not trying to legislate that Christians should not belong to labor unions … just showing the inconsistencies with the tone of the Biblical passages dealing with the workplace …

God's View of Labor Unions – both employee and employer working together to fulfill their responsibilities under the accountability of the same Lord Jesus Christ . . .
He does not want an adversarial relationship … He wants there to be true union … just as employees are accountable to the boss … every boss … even the owner … the Top Boss … is accountable to the ultimate Master – the Lord Jesus Christ. We should all have the same work ethic that has as its goal pleasing Christ in anticipation of heavenly reward for faithfulness. The principles mentioned in this passage are what we want to take back to the workplace with us: the principles of diligent work, equality, justice and brotherhood – principles that should transform any workplace.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are some specific examples in your life where you chose to submit to your employer in areas where you disagreed or areas that you found unpleasant? What was your attitude in those

circumstances and how did your boss perceive your obedience?

2) What are some practical suggestions for teaching our children to work their hardest and to work whole-heartedly? What are we modeling in this important area?

3) Do the motivations of pleasing the Lord and fearing the Lord take precedence in our work experience over the motivation to be recognized and rewarded by our superiors?

4) Are we able to focus on the prospect of future inheritance as more significant than the amount of temporal compensation?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Hendriksen: "The Roman world was full of slaves. It has been estimated that in Rome itself at one time about a third of the inhabitants belonged to this social class. They had become slaves as prisoners of war, or as convicts, or through debt, kidnapping, purchase, or birth from slave-parents.

Now Paul did not recommend outright revolt by the slaves against their masters. On the contrary, he took the social structure as he found it and endeavored by peaceful means to change it into its very opposite. His rule, in summary, amounted to this, 'Let the slave wholeheartedly obey his master, and let the master be kind to his slave.' Thus the ill-will, dishonesty, and laziness of the slave would be replaced by willing service, integrity, and industry; the cruelty and brutality of the master, by considerateness and love."

Hendriksen: Significance of the concept of *inheritance*:
a. it is a *gift* (a person does not earn an inheritance)
b. it is *inalienable* (1 Kings 21:3; Heb. 9:15)
c. it was *willed* to the person who receives it, and in that sense, is therefore his by *right* (cf. Isa. 1:27)
d. it implies the *death of the testator* (Heb. 9:16)

Lightfoot: "The recent fault of Onesimus would make the Apostle doubly anxious to emphasize the duties of the slave towards the master, lest in his love for the offender he should seem to condone the offence… But on the other hand it is the Apostle's business to show that justice has a double edge. There must be a reciprocity between the master and the slave. The philosophers of Greece taught, and the laws of Rome assumed, that the slave was a chattel. But a chattel could have no rights. … Justice and equity are the expression of the Divine mind: and with God there is no partiality."

Thomas: "Slaves, or servants in general, were called upon for a sevenfold obedience.
(1) This was to be a complete obedience …
(2) It was to be a genuine obedience, springing from an undivided heart and free from all improper obsequiousness …
(3) It was also to be a thorough obedience (v.23a), proceeding from the soul (Gr.) and

expressive of all the power of the inner being …
(4) It was also to be a spiritual obedience (v.23b), the slave being conscious of the Lord Jesus as the One to whom his service was primarily being rendered
(5) Thus it was even an encouraging obedience (v.24a), since the slave was told that he would be rewarded by Christ, who knew what he was doing and why he was doing it
(6) It was thus an obedience that was really a privileged one (v.24b), for in serving his earthly master he was actually serving Christ, and this would give special dignity to the humblest service day by day
(7) And yet it must be a righteous obedience, because if the slave did wrong there would be judgment, since God is no respecter of persons (v. 25)"

Robertson: "The Christian slave is not to presume on his Christianity as justifying him for any wrongdoing toward his master. The master must not think that God cares most for wealth and power. In war both sides cry to the same God, who holds the scales of right and justice in an even balance. There will be no partiality in the sure recompense from God."

Moule: Re the charge to Masters: "Let His sovereignty possess your inmost souls; it will only quicken your sense of responsible authority, but it will at the same time keep out of it effectually the poison of the despotic spirit."

Laurin: "The employee is urged to render the respect that is fitting in his association and to perform his tasks with faithful and efficient industry. The wrong of much employee service is that it is rendered with eye service. It is the kind of labor that watches the clock. But the Christian ideal is in '*singleness of heart fearing God*' and not with '*eye service as men pleasers*.' It is to be in the fear of God rather than in the fear of the boss. It is not trying to get by with as little as possible but rather striving to get on with the best and as much as possible."

Lucas: "… the apostle's paramount concern is not man's relationships with his fellows, but everyone's relationship with God. Paul does not attempt to resolve these human problems between slave and master horizontally. It is clear that he assumes that it is only by learning to serve the Lord Christ that each can begin to come to proper terms with the other."

Os Guinness
The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life –
It is often distorted on one side by being spiritually narrowed into simply meaning guidance. On the secular side, it has been distorted into becoming just your job. By calling I mean that God calls us so decisively in Christ that everything we are, everything we have, and everything we do is invested with a direction and a dynamism because it is done in response to his summons and his call.

Historically there are two great distortions of calling. One is the Catholic distortion, which is a form of spiritual dualism. It makes the spiritual higher than the secular, so you have a distinction between higher and lower, sacred and secular. As Eusebius called it, a perfect life for the monks, nuns, and priests. Now that is the Catholic distortion, although many Protestants have fallen for it. In evangelical circles we hear of "full-time Christian service," a term suggesting that a call to the ministry, or the mission field, or evangelism is higher than a call to being a businessperson.

