

Colossians Devotionals

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COLOSSIANS DEVOTIONALS

Today in the Word

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Colossians 1

Colossians 1:1–2

“Jesus, name above all names / Beautiful Savior, glorious Lord / Emmanuel, God is with us / Blessed Redeemer, Living Word.” The words of this classic chorus by Naida Hearn are simply a list of names for Jesus. Simple, yet profound. Simple, yet powerful. Simple, yet it will take eternity for us to worship Christ. This month we'll study the book of Colossians and see some of the simple, profound, and powerful truths about Jesus. We'll examine the evidence for His sovereignty, superiority, and glory, as well as His redemption proclaimed in the gospel and through our life in Him.

Colossae was a city located in the Lycus River Valley in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), about 100 miles east of Ephesus. Its location has been identified, but it has never been excavated. Focusing on the centrality of Christ, the epistle appears to have been written to combat a heresy. We don't know exactly what heresy, but it seems to have been a syncretistic blend of Judaism, mysticism, legalism, and paganism. Epaphras, very likely the

planter and pastor of the Colossian church (1:7), knew the heresy threatened the purity of the gospel and the spiritual lives of believers in his congregation, probably a mix of Jews and Gentiles. He was worried enough to go on a trip to Rome to ask Paul's advice (4:12).

In response, Paul, with Timothy's assistance, wrote this epistle and sent it to Colossae (vv. 1–2). Since it was written during one of his imprisonments (4:3, 18), it is often grouped with other “prison epistles” such as Philemon. Scholars are not sure exactly which imprisonment, but scholar Douglas Moo identifies Rome as the most likely location, meaning that the book was probably written around a.d. 60 (see Acts 28). Commentator N. T. Wright summarized the book's overall purpose: “Writing to a young church discovering what it was like to believe in Jesus Christ and to follow him, Paul shares their sense of wonder as he encourages them to explore the treasures of the gospel and to order their lives accordingly.”

Apply the Word

For many in our culture today—as in the culture of the Colossians—truth is considered relative: you have your truth, and I have mine. As we study the letter to the Colossians this month, pray that the Spirit will renew your commitment to the truth of the gospel

and the truth of who Jesus is. Pray that this truth will make a difference in how you live as a committed follower of Christ.

Colossians 1:3–5

In “A Call for Christian Risk,” pastor and theologian John Piper discussed the life of faith as a call to courage: “When the threat of death becomes a door to paradise the final barrier to temporal risk is broken. When a Christian says from the heart, ‘To live is Christ and to die is gain,’ he is free to love no matter what. Some forms of radical Islam may entice martyr-murderers with similar dreams, but Christian hope is the power to love, not kill. Christian hope produces life-givers, not life-takers. The crucified Christ calls his people to live and die for their enemies, as he did ... Jesus unleashed a movement of radical, loving, risk-takers.”

This is the Christ-centered faith Paul lived out and wrote about. He had already identified himself as an “apostle of Christ” (v. 1) writing to “faithful brothers and sisters in Christ” (v. 2). In today’s verses, he went on to recognize the Colossians’ faith in Christ as a key reason to thank God for them (vv. 3–4), and to remind them that their faith and love were rooted in the gospel of Christ (v. 5). Faith and love “spring from” or are the active result of the hope of the gospel. Here, “love” is not an emotion, but rather the virtue of acting for others’ good. Paul elsewhere referred to faith and love as part of the armor of God that should be worn by Christians (1 Thess. 5:8).

Paul had never actually been to Colossae (2:1). Yet he kept them in his prayers and was aware of the church’s reputation. He wanted the believers there to continue growing in Christ, that is, to be “radical, loving, risk-takers” for the sake of the gospel. This was the “word of truth” they had originally heard and believed and which was eternally guaranteed or “stored up” for them by God (v. 5).

Since these things are true for all believers, this epistle is written for us as well! We, too, have heard and believed, want to keep growing in Christ, and trust in God to guard our salvation.

Apply the Word

Paul wrote of thanking God in prayer for the Colossians (v. 3). Praying for specific individuals and groups is a good habit. For example, instead of just praying for the “unsaved,” we might name a specific friend or neighbor. If you are reading a news article about persecuted Christians in China, Egypt, or elsewhere, that would be a great time to pray for the people in the article. Another idea is to pray for a specific Facebook friend every time you use that social media website.

Colossians 1:3-8; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

I thank my God every time I remember you. - Philippians 1:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

The murderous Russian dictator, Josef Stalin, reportedly once said, “Gratitude is a sickness suffered by dogs.” A different man, also named Josef, would strongly disagree. Josef Gabor grew up in communist Czechoslovakia, under the dark shadow of Stalin’s Soviet Union. Gabor was told that religion was weakness and was taught communist doctrine by his father. His mother, though, was a follower of Jesus Christ. She took Josef and his brother to church, which was a three-hour train ride away. Despite the distance and danger of going to church, Josef Gabor remains grateful to God for a mother who helped bring him to Christ. For many years, Gabor served with Trans World Radio, and is currently the director of Youth for Christ in Central Europe.

Yesterday we saw how gratitude flows na-turally from seeing God’s power to break the bondage of evil. In today’s passage, we find that gratitude similarly flows when we see the gospel’s worldwide spread. These two truths go hand-in-hand, because the gospel always brings freedom and healing wherever it goes.

It’s possible that Paul never visited the church in Colossae. But when Epaphras, who was probably converted through Paul’s ministry, brought news of the good things that were happening in this small church, Paul was filled with gratitude. Notice the triad of faith, love, and hope in verses 4 and 5. Together, these offer evidence of the gospel’s transforming power. The news that gospel was spreading into this part of the world (now part of modern-day Turkey) filled Paul with praise and thanks, because it confirmed that the good news of Jesus Christ was indeed increasing around the world.

Paul had the same response when he learned about the effects of the gospel in the Thessalonian church, one of the first churches that he planted in Europe. Despite persecution and efforts to thwart the gospel, this church had become “imitators” of the more established, mature churches in Judea.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Both yesterday’s and today’s Bible readings show that gratitude is an essential part of the gospel. When the gospel comes into people’s lives, thanksgiving is evidence of its transforming power. But it’s also the case that when we hear about the spread of the

gospel, we're filled with thanksgiving to God. Today would be a good time to learn more about the gospel's spread and power. A

Colossians 1:6–8

Last year was the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Version of the Bible. Believers and unbelievers alike acknowledge the powerful influence of the KJV throughout Western culture and history. One writer pointed out: "It's the Bible of the speeches of Lincoln. It's the Bible of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. It's the Bible of the speeches of Martin Luther King." More than 350 idiomatic expressions used in daily life come from the KJV. Many readers find that the archaic language still conveys a sense of the beauty and majesty of Scripture. In fact, the KJV is the best-selling Bible translation of all time!

The story of the King James Version is just part of the ongoing story of the worldwide spread of the gospel. As Paul wrote, "The gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world" (v. 6). This was something the Colossians themselves had been experiencing from the first day they heard, understood, and accepted the message of God's grace in all its truth. The idea of "bearing fruit and growing"

is geographical, as when the unreached hear the gospel and new churches are planted, as well as personal, meaning that the Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of believers to make us more like Christ.

The church at Colossae was apparently planted by Epaphras (vv. 7–8). Many scholars believe that Epaphras first trusted Christ during Paul's ministry in Ephesus (see Acts 19), then went from there to preach the gospel in Colossae, and possibly Laodicea and Hierapolis as well (4:13). By mentioning the church's pastor, Paul made a personal connection with a congregation he hadn't met and honored one of his co-workers in Christ. This connection also alerted the Colossians, in an apostolically authoritative manner, that they needed to heed Epaphras and reject false teachers. The heresy wouldn't be addressed until chapter two, but Paul was already laying the groundwork. From his perspective, the gospel is a powerful reality that is past (received), present ("bearing fruit and growing"), and future (promised).

Apply the Word

One excellent book about the 400th anniversary of the KJV is *The Legacy of the King James Bible* by Leland Ryken (Crossway, 2011). He recounts the historical story of the KJV, including the translation itself and also its influence in education, government, religion, and art. As a scholar of literature from that historical period and of Bible translations in general, Ryken focuses especially on the KJV's literary qualities and its status as an enduring literary masterpiece.

Colossians 1:9–11

Images of roads and journeys and the theme of pilgrimage are central motifs in the Christian life. The idea is that we, like the Israelites in the Exodus, are on our way to somewhere better. While on our way, we have choices to make, lessons to learn, people to serve, commands to obey, injustices to suffer or make right, and praises to sing. Through it all, God is glorified—that's the meaning of the journey. No wonder we call this our "walk" with the Lord!

Paul had this theme in mind when he wrote to the Colossians about living "a life worthy of the Lord" (v. 10). Such a life was at the center of his prayers for them. "For this reason" meant that he prayed on the basis of their history with the gospel and the gospel's truth and power in their lives and throughout the world (v. 9).

His main prayer request was for "God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives." That is, now that they had received the gospel and were growing in faith and love, Paul's

ambition was for them to grow also in obedience and wisdom. To be filled with the knowledge of God is to be controlled by it. To know God's will is to follow it. Therefore, the outcome of this prayer would be a God-pleasing life—a high calling indeed!

What does a God-pleasing life look like? In verses 10 through 12, Paul lists four characteristics. First, "bearing fruit in every good work." That fits with his earlier mention of Christian love, or acting for others' good. Second, "growing in the knowledge of God." This means "learning" in the sense of both information and action. If theology is a relationship with God, then the "knowledge of God" must involve both knowing and doing. Third, "being strengthened with all power." The source of strength is divine, and the outcome of a strengthened faith is endurance and patience. Finally, "giving joyful thanks to the Father." The One for whom we are to "live worthy" is the One who empowers us to do so!

Apply the Word

One is struck in today's reading by the holistic nature of pleasing God and living lives worthy of the gospel of Christ. We can't just learn about God abstractly—learning and doing go hand-in-hand. We can't just emphasize attitude—gratitude must include action, not just feelings.. This is not something we can do on our own. We must rely on the Holy Spirit. To walk God's way requires His truth, power, and grace!

Colossians 1:9-14; 2:6-7

I will give you thanks forever. - Psalm 30:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

Over 147 years ago, on October 3, 1863, Abraham Lincoln stated: "The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added ... They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God ... It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and voice by the whole American People. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States ... to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens."

Although Lincoln made Thanksgiving an official holiday, the practice of setting aside a day of thanks was a longstanding tradition in the United States. Moreover, Lincoln's writings, as well as those of other American leaders long before him, frequently reflect a deep sense of gratitude to God, both for His providence in national matters and in their own lives and families. It's evident that thanksgiving extended beyond a national holiday to lives that were characterized by gratitude to God.

Thanksgiving as a lifestyle has been a recurring theme in our study this month. This is particularly evident in Colossians. In Colossians 1:9-14, Paul indicates that he is praying that the Colossians would be filled with God's knowledge, so that they might live lives worthy of the Lord. Then he lists four characteristics of such a life: believers are to be fruitful, maturing, empowered, and thankful. The order of this list suggests that the more we progress in our walk of faith the more thankful we become. This is repeated in Colossians 2, where Paul links spiritual growth with overflowing thankfulness.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Bible scholar David Pao writes, "Thanksgiving becomes an essential part of the day to day living of believers. To live a life worthy of the Lord is to live with the constant awareness of God's grace." As you give thanks today for family, friends, and a special meal, pray that you will grow in gratitude throughout the upcoming year. Both of today's passages also link thankfulness with growing in the essentials of our faith. If you aren't already attending a Bible study, commit to making that a priority as well.

Colossians 1:9-14

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him. - Colossians 2:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his book *The Discipline of Grace*, Jerry Bridges tells about a Cold War-era Russian pilot who flew his fighter plane to a U.S. base in Japan and asked for asylum. He was flown to the United States and given a new identity. Bridges points out that although this pilot had the same physical characteristics and personality traits after his experience, his new identity allowed him to live a new life. He was delivered from a totalitarian regime, and able to enjoy all the benefits of living in a free society.

That's a good illustration of what happened to us when we were delivered from Satan's kingdom into the kingdom of God's Son. We went from guilt to forgiveness, from slavery to freedom, from weakness to strength, and from total spiritual poverty to an eternal inheritance.

Isn't that an encouraging perspective in these closing days of the year? If we fully understand our position in Christ, we won't worry too much about what might happen tomorrow or next week.

Instead of worrying or being fearful, our emphasis should be on thanking God for all these gifts. Besides expressing our thanks with words, we can show God our gratitude by the way we live for Him and grow in our faith. This was the prayer Paul had for the Colossian Christians.

The apostle wanted these believers to be filled with the knowledge of God's will by gaining spiritual understanding. We can know the will of God for our lives, and knowing what He expects from us comes from Spirit-directed reading and study of the Word.

The result of this will be seen in our lives. First, we will ""find out what pleases the Lord"" (Eph. 5:10, see Col. 1:10). Jesus said His Father was glorified when we bear fruit (Jn. 15:16); pleasing God involves spiritual fruit-bearing, reproducing the character of Christ in ourselves and in others.

Keeping the right spiritual perspective also results in endurance and patience (v. 11), two qualities in great demand and short supply in the world today--and too often, among Christians as well.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Back on December 12, we talked about special Christmas gifts you can give to your family and friends.

As the shopping days before Christmas dwindle to a few, and the pressure is on to get all the holiday projects done and get-togethers planned, it seems that endurance and patience would be two good gifts to add to your ""gift"" list. Pray that God will give you all the energy and grace you need to carry you through the season, and that you will bless others by your patient reaction in any circumstance.

Colossians 1:9-23

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. - Colossians 1:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

“Twinkle, twinkle, little star ... like a diamond in the sky” goes the familiar children’s song. It’s actually true! A team of astronomers at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics recently discovered a “diamond star” 10 billion trillion trillion carats in size, or about 932 miles across. By comparison, the largest diamond ever found on earth was only 3,100 carats. The star is actually a crystallized white dwarf, the leftover core of a star that has burned out. About 50 light years away from us, its carbon interior “has solidified to form the galaxy’s largest diamond,” explained one scientist.

How much would such a diamond be worth? It boggles the mind. Paul felt exactly this way about the incredible, incalculable worth of Jesus Christ. We cannot emphasize enough that a “life filled with purpose” is a life filled with Christ. In today’s two readings—again drawn from epistles written during his first imprisonment—Paul celebrated this truth. A theological library could be written on these passages, but we will focus on one question: What does a life filled with Christ look like?

A life filled with Christ is one filled with blessing and lavished with grace. After all, God predestined and chose us to be adopted as His children. He loved us so much that He sent His Son on a life-costing, life-giving mission of forgiveness and redemption. Our lives, too, should be characterized by love, grace, and forgiveness—doing as well as speaking gospel truths to those around us. God’s purpose in choosing us is to make us holy and blameless, to the praise of His glory. We believe and hope in these spiritual realities, and already enjoy the Holy Spirit as a guarantee and firstfruits of the inheritance to come.