This is an utterly disastrous distortion of the scriptural understanding of calling.
The other distortion is the Protestant distortion. Calvin and Martin Luther rightly said that ordinary work, too, is of our calling. But within a hundred-odd years, work and employment began to be used interchangeably with calling and vocation, so that calling became merely your job. Of course, calling is far, far more than that. Above all, it means we are called to Christ in whatever we do.

You can see this magnificently in the Shakers. They taught that you make the back of the chair as well as the front and the bottom of the chair as well as the top. Because, as they said, you wanted to make a chair that was "fit for an angel to sit on."

The result of these two major changes has led to the separation of church and state and the sacred versus secular view of work and calling. The challenge is to remember that God calls us first to Himself and then to do everything for Him.

What would happen if everything we are, everything we do and everything we have is lived for God? Could it be that there is no greater adventure?

Viewing Work As A Ministry
In the movie, Chariots of Fire, the Olympic runner, Eric Liddel, understood this concept. "When I run I feel His pleasure," he said.

God calls us to see our work as worship to Him. Both words in the Old Testament come from the same Hebrew word, avodah. If you are in the workplace, your mission field is as great as any mission field in the world.

Jesus is our primary model to understand that our work is a calling from God. God placed His Son in a carpenter shop as a young man until the age of 30. A carpenter shop!

The first distortion I describe as the "Catholic distortion." This creates a higher-lower, sacred-secular divide, which goes all the way back to people like Eusebius. He spoke of the Christian life in terms of two types of believers, "perfect" and "permitted." The perfect included monks, nuns, and priests-people who "had a calling." The permitted were soldiers, farmers, businesspeople-those who "just had jobs."

The other distortion is what I call the "Protestant distortion." This distortion is opposed to spiritualizing the concept of calling. There is no question that the genius of the Reformation was in its affirmation of calling as including work too. Yet it has put so much emphasis on work and vocation that one's work, what one does, has become virtually synonymous with one's calling.

There are all sorts of formidably bad teaching swirling around, which prevent people from truly tangling with the question of, "What is my gift and calling?" Some mega churches have developed new strategies for people to "discover" their calling. Yet, most of this is presented in the service of discovering spiritual gifts. The effect is that once people discover their spiritual gifts, presto! the church puts them to work in the church-or, more accurately, merely employs them.

The real challenge is to discover not just our spiritual gifts but our natural gifts. The church should be releasing people to be free to do the things they are cut out to do by the Lord.

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Your Work Matters to God: Finding Meaning and Dignity in Your Work
Dr. Haddon Robinson; Harold John Ockenga

* * *

Mark Sorgius
Monday Ministry Minute #03
http://www.facultylinc.com/local/mmm.nsf/0/5529204f6f30408b852569ea00532d8f?OpenDocument

The Joy of the Job

Monday Ministry Minute (MMM #3C) - Sept. 4, 2000

Topic: The Joy of the Job?

Once again we have the opportunity to set aside a day to honor the "laborer." However, with so many people who seem to express a disdain for their work, is it really possible to speak of our job bringing us joy?

I think it is if we keep at least two things in mind. First, we need to be sure that what we are doing is where God has called us to be. And, second, we need to avoid the error of separating our lives into two distinct areas - the sacred and the secular.

What is it that really motivates you? What is it that you just love to do? What is your passion in life? After you have answered these questions, ask yourself this - "Am I doing what I love each day?" God has called you to Himself and then called and gifted you to have a unique vocation that glorifies Him. If you are not doing your passion, you might want to consider a change.

Do you love to teach, but have gotten into some administrative job you hate? Do you have a passion for research that honors Christ, but find it hard to find the time due to all the committee work? Do you really enjoy giving direction to large projects, or is it spending time one-on-one in a mentoring relationship, or could it be working on details so that the entire team benefits? Joy on the job comes when we are doing that which we were created to do.

The second perspective is just as important. We need to avoid the trap of separating the "spiritual" from the "secular" callings we have. Often it becomes easy to picture our "spiritual lives" as that which we do at home and at church, and our "secular lives" as that which we must trudge through to make a living.

But God has ordained all honorable labor as His gift to us, and a central arena of our lives to bring glory to Him. That makes the "secular" part just as "spiritual" as the "spiritual" part. In

their book, "Your Work Matters to God," Sherman and Hendricks say, "[We often have a] view of work that distinguishes between work that matters to God (work that deals with the soul, with the eternal and sacred things, essentially the work of "ministry") and work that has little if any value to God (secular, everyday work)."

A.W. Tozer, in his classic, "The Pursuit of God," describes it this way, "One of the greatest hindrances to the Christian's internal peace is the common habit of dividing our lives into two areas - the sacred and the secular. But this state of affairs is wholly unnecessary. ... The sacred-secular antithesis has no foundation in the New Testament."

THE BIBLE AND LABOR UNIONS

EQUALITY:

Men are not equal. The parable of the talents demonstrates that God in his sovereign pleasure dispenses talents unequally as he sees fit. The same parable also illustrates that men do not make the same effective uses of the talents that they do have. Paul reminds Timothy to stir up the gift that is within him, and Christ rebuked the slothful servant that neglected his talent. In the Biblical scheme of things men are expected to produce according to their various talents and are judged and rewarded accordingly. “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required,” and “whosoever hash, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken” (Luke 12:48 & 8:18). However, the labor union scheme of things is entirely different. Here all men are considered equal in talent, are all expected to do the exact same quantity and quality of labor and are all to be exactly compensated by the same wage. Those with superior talents are compelled to play the part of slothful servants and cannot heed the admonition of Paul in Ephesians 6:5-8, while the mediocre are rewarded in their slothfulness. The Bible declares the responsibility of all men to give account of the talents entrusted to them, but the flight from responsibility has become the flight from freedom, as the drive for equality and security in one’s mediocrity has become the drive to the slavery of the labor unions.

Morgan:

WHAT TO DO

A. Obey -- listen and then respond to directions;
B. "hearken"

II. HOW TO DO IT

A. Not depending on inspection of boss looking over the shoulder; not just to please men
B. With singleness of heart; undivided in motive sincerity; no deceit
C. Diligently (:23) "work"
D. Heartily -- out of your soul, with your heart in it
E. As to the Lord -- the one to whom I'm responsible

Hendriksen: “The summary of admonitions addressed to separate groups ends, accordingly, with the mention of the all-sufficient, pre-eminent Master, even ‘*the Lord Christ*’ (cf. 4:1 and 3:24), for it is he who is the source of the believers’ life, the One who is ever ready to enable every believer, to whatever group he belongs, to live to the glory of God.”

Stedman: The reward of faithful service is always opportunity for greater service. The reward is to be allowed to demonstrate your love in still greater service. That is why Jesus said that he that is faithful is given rule over ten cities, while another one, who is less faithful, is given rule over five cities. Thus, opportunity for service is the reward. It is what our hearts will desire more than anything else in that day. . .

Here's a remarkable promise. Keep in mind that in the first century, slaves didn't own anything. They didn't have any property they could call their own. They couldn't inherit anything. And yet Paul promises to slaves the greatest inheritance that any man could ever want.

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

TITLE: EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION – WITH GOD AND UNBELIEVERS

BIG IDEA:
UNION WITH CHRIST MANIFESTS ITSELF IN CONSISTENT PRAYER, MISSIONARY FOCUS, OPPORTUNISTIC TESTIMONY, AND GRACIOUS SPEECH

INTRODUCTION
We are going to try something a little different this morning … a PowerPoint presentation … no fancy bells and whistles .. pretty basic … but a change of pace sometimes helps us concentrate.

[SLIDE 1 – TITLE] (Slide references are to a PowerPoint Presentation)
Very interesting how my experiences at work are overlapping with what we are covering in Colossians – maybe God is actually trying to teach me something …

Looked at relationship between Master and Servant / between Employee and Employer / Between Teacher and Student … last week –

This month at work I am heading up a committee that is charged with fleshing out a specific Critical Success Factor that is part of our long range Strategic Business Plan:
"We must have effective communication with our stakeholders"

Turns out surprisingly that Effective Communication is also our topic for today from Colossians chapter 4!

[SLIDE 2 – BIG IDEA]
Read: 4:2-6

I. (:2-3A) CONSISTENT PRAYER – (directed to God) **[SLIDE 3]**

Good Book by Bill Hybels: TOO BUSY NOT TO PRAY – Slowing Down to Be with God
Starts off: "Prayer is an unnatural activity. From birth we have been learning the rules of self-reliance as we strain and struggle to achieve self-sufficiency. Prayer flies in the face of those deep-seated values. It is an assault on human autonomy, an indictment of independent living. To people in the fast lane, determined to make it on their own, prayer is an embarrassing interruption."

My wife is setting a good example here … a prayer partner in her home school group so they can pray for all the families …

Prayerlessness is really a sign of a lack of faith … some people like to mock what they view as the passivity of prayer**: [SLIDE 4 – UNBELIEVERS MOCK PRAYER]**
"Give a man a fish, and you'll feed him for a day; give him a religion, and he'll starve to death while praying for a fish." ~Author Unknown

[SLIDE 5 – CHRIST PRACTICED AND TAUGHT THE PRIORITY OF PRAYER]

"give us this day our daily bread …"

Don't forget our theme of Union with Christ

A. Consistent Dedication – "Devote yourselves to prayer"

What are we devoted to in our lives?? What can't we live without??

Continue in .. don't get discouraged and distracted …

Cf. passages in early chapters of Acts – disciples devoted themselves to a number of key things – one was prayer (apostles' teaching, breaking of bread, fellowship) – maybe we have way over emphasized the teaching side …. Rom 12: 2 "devoted to prayer"

Watch out for the MARTHA Syndrome **[SLIDE 6]**

You remember Martha in the gospels – like a beehive of activity … always moving quickly from one activity to another … driven by a desire to accomplish something productive …

I wonder how Martha was in her prayer life … probably had trouble carving out time for something where she couldn't see the immediate result

Why did the apostles in Acts 6 need the help of deacons in the area of practical ministry?? So they could "devote themselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word"

How did Jesus devote Himself to prayer?

[SLIDE 7 – MARIO ANDRETTI QUOTE]

"Desire is the key to motivation, but it's determination and commitment to an unrelenting pursuit of your goal – a commitment to excellence – that will enable you to attain the success you seek."

Transition: Opposite danger of being too busy to pray … Getting lazy in our prayers …

B. Consistent Concentration – "keeping alert in it"

[SLIDE 8 – RIP VAN WINKLE SYNDROME]

Mark 14:37-38 Garden of Gethsemanee … Christ found Peter and the disciples sleeping .. "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak"

Christ wasn't the one daydreaming and drifting off in prayer … he was praying so intensely his sweat rolled off him like drops of blood

Watch and pray … want to avoid temptation; don't want to be oblivious to danger around you

Prayer should be Exciting! Oppty to talk directly to God ….