A life filled with Christ is one governed by the knowledge of God’s revealed will, that is, His plan of salvation. Having crossed over from death to life in Christ, we should continue walking with and growing in Him. We should live righteously, worthy of our salvation—that is, to please Him. This will assuredly bear fruit in our lives, including endurance, patience, thankfulness, and joy.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you find that you can better relate to fiction, pick up a copy of *Paul: A Novel*, by Walter Wangerin Jr. In this engaging and substantial modern novel, Wangerin takes into account the latest historical and cultural scholarship on the first century and writes from an imaginative, faith-filled perspective. In the author’s own words, “This is a novel, particularly, of the man who bore [the] gospel east to west with fury and faith and tenderness... He is the hinge of history.”

Colossians 1:12–14

The famous scientist Isaac Newton graduated from Cambridge University in 1665. At that time, people believed that white light was the purest form of light, and thus that colored light was somehow impure. To test this belief, Newton shone a beam of sunlight through a glass prism. The prism separated the light into a spectrum of colors, showing that white light is actually composed of many different colors. Newton concluded that these colors, also seen in rainbows, are the fundamental colors seen by the human eye. His test changed our view of light and color and is one of the best-known experiments in the history of science.

Today’s reading focuses on a spiritual movement from darkness to light. The final item on yesterday’s list of characteristics of a God-pleasing life was thankfulness. And the primary reason we have to give thanks to God is for His plan of redemption—how He saved us from death by sending His Son to die in our stead (vv. 12–13). As a result, we who were enslaved in the “dominion of darkness” are now “qualified” to be citizens in His “kingdom of light.” This is pictured as an “inheritance,” that is, as a gift, something earned not on our own merit but by virtue of being a member of God’s family.

The light-versus-dark imagery captures the complete contrast between two realities. The “dominion of darkness” is about sin and death, while the “kingdom of light” is about holiness and life. These two realities have opposite power structures, opposite beliefs to live by, and opposite outcomes. We were spiritually dead and headed for damnation—there was absolutely nothing we could do to move ourselves from one domain to the other. Only God could rescue us, which He graciously did even though it meant the sacrifice of His beloved Son.

Christ died and rose again, winning the victory over death and making possible forgiveness of sin (v. 14). The “kingdom of light” is rightfully His kingdom, and the gospel received by the Colossians and still spreading all over the world proclaims the loving power of His kingship.

Apply the Word

The word “qualified” in verse 12 shows us clearly that our redemption is a gift from God. The term means “made sufficient” or “made fit.” The idea is that something lacking is provided, or that someone who needed something is equipped with it by someone else. Spend time today thanking God that His Son made your redemption possible, and that His Spirit lives in you. This is the greatest gift; let us live out our gratitude to the Giver!

Colossians 1:12–14

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Colossians 1:13 Exodus 12:1-42

He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son. - Colossians 1:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Gladys Aylward was a British missionary to China, and shortly after her arrival in the 1930s the Japanese invaded China. After the town where she lived was bombed, Japanese soldiers were sent to kill any survivors. Aylward led the survivors, including many children, on a long march through perilous terrain. Miraculously, many survived this harrowing escape and caught the last train for freedom.

There's something very compelling about rescue operations, the greatest of which is surely found in the story of the Exodus. Here we see a pattern of God's redemptive work. Just as He chose one man, Abraham, through whom He would bless all the peoples of the earth, so now He chose this nation, Israel. But before this nation could be a blessing, they would have to be freed.

Exodus 12 is really the climax of the first eleven chapters of Exodus, which record the efforts of Satan to thwart God's redemptive plans and God's sovereignty. The book opens with the cruel plot to crush the Jews through forced labor (1:11), but the Jews continued to increase. Then the Pharaoh ordered the murder of all Jewish baby boys, but God intervened again (1:15-20). The story of Moses' birth (Ex. 2) is an entire rescue operation in itself! God's protection of His people is tied to His covenant promise to Abraham (Ex. 3:13-17).

Exodus 12 describes the final plague. Although this plague was to fall upon every firstborn in Egypt, the Lord provided a substitution

for the Israelites: a spotless yearling lamb, whose blood was to be spread on the outside doorframe (v. 7). In this way, the plague would pass over the Israelite households (v. 22).

As we read this account, it can be difficult to see how this was a blessing to the nation Egypt. But notice that many other people, presumably Egyptians, left with the Israelites (v. 38). They likely saw the power of God and wanted to join His people. Keep in mind also that God's purpose for rescuing the Israelites was to make them a great nation that would be a blessing to all the nations around, including Egypt.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It's not hard to see how the Passover prefigures our Lord Jesus Christ. Like the sacrificial lamb, whose blood offered protection, His death upon the cross offers salvation.

Luke 4:18 says that Jesus came to set the oppressed free, but the oppression here is not physical bondage to a foreign power, but spiritual bondage to the Evil One. By His death and resurrection, Jesus has made possible the greatest rescue operation in the history of the universe—the rescue of a lost person from the realm of darkness (Col. 1:13).

Colossians 1:15–17

Keith Getty and Stuart Townsend penned the popular modern hymn, “In Christ Alone.” In its second verse, this hymn reflects on the wonder of the Incarnation: “In Christ alone / Who took on flesh / Fullness of God in helpless babe! / This gift of love and righteousness / Scorned by the ones He came to save. / Till on that cross as Jesus died / The wrath of God was satisfied / For ev'ry sin on Him was laid / Here in the death of Christ I live.”

Paul, too, exalted the full deity and humanity of Christ. Colossians 1:15–20 is often considered the climax of this epistle because of its doctrinal and poetic qualities. Paul might be quoting an existing hymn, but it's also possible he composed the hymn or poem himself. In any case, he asserted that Christ “is the image of the invisible God” (v. 15). This means that although God is a spirit and cannot be seen, Christ became human and made it literally possible to see God. This is also a way of saying that Christ is fully God. Hebrews 1:3 similarly affirms, “The Son

is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.”

Christ is also “the firstborn over all creation.” “Firstborn” is a positional metaphor—that is, it doesn't mean the Son of God began His life at a certain point in time (He's eternal!), but rather indicates His position as ruler over the created world. This interpretation is confirmed and expanded in the next verse, where we learn that “in him all things were created” (v. 16). Christ's relation to creation is not only one of authority, but also one of authorship. He spoke it into being and continually sustains it (cf. John 1:14). His preeminence covers the entire created realm, including supernatural beings, a truth that will be applied specifically in chapter two against the false teachings spread in Colossae (2:18–19). In summary, Paul wrote: “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (v. 17). Or as one commentator put it, “Things make sense only when Christ is kept at the center.”

Apply the Word

Today's passage takes us back to Genesis 1 with fresh eyes. Since Christ is the creator and ruler over all creation, then He is the One to whom we as stewards of creation must give account (Gen. 1:28–30). He made it all, and He will make it all new (Rev. 21:5). It can be invigorating and convicting to realize that He is the One holding everything together, that He stands at the beginning and end of history as its Alpha and Omega, and that in Him we actually see God.

Colossians 1:15-29

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. - Colossians 1:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

When a legal document was drawn up in ancient Greece, such as a receipt or an IOU, it always included a description of the chief characteristics and distinguishing marks of the two parties involved. This helped in future identification. The Greek word for such a description is *eikon*, which is the same word Paul used to describe Christ as “the image of the invisible God.”

Sadly, modern-day cults are not the first assaults on the orthodox, true teaching of the gospel. A heresy in the early church called Gnosticism taught that all matter was evil and only spirit was good. Therefore, the Gnostics concluded that since God was good, God could not become man, nor could He be the agent of creation of matter. This heresy flatly contradicted both the Old Testament teaching about God, as we read in Genesis, and the accounts of Jesus' birth, life, and death in the Gospels. Some cults today still teach a variation on this ancient heresy.

As we've seen, if Jesus were not both God and man, His atonement would not be possible. He had to die, and in order to die He had to be a man.

In Colossians 1 we see affirmation that Jesus is God and man. "For by him all things were created" (v. 16) brings us full circle to December 1 and our discussion of Creation. When Paul said, "He is before all things" (v. 17), he showed that Christ has no beginning. Jesus was there when God created the earth (John 1:1).

Then Paul reminds us that Jesus was also fully human; His physical body died so that we can be reconciled to God (v. 22). Because of the blood Jesus shed on the cross, we are forgiven of our sins. Our race and nationality don't matter, nor do our social and economic standing. God's love and mercy are available to all of us who accept Jesus as our Savior.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Colossians 1:21–23 sums up the heart of the gospel: we were alienated from God because of our sin, but Christ died and rose again to present us holy before God.

Colossians 1:15-20 Genesis 1:26-31;

Just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. - 1 Corinthians 15:49

TODAY IN THE WORD

When the glittering gold artifacts from the tomb of Egyptian King Tutankhamun toured the world in the 1970s, people camped out on museum steps for tickets to this blockbuster exhibition. So far the 2006 exhibition has sparked similar enthusiasm. Seeing these amazing relics illustrates how the ancient Egyptians believed that Pharaoh was the very image of god.

We've looked at Jesus' humanity, and its importance for salvation. We'll continue this focus for several more days by concentrating upon Jesus as the perfect human being. We begin by considering humanity as made in the image of God.

As we've noted, ancient Egyptians claimed that only a Pharaoh could be the image of God. Old Babylonian myths said humans were created by lesser gods who were tired of the duties to serve and feed the higher gods. How different is Genesis 1:26-31! As the culmination of God's creativity, human beings were created in His own image and likeness, stressing that humans are like God in important ways, although they are not God.

Created as male and female, we see that relationship is one way humans are in God's image. We also see that God uses language to reveal Himself to humanity, and language distinguished humans from the rest of creation. Finally, God entrusts humanity with responsibility, showing that human morality is also part of the image of God.

Yet the Fall marred humanity's ability to image God. As the perfect human being, however, Jesus images God perfectly. Recall from John 1 that in Jesus we behold God's glory. As Bible scholar Peter O'Brien notes, "In him the invisible has become visible." In Him, we behold the power that brought creation into existence and that continues to uphold it (v. 17). In Him, we behold the fullness of deity and the reconciliation that He is bringing about throughout all creation.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Colossians 1:15-20 offers exciting parallels between God's work in creation and His work of redemption. In creation, Adam and Eve together bore God's image. In His incarnation, the perfect human being Jesus Christ perfectly images the true God. And because of His resurrection (the firstborn from the dead, v. 18), in redemption, the body of Christ, the church, now bears the image of God. How do our churches and fellowships reflect His image, and how we might more fully bear His image to a fallen world?

Colossians 1:15-23; Revelation 1:5

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. - Colossians 1:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

A lot of studies have come out recently describing characteristics of firstborn children. These people tend toward positions of leadership because that was the role they filled among their siblings. Firstborns tend to be orderly and goal-oriented, and they tend to assume responsibility early.

The biblical role of firstborn is well-developed in the Old Testament. The firstborn received both privilege and responsibilities; for example, the firstborn was to receive a double portion of the inheritance (Deut. 21:17), but was entrusted with carrying on the family name.

By the time of the New Testament, the term firstborn began to refer to something that was supremely important, and was no longer simply confined to birth order. This is probably what Paul had in mind when he wrote Colossians. In Colossians 1:15, we read that Jesus “is the image of the invisible God.” Because “all things were created by him and for him” (v. 16), Jesus is obviously supreme over all creation. In Jesus, all creation holds together (v. 17). The term firstborn well expresses this total supremacy of Jesus.

Not only is Jesus paramount over all the created world, He is also supreme over the re-created, or resurrected, world (v. 18). As we saw earlier (see December 13), it’s not just that Jesus was raised from the dead, it’s that Jesus has been resurrected to a completely new kind of life. As the “firstborn from among the dead” (v. 18), Jesus reconciles all things to Himself, through His shed blood (v. 20). Just as Jesus is preeminent over the created world, so also He is chief over the resurrected world.

As believers, we have been reconciled to God through Jesus. Because we are now God’s children (Rom. 8:14), we have been made “co-heirs” with Jesus (v. 17), adopted into His family. Yet because Jesus is the “firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29), He will always have the supreme rank over all God’s children.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

When the elders and angels in heaven beheld the Risen Lamb, the Firstborn from the Dead, they broke into spontaneous worship

Colossians 1:18–20

Paul pictured the church as one body that consists of many parts (see 1 Corinthians 12). A body made entirely of ears wouldn’t be able to walk. A body made entirely of legs wouldn’t be able to eat. A body made entirely of hands wouldn’t be able to see. In the same way, a diversity of people and spiritual gifts is exactly what the church needs to thrive. The key, of course, is a head. Without a head to run the show, a body is just a corpse. In the case of the church, the Head is Christ. He’s the One in charge!

Christ’s headship over the church is yet another facet of His greatness and glory (v. 18). He is also “the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead.” Just as He rose from the dead with a glorified body, so also will we (see 1 Corinthians 15). Because of Him, death has lost its sting and the gift of eternal life is ours. This has been God’s plan all along: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be

the firstborn among many brothers and sisters” (Rom. 8:29). In everything Christ has the supremacy.

Christ’s identity and mission are closely intertwined. His identity is fully God, that is, “God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him” (v. 19). In His humanity, Christ’s mission on earth was redemption and reconciliation. Why reconciliation? Because of sin, we were God’s enemies. We were in a state of war with the Almighty, and peace needed to be made. But we were enslaved in the “dominion of darkness” and incapable of rescuing ourselves. So God reached out to us and made “peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (v. 20). The state of war ended, thanks to the sacrifice of the Victor Himself.

Paul celebrated the identity and mission of Christ in order to remind the Colossians of the Person and truth who had transformed their lives, and to call them (and us) to worship and live worthy of Him.

Apply the Word

Every believer has one or more spiritual gifts that are to be used in service to the body of Christ, the church. These gifts are given and cultivated by the Holy Spirit. A variety of gifts is necessary for the health of the church (see 1 Cor. 12:6–7). Are we using our gifts to participate in the life of the church? Just as our gift of salvation should prompt us to live in gratitude, so also our spiritual gifts should encourage us to live in service to God and others.

Colossians 1:21–23

The Ardabil Carpet is regarded by experts as “one of the two greatest Persian rugs ever woven.” Dating from the sixteenth century, it was originally made for a religious shrine in the city of Ardabil (modern Iran) and is now housed in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. It was created by “Maqsur of Kashan”—probably a court official supervising a team of weavers—and consists of 35 million knots, or an amazing 800 knots per square inch. It measures 23 feet long by 13 feet wide, and pictures a garden of paradise through intricate floral patterns and geometric shapes.