- Prayer is the Conduit to God's Peace – Phil. 4
- Prayer is the Connection to God's Power – Remember story of Moses in OT holding up his arms

while Israelites fought battle against the Amalekites (Exod 17:8-13) – Aaron and Hur had to help hold his arms up while Joshua led the troops in battle
- Prayer needs to be Specific to be Exciting

[SLIDE 9 – PRAYER IS HARD WORK]

"Plough deep while sluggards sleep" - Benjamin Franklin

Why do we so easily give up rather than persevere in praying about those things that really matter to us??

- Do we really believe in our heart that God cares about us?
- Do we really believe that He is powerful enough to do what we need done?

What is the connection between prayer and experiencing the presence of God … talking about living out our union with Christ

C. Consistent Thanksgiving – "with an attitude of thanksgiving" [**SLIDE 10]**
Phil. 4:6

Not whining, not complaining, not discouraged …

"Most people do not pray; they only beg." -- George Bernard Shaw

What is the overall Tone of our prayers? Remember we are a child talking to our Heavenly Father ..

The importance of this tone of thanksgiving has been stressed throughout the epistle

Kids: this is one easy area for you to try to grow spiritually – concentrate on that attitude of thanksgiving

[SLIDE 11 – QUOTE FROM WARD]

"Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it"
- William Arthur Ward

Remember story about the 10 lepers Christ healed and only 1 came back to say Thanks

Transition: Purposeful Prayer – not some vague generalities; Prayer is essential for the spread of the gospel

II. (:3-4) MISSIONARY FOCUS -- (intercessory prayer for the effective testimony of others)
[SLIDE 12 - <u>FOXE'S BOOK OF MARTYRS</u> / MARTIN BURNHAM]

A. Intercessory Prayer is the Missionary Opportunity for All Believers **[SLIDE 13]**

"praying at the same time for us as well"
us = Paul, Timothy, Epaphras, Aristarchus = fellow prisoner

There are certain soldiers out there on the front lines as key commanders and leaders …

They are deserving of special prayer and focus on our part ….
Need to feel some connection with these key figures …

Paul not bashful about asking for prayer support .. cf. how much emphasis he puts on prayer support vs. financial support … both are necessary … he's not just playing games … he really does place the priority on prayer

Notice his team approach to missions –

B. Intercessory Prayer Opens Doors for the Gospel – especially door of men's hearts
[SLIDE 14]

"that God may open up to us a door for the word"
Acts 14:27 "opened a door of faith to the Gentiles";
Eph. 6:19-20 – important parallel passage
Paul was behind prison doors at the moment, but still preaching the gospel effectively
He wanted to be set free by God opening the door of prison as He had done earlier and
Expanding the scope of his missionary outreach

Why is it necessary for God to open a door for the Gospel / for the Word to be productive / for our audience to hear and understand and believe?? Why can't we just forge ahead and aggressively spread the Word??

- the lost are blinded by Satan – will not understand unless God opens their hearts
- Satanic forces are opposing the spread of the gospel; sometimes the door is not open – cf how situations change today in different countries: Russia, China, Afghanistan, etc.
- God is sovereign in drawing sinners to Himself and causing His Word not to return void but to accomplish the results He has intended

If God is sovereign … if doors must be opened by Him … why should I always be striving to bring the message of the gospel to others??

[SLIDE 15 – PIPER QUOTE – WAR-TIME ANALOGY]

"I have often said that one of the reasons we feel so weak in our prayer lives is that we have tried to make a domestic intercom out of a wartime walkie talkie. Prayer is not designed as an intercom between us and God to serve the domestic comforts of the saints. It's designed as a walkie talkie for spiritual battlefields. It's the link between active soldiers and their command headquarters, with its unlimited fire-power and air cover and strategic wisdom."

C. The Gospel Message Offers All Men Everywhere Union with Christ – **[SLIDE 16 …]**
= "the Mystery of Christ"
WHAT is the Mystery??
1:27 "Christ in you [Gentiles], the hope of glory"
Gentile emphasis here – they are being united in one body with believing Jews

WHY is it Mysterious?? Not because it is complicated or spooky or doesn't make sense /
But requires God revealing it – He chooses to do that today through us!

HOW can we make the Mysterious CLEAR??

D. Missionaries Must Remain Faithful to the Gospel Message – Cost Involved
"for which I have also been imprisoned" **[SLIDE 17]**
Paul was not going to modify his message to avoid persecution
We study through this epistle and we forget that Paul wrote it from prison

E. Missionaries Need Prayer to Effectively Communicate the Gospel Message –
"in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak"

we want to communicate the simplicity of the cross and of the gospel;
we don't want to confuse the issue, complicate things or muddy the waters

[SLIDE 18 -- Sales Process slide –] – sometimes we muddle everything up – overcomplicate the simplicity of the gospel – need to focus on the basics … that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures .. that he was buried … that He rose again the third day …. That He is alive and actively involved in changing my life today ..

III. (:5) OPPORTUNISTIC TESTIMONY – (towards unbelievers) **[SLIDE 19]**
cf. book: I'm Glad You Asked , Larry Moody – Search Ministries
one of the all-time great titles for a book on Apologetics and lifestyle evangelism
helps equip believers to answer some of the common questions so we feel more comfortable and confident engaging others in evangelistic discussions

A. Requires Some Street Smarts – "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders"
[SLIDE 20]
Christ taught us to be shrewd as serpents – Matt. 10:16
"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves"

In another context: Matthew 7:6
"Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."