Just as the Ardabil Carpet is an artistic masterpiece, so also is Christ’s work of redemption a spiritual masterpiece. Today’s verses are a classic “once you ... but now” before-and-after picture that Paul loves to use. “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior” (v. 21). While the preceding verses position Christ with reference to people, these verses position people with reference to God. Due to sin, we were disconnected from our Creator and in a state of rebellion against Him. Paul located this rebellion in our minds, because in this epistle his emphasis is on knowledge and truth and their consequences.

But then ... the alienation turned to friendship and the rebelliousness to obedience (v. 22). The relationship was transformed. How did this miracle occur? “By Christ’s physical body through death” (cf. 2:15). And the fact is that this miracle is still occurring. We’re being purified and made holy through God’s ongoing work of sanctification in our lives. Salvation is a one-time event that changes our life forever; it’s a process or pilgrimage that continues until we reach our destination. That’s what Paul meant when he said, “if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel” (v. 23). Letting God do His work in us is what faith is all about. If the Colossians and Paul have learned anything from their experience with the gospel, this is it!

Apply the Word

For those of us who live on the “but now” side of redemption, the issue is whether we are living as if Christ really does have the supremacy in everything (v. 18). Does He hold first place in our thoughts and feelings? Is He preeminent in our marriage, family, work, and play? Is He glorified above all else in our words and actions, including in our leisure, media, and music choices? Is He honored and worshiped as Head of the church and of every dimension of our lives?

Colossians 1:24–27

From a big picture perspective, the Bible is a single book, with God as the Author and the main story as His plan of salvation. The plot unfolds something like a mystery. The original crime took place in the Garden of Eden, with Adam and Eve as the guilty perpetrators. God promised right then and there that one of their descendants would crush Satan’s head (Gen. 3:15). But when and how would this promise be fulfilled? As history unfolds in the Old Testament, characters are introduced, prophecies made, and more clues given. Finally, the mystery is revealed: God’s redemption came in person! His Son Jesus became a man, died for sin, and rose again so that we could be saved from the penalty of death.

Paul’s life-purpose was to serve this mystery that is no longer mysterious (vv. 25–26). What did it mean for him to be a servant of the church and of the gospel? Part of what it meant was that he had counted the cost. Paul suffered for

the sake of the church (v. 24). He didn’t respond with complaining or even stoicism, but with rejoicing, following the example of Christ (Heb. 12:2). It’s not even as though the suffering was in the past, since he was imprisoned at the time he wrote this epistle.

Paul’s second point was that he had been commissioned by God to preach the gospel (v. 25). This was a serious responsibility, for the gospel was the revelation of a wonderful mystery (v. 26): God’s plan to send His Son, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (v. 27). Another part of this mystery was the inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles in God’s plan. Since the Colossian congregation likely included both, the believers there understood the racial and cultural dimensions of the gospel-empowered reconciliation found in Christ. As Paul wrote elsewhere: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

Apply the Word

In verse 24, the word “lacking” doesn’t mean Christ’s redemptive sacrifice was lacking in any way. He did it all—we can add nothing. Yet at the same time, we’ve been given the mysterious privilege of sharing or participating in His sufferings. If you need encouragement through a period of suffering, write Philippians 3:10–11 on a card to review throughout the day. Our participation in suffering also assures us that we will share in the power of His resurrection!

Colossians 1:28–2:1

Information technology is at the core of contemporary society. That’s one reason why Charles Kao, Willard Boyle, and George Smith recently shared the Nobel Prize in physics. Kao proved that information can be efficiently carried by light through glass fibers. Today, more than 600 million miles of fiber-optic networks circle the globe and transmit most of the world’s television, telephone, and computer communications. Boyle and Smith developed an electronic eye device that is now used in most digital cameras. If your cell phone can take pictures and send them to your computer, these three men are the ones to thank!

Communication was also a passion of the apostle Paul. His desire was to preach the gospel of Christ with every ounce of energy he could muster and God would give him. This work of preaching didn’t consist only of evangelism but extended to discipleship (1:28). Christ was proclaimed; then those who believed would need further admonishing and teaching in order to grow in Him. The ultimate goal was to “present you holy in his sight” (cf. 1:22).

In verse 28, Paul used “we” to include his entire ministry team, but in verse 29 he inserted a more personal statement of purpose and passion. The words “strenuously contend” indicate the kind of intensity an athlete feels in competition. Yet Paul wasn’t taking credit, for he said clearly that his labors were done with Christ’s energy. There is a beautiful balance here between faith that rests in God’s sovereignty and faith that runs all out so as to win the prize (Phil. 3:13–14).

Like a hummingbird to a flower, Paul’s every phrase in this epistle circles back to Christ and hovers there. He wanted to make sure

the Colossians understood both how energetically he labored on their behalf and how none of the credit and glory should go to him, but rather to his Lord (2:1). Christ has done all the work and should receive all the glory!

Apply the Word

There's great freedom in knowing that our efforts to live for Christ are sustained by the Spirit's power. While we have the responsibility to pursue holiness to live worthy of the gospel, we are also given God's strength in this endeavor. If God has called you to take action for Him, He will also provide the endurance for you to obey. If you need to take a step of faith today, thank the Lord for His sustaining grace that makes your obedience possible.

MULTIPLE OTHER DEVOTIONALS

COLOSSIANS 1

Col. 1:3

Starving Prayer by Alexander Whyte

"We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you" (Col. 1:3).

I am as certain as I am standing here, that the secret of much mischief to our own souls, and to the souls of others, lies in the way that we stint, and starve, and scamp our prayers, by hurrying over them. Prayer worth calling prayer: prayer that God will call true prayer and will treat as true prayer, takes far more time, by the clock, than one man in a thousand thinks. After all that the Holy Ghost has done to make true prayer independent of times, and of places, and of all kinds of instruments and assistances,--as long as we remain in this unspiritual and undevotional world, we shall not succeed, to be called success, in prayer, without time, and times, and places, and other assistances in prayer. Take good care that you are not spiritual overmuch in the matter of prayer. Take good care lest you take your salvation far too softly, and far too cheaply. If you find your life of prayer to be always so short, and so easy, and so spiritual, as to be without cost and strain and sweat to you, you may depend upon it, you are not yet begun to pray. As sure as you sit there, and I stand here, it is just in this matter of time in prayer that so many of us are making shipwreck of our own souls, and of the souls of others.

Col. 1:4-5

Faith, Love and Hope by W. H. G. Thomas

"Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven..."

(Col. 1:4-5).

Faith rests on the past, love works in the present, and hope presses toward the future; or, faith looks backward and upward, love looks outward, and hope looks forward. These three constitute the true, complete Christian life and not one of them should be omitted or slighted. We are only too apt to emphasize faith and love and forget hope but, inasmuch as hope is invariably connected with the coming of the Lord, "that blessed hope" (Titus 2:13), it is a vital part of our Christian life. Faith accepts, hope expects; faith appropriates, hope anticipates; faith receives, hope realizes; faith is always and only concerned with the past and present, hope is always and only concerned with the future. We know that faith comes by hearing; we shall find that hope comes by experience. Faith is concerned with a person who promises, hope with the thing promised; and faith is the root of which hope is a fruit.

Colossians 1: 1-8

What Do You Believe In? by Theodore Epp

Almost everyone talks about faith because almost everyone has faith in something.

But faith is only as good as its object. It is important to recognize that we are not saved from condemnation by having faith in faith. Paul commended the Colossians for their "faith in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:4).

So it is not sufficient to tell a person, "Just believe." The question is, Believe what? The message of the Gospel is not to believe in yourself, in church or in doctrine but in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This implies believing in all that Christ did for us when He died on the cross in our place. It recognizes that we are sinful human

beings who deserve condemnation, or else it would never have been necessary for Christ to die.

It means we recognize that Christ is our only hope because if we could have been saved by some other means, Christ would not have had to die (see Gal. 2:21).

Having faith in Jesus Christ implies we have placed our confidence entirely in His finished work on the cross, recognizing that He forgives our sins and gives us eternal life.

One can summarize saving faith as a commitment to Jesus Christ, who is our life and Lord. Faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord is also necessary for growth in our Christian walk.

"And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31).

Living to Please God by Theodore Epp

Colossians 1:9-12

As Paul prayed for the Colossians and their walk, or way of life, he did not pray that it might be pleasing to man but to God.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul said of himself, "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (1:10).

Of course, when we live in a way that pleases God, many people will also be pleased by the way we live. But our focus of attention should be on pleasing God rather than people.

Living in a way that pleases God cannot be done in one's own strength. It is only by means of the indwelling Christ that the believer can exhibit the fruit of the Spirit and have a walk that pleases the Lord.

Although the believer seeks primarily to please God, not people, we must keep these truths in balance.

We will not be successful in reaching others with the Gospel if we constantly displease them by our attitudes and actions. But above all, we must be true to God Himself in all that we do.

As Paul sought to evangelize the lost, he was very careful not to unnecessarily offend those he was endeavoring to reach. Paul summed up this aspect of his life in this way: "Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved" (1 Cor. 10:33).

"For I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29).

"Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him" (Ps. 37:7).

Have you prayed and prayed and waited and waited, and still there is no manifestation?

Are you tired of seeing nothing move? Are you just at the point of giving it all up? Perhaps you have not waited in the right way? This would take you out of the right place the place where He can meet you.

"With patience wait" (Rom. 8:25). Patience takes away worry. He said He would come, and His promise is equal to His presence. Patience takes away your weeping. Why feel sad and despondent? He knows your need better than you do, and His purpose in waiting is to bring more glory out of it all. Patience takes away self-works. The work He desires is that you "believe" (John 6:29), and when you believe, you may then know that all is well. Patience takes away all want. Your desire for the thing you wish is perhaps stronger than your desire for the will of God to be fulfilled in its arrival.

Patience takes away all weakening. Instead of having the delaying time, a time of letting go, know that God is getting a larger supply ready and must get you ready too. Patience takes away all wobbling. "Make me stand upon my standing" (Daniel 8:18, margin). God's foundations are steady; and when His patience is within, we are steady while we wait. Patience gives worship. A praiseful patience sometimes "long-suffering with joyfulness" (Col. 1:11) is the best part of it all. "Let (all these phases of) patience have her perfect work" (James 1:4), while you wait, and you will find great enrichment. --C. H. P.

Hold steady when the fires burn,
When inner lessons come to learn,
And from this path there seems no turn
"Let patience have her perfect work."
--L.S.P.

Power to Meet and to Give Thanks by Elisabeth Elliot

Often I pray for someone whose circumstances or needs are unknown to me. There are many prayers in Paul's letters which may be used for almost anyone. One of my favorites is in Colossians 1:9-12. A part of this prayer asks "May He strengthen you, in His glorious might, with ample power to meet whatever comes with fortitude, patience and joy, and to give thanks to the Father" (NEB).

That seems to cover every possibility. It does not ask for instant solutions or reversals. It does not call on God for miraculous deliverance out of any trouble that might come. It asks for a truly Christian response, by the sufficient power of God: to meet whatever comes as a true Christian should meet it, with the Holy Spirit's gifts of fortitude, patience, and joy. It asks for the power to give thanks. It takes power, doesn't it, to thank the Father when everything in us protests? But we find in Him (not always in what happens to us) plenty of reason to thank Him and plenty of power.

Acceptance of God's Dispensations by Mary Wilder Tileston

Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness. --COLOSSIANS 1:11

REJOICE in Christ always!
When earth looks heavenly bright,
When joy makes glad the livelong day,
And peace shuts in the night.
Rejoice, when care and woe
The fainting soul oppress,
When tears at wakeful midnight flow,
And morn brings heaviness.
--JOHN MOULTRIE

A GREAT point is gained when we have learned not to struggle against the circumstances God has appointed for us.
--H. L. SIDNEY LEAR

All mental discomfort comes from our minds being in divergence from God's; when the two are agreed no warfare occurs, for they work together, and man's mind accepts God's rule, but reason tells us that disagreement must bring conflicts. He will have His way, and would have us accept all events with the knowledge that He is love, whatever and however contradictory those events may be to our comprehension of Him.
--CHARLES GEORGE GORDON

Something is wrong, when the Christian cannot rejoice in all the dear dispensations of his Father's providence.
--ISABELLA CAMPBELL, 1825

Inheritance of the Saints by Mary Wilder Tileston

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

--COLOSSIANS 1:12

NOT their own, ah! not from earth was flowing
That high strain to which their souls were tuned;
Year by year we saw them inly growing
Liker Him with whom their hearts communed.
Then to Him they passed; but still unbroken,
Age to age, lasts on that goodly line,
Whose pure lives are, more than all words spoken,
Earth's best witness to the life divine.
--JOHN CAMPBELL SHAIRP

ONLY to remember that such have been, that we walked for a season with them, is a chastening, a purifying, yea, and however much we may miss and mourn them, a gladdening thought.

--RICHARD CHENEVIX TRENCH

The beatitude of the Saints is the matured result of the long course of patient strivings, which may have passed wholly unobserved because of their minuteness. One step has followed another in the mysterious progress of daily, hourly acts, each seeming to pass away, as footprints on the sand are obliterated by the advancing tide; but the end is the Vision of God, and the recompense is the perfection of a nature made one with the Mind of God.

--T. T. CARTER

A New Beginning by Theodore Epp

Colossians 1:12-14

Exodus 12:1-14

That the time of the Exodus was also the time of the birth of Israel as a nation is evident from what God told Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt.

This was actually a fulfillment of what God had told Jacob: "Fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation" (Gen. 46:3).

The month referred to in Exodus 12:2,3 is the month of April, known to the nation of Israel as "Abib." From that point on, Israel was to keep the Feast of the Passover during this month.

Deuteronomy 16:1 refers to this: "Observe the month of Abib, and keep the passover unto the LORD thy God: for in the month of Abib the LORD thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night."

The Feast of the Passover was a remembrance of the beginning of the nation of Israel. As such, the Passover reminded the Israelites of everything that was foundational to the nation itself.

Just as the Israelites needed to be reminded of their beginning as a nation, those of us who know Jesus Christ as Saviour need to be reminded of the deliverance we have experienced.

Colossians 1:12-14 refers to this deliverance: "Giving thanks unto the Father, . . . Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

"This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before" (Phil. 3:13).

Fit for Heaven by Henry Allan Ironside

"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12).

This is true of every Christian, and there are no degrees in this divine fitness. We are made meet to be partakers of our glorious inheritance the instant we are cleansed from our sins and receive the new nature, which is imparted by a divine operation when we are born of God. How different are the thoughts of even some of the best of men! How often we hear it said of some devoted and aged believer, "He is fit for heaven at last." But he was just as truly fit for heaven the moment he received Christ as he is at the end of a long life of devoted service. Fitness does not depend upon experience. But in this connection it is well to remember that there is something more than the Father's house, the inheritance of the saints in light, before us. It is important that we should also have in mind the coming glorious kingdom. In 2 Peter 1:10, 11 we are told, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." The expression, "these things," refers to the various Christian virtues enumerated in verses 5-7. It is through these things we are fitted for a place in the coming kingdom, but it is the justifying, regenerating grace of God that alone makes us meet for our heavenly inheritance. In other words, it is important that we distinguish between salvation by grace and reward for service.

Members of the Kingdom by Mary Wilder Tileston

Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son.

COLOSSIANS 1:13

IT is right that we should have an aim of our own, determined by our individuality and our surroundings; but this may readily degenerate into exclusive narrowness, unless it has for a background the great thought that there is a Kingdom of God within us, around us, and above us, in which we, with all our powers and aims, are called to be conscious workers. Toward the forwarding of this silent, ever-advancing Kingdom, our little work, whatever it be, if good and true, may contribute something. And this thought lends to any calling, however lowly, a consecration which is wanting even to the loftiest self-chosen ideals. But even if our aim should be frustrated and our work come to naught, yet the failure of our most cherished plans may be more than compensated. In the thought that we are members of this Kingdom, already begun, here and now, yet reaching forward through all time, we shall have a reserve of consolation better than any which success without this could give.

JOHN CAMPBELL SHAIRP

Christ Eternal! by Theodore Epp

Colossians 1:13-19

Christ existed prior to all creation. He is "the firstborn of every creature" (Col. 1:15). From the original language of the New Testament, this phrase is literally "firstborn of all creation."

The Greek word translated "firstborn" does not mean that He was the first one born; rather, it emphasizes priority and sovereignty. He existed before anything was ever created.

This truth is obvious from verse 16: "For by him were all things created." He had to exist before all created things in order to create them. And because He is the Creator of all things, this implies sovereignty.

John 1:1-3 states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."

Notice especially verse 3: "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." This directly connects with the truth presented in Colossians 1:15.

The emphasis, then, of "firstborn" is one of rank and is not related to birth as we commonly think of it.

Psalm 89:27 uses the word "firstborn" in referring to David's son, but it looks ahead to Christ: "I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth."

Since Colossians 1:17 indicates that the Lord Jesus Christ existed before all created things, He Himself is uncreated, thus eternal. This verse says, "He is before all things, and by him all things consist." He is the eternal God; therefore, He is the Supreme Being.

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day and for ever" (Heb. 13:8).

Distinguished Blessings by Henry Allan Ironside

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:14).

It is very important to distinguish these things; that is, to have clearly in mind the privileges and blessings which are non-forfeitable, because confirmed to us by God in Christ from the moment we believe on Him who died to make them good to us; and the additional blessings for which we need to pray daily, and concerning which there should be constant soul-exercise lest we fail to enter into and enjoy them. Many believers fail in not distinguishing the two classes of blessings. In certain circles almost every public prayer will be concluded somewhat as follows: "We pray Thee, forgive us our sins, and wash us in the blood of Jesus; receive us into Thy kingdom, give us Thy Holy Spirit, and save us at last for Christ's sake, Amen." Yet every petition in this prayer has already been granted to the believer in Christ! God has forgiven us all trespasses. We are cleansed by the blood of Jesus. He has already translated us out of the kingdom of darkness into that of the Son of His love. He has sealed us with His Holy Spirit, for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." And we are saved eternally from the moment we believe the gospel.

Therefore we might far rather cry exultantly in faith: "We thank Thee that Thou hast forgiven all our sins, and washed us from every stain in the blood of the Lamb. Thou hast brought us into Thy kingdom, given us Thy Holy Spirit, and saved us for eternity." Faith says "Amen" to what God has declared in His Word to be true. To go on praying for blessings that He tells us are already ours is the most subtle kind of unbelief, and robs us of the enjoyment that should be our portion if we but had faith to lay hold of the exceeding great and precious promises which are ours in Christ.

Only One Can Have It By Tony Beckett and Woodrow Kroll

Isaiah 32-33, Colossians 1

Key Verse: Colossians 1:18

Supremacy is a rather limited word. We may try to use it broadly, but when something or someone has supremacy, it really is singular. Only one can be supreme. Anyone else may be close, but not quite. The same is true of preeminence.

Paul says that preeminence and supremacy belong to Jesus because of the Resurrection. We need to know that and remember that preeminence is His by right, not ours to grasp. In Colossians 1, the emphasis of verses 15-19 is on Jesus.

Contrast this with Diotrophes, the church leader characterized in 3 John as a man "who loves to have the preeminence" (v. 9, NKJV). The root word in Colossians 1 and 3 John is the same in the Greek. The only difference is that in 3 John it is a compound word, the other part meaning "he loves to be." Diotrophes loved to be first, to have the preeminence.

It is striking that this word appears only twice in the New Testament. When Paul used it, he was stating what rightfully belongs to Jesus. When John used it, he was condemning a man who wanted what belongs to Jesus. The desire to control, to be the center of attention, to have the power to exclude others, came from a heart that wanted what belongs to Jesus.

The preeminence is His to have, not ours to take. Watch your pride, lest you become like Diotrophes.

Do you have the heart of a servant or a usurper? Read carefully the description of Diotrophes and then again the one of Jesus. Ask God to help you be humble, not seeking in any way what belongs only to Him.

"Christ in You" by Theodore Epp

Colossians 1:21-29

On the surface, the emphasis of "Christ in you" (Col. 1:27) may not seem so important. But when we grasp the significance of this great truth, our thinking about Christ and ourselves will be changed, and even our prayer life will be changed.

I well remember when I was a young preacher and my father had grasped the glorious truth of "Christ in you." Those were good words to me, but I did not see the importance in them that my father did.

But one of the red-letter days of my life was when God opened my inner eyes and ears to understand what it really is to be in Christ and to have Him in me.

I then experienced a change in my outlook on life in general and in my prayer life in particular. I experienced a new insight and a new understanding of what it means to be able to say, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20).

The Lord Jesus Christ, who walked on this earth and who is now at the Father's right hand, must not only be a leader or teacher to us.

It is not enough that He came, lived, died and rose again; He must be personally received as Saviour, at which time He will take up personal residence in our heart.

And as we study the Scriptures to learn more about Him and apply the truths to our lives, He will be formed in us.

An intellectual acceptance of the facts of Christ's person and work is not sufficient for what we need and want. We certainly need to know those facts, but we must go beyond those facts to place our faith in Him as Saviour and to daily experience His living power in us.

This is the thrust of the Book of Colossians, and that is why I think it is so important.

"At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you" (John 14:20).

Is Christ Born in Us? by Mary Wilder Tileston

I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me GALATIANS 2:20

Christ in you, the hope of glory. COLOSSIANS 1:27

THOUGH Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born,
If He's not born in thee, thy soul is still forlorn.

JOHANN SCHEMES

THE great mystery of the Gospel does not lie in Christ without us only (though we must know also what He has done for us); but the very pith and kernel of it consists in Christ inwardly formed in our hearts. RALPH CUDWORTH

When therefore the first spark of a desire after God arises in thy soul, cherish it with all thy care, give all thy heart into it; it is nothing less than a touch of the divine loadstone, that is to draw thee out of the vanity of time, into the riches of eternity. Get up therefore, and follow it as gladly as the wise men of the east followed the star from heaven that appeared to them. It will do for thee as the star did for them, it will lead thee to the birth of Jesus, not in a stable at Bethlehem in Judea, but to the birth of Jesus in the dark centre of thine own soul. WILLIAM LAW

Jesus In Your Heart by Mary Wilder Tileston

Christ in you, the hope of glory. COLOSSIANS 1:27

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith. EPHESIANS 3:17

ENTER my opening heart;

Fill in with love and peace and light from heaven;

Give me Thyself--for all in Thee is given;

Come--never to depart. THOMAS WILLIAM WEBB

WHEREVER thou goest, whatever thou dost at home, or abroad, in the field, or at church, do all in a desire of union with Christ, in imitation of His tempers and inclinations, and look upon all as nothing, but that which exercises, and increases the spirit and life of Christ in thy soul. From morning to night keep Jesus in thy heart, long for nothing, desire nothing, hope for nothing but to have all that is within thee changed into the spirit and temper of the holy Jesus. This new birth in Christ, thus firmly believed and continually desired, will do everything that thou wantest to have done in thee, it will dry up all the springs of vice, stop all the workings of evil in thy nature, it will bring all that is good into thee, it will open all the gospel within thee, and thou wilt know what it is to be taught of God. WILLIAM LAW

Col 1:29

Power for You-Today! by Theodore Epp

Ephesians 1: 19-23

The Scriptures frequently refer to God's power as it relates to the believer.

Ephesians 6:10 says, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."

Philippians 1:6 says, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Colossians 1:29 records Paul's testimony: "I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily."

God's power is sufficient for our every need. None of us has to live a defeated life. But those who do not make use of God's available power live miserable, defeated lives.

There's more than enough power to break the hold of all sinful habits; more than enough to give deliverance from temptation; more than enough to enable the believer to live above circumstances. Paul said that God's power is "to us-ward who believe" (Eph. 1:19).

God's power is made available to us by His indwelling presence. Paul referred to this when he told the Colossians that God's power "worketh in me mightily" (1:29).

So the dynamo of Christian living is within the believer because God is within the believer. Hebrews 13:21 records the prayer, "Make you perfect [mature] in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight."

The person who has received Christ is a new creation. Referring to himself as a believer, Paul wrote: "I am [have been] crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20).

Colossians 2

Colossians 2:2–5

"Fossick" is a fun English word. It's a verb that suggests treasure hunting, but in an unsystematic or random manner. One dictionary defines it: "To search for gold or gemstones, typically by picking over abandoned workings." The word is also used more generally to mean looking for something in a disorganized way. For example, one might "fossick about" in a drawer, searching for a missing sock. Another dictionary says it means "to rummage or search in a slightly aimless manner for an item of interest or value."

The treasure of the gospel is worth a real treasure hunt! Paul had spent his life in pursuit of this treasure, in possessing it, and in giving it away—all at the same time! In today's passage, he continued to explain the purpose of his ministry to the Colossians, so that they would better understand this apostle they had never met. Paul wanted the believers to be "encouraged in heart and united in love," not divided by arguments and false teachings. Only in the unity of the Spirit would they enjoy the "full riches of complete understanding" of God's plan (v. 2). And only then would they truly grasp the mystery of the gospel.

The mystery is Christ Himself (v. 3). Christ has always been the bottom line. "All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are hidden in Him and nowhere else. Anyone who says otherwise is a false teacher offering a false hope (v. 4). They may claim to have solved the mystery, but they're still in the dark! Though he was playing with the metaphors of mystery and hidden treasure, Paul didn't mean the truth was still hidden. As he said, the mystery of God's plan now stands revealed. But the complete meaning of our relationship with Christ and what it means to live out the gospel still need to be fully explored by us.

Even though Paul wasn't physically present in Colossae, his apostolic care and authority were engaged in their spiritual growth (v. 5). He delighted in what he heard from Epaphras, but he was concerned that their commitment to the truth and person of Christ was being corrupted.

Apply the Word

When you tell children Christmas is coming, their eyes light up in anticipation of gifts, decorations, and special foods. In the same way, "it's time for church" or "it's time for devotions" should cause us to anticipate discovering more "treasures of wisdom and knowledge" in Christ. As you look forward to worshiping the Lord with other believers tomorrow, remember that these treasures have incomparable value and are worth everything we have to give and more (Matt. 13:44–46).

Colossians 2:6 Colossians 1:9-14

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him. - Colossians 2:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his book *The Discipline of Grace*, Jerry Bridges tells about a Cold War-era Russian pilot who flew his fighter plane to a U.S. base in Japan and asked for asylum. He was flown to the United States and given a new identity. Bridges points out that although this pilot had the same physical characteristics and personality traits after his experience, his new identity allowed him to live a new life. He was delivered from a totalitarian regime, and able to enjoy all the benefits of living in a free society.

That's a good illustration of what happened to us when we were delivered from Satan's kingdom into the kingdom of God's Son. We went from guilt to forgiveness, from slavery to freedom, from weakness to strength, and from total spiritual poverty to an eternal inheritance.

Isn't that an encouraging perspective in these closing days of the year? If we fully understand our position in Christ, we won't worry too much about what might happen tomorrow or next week.

Instead of worrying or being fearful, our emphasis should be on thanking God for all these gifts. Besides expressing our thanks with words, we can show God our gratitude by the way we live for Him and grow in our faith. This was the prayer Paul had for the Colossian Christians.

The apostle wanted these believers to be filled with the knowledge of God's will by gaining spiritual understanding. We can know the will of God for our lives, and knowing what He expects from us comes from Spirit-directed reading and study of the Word.

The result of this will be seen in our lives. First, we will "find out what pleases the Lord" (Eph. 5:10, see Col. 1:10). Jesus said His Father was glorified when we bear fruit (Jn. 15:16); pleasing God involves spiritual fruit-bearing, reproducing the character of Christ in ourselves and in others.

Keeping the right spiritual perspective also results in endurance and patience (v. 11), two qualities in great demand and short supply in the world today--and too often, among Christians as well.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Back on December 12, we talked about special Christmas gifts you can give to your family and friends.

As the shopping days before Christmas dwindle to a few, and the pressure is on to get all the holiday projects done and get-togethers planned, it seems that endurance and patience would be two good gifts to add to your "gift" list. Pray that God will give you all the energy and grace you need to carry you through the season, and that you will bless others by your patient reaction in any circumstance.

Colossians 2:6-8

Evangelist Billy Graham had this to say about the Lordship of Christ: "No man can be said to be truly converted to Christ who has not bent his will to Christ. He may give intellectual assent to the claims of Christ and may have had emotional religious experiences; however, he is not truly converted until he has surrendered his will to Christ as Lord, Savior and Master."

For Paul, conversion was only the beginning of a Christ-centered, Christ-fueled transformation. He desired to proclaim the gospel, so that his hearers would understand and receive it, so that their understanding and faith would grow, so that their righteousness would increase, so that the truth would continue to spread and bear fruit all over the world, so that one day the entire body of Christ would be presented holy and blameless before our Lord.

"So then," Paul wrote, or in other words, "given all this," keep growing (v. 6)! The Colossians had received Jesus as Savior, and their rescue into the kingdom of light was indeed a marvelous miracle. Since they had also received Him as Lord, they needed to "continue to live [their] lives in him" on a daily basis. The title "Lord" means that Christ has all authority and we owe Him our obedience. He has all authority because He's fully God and fully man, the Creator and sustainer of all things, the Head of the church, the One who rescued us and reconciled us to God and to one another, and the central mystery and treasure in God's epic plan of redemption.