We don't always tell everybody everything … there is a time and a place … and we need to discern what is appropriate
But here, the admonition is mostly in a positive direction about seizing the opportunities that present themselves … not so much about holding anything back

e.g. At work – paid to work not to evangelize …. But plenty of oppts to evangelize without compromising my commitment to my boss to do my job

B. Requires Seizing Every Opportunity – "making the most of the opportunity"
[SLIDE 21 – OPPORTUNITY DIAGRAM]

[SLIDE 22 – RITA COLLIDGE QUOTE]
"Too often the opportunity knocks, but by the time you push back the chain, push back the bolt, unhook the locks and shut off the burglar alarm it's too late."

IV. (:6) GRACIOUS SPEECH – (towards all – but especially towards unbelievers who raise questions**) [SLIDE 23]**
Book: Out of the Salt Shaker & Into the World – Evangelism as a Way of Life
– Rebecca Manley Pippert
Her approach: "I believe that much of our evangelism is ineffective because we depend too much upon technique and strategy. Evangelism has slipped into the sales department. I am convinced that we must look at Jesus, and the quality of life he calls us to, as a model for what to believe and how to reach out to others. This basic assumption underlies both the content and the structure of this book."

She stresses: authenticity – obedience – sensitivity – being able to talk about our relationship with Christ … not in a weird panicky way … but in a natural way since Christ is integrated throughout our life and not just in some special religious compartment

That is the emphasis we are trying to take away from Colossians – we are united with Christ; complete in Him; the old self is dead and its remnants need to be laid aside; we need to live in the power of the resurrection life of Christ … seeking those things which are above … where Christ is , seated at the right hand of God …

[SLIDE 24 – Sometimes we are our own Worst Enemy]

A. Fundamental Characteristic – "Let your speech always be with grace"
has not always been the reputation of Fundamentalists!
[SLIDE 25 – not thundering away]
Kids … that applies to you, too … may not be cool to speak with grace towards others … but we need to be learning this ..

B. Attractive/ Appetizing Quality – "seasoned, as it were, with salt"
[SLIDE 26 – seasoned with salt]
Are we bland Christians … ho hum Christians … dull Christians … nothing ever going on in our lives … no magnetic force field that draws out unbelievers to ask us about our faith …

C. Overall Objective – "so that you may know how you should respond to each person"
[SLIDE 27 -- PERSONAL RESPONSE] – each person and situation is different

emphasis here is on being prepared to respond to questions and openings to witness rather than to force the word on others in an unnatural way; this is a good verse for lifestyle evangelism; but it must be coupled with the thrust of preaching from the preceding verses

CONCLUSION:
All this talk about Effective Communication --
[SLIDE 28 – Don't Forget Listening Skills]

Quick Review Finish Up
[SLIDE 29]

UNION WITH CHRIST MANIFESTS ITSELF IN CONSISTENT PRAYER, MISSIONARY FOCUS, OPPORTUNISTIC TESTIMONY, AND GRACIOUS SPEECH

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are some of the practical techniques to help one "keep alert" in prayer?

2) Trace the importance of "thanksgiving" throughout this epistle. What is the pervasive tone of our prayers? How can we use singing and the psalms to nurture our spirit of thanksgiving?

3) What does an "open door" for the gospel message look like? When is it not opportune to preach the gospel? How did Paul evaluate such circumstances – both open and closed doors?

4) How salty has our speech been lately?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Lenski: "Christian wisdom in our daily contact with them will avoid everything that may prejudice them against the gospel and will do everything that may win them for the gospel. It will make the most of every opportunity that offers itself as one does when he gets a good chance to buy up something and then buys to the limit"

Bruce: "Prayer and thanksgiving can never be dissociated from each other in Christian life. The remembrance of former mercies not only produces spontaneous praise and worship; it is also a powerful incentive to renewed believing prayer. And believing prayer will be persevering prayer."

Stedman: "… we live in a dangerous world. We are under subtle attack all the time, and we ought to be aware of what that is doing to our lives—how it robs us of our joy, takes away our peace, or restricts our love, changing us and making us dull and shallow in our reactions. When you sense something lessening spiritual vigor in your life, pray that God will restore it. And not

only pray for yourself but, as Paul suggests here, pray for others too, for open doors for those who are ministering."

Martin: "Our vocal witnessing is to be gracious and to concentrate on God's offer in Christ the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24, 30; 2:6), so that those who hear our words may sense that we are speaking to their need and matching their questionings with God's provision in the message of His love and wisdom in Christ's cross, as in 1 Peter 3:15"

Moule: "He assumes that every convert would covet to be thus an 'apologist'; an expounder and vindicator of the truth, of the Lord, whom he had found. His life would mark him out for enquiry, so different would he be from his old self. And then he must be ready to avow why and how he was different. He had found access into the peace and into the love of a God supreme, eternal, holy. He had discovered Him in a Lord and Saviour who was at once celestial and human. He positively knew forgiveness in Christ, and equally well knew moral purity and liberty in Him, and had received the beginnings of heavenly bliss in Him; Christ was 'in Him, the hope of glory.' And this Christ was ascertainable, historic. He was fact of earth as well as truth of heaven. Will not the enquirer also make proof of Him, make adventure upon Him, even as his neighbour in the same street of Colossae had done, and had found it so good to do?"