Paul used three phrases to describe following Christ in this way. The first was an agricultural picture, "rooted and built up in him" (v. 7). Plants without roots wither and die. In the same way, Christ must be our source of life. The second was being "strengthened in the faith" and avoiding "hollow and deceptive philosophy" by means of sound teaching (v. 8). False teaching is human-centered rather than Christ-centered, and results in captivity rather than freedom. The final phrase was "overflowing with thankfulness," a mirror of Paul's opening prayer (1:11-12).

Apply the Word

Scripture uses tree and plant imagery to describe us as followers and worshipers of God. The righteous are "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither" (Ps. 1:3). Or they are branches, abiding in the vine, Jesus Christ: "If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit" (John 15:5). When we are rooted in Christ, we will see His fruit in our lives as a testimony to His sustaining work to transform us to be more like Him.

Colossians 2:6-7

I will give you thanks forever. - Psalm 30:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

Over 147 years ago, on October 3, 1863, Abraham Lincoln stated: "The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added ... They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God ... It has seemed to me

fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and voice by the whole American People. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States ... to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens."

Although Lincoln made Thanksgiving an official holiday, the practice of setting aside a day of thanks was a longstanding tradition in the United States. Moreover, Lincoln's writings, as well as those of other American leaders long before him, frequently reflect a deep sense of gratitude to God, both for His providence in national matters and in their own lives and families. It's evident that thanksgiving extended beyond a national holiday to lives that were characterized by gratitude to God.

Thanksgiving as a lifestyle has been a recurring theme in our study this month. This is particularly evident in Colossians. In Colossians 1:9-14, Paul indicates that he is praying that the Colossians would be filled with God's knowledge, so that they might live lives worthy of the Lord. Then he lists four characteristics of such a life: believers are to be fruitful, maturing, empowered, and thankful. The order of this list suggests that the more we progress in our walk of faith the more thankful we become. This is repeated in Colossians 2, where Paul links spiritual growth with overflowing thankfulness.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Bible scholar David Pao writes, "Thanksgiving becomes an essential part of the day to day living of believers. To live a life worthy of the Lord is to live with the constant awareness of God's grace." As you give thanks today for family, friends, and a special meal, pray that you will grow in gratitude throughout the upcoming year. Both of today's passages also link thankfulness with growing in the essentials of our faith. If you aren't already attending a Bible study, commit to making that a priority as well.

Colossians 2:6-23

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him. - Colossians 2:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

Almost three months have passed, and most of us have probably forgotten our New Year's resolutions. We meant to lose a few pounds and serve more at church, and for a couple of weeks, our resolutions paid off. But we turned the corner to February, then March, and our best intentions have failed us. It's often easy to begin a project, resolution, or task—but much harder to continue and finish.

The same is true for us spiritually, especially in the realm of faith in Christ. We do not depend upon our performance to begin this race; neither can we trust our own efforts to run this race. Yet churches find it so easy to fall into the trap of legalism. Where we begin in faith, we try to continue by works.

The Colossians faced this kind of heretical teaching in their church. That's why Paul's command to them is to "continue to live in [Christ]" (v. 6). In other words, he didn't want them exchanging faith for a works-oriented Christianity. He aims to help them see the contrast between trusting in Christ and trusting in rules.

Genuine salvation and sanctification happen because of Christ alone (vv. 6, 7). He is God (v. 9), and He is our victory over sin (vv. 12, 13). He is the source of our spiritual vitality and growth (v. 19). Our only hope for holiness is to stay connected with Christ. Everything—from the initial moment of salvation to our final sanctification—depends upon our union to Christ. The body must stay vitally connected to the Head.

The heretics at Colossae, on the other hand, emphasize "human commands and teachings" (vv. 8, 22), specific rules and prescriptions regarding matters from what one should eat to how one should observe the Sabbath (vv. 16, 20). The result was harsh condemnation against believers. What they said seemed right. Their rules had an "appearance of wisdom," but because they originated with men and not Christ, they were powerless to restrain sin and promote holiness (v. 23).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It's much easier to follow rules than to follow the Rule Maker. That's why churches fall prey to legalism. Rules don't require that we think, pray, or keep learning. They are static and manageable. We are meant to feel in control when we master the rules. Following Christ, the Rule Maker, might be less predictable—but it's certainly more fulfilling and the only way to grow spiritually. Identify your own tendencies towards legalism and confess that as sin to God.

Colossians 2:9-15 Ephesians 3:7-13

Through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. - Ephesians 3:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to a Federal Trade Commission report last February, complaints of identity theft have increased about 50 percent since 2002. Identity theft, “when someone appropriates your personally identifying information (like your Social Security number or credit card account number) to commit fraud or theft,” raises the question of how secure our personal information really is.

So far Ephesians has explained God's wonderful mystery that Gentiles, once separated from God and without hope on account of the Law's regulations, have been brought near to God, because Jesus' death has done away with the division between Jew and Gentile. The Law no longer determines human identity. Because of Jesus' shed blood, human identity is first and foremost determined by one's relationship to Jesus. Instead of Jew versus Greek, the unifying power of Jesus' heavenly and earthly authority makes the key distinction being “included in Christ” or not. All one needs to do to be counted “in Christ” is believe the gospel.

This wonderful truth means that, whereas the Law limited access to God, those who are “in Christ” may approach God with freedom and confidence (v. 12). Why has God allowed this access? We find several reasons offered in Ephesians. First, God loves Jesus and this love graciously overflows to all those who are included in Jesus (see 1:6).

Second, God has done this to bring glory to Himself (see 1:12, 14). Third, God did this in order that through the church His own great wisdom would be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms (vv. 10-11). Paul tells us clearly in Colossians that these “powers and authorities” had used the regulations of the Law to keep people from having access to God (Col. 2:13-15). Jesus' death and resurrection, which cancelled the Law's divisive regulations “disarmed” these powers (Col. 2:15). Christ now holds ultimate authority over them (Col. 2:10). God worked within the Law to open access to Himself and in so doing showed those powers the extent of His own wisdom.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The government may use your Social Security number and your bank may use your checking account to identify you. But where does your identity truly come from? Perhaps you've defined yourself by job status or appearance or even personal relationships. First and foremost, however, our identity should be rooted in our status as children of God through the saving work of Christ. This is an identity that no one on heaven or earth can ever steal from us (see Rom. 8:38-39).

Colossians 2:9–12

In the mid-1520s, Martin Luther preached on Christ's death and resurrection: “[W]hen I come to understand the fact that all the works God does in Christ are done for me, nay, they are bestowed upon and given to me, the effect of his resurrection being that I also will arise and live with him; that will cause me to rejoice... [I]t has been done easily, namely, by Christ, who has crushed the serpent once, who alone is given as a blessing and benediction, and who has caused this Gospel to be published throughout the world, so that he who believes, accepts it and clings to it, is also in possession of it, and is assured that it is as he believes. For in the heart of such a man the Word becomes so powerful that he will conquer death, the devil, sin and all adversity, like Christ himself did.”

Baptism is a public confession of and identification with the death and resurrection of Christ. In today's verses, Paul again affirmed both the divinity and the humanity of Christ, in whom “all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (v. 9). He also affirmed the supremacy of Christ, as He “is the head over every power and authority” (v. 10). The contrast here between Christ's gospel and the “hollow and deceptive philosophy” (v. 8) tempting the Colossians couldn't be stronger!

Because of who Christ is and what He did, we ourselves have been given His fullness (v. 10). What does this mean? Paul explained it using two of the most powerful symbols in Scripture. The first was circumcision (v. 11). Physical circumcision had for the Jews been a sign of being set apart as God's chosen people (cf. Deut. 30:6). Now that Christ has come, spiritual circumcision, that is, the “your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off,” is available to all who believe in Him. The second symbol was baptism (v. 12). Previously a sign of repentance or dedication, it has now also become a public testimony to one's faith in the death and resurrection of the Son of God.

Apply the Word

Christ made baptism part of the Great Commission: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). In Romans, Paul again connected baptism with Christ's death and resurrection: “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (6:4).

Colossians 2:13–15

Meditating on the Cross and the atonement of Christ during a recent Easter week, writer Philip Yancey shared several insights. First, “The Cross made possible a new intimacy with God.” We can now “approach the throne of grace with confidence” and find “mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb. 4:16). Second, “The Cross reveals the limits of human achievement.” Though

some look to politics or science to solve humanity's problems, Christ exposed these as false hopes at the Cross. Third and finally, "The Cross brings to light an unexpected quality of the Godhead: humility." The Son of God "made himself nothing ... he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:7–8).

This is the triumph of the Cross trumpeted by Paul in today's reading! In a sense, the flow of the book repeats itself here. Paul had moved from describing Christ (1:15–20) to applying Christ's gospel to Christ's people (1:21–23). Now again, Paul went from describing Christ (2:9–12) to applying Christ's gospel to Christ's people (2:13–15). He was laying the groundwork for a definitive refutation of the false teaching tempting the Colossians (see tomorrow's devotion).

We also see here Paul's preferred before-and-after approach to describing saving faith (v. 13). "Before" we were sinful, spiritually dead and uncircumcised; "after" we have been forgiven and made righteous, spiritually alive and circumcised. All the credit for this goes to God. He is the one who gave us life and forgave us. He is the one who "canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness," and nailed it to the Cross (v. 14). He is the one who conquered all at the very moment it appeared all was lost (v. 15).

God could do all this because of the Cross. Jesus' death paid the debt for sin. It was the final, once-for-all sacrifice. A cross was an instrument for criminal execution, but this Cross became an ironic, decisive symbol of God's victory over the forces of evil.

Apply the Word

In light of our devotion, perhaps Valentine's Day needs to be observed differently today. The greatest act of love in human history is beyond the romance of chocolates and candlelight. The Cross represents "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." His ultimate love "surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3:18–19). What can we do today that would honor Valentine's Day in a way that spotlights and glorifies the greatest Love of all?

Colossians 2:20-3:2

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. - Colossians 3:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his classic book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A. W. Tozer fervently prayed to have the mind of Christ: "You, O Christ, who were tempted in all points like as I am, yet without sin, make me strong to overcome the desire to be wise and to be reputed wise by others as ignorant as myself. I turn from my wisdom as well as from my folly and flee to you, the wisdom of God and the power of God. Amen."

At this point in our study, we understand clearly that our leisure choices matter to God, that they cultivate fruit and have spiritual consequences, that they require wisdom, and that they, like all of life, are part of how we walk with God. There is no neutral ground, no corner of life we may selfishly reserve for our personal pleasures. Free time is not free from our calling as disciples of Christ.

Based on today's reading, then, how can we summarize several key principles we've studied about godly leisure? One certainty is that in our pursuit of genuine rest, beauty, and pleasure, we need to leave behind worldliness and legalism. In Paul's words, "Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!'" (2:20–21). Worldliness and legalism are merely human and completely useless for discipleship. We, on the other hand, want a life based on truths and practices that are eternal, divine, and effective in our ongoing spiritual journeys.

Therefore, we are to live life, including leisure, according to two principles: "Set your hearts on things above" and "Set your minds on things above" (3:1–2). These imperatives suggest that our whole being—including thoughts, feelings, desires, goals, and efforts--must be devoted to God's ways.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Is there a leisure activity you used to enjoy, but somehow it's gotten crowded out of your life? Perhaps you used to enjoy reading biographies, or knitting, or putting jigsaw puzzles together, or playing your trumpet, or boating in a local lake.

Colossians 2:16–19

The audience gasped in horror. After enjoying a concert by renowned violinist David Garrett, they watched him trip, fall down a flight of steps, and land on top of his violin case. When he opened it, he found the instrument in pieces. The violin was a nearly 300-year-old Stradivarius, worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. At the time, experts said it would take at least eight months to fix and might never sound the same again.

Just as Garrett's unfortunate accident damaged a priceless violin, so also legalism does irreparable harm to the gospel. The false

teaching faced by the Colossians seems to have been a mix of legalism, paganism, Judaism, and mysticism. Christ-followers are supposed to have died to these inadequate philosophies! “Therefore,” said Paul—in light of who Christ is and His triumph on the Cross—“do not let anyone judge you” with regard to trivial concerns such as food and holidays (v. 16). The Law had specified clean and unclean foods, but those days were gone. “New Moon celebrations” were probably linked with pagan customs, and those too were inapplicable to believers in Jesus. The best we can say about some of these things is that they were a “shadow” or foreshadowing of God’s plan (v. 17). Now that the reality, Christ, has fulfilled these symbols, there is no point in judging others about whether they observed these things.

People who continue to pursue such things or who pass judgment based on them are arrogant (v. 18). They parade their false piety before others and delight in spiritual sensationalism. They like to hear themselves talk. They’ve lost connection with Christ the Head; they’re separated from His life and truth (v. 19). What a shame it would be to let such people “disqualify you” or pull us off the track of true discipleship! The spirit of legalism is the tendency to turn faith into a set of rules to follow or a set of experiences to avoid or crave. Since the rich treasure of Christ and the gospel are ours, why would we settle for such empty counterfeits?

Apply the Word

Issues related to food and holidays aren’t just historical (v. 16)—they’re still issues today. Choices about what people will and won’t eat, and why, are contentious matters. As Christian holidays like Christmas and Easter have become identified with and defined by our consumerist culture, believers face challenges in maintaining the spiritual significance of these days. We should all be reminded of the godly qualities of charity and humility in these matters.

Colossians 2:20–23

Recent research has found that “nuggets of misinformation embedded in a fictional television program can seep into our brains and lodge there as perceived facts.” Even if we’re skeptical at first, the study showed that just two weeks after viewing such a program, we’re more likely to accept misinformation as true or possibly true. One reason for this is that as our memory fades, we no longer remember the source—the misinformation gains credibility as we forget where we heard it. This is called the “delayed message effect” or the “sleeper effect.” The researchers commented: “People are bombarded by mass media every day all over the world, and a sizeable (and growing) body of mass communication research has demonstrated that much of this content is distorted in a multitude of ways.”

Our beliefs are only as good as their source. That’s why Paul was so concerned that the Colossians’ faith be grounded in the pure gospel. The syncretistic false teachings that were causing an uproar in the church and leading some away from true faith were like weeds in a garden. They needed eradicating! So in today’s passage Paul essentially repeated the same points as yesterday. He reminded them of the genuine gospel in our key verse for today. Christ’s death was not just an unpleasant prelude to the miracle of resurrection. It was a spiritually necessary act that paid the penalty for human sin. In the same way, to say that we “died with Christ” isn’t just a figure of speech. It’s a spiritually necessary crucifying of the old sin nature and of our attachments to the world.

What are “the elemental spiritual forces of this world” (vv. 21–23)? They’re legalistic rules, carrying an “appearance of wisdom” but in fact lacking “any value in restraining sensual indulgence.” They may look like the pursuit of holiness, but the truth is they’re wasted effort. Again, the best we can say is that these practices might be useful for a time, but as merely “human commands and teachings” they are not the road to Christlikeness.

Apply the Word

Once again, the errors Paul condemned are not only historical but current concerns. It’s not hard to think of things about which some Christians say, “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” (v. 21). We all need to embrace wisdom and the need to make choices according to kingdom values, but strategies of avoidance or asceticism cannot be made into general rules for everyone. To do so dishonors the discipline of freedom in Christ (Gal. 5:1).

MULTIPLE OTHER DEVOTIONALS COLOSSIANS 2

You Grow the Way You Were Born by Theodore Epp

Colossians 2:1-7

Paul spoke here of the necessity of the Colossians to continue as they had begun. In other words, he was telling them, “Get settled in Christ; see that Christ is everything in your life.”

Paul wanted the Colossians to recognize that if someone taught differently, then that teaching was in error.

We are to walk in Christ the same way as we originally received Him as our Saviour. We received Him by faith; so we are to walk in Him by faith.

The way of salvation is made crystal clear in Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please him."

Notice that Paul used the full title for the Lord: "Christ Jesus the Lord" (Col. 2:6). Christ" means "anointed one" or "Messiah." That is Jesus' heavenly name.

"Jesus" means "one who saves" and refers to the historical Person who became flesh and lived among mankind. "Lord" means "master" and refers to His supreme control of everything.

With this threefold emphasis, Paul was reminding the Colossians whom they had become rightly related to when they received salvation. He is the Anointed One of God; He is the Saviour of mankind; He is the Supreme Lord.

Paul urged the Colossians to remember that they had started with Christ by faith and that now they must continue to walk with Him by faith.

"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:15).

Possibilities in Love by Mary Wilder Tileston

My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen Thou me according unto Thy word.

--PS 119:28

That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love.

--COLOSSIANS 2:2

WHEN I am with Thee as Thou art with me,
Life will be self-forgetting power;
Love, ever conscious, buoyant, clear, and free
Will flame in darkest hour.
--GEORGE MACDONALD

EVERYTHING becomes possible to those who love. The commands of the Lord are no longer grievous, for the soul that loves is gifted by that love with fresh energies; it discovers in itself unsuspected possibilities, and is supplied with ever-flowing currents of new vigor. We shall be enabled to do so much if only we love. We live by loving, and the more we love the more we live; and therefore, when life feels dull and the spirits are low, turn and love God, love your neighbor, and you will be healed of your wound. Love Christ, the dear Master; look at His face, listen to His words, and love will waken, and you will do all things through Christ who strengtheneth you.

--HENRY SCOTT HOLLAND

The noble love of Jesus impels a man to do great things, and stirs him up to be always longing for what is more perfect.
--THOMAS A KEMPIS

Christians United in Love by W. H. G. Thomas

"That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding..."

(Col. 2:2).

He prayed that these Christians might be joined together, knit together, and kept together. Solitary Christians are apt to be weak Christians, for in this sphere as in all others "union is strength." If Christian people are not truly knit together, the cause of Christ may suffer, for through the severances caused by division the enemy can keep thrusting his darts which must be parried alone. That is why the apostle elsewhere urges believers earnestly to strive "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). One of the greatest powers that Satan wields today is due to disunion among the genuine people of God. It is true alike of the Christian home, congregation, and denomination that this wedge of discord can become one of the enemy's most powerful weapons. On the

other hand, where the brethren are able to "dwell together in unity," there the Lord commands His blessing (Ps. 13 3:3).

This unity, however, is only possible "in love." It is the love of God to us that unites us to Him and it will be the love of God in us that unites us to our brethren. Indeed, there is no power like love to bind Christians together. We may not see eye to eye on all aspects of the truth we hold; we may not all use the same methods of worship and service; but if we love one another God dwells in us and among us, and He can add His own seal of blessing to the work done for Him. Let every evangelical Christian be fully assured that, in so far as he is striving, praying, and laboring for the union of God's people in love, he will be doing one of the most influential and blessed pieces of work for his Master and, at the same time, one of the greatest possible pieces of disservice to the kingdom of Satan. Contrariwise, the Christian man or Christian church practicing separateness and exclusiveness because of non-essential differences of opinion or policy is one of the best allies of Satan and one of his most effective workers.

His Will Becomes Mine by Mary Wilder Tileston

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him.

COLOSSIANS 2:6

We have the mind of Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:16

NEVER further than Thy cross;
Never higher than Thy feet;
Here earth's precious things seem dross;
Here earth's bitter things grow sweet.

Here we learn to serve and give,
And, rejoicing, self deny;
Here we gather love to live,
Here we gather faith to die.

ELIZABETH R. CHARLES

ARE we assimilating His mind, His way of looking at things, His judgments, His spirit? Is the Christ-conscience being developed in us? Have we an increasing interest in the things which interest Him, an increasing love of the things that He loves, an increasing desire to serve the purposes He has at heart? "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you," is the test by which we can try ourselves.

HUGH BLACK

This I saw, that when a soul loves God with a supreme love, God's interests and his are become one. It is no matter when nor where nor how Christ should send me, nor what trials He should exercise me with, if I may be prepared for His work and will.

DAVID BRAINERD

Walking by Sight, Not by Faith by Theodore Epp

Col 2:6

Numbers 13:1-3, 25-33

In addition to being characterized by unbelief, the Israelites were also characterized by self-will.

Concerning the Israelites, the psalmist said, "They quickly forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel, but craved intensely in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. So He gave them their request, but sent a wasting disease among them" (Ps. 106:13-15, NASB).

The King James Version translates this last verse: "He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul" (v. 15). This reveals that God sometimes permits what is not in His direct will. It also reveals that the individual loses out spiritually.

What a paradox! The Israelites were to walk by faith, but they wanted to send spies into the land (see Deut. 1:19-23). What does faith want with spies? Apparently they were more concerned about walking by sight than by faith.

Many believers today find it extremely difficult to take God at His word. Instead of walking by faith, they want proofs about the future beyond what God has said and the power He has demonstrated.

They are just like the Israelites who wanted to send spies into the land so they would know what it was like and how strong it was. Then they would choose whether or not to go in.

Every believer should remember 2 Corinthians 5:7: "(For we walk by faith, not by sight.)"

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (Col. 2:6).

A Submissive Faith by Theodore Epp

Genesis 22:7-9; Colossians 2:6-7

Isaac probably knew that he was the sacrifice. He could have resisted because he was no longer a child; he was probably between 17 and 25 years of age. Physically, all the advantages were his. His father was old; he was young.

Here the Word of God introduces us to the submissive trait that seems to have been the strong factor in Isaac's life. He was characterized more by submissiveness than by aggressiveness.

Abraham was the one with an aggressive faith, but Isaac had a submissive faith--willing to be what God wanted him to be. Even when he was offered as a sacrifice, Isaac submitted himself to his father because God had so willed it.

Isaac's submission was a picture of Christ's submission to the Father. Jesus Christ was the sacrifice for the sins of the world so that the holy standards of the Heavenly Father might be satisfied.

Concerning Christ, 1 John 2:2 tells us that "he is the propitiation [satisfaction] for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

Jesus was submissive to the Heavenly Father's will. The purpose of the Father and the Son was one. God the Father willed the sacrifice to be made, and the Son willed to be the sacrifice.

The life of the Lord Jesus Christ is summed up in the statement "I come ... to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). What a wonderful God we have!

"Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom. 6:13).

Vain Knowledge by Henry Allan Ironside

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ"

(Col. 2:8).

Scripture nowhere condemns the acquisition of knowledge. It is the wisdom of this world, not its knowledge, that is foolishness with God. Philosophy is but worldly wisdom. It is the effort of the human mind to solve the mystery of the universe. It is not an exact science, for the philosophers have never been able to come to any satisfactory conclusion as to either the "why" or the "wherefore" of things. "The Greeks seek after wisdom," we are told; and it was they who led the way for all future generations in philosophical theorizing. Before a divine revelation came it was quite natural and proper that man should seek by wisdom to solve the riddles that nature was constantly propounding, but now that God has spoken this is no longer necessary, and it may become grave infidelity. From Plato to Kant, and from Kant to the last of the moderns, one system has overturned another, so that the history of philosophy is a story of contradictory, discarded hypotheses. This is not to say that the philosophers were or are dishonest men, but it is to say that many of them have failed to avail themselves of that which would unravel every knot and solve every problem, namely, the revelation of God in Christ as given in the Holy Scriptures.

Plato yearned for a divine Word--"logos"--which would come with authority and make everything plain. That Word is Christ of whom John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And again, "The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us, and we beheld His glory the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The Word is no longer hidden. We do not need to search for it. "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

Our Union With Christ by W. H. G. Thomas

"And ye are complete in Him..." (Col. 2:10).

The emphasis on the words "in Him" (vv. 9-11) very plainly shows that the source of all spiritual power lies in the union of the soul with Christ. But not only so--we are circumcised, and buried, and raised, and made alive "with Him" (vv. 11, 12, 13), suggesting a spiritual fellowship. All this is associated with a definite confidence in God as the object of our trust and as the source of all spiritual blessing. Scripture is very emphatic in regard to the way in which faith links us to God as the means of obtaining grace and power.

Thus at every point Christ and the believer are identified. When our Lord was circumcised, we were circumcised with Him; when our Lord died, we died in Him; when He was buried, we were buried; when He rose, we were raised; and when He was quickened, we were quickened. To these great truths we may add that when He ascended, we ascended; and, as in one of the parallel passages, Ephesians 2:4-6, now that He is at God's right hand we are seated with Him in heavenly places. In this spiritual unity will be found the only guarantee of faithful adherence to what is true and of fearless abhorrence of what is false. This emphasis on the spiritual life as distinct from mere knowledge and even philosophy (v. 8) will be found as potent today as ever. When faced with ideas which under specious guises of one sort or another tend to lead us astray, it is not too much to urge that a careful attention to a passage like this one will do more than anything else to protect against them. Thus, old errors, which continue to appear in new forms, may be met and vanquished just as in St. Paul's day. Yes, union with Christ affects both thought, the full exercise of mental powers, and action, the translation of thought into redeemed, victorious living.

Not "Ought" but "Are" by Theodore Epp

Colossians 2:10-15

Realizing that all of the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is then awesome to consider that we "are complete in him" (Col. 2:10).

We are filled with His fullness. Notice it does not say we ought to be complete in Him; it says we are complete in Him.

Of course, believers are to constantly grow in the knowledge of Him as they progress from babes in Christ to those who are spiritually mature. But the completeness exists from the moment of salvation.

This is why it can be said in 2 Peter 1:3 that Christ "hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness."

Even in our day, it is common for people to tell believers, "It is wonderful that you know Christ as Saviour and that you are endeavoring to live the Christian life the best you can, but you need something special in order to really have all that God wants you to have."

They may not say it in quite these words, but this sort of teaching is causing mass confusion among Christians today.

But what we need to understand is that, having trusted Jesus Christ as Saviour, we are complete in Him and need nothing else. There is no special ordinance or any special experience that needs to be tacked on to the Person and work of Christ.

What can be added that the believer does not already possess in Jesus Christ? Our need is simply to appropriate what we have in Christ and thus, by faith, live accordingly.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

Why Jesus was Crucified by Henry Allan Ironside

"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross"
(Col. 2:14).

Pilate wrote out the inscription to be placed over the head of Christ Jesus, and that in three languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, that all might know why the patient Sufferer from Galilee was being publicly executed. "This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews." As the people read this they understood that he was being crucified because He made Himself a king and was thus disloyal to Caesar.

But as God looked upon that cross His holy eye saw, as it were, another inscription altogether. Nailed upon the rood above the head of His blessed Son was the handwriting of ten ordinances given at Sinai. It was because this law had been broken in every point that Jesus poured out His blood, thus giving His life to redeem us from the curse of the law. And so all of our sins have been settled for. There the law, which we had so dishonored, has been magnified to the full in the satisfaction which He made to the divine justice. Thus Christ has become the end of the law to every one that believeth. It is of course the Jewish believers Paul has in mind when he says "us," for Gentiles were not under the law. But it is true now in principle for us all, to whom the knowledge of the law has come. Christ has, by His death, met every claim against us and cancelled the bond we could not pay.

Colossians 3

Colossians 3:1-4

Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. - Colossians 3:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Before playing for a major league ball club, almost every professional baseball player in the United States has to spend some time in the minor leagues. They spend long trips on buses, stay in hotels apart from their families, and play in less-than-ideal conditions on the field. And when the month of September arrives and the minor-league championship playoffs begin, some of the best players are promoted to their respective major league teams. Many of these players only see limited playing time, being used as last-minute substitutions in meaningless games. One might think that a player would rather compete in intense playoff games in the minors, but that isn't how the players feel about it.

In the words of former pitcher and current baseball commentator Steve Stone, 'When you're in the minors, all you're thinking about is wearing a big-league uniform and playing in a big-league ballpark.' Every player has his mind set on advancing to the next level.

Paul tells us to have a similar mindset towards our life on earth. He tells us to set our hearts, minds, emotions, and thoughts on 'things above.' We can't do that if we're busy getting upset about events, real and imagined, going on around us.

Focusing on eternity is a great formula for a healthy spiritual life, but it's possible to read these verses and go off in one of two extreme directions.

The first is to assume that the apostle is talking about some kind of dreamy, hazy 'other worldly' state of mind in which we float around in the clouds. The other extreme is to assume that Paul is advocating a grit-your-teeth, hard-nosed kind of Christianity you grind out in your own strength.

Both extremes are far-removed from reality. Paul is telling us to live in a manner consistent with who we already are, citizens of heaven. He's saying that since reality for us is located 'in the heavenly realms' (Eph. 2:6) where the risen Christ is seated in power, we need to take our cues and commands for life from heaven.

Focusing on things above makes perfect sense for people who have died to their old way of life, and who now draw their life from Jesus Christ. You don't have to ignore earthly concerns to anchor your mind on the things of Christ. But it does mean that daily concerns don't drive or control you Christ does.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If our minds and hearts are set on the things of Christ, this ought to be evident in some very practical ways.

Consider your checkbook and your schedule, for example. It can be very enlightening to go back through your check register for the last six months or so and see how much your use of money reflects a Christ-first focus. It's also revealing to step back and look at your schedule for the upcoming week or month in the same light. Take time to review both of these today.

Colossians 3:1–4

In the middle of Hebrews 11, popularly dubbed "Faith's Hall of Fame," the writer paused to summarize the lives of such heroes as Enoch, Noah, and Abraham. What set their faith apart? "Admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth, people who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them" (Heb. 11:13–16).