Lightfoot: "Long continuance in prayer is apt to produce listlessness. Hence the additional charge that the heart must be awake, if the prayer is to have any value."

Wuest: Re: "Devote yourself to prayer" -- "to give constant attention to a thing, to give unremitting care to a thing, to persevere, to wait continually upon, to be in constant readiness for"

Stedman: Graciousness means to be pleasant and courteous, to be easy to live with. What we have to say may make people mad, finally, but the way we say it is very important. Here the apostle takes note of this. "Saltiness" is not pungent, obscene phrases thrown into the conversation. Today we say someone is "salty" because he uses profane language, but that is not what is meant here. It means conversation that is flavored with attractive ideas so that listeners are stimulated, their curiosity aroused.

Kent: "This vivid metaphor suggest either the attractiveness of one's speech (from the use of salt to make food palatable and savory) or its wholesomeness (from the common use of salt as a preservative). In the Old Testament salt was used in the ritual of making a lasting covenant because its preserving qualities supplied an appropriate symbol of endurance (Num. 18:19; II Chron. 13:5). Favoring the latter emphasis is Paul's reference elsewhere to 'corrupt speech' which should not issue from the Christian's mouth (Eph. 4:29)."

Kent: "Our speech to others (including unbelievers) should be characterized by the same kind of grace whereby God has dealt with us. Love, patience, sacrifice, and undeserved favor are aspects of grace which our speech should display."

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 4:7-18

TITLE: CLOSING GREETINGS

BIG IDEA:
UNION WITH CHRIST MANIFESTS ITSELF IN PRECIOUS BONDS OF FELLOWSHIP WITH THOSE WHO LABOR WITH US IN THE GOSPEL MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION:
We have come to the end of our series on Colossians … REVIEW
THEME: THE KEY TO SPIRITUALITY IS LIVING OUT OR UNION WITH THE SUPREME AND SUFFICIENT CHRIST (UNDERSTANDING THAT WE ARE COMPLETE IN HIM)

- We studied the **Supremacy of Christ** in Chap 1 –
  His work of Headship and of Reconciliation – over all of creation and in the church
- We studied the **Sufficiency of Christ** – concluding that we are *"complete in Him"* – no need to look anywhere else for True Spirituality – *"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him"*
- We looked in some detail at our Freedom from the Bondage and Condemnation of the isms – Ritualism, Mysticism, Legalism – so that we can experience True Spirituality in Living out our Union with Christ
  Brian provided some excellent resources into understanding the errors of present-day Judaism, of Islam, of current strands of Mysticism
- We have been finishing up by studying a number of different relationships where we should see the practical outworking of our Union with Christ
  - in the church family – where love should be the perfect bond of unity
  - in our own family – husbands and wives; children and parents
  - and in the workplace
- Last week we looked at Effective Communication – with a special emphasis on Outreach – whether via missionary involvement or our own personal testimony

Today is a perfect example of the beauty of preaching through an entire book … When would I choose to dive into such a section that is marked by personal greetings … just little snippets about all the important foot soldiers that make up the Gospel Army .. You probably haven't heard many messages on this text … (a lot better than OT genealogies … but still a challenge)

Today .. a special treat … I have prepared 2 messages – one a more traditional outline that we will use for a **quick overview** and another different approach from my wacky side
Kids, Don't worry … 2 messages doesn't mean twice the time … in fact we can do 2 in less than our typical time so you can get home and start celebrating Father's Day …

TRADITIONAL OUTLINE – quick overview:
UNION WITH CHRIST MANIFESTS ITSELF IN PRECIOUS BONDS OF FELLOWSHIP WITH THOSE WHO LABOR WITH US IN THE GOSPEL MINISTRY
Should really be a Missionary Conference Message – talking about the relationship between those who labor on the front lines as missionaries and their supporters back at home base – **3 key areas of Interaction**:

I. (:7-9) INFORMATION – leads to encouragement
II. (:10-14) INTIMACY – leads to encouragement
III. (:15-17) INVOLVEMENT

I. (:7-9) **INFORMATION**: MISSIONARIES MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO KEEP THEIR SUPPORTERS FULLY INFORMED THROUGH FAITHFUL MESSENGERS

A. (:7-8) Tychicus
1. His Commendation
a. *"beloved brother"*
b. *"faithful servant"*
c. *"fellow bond-servant in the Lord"*
2. His Mission
a. Inform the believers about Paul's affairs
"as to all my affairs"
"will bring you information"

"For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances"
b. Encourage the hearts of the believers
"and that he may encourage your hearts"

B. (:9) Onesimus
1. His Commendation
a. *"our faithful and beloved brother"*
b. *"who is one of your number"*
2. His Mission
"They will inform you about the whole situation here."

Kent: "He was from the province of Asia and accompanied Paul at the close of the third missionary journey (Acts 20:4), apparently as one of the delegates taking the collection to Jerusalem. He was with Paul in Rome toward the close of the first Roman imprisonment (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7). Near the end of Paul's life he was sent on missions to Crete (Titus 3:12) and Ephesus (II Tim. 4:12).