To live as “foreigners and strangers on earth” and to be “longing for a better country” is exactly what it means to set our hearts on Christ (v. 1). Up to this point in Colossians, Paul had laid a powerful doctrinal foundation, explaining clearly and beautifully the person of Christ and the message of the gospel. He had also used that doctrine to expose and condemn the syncretism and false teaching that was infiltrating the Colossian church. Now he turned his full attention to the flip side. If the heresy had gotten it all wrong, then what is an authentic godly lifestyle?

The rest of the book answers this question. An authentic godly lifestyle—that is to say, how people who have “died with Christ” should live—starts with us setting our hearts and minds on Him. This means our whole person, including thoughts, feelings, choices (our will), and creativity (our imagination). The weak alternative is to be preoccupied with and live for things that are only temporal, earthly, and human (v. 2).

To set our sights on “things above” is to live every moment in light of the beauty of Christ (v. 4). Faith that strives for this orientation is the surest path to spiritual growth. Thankfully, we don’t have to (and can’t!) do this in our own strength. Christ, whose redemptive mission is complete (that’s why He’s pictured as seated at God’s right hand), will empower us because our life is now actually hidden in Him (v. 3).

Apply the Word

Living as “foreigners and strangers” can wear us down. We would rather be home (v. 4). The road can seem long, even when we’re walking with the Lord. A good book, some good music, or time with Christian friends might be the spiritual pick-me-up we need. Some recommended books in this regard are *Hunger for Reality*, by George Verwer; *Don’t Waste Your Life*, by John Piper; and *Eternity: Reclaiming a Passion for What Endures*, by Joseph Stowell.

Colossians 3:1 Ephesians 1:15-23

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TODAY IN THE WORD

Some of you may remember the TV game show, *Let’s Make a Deal*. Contestants had to choose one of three doors, all of which concealed various prizes. Suspense mounted as a contestant deliberated between a known prize and the possibility of a better one behind Door Number One, Door Number Two, or Door Number Three.

Sometimes life can feel a bit like this game show. As believers, we are asked to give up attachments to this world for the “prizes” God promises in the world to come, which we have never seen. It can be hard to forsake what’s so familiar and comfortable without a clear idea of what’s behind the next door.

Maybe that’s why Paul spent so much time talking about the glorious inheritance of believers. He wanted believers to be so focused on what was eternally theirs through their relationship with Christ, that they would become less distracted by things that would eventually pass away.

Paul wrote Ephesians from a prison in Rome. It increases our appreciation for his heavenly focus and his prayer that believers would also be focusing upward. Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians is rooted in his praise for the work of God through His Son. In Christ, we have been chosen and called as believers (Eph. 1:3–14). It is the key starting place for any prayer--God’s plan of redemption.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Paul’s prayer not only shows us how we can pray for our needs; it is also an example of how we can pray for others.

Colossians 3:1-4

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TODAY IN THE WORD

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In the words of former pitcher and current baseball commentator Steve Stone, 'When you're in the minors, all you're thinking about is wearing a big-league uniform and playing in a big-league ballpark.' Every player has his mind set on advancing to the next level.

Paul tells us to have a similar mindset towards our life on earth. He tells us to set our hearts, minds, emotions, and thoughts on 'things above.' We can't do that if we're busy getting upset about events, real and imagined, going on around us.

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Both extremes are far-removed from reality. Paul is telling us to live in a manner consistent with who we already are, citizens of heaven. He's saying that since reality for us is located 'in the heavenly realms' (Eph. 2:6) where the risen Christ is seated in power, we need to take our cues and commands for life from heaven.

Focusing on things above makes perfect sense for people who have died to their old way of life, and who now draw their life from Jesus Christ. You don't have to ignore earthly concerns to anchor your mind on the things of Christ. But it does mean that daily concerns don't drive or control you Christ does.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

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Consider your checkbook and your schedule, for example. It can be very enlightening to go back through your check register for the last six months or so and see how much your use of money reflects a Christ-first focus. It's also revealing to step back and look at your schedule for the upcoming week or month in the same light. Take time to review both of these today.

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Colossians 3:1-4 1 Peter 2:4-9; Colossians 3:1-4

You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house. - 1 Peter 2:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

One of the world's most famous gems is the Hope Diamond. The story goes that a French merchant purchased an enormous 112-3/16-carat diamond. The diamond, most likely from India, was described as having a "beautiful violet" color. The merchant sold the diamond to King Louis XIV of France in 1668. Many of its owners experienced bad luck and even death, which led to the association of the gem with its unfortunate legend. Over the years, the diamond passed through the hands of royalty and wealthy businessmen, and along the way, it was recut and shaped to its present 45.52 carats. Although now a fraction of its original weight, the diamond is still a magnificent treasure on permanent display in the Smithsonian.

Precious stones do not go unnoticed. They are valued, displayed, treasured, and fought over. They are used as a tribute to one's love when placed in an engagement or anniversary band. So it is noticeable that God compares us, as well as His Son, to living stones "chosen by God and precious to him" (1 Peter 2:4).

In Colossians, our value is linked to Christ. Paul explains that since we have been raised with Christ into a new life (v. 1), our focus should not be on things here on earth, but on eternal things. Our new life, says Paul, is "hidden with Christ in God" (v. 3). To be hidden means that our own selfish desires are submitted to Christ. We are invisible, so that Christ can become visible in our lives.

The word hidden also carries with it the idea of protection. When a gem is very valuable, it is often hidden to protect it from theft or destruction. Our lives, our very identity, is hidden safely in Christ. No one can take or destroy what is safely hidden with God. Scripture tells us that our one gem becomes part of a larger dwelling, "a spiritual house" offering sacrifices acceptable to God. Together, our precious gem becomes transformed into something immensely valuable to our Creator.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Our lives and our identities are hidden in Christ—protected and being transformed to be more like Him. Spend time in prayer today asking the Holy Spirit to show you any areas where you are tempted to shine your own light or promote your own identity. Sometimes we do this out of fear or in order to feel in control. Ask the Lord to help you remember that when you are hidden in Christ, you are safe and fully loved.

Colossians 3:1-17

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. - Colossians 3:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

The television show, *This Is Your Life*, offered its guests an entertaining, nostalgic look at all the wonderful things they had accomplished and all the people whose contributions made that person into the success they had become. Many people would come to tears of joy as they relived the greatest memories of their time here on earth.

In Colossians 3, though, Paul changes the direction completely. Instead of *This Is Your Life*, Paul says that Christ is your life (v. 4). And those things of the past, all the passing events that attracted the focus of Ecclesiastes, really have become meaningless. Our eyes are on the new life we're living in Christ (v. 10).

It all begins with our thoughts and our attitudes. So we are to put our hearts and our minds where our Lord is (v. 1). We are raised with Him, and our thought life should follow suit. We need to stop digging up our old selves and all the evil practices we are prone to (vv. 4–9). Remember, these are the things that bring God's wrath on men, from the flood, to the enemies of Israel, to the coming judgment on this world (v. 6). How meaningless would it be to be raised from that spiritual death—and yet constantly trying to return to the grave instead of enjoying the righteousness of Christ?

Growth is a process, and we read that our new self "is being renewed in knowledge" in the image of God (v. 10). Notice a couple of other points. First of all, this new self is just that: something new! It answers the cry of Ecclesiastes. But notice, too, that knowledge is part of the process—wisdom is a means to make us more like Christ; but without Him and His Spirit, that wisdom is unattainable (1 Cor. 2:13, 14).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

So what do we take away from this month of studying the questions and conclusions of Ecclesiastes and the revelations of Christ in the New Testament? How do we put it into practice in our lives? Verse 17 says it all: “Do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” That’s whatever we do, whatever we say, done to His glory, resulting in a life of thankfulness. Obedience is the best thank-you for God’s most meaningful gift!

Colossians 3:2; 2Timothy 3:1-5

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. - Colossians 3:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to data from the Unity Marketing Group in Stevens, Pennsylvania, Americans spent almost \$706 billion on entertainment in 2004. As company president Pam Danziger explained, “Recreation and entertainment are purely discretionary and emotionally driven.”

As we continue to study holiness and humor in Scripture, we must reckon with our own choices in entertainment, recreation, and humor. Our passage provides a strong warning about our priorities.

This letter from Paul to Timothy was the last missive written by the aging apostle. Throughout the letter, his passion for the gospel, sense of urgency, and commission to Timothy permeate each sentence. He knew his own days on earth were numbered, and he wanted to be sure to communicate each exhortation that the next generation needed to hear.

Our text warns of the traits that will be seen and celebrated in the last days. We might expect to read about shocking or barbaric attitudes and actions to be catalogued here; it’s sobering to consider how unshocking most of us would find these descriptions. Lovers of money? Proud? Disobedient to parents? Unforgiving? Rash? If we were making a list of behaviors that signal the apocalypse, would we include these? Paul describes them as “terrible” (v. 1).

Included in the list is “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (v. 4). This sums up the root of all these sins. Rather than place God at the top of all priorities, people have placed themselves there. Rather than follow God’s instructions for relationships, people follow their own agenda. When self is on the throne, terrible things will follow.

These sinful priorities can infiltrate our attempts to worship. When we value self-actualization above Scripture, seek pleasure above discipleship, promote profit above praise, or want entertainment above worship, we deny the power of the gospel (v. 5). The corrective is to measure our actions, attitude, and priorities against the truth of God in Scripture (vv. 14-17).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Some ascetics have used these verses to claim that all pleasure or entertainment is sinful, but that view isn’t supported here. Pleasure isn’t inherently sinful, but it must be subordinated to God. Saturation in Scripture is one of the best ways to help keep our priorities and pursuits in line. You can supplement your daily Bible reading with a Scripture memory plan, reviewing note cards with verses throughout the day, or listening to music that uses Scripture as lyrics.

Colossians 3:4 Song of Solomon 3:6-11

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. - Colossians 3:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his essay entitled, “The Weight of Glory,” C. S. Lewis notes that the concept of glory is very prominent in the New Testament and is often associated with things like palms, crowns, white robes, thrones, and splendor like the sun and stars. “All this,” Lewis observes, “makes no immediate appeal to me at all, and in that respect I fancy that I am a typical modern.”

Nearly a century before Lewis wrote these words, Mark Twain made a similar observation about the biblical imagery of glory, when he wrote of harps and robes, “That sort of thing wouldn’t make a heaven—at least not a heaven that a sane man could stand a week and remain sane.”

Twain, of course, was no theologian; in fact, it seems that he wasn’t a believer. Yet the problem he identifies is the same one that Lewis mentions. In this world of earthly glitter and tangible reality, who can get excited about what seems on the surface to be a promise of some vague notion of glory? What good is a crown in heaven to someone who doesn’t wear a hat on earth?

According to Lewis, glory is a matter of being “noticed” by God, “Glory means good report with God, acceptance by God, response,

acknowledgement, and welcome into the heart of things. The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last.”

The appearance of the king and his retinue in today’s reading is described in terms that are best summarized with the word glory. Those who accompany the king share in his glory. What was true on an earthly level in this description will be true on spiritual level with those who accompany Christ when He returns. They will “appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The hope of glory helps us to live a holy life. The knowledge that we will one day return with Christ in glory motivates us to say “no” to the powerful impulses of our earthly nature and “yes” to God.

Colossians 3:5-10 Ephesians 5:3-10;

Be on your guard against all kinds of greed. - Luke 12:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

There once was a very wealthy man. His farmland was very productive. In fact, his crops were so abundant that his barn couldn’t hold the harvest. He wasn’t quite sure what to do. Finally, he decided to build a bigger barn for the extra grain. Then he could just sit back and relax, knowing that he didn’t have to worry about a thing—he had more than enough. But God was displeased with this plan, and said to the greedy man, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” (Luke 12:20).

You may be wondering what the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21) has to do with today’s readings. At first glance, it seems as if these two passages primarily concern sexual immorality. But a closer reading shows that greed is an important part of each passage as well. What Luke 12, Ephesians 5, and Colossians 3 all have in common is that they show that greed is a failure to recognize that every good gift comes from God and to be thankful for what God had provided. In the parable, the rich fool fails to see that his harvest is a gift from God. In Paul’s exhortations to the Ephesians and Colossians, problems with sexual immorality are linked with a failure to be thankful for what God has given.

The connection between sexual sin and greed goes back to the tenth commandment, which forbids coveting the wife of one’s neighbor. As our previous study showed, covetousness is a failure to be thankful for what God has provided, which leads to looking elsewhere (see November 9). We also noted that thanksgiving was part of God’s calling for His people. Paul may have had these covenant commandments in mind when he wrote Ephesians. Notice also the clear connection that Paul draws between “God’s holy people” (v. 3) and thanksgiving.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It may be surprising that Paul links greed with idolatry in Colossians 3:5. But recall that the first commandment forbids having any other god apart from the Lord God. Greed can easily lead to idolatry because we’re focused on the gift, such as sexual intimacy, rather than the Giver of the gift and His purposes for the gift. Once again, thanksgiving is the key. As Bible scholar Walter Liefeld writes, “Thanksgiving ... not only expresses satisfaction but, in a sense, can even create satisfaction within us.”

Colossians 3:5–7

The statistics about pornography are shocking. Every second, more than \$3,000 is spent on it and nearly 30,000 Internet users view it. Every 39 minutes, a new pornographic video is created. The pornography industry pulls in about \$100 billion in annual revenue worldwide. At least 4.2 million websites, or 12 percent of the total, are pornographic. Every day, Internet users make 68 million pornographic search engine requests, or about one-quarter of the total. While men are the main consumers of pornography, one of every three visitors to an adult website is a woman.

Sexual immorality is a disease with only one cure: “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature” (v. 5). Dying with Christ isn’t just a compelling metaphor (v. 3). It means that “whatever belongs to your earthly nature” must be killed off. To continue living in sin is to dishonor Christ’s gift of righteousness. These were the ways in which the Colossians had walked before receiving the gospel (v. 7), but they have no place in the life of faith.

Paul’s list of sins wasn’t exhaustive. Most of the examples he chose revolve around sexual sin. “Sexual immorality” is the Greek word *porneia*, from which we get our word pornography. “Impurity” could be any kind of corruption, but often connotes sexual transgression. “Lust” is adultery of the heart (Matt. 5:28). In context, “evil desires” seems to suggest improper sexual cravings. “Greed,” or the idolatry of materialism, is the final item on the list. It might seem out of place, but in fact greed and sexual immorality are often linked because they both look to something other than God for satisfaction.

“Because of these,” Paul warned, “the wrath of God is coming” (v. 6). God hates sin and will one day judge it. All who sin are under a

death penalty, waiting for that day. We who have trusted Christ, by contrast, have been rescued from death. Our penalty has already been paid. Why, then, would we continue to act as God's enemy and do things He hates? We are children of God and should seek to live worthy of our salvation!