II. (:10-14) **INTIMACY**: THE INTIMACY OF PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL IS EXPRESSED VIA PERSONAL GREETINGS OF FRIENDSHIP AND ENCOURAGEMENT

A. Three Jewish Christian Converts = *"Fellow workers for the kingdom of God"*
"who are from the circumcision"
1. (:10a) Aristarchus
"my fellow prisoner"
2. (:10b) Mark = Barnabas' cousin
"about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him"
3. (:11) Jesus = who is called Justus

Summary: *"they have proved to be an encouragement to me"*

B. (:12-13) Epaphras
1. His Commendation
a. *"who is one of your number"*
b. *"a bondslave of Jesus Christ"*
2. His Mission
a. Fervent Prayer Ministry
"always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers"
b. Goal-Oriented
"that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God"
(1) steadfastness of character – to resist error and persevere in the truth
(2) maturity of experience – full-grown
(3) realization of assurance – focused around the will of God (Thomas)
c. Widespread Pastoral Concern
"For I bear him witness that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis"

C. (:14a) Luke = *"the beloved physician"*

D. (:14b) Demas
later Paul would lament: *"Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world."*
2 Tim. 4:10

III. (:15-17) **INVOLVEMENT**: THE RECIPIENTS OF THIS MISSIONARY REPORT MUST SHARE WITH OTHERS ITS GREETINGS AND EXHORTATIONS

A. (:15) Pass Along Greetings to:
1. *"the brethren who are in Laodicea"*
2. *"Nympha and the church that is in her house"*

B. (:16) Exchange letters with the church of the Laodiceans

C. (:17) Exhort Archippus:
"And say to Archippus, 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it'"

* *

We could be done now … don't leave …

MESSAGE #2:

I want you to remember this message for at least a week …
Information / Intimacy / Involvement – maybe that will stick ….

But 10 odd ball personal names – how are you ever going to make that connection??
- one way – takes a long time … but you could plan on having 10 kids and naming them Tychicus, Onesimus, etc. – that's a tough way to go …. I have an easier plan ….

I am going to share with you one of my educational tricks that has made me the highly successful executive I am today .. Kids .. pay attention .. you want to do well in your schoolwork … here's how I made it through …

take what you want to memorize (10 names for us) … take the first letter of each name and come up with some type of saying to prompt you …

The **O**bjective of **A**ll **M**issionary **J**ourneys: **E**ternal **L**ife **DNA**

pretty stupid, eh … stick with me … don't give up yet …
That's all you are going to have to remember to have a handle on this message … one little saying … Of course we have to understand that saying …

Our DNA is the physical stuff that makes us who we are as a natural person … but remember we are a New Creation in Christ … so I am talking about our spiritual DNA = who we are in Christ … we will call that our Eternal Life DNA ..

Why do we need missionaries like the Apostle Paul? Because there is only **one way** for fallen sinners to come back into fellowship with a Holy God … and that is through faith in the person of Jesus Christ -- since that message is exclusive … there is only one way to God – we need to get that message out to the world

The **O**bjective of **A**ll **M**issionary **J**ourneys: **E**ternal **L**ife **DNA**

Now we are going to take those 10 Key Letters and Look at the **10 Key Players** in our Passage: (Pretty impressive bunch – wrote a good bit of the NT)

these saints … laboring together as partners in the gospel … dependent on the support of those back in their home churches … much like us today … diverse yet unified

1) T -- **Tychicus** – *Translator of Circumstances*
   - entrusted with carrying the letter back to the church; not just providing **information** but **interpreting Paul's circumstances** from God's perspective so that they would truly understand the situation (Acts 20:4)
   - no email, no snail mail, no telephone calling card, no easy way to communicate … How well do we understand the circumstances facing our missionaries? How connected are we today?
   - not many people would have been qualified to so interpret Paul's situation; you can ask him questions; press him for more details … and he will put everything in the proper perspective
   - training ground was not formal seminary education, but practical discipleship – on the job type of exposure to real life pressure situations
   - genuine affection of Paul for those on his missionary team
   - partnership spirit of early ministers – not a formal hierarchy of position; viewed as equals – Why did the early church abandon this so quickly and establish bishops in a hierarchy??

2) O -- **Onesimus** – *Opposite of Runaway Slave – The Transformed Life*
   came into contact with Paul in Rome; was dramatically converted and his life changed forever; not the same man who had run away; new spiritual DNA
   - not a faithless runaway; deceitful; untrustworthy but a faithful communicator

of truth
- not a piece of property of the lowest social class but a beloved brother
- not somebody to be scorned and mocked but appreciated
- Demonstrates the Power of :
    - a Transformed life – the gospel really is the power of God unto salvation
    - and Christian forgiveness
- "one of your number" – not an outsider; should fit right back in and be received

3) A – **Aristarchus** (I guess this is A1 since we have an A2 later)
Accompanier of Paul – True Team Player
- "*my fellow prisoner*" – Origination of Prison Fellowship Ministries (Chuck Colson)
- native of Thessalonica
- Not his first prison episode -- arrested in riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:29)
- accompanied Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4)
- went thru shipwreck with Paul on the way to Rome from Macedonia – no stranger to hardship; Stuck with Paul through thick and thin – Dependable co-worker

None of us can go it alone – Missionary work is always a team effort

4) M – **Mark** -- *Maturity of Restoration*

John Mark – the writer of the gospel

son of a wealthy widow who lived in Jerusalem

Barnabas' cousin – apparently Barnabas was better known to the Colossians … this was a reference as to his character

Had gotten labeled as a Quitter because he abandoned Paul on first missionary journey

Don't be suspicious of him because of the former rift between Paul and Barnabas over taking John Mark along .. he is now judged to be valuable for the ministry
Acts 15:36-39

God is the God of Second Chances, God of Grace – how willing are we to forgive and restore?

5) J – **Jesus** / Justus --*Jews for Jesus*
- sad for Paul to see the overall rejection by the Jews of their Messiah
- here he singles out three men for their specific ministry and commitment as a tremendous encouragement to him
- comfort to me (medical term = soothing relief)
- Takes a lot of ordinary foot soldiers to make an effective army

6) E – **Epaphras** -- *Energizer Bunny of Intercessory Prayer*
- the founder of the church at Colossae – close by: Laodicea, Hierapolis; possibly converted while visiting Ephesus??
- laboring for them very intensely in his prayers
- concerned for their spiritual growth and maturity – understanding True Spirituality; not being led astray by the heretical teaching of all the –isms
Asceticism, Legalism, Mysticism, Ritualism

Remember last week: "*Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving*"

7) L – **Luke** -- *Legend of Many Talents*

- physician who would have taken care of Paul's medical needs on many occasions
- very educated
- missionary and writer of Gospel and Acts; historian
- very humble; not pretentious; fit in with people of all economic brackets
- 2 Timothy 4:11, at the close of his ministry, Paul writes: "*Only Luke is with me*"
- the world would have tried to sell Luke a Lie: "you are wasting your life, throwing away your education, following the path of the cross, not amounting to anything"

Our talents are never wasted in the service of the King

8) D – **Demas** -- *Danger of Defection*

- let Paul down during his second Roman imprisonment – 2 Tim. 4:10
  "*Demas has forsaken me having loved this present age, and has gone back to Thessalonica*."
- interesting that no special commendation is offered here
- Warning to examine ourselves – Where is the attraction for this world creeping in and compromising our commitment to follow Christ?

9) N – **Nymphas** -- *Nerve Center of Church Fellowship*

- some debate whether a man or a woman – look at the gender of the pronouns; textual evidence
- in NT, "*church*" always refers to the gathered together assembly of believers … not the particular building where they met … here they met in her house
- required generosity, sacrifice – just like those who get here early and set up and take down our equipment

10) A – **Archippus** -- *Anticipation of Fulfilled Ministry*

- associated somehow with Philemon – (Phil. 2)
- no lack of spiritual gifts in the early church or in Open Door today – just a danger that we as individuals will fail to fully grasp and **fulfill the ministry** that should be ours

(Provides excellent transition towards where we will be concentrating in coming weeks)
How do you discover your **intended ministry?**

How concerned are you about identifying and fulfilling your ministry?
The role of spiritual leaders is not to do all the ministry … but to equip the body to perform the works of ministry …. Ideally, we should all … if given the opportunity … be able to stand up and communicate our particular passion for ministry and how we are pursuing it …

(:18) SIGNATURE AND CLOSING

A. Authenticity of His Letter -- Signature

"*I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand*."

B. Authenticity of His Ministry -- Closing Exhortation

"*Remember my imprisonment*"

Just as Paul deeply loved the fellow believers, he valued their reciprocal love as well

C. Appropriation of God's Resources -- Closing Benediction

"*Grace be with you*"

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How have you experienced deepened friendships among those with whom you have most closely labored in partnership in the gospel?

2) How important is communication (missionary information/reports/etc.) in fostering the partnership relationship?

3) What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of house churches (believers meeting together in a private house rather than some type of larger facility)?

4) What were some of the characteristics of Paul's relationship with Epaphras? with Mark?? cf. other NT references to these individuals.

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Laurin: "The futility of really mattering in life, where we are but one person among two billion, and where we appear of such little importance, seems to loom so large before our eyes that we are promptly discouraged and conclude that it does not matter whether we really matter or not. But we must never succumb to this feeling of futility for God has a place for personality. He has a place for us. Fill it with faith and it will fill us with joy and blessing."

Laurin: Re *"Grace be with you"* – "It is by the communication of God's grace that our bonds may become the means of great triumphs. Grace remains the sinner's only hope of life and the believers' only means of living. It is the greatest and the noblest of all the words in the vocabulary of God."

Wiersbe: "Paul was not only a soul-winner; he was a great friend-maker. If my count is correct, there are more than 100 different Christians (named and unnamed) associated with Paul in the Book of Acts and in his epistles. He named 26 different friends in Romans 16 alone!

Wiersbe: "As we come to the close of our study of this remarkable letter, we must remind ourselves that we are complete in Jesus Christ. We should beware of any teaching that claims to give us '*something more*' than we already have in Christ. All of God's fullness is in Him, and

He has perfectly equipped us for the life that God wants us to live. We do not live and grow by *addition*, but by *appropriation*.

May the Lord help us to live as those who are complete in Christ."

Martin: "The custom of early Christians to meet as house-congregations has more than a historical or academic interest. Recently it has been maintained (by the liturgical scholar J. P. Audet) that when Christians abandoned the house church as a model they accepted a new pattern of worship in which the basilica replaced the house and family instruction gave way to a preaching oratory… numbers necessarily change the form and content of human relationships."

Martin: Re vs. 18 – "'The reference to *bonds* is not chiefly a matter of pathos but of authority' (Moule), and Paul is not morosely inviting his readers to spare a tender thought for him in his distress. Rather, he is summoning them to respect his authority (as in Philemon 9) as a prisoner for the gospel's sake and on behalf of the Gentiles whose interests he has at stake in his apostolic sufferings (1:23-25). He lies in prison on account of his vocation and because he will not surrender his commission to be an apostle and teacher of the Gentiles. The appeal to his fetters is therefore a powerful incentive which he calls into play that the Colossians should give heed to his teaching and not yield to the heretical doctrine which encroaches upon them."

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