Apply the Word

You're probably familiar with the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted" list. These are top criminals that the government would like to see captured. Now that we've "died with Christ," we should take seriously our own "most wanted" list—desires and actions that we want to see out of our lives because they don't bring honor to the Lord. If you are struggling to eradicate the control of these sins, commit to prayer and also seek the counsel of a wise Christian pastor or counselor to help you.

Colossians 3:8–11

When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He gave them a single command—not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But Satan tempted them and they chose to disobey. We call this event the "Fall" because they fell from their original state of innocence into an experiential knowledge of sin, dooming all humanity to death (see Genesis 3). Though Adam and Eve had been created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), their disobedience defaced that image, as if mud had been smeared onto a beautiful painting.

Christ's redemption cleanses us of sin, washing the painting of mud, as it were, and restoring the image of God in us (v. 10). In daily life, living out the gospel means to rid ourselves of all that is unChristlike. Once again, Paul made this point with a before-and-after contrast. In the life they had once lived, the Colossians had walked according to their "earthly nature" (v. 7). "But now," he wrote, "you must also rid yourselves of all such things" (v. 8).

This second list of sins deals mostly with relational or interpersonal wrongdoing, with a strong link to sins of speech and the lack of self-control (vv. 8–9). "Anger" is destructive and unloving, as is "rage," which suggests abusiveness or being out-of-control. "Malice" is animosity or an intent to injure someone. "Slander" includes gossip designed to drag down another's reputation. "Filthy language" is profanity or obscenity. Finally, lying violates the commandment not to bear false witness against one's neighbor (Ex. 20:16).

Paul then restated his overall point as a kind of clothing metaphor (vv. 9–10). An old garment needs to be taken off, while a new one should be put on. From "old self" to "new self," our rebirth in Christ is a transformation in our identity. We are not who we were, and we're not to live as we did formerly. The "new self" is still in process and is "being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." In this sense, we're all co-pilgrims together on the journey to Christ (v. 11).

Apply the Word

The themes of process and pilgrimage have emerged several times in our study of Colossians. Salvation includes the past (gospel received in faith), present (putting our earthly natures to death, setting our hearts on things above), and future (when we're presented blameless before our Lord). One of the great classics of Christian literature that memorably captures this narrative and these dimensions of the Christian life is *The Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan.

Colossians 3:12–14

Do you ever wish you had more self-control? Well, there's an app for that! SelfControl, an open-source program for Macintosh, runs a blacklist to which you can add websites, including email servers, that are distracting you from work or causing you to procrastinate. You tell the program not to give you access to these sites for, say, the next two hours, leaving you free to concentrate on work. "Once started," says the program's description, "it cannot be undone ... you must wait for the timer to run out."

If only godliness were that easy! Having presented two lists of vices to "put to death," Paul now turned to an extended list of spiritual virtues (vv. 12–17). He also continued the take off/put on clothing metaphor from verses 9 and 10. Overall, today's verses continue to develop the implications of what it means to live "as God's chosen people" (v. 12). With this phrase, Paul spotlighted the new revelation of God's plan that took place in Christ. In the past, Israel would have had the "chosen people" label (see Deut. 7:6). This doesn't mean they were the only ones God loved, for His plan has always included the entire world. But now, it is the church that is "holy and dearly loved."

As such, what clothing should believers put on? Notice that this action is a continuous imperative, not a one-time event. "Compassion" indicates a merciful or tender heart. "Kindness" and "patience" are also on Paul's list of fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23). "Humility" is a willingness to serve or take a lower position (see Matt. 20:25–28). Similarly, "gentleness" or meekness characterizes someone not given to self-importance. We should also bear with and forgive one another freely and generously, just as Christ did for us (v. 13). Above all, we should "put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (v. 14; cf. 1 Corinthians 13). The verb "binds" means "links," "joins," and "gives shape and purpose." Like wearing a sports jersey to show our allegiance, clothing ourselves with these virtues shows we've set our hearts on Christ.

Apply the Word

Clothing ourselves with spiritual virtue is a metaphor also seen elsewhere in the New Testament (Rom. 13:14; 1 Peter 5:5). At least twice, armor is used to emphasize the reality of spiritual warfare (Rom. 13:12). For example, Paul wrote to the Ephesians that they should “put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (Eph. 6:10–18). These clothing items make a fashion statement that never goes out of style!

Colossians 3:13 Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-35

Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. - Colossians 3:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Christ Jesus, you did not come to earth to judge the world but so that through you, the Risen Lord, every human being might be saved and reconciled. And when the love that forgives burns with a Gospel flame, the heart, even when beset by trials, can begin to live again. –Taizé, Prayer for Each Day

Clearly God takes forgiveness of sin quite seriously! If He was willing to send His Son to die on the cross, we can be certain that we should also take seriously His command to be forgiving of one another. Indeed, Scripture teaches that an unwillingness to forgive and show compassion on our part hinders our own ability to receive forgiveness from the Lord (Matt. 6:14) and hinders our prayers (1 Peter 3:7). “Hostility and an unforgiving spirit are acids which destroy our capacity to worship and pray,” writes Bingham Hunter.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

When a person is deeply wronged, forgiveness can be difficult. Here are a few steps that may help on the journey to forgiveness and healing. First, acknowledge that sin is evil, and allow yourself to grieve. Second, look to the cross as the place where all sin has been dealt with. Finally, remember all that Jesus has forgiven you and pray for release through forgiveness for the transgressions committed against you.

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” says Romans 15:5–6.

Colossians 3:15–17

Horace Clarence Boyer started as a gospel musician and became one of the first scholars of African-American sacred music. In the late 1950s, he and his brother, James, achieved fame as the Boyer Brothers, recording such classics as “Step by Step.” When Horace later applied to the Eastman School of Music and told them he wanted to study gospel music, they told him the library didn’t have enough resources. When he responded that he would collect and record what he needed for his scholarly work, they were persuaded and admitted him. His research was published in 1995 in *How Sweet the Sound: The Golden Age of Gospel*. Horace Boyer knew all about singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (v. 16)!

Today’s passage builds on yesterday’s to teach us more ways to live out our redemption in Christ. Two closely linked ways are presented. First, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” (v. 15). “Peace” reminds us that our redemption included reconciliation, both a cessation of hostilities with God and a source of unity among believers (1:22). “Rule” is a strong verb indicating governance and control. The “peace of Christ” is analogous to an umpire in baseball—the decision-maker, an authoritative guide to spiritual life and practice. So one way to paraphrase this verse is, “Submit to Christ’s salvation at work in your life.”

Second, “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly” or fruitfully (v. 16). How? By teaching and admonishing one another, helping one another stand firm in the truth and live lives worthy of the gospel. These are the exact activities that Paul and his companions were so committed to in their own ministry (1:28). How else? By singing a variety of styles of music in order to express worship and thankfulness to God.

Verse 17 summarizes Paul’s main point here. How can we live in ways that honor Christ? By doing everything in His name and for His glory. Even daily activities like eating should inspire thankfulness to God.

Apply the Word

Church music wars are a violation of Colossians 3:16. Judging a fellow believer’s spirituality by his or her musical preferences is not godly. We’re expressly commanded to “sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,” that is, a variety of styles of sacred music. Any of these can be worshipful. Any of these can be used to give thanks to the Lord. Choose some music today to either sing or listen to as a way to focus your heart on gratitude to the Lord.

Colossians 3:15 1 Corinthians 10:31-33;

Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. - Colossians 3:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

A Christian camp used to have a sign over the kitchen sink that announced, "Worship services held here three times daily." Depending on your attitude toward washing dishes, you may think a sign like this is either cute or cruel. But whoever posted that sign understood theological truth that needs to be recaptured in a world that would like to confine God within the walls of the church sanctuary.

We need to turn our workplaces into praise and worship centers because we're working for God's glory in the name of Jesus Christ. That's why we have called the last section of this study "Praise and Our Work" (see the August 1 study).

Let's refer to Paul again for our model. Anybody who could preach the gospel and make tents, serving God with the same gusto in both jobs, has something to teach us.

Paul was explaining to the Corinthians the importance of applying the "glory of God" principle in something as ordinary as a meal invitation from a pagan neighbor (1 Cor. 10:27-30). If you can't eat with a clear conscience to God's glory, Paul says, don't do it. Then the apostle broadened the principle to any and every activity, which includes our work.

If we're working with that motive, and putting the good of others ahead of our own, we won't have to worry about being a bad testimony for the gospel at the workplace.

In Colossians, Paul was writing about our calling as Christians. Notice the inner qualities that precede the command to do everything in Christ's name. First, we need the peace of Christ to stand guard in our hearts. If our workplaces are going to be worship centers, they need to be places of peace.

Then, Paul says we need the life-giving nourishment of God's Word. This doesn't mean just having the Word close at hand, but close at heart. If our lives are being enriched by the Word, that will come out at work.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Imagine going to work with God's peace and His Word ruling inside of us, and gratitude to Him coming out of our mouths.

Colossians 3:15-17

Giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. - Ephesians 5:20

TODAY IN THE WORD

Several recent books stress the power of gratitude, such as *Seasons of Grace: The Life-Giving Practice of Gratitude* by Alan Jones and John O'Neil. On the back cover of this book, one reviewer writes, "Most people are grateful because they're happy; wise people are happy because they're grateful. Thank you, Alan Jones and John O'Neil, for reminding us of this happy fact." In *Attitudes of Gratitude: How to Give and Receive Joy Every Day of Your Life*, M. J. Ryan writes, "All we need is an attitude of gratitude. Gratitude creates happiness because it makes us feel full, complete; gratitude is the realization that we have everything we need, at least at this moment." But remarkably, neither book indicates to whom we should be grateful. It's one thing to say "thank you," but it's also very important to know the "You" whom we're thanking!

Throughout this month's study, we've seen that gratitude ultimately is directed toward God. It's always a good idea to say thank-you to someone for a specific gift or kind act. But a lifestyle of gratitude flows from the knowledge that God has extended His grace toward us. The most powerful example of this is the fact that God the Father sent God the Son to pay the price for our sin so that we might be reconciled with our loving heavenly Father.

Perhaps no other biblical author captures this as well as Paul. We have seen his clear understanding of gratitude in several of our studies. In Colossians 3, Paul shows that we are to give thanks to the Father, through Jesus Christ.

Notice the focus on Christ in this short passage. First, the peace of Christ is to rule our hearts; second, the word of Christ is to dwell within us. And in everything, we are to give thanks in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice also the strong link between thanksgiving and worship.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Perhaps this is the first time that you've considered the connection between praise and thanksgiving. To see this more clearly, look up the words thanks, thanksgiving, and praise in a Bible concordance. You'll find many entries in the Psalms. As you look up a few

of these entries, you'll see that many times the psalmist moves back and forth between praise and thanksgiving. When our gratitude is focused on the One whom we should thank, praise is a natural response.

Colossians 3:16 Romans 15:14-16;

TODAY IN THE WORD

After a distinguished performing career, virtuoso violinist Jascha Heifetz accepted an appointment as professor of music at UCLA. Asked what had prompted his change of career, Heifetz replied: ""Violin playing is a perishable art. It must be passed on as a personal skill; otherwise it is lost.""

We need to listen to this great musician. Living the Christian life is a highly personal experience. We can't pull it off merely by watching skilled veterans ""perform."" We need hands-on instruction.

The church has always honored and valued its great teachers, but the reality is that God has called every believer to help pass along the faith. We are not all blessed with the spiritual gift of teaching, but nonetheless God has made us ""competent to instruct one another"" (Rom. 15:14).

There are actually two concepts represented in today's text. The word ""instruct"" can also be translated ""admonish,"" as it is translated in Colossians 3:16. The core idea is that of counseling, encouraging, or warning people. One Bible teacher calls this ""spiritual and moral counseling.""

Paul expressed his confidence that the believers at Rome were mature enough to carry out this ministry with one another. The qualifications are twofold: ""full of goodness [and] complete in knowledge"" (Rom. 15:14).

In Colossians 3, the apostle adds the more formal word for teaching. But again, the use of ""one another"" means we can't leave all the teaching in the body of Christ to those for whom teaching is a full-time calling. Notice the qualification for teaching and admonishing one another. The word of Christ must ""dwell in you richly"" if you want to have something to pass along.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We can thank God for those He has sent our way to counsel, warn and instruct us in the faith.

Look back for a minute. Can you recall that Sunday School teacher, pastor or Bible club leader who first opened your heart and mind to the treasures of God's Word? If so, pause to offer God a word of gratitude and praise for that special person.

Colossians 3:17 Psalm 127

Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. - Colossians 3:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 2009, Morgan Freeman made famous the nineteenth-century poem "Invictus" through his portrayal of South African President Nelson Mandela in the film by the same title. The movie begins and ends with Freeman reciting the poem, including its well-known ending, "I am the master of my fate / I am the captain of my soul." While many people in our culture subscribe to this belief, according to our passage today this is not true for the people of God.

Psalm 127 contains two segments. The theme of the first is clarified by the three-fold repetition of "in vain" (vv. 1-2). Activities such as building a house, guarding a city, and daily work are futile unless motivated by God's purposes, accomplished in His strength, and done for His glory. The promise of sleep affirms a rhythm of work and rest that God ordains. When His people submit to this rhythm, they entrust God with their work and its fruit.

The theme of the second section is highlighted by the three-fold repetition of "children" or "offspring" (vv. 3-5). Children are a blessing from the Lord. In ancient Israel, the larger the family, the less vulnerable the family was to the danger of attack or censure in court. Children, like arrows, offered security.

Psalm 127 does not say that families with children have special favor with God or that families without children are cursed by God. The Bible affirms that God has a special place for barren women in His heart and in His kingdom purposes, as seen in Sarah (Genesis 16-18), Rebekah (Gen. 25:21), Hannah (1 Samuel 1-2), and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5-25)—to name only a few.

Psalm 127 is about work and children, two staples of everyday life. The pilgrims know they are dependent on God for life itself and that "every good and perfect gift comes from [God]" (James 1:17). Everything they have, great and small, mundane and extraordinary, comes from God who desires abundant life for His children.

APPLY THE WORD

Are you surrendered to Christ's Lordship? It is easy to imagine that "I am the master of my fate / I am the captain of my soul." We might be tempted to charge ahead with our own plans, and then retroactively ask God to bless them. The truth of Psalm 127 completely exposes these false ways of living. Today, take an inventory of your work, family, and other responsibilities. Is God the one guiding your entire life for His purposes or are you, for your purposes?

Colossians 3:18–21

When nonbelievers read our Bible passages for today, they tend to make accusations of patriarchy and sexism. But sociologist W. Bradford Wilcox of the University of Virginia has done research challenging these stereotypes. As he told an interviewer, the critics "need to cast aside their prejudices about religious conservatives and evangelicals in particular. Compared to the average American family man, evangelical Protestant men who are married with children and attend church regularly spend more time with their children and their spouses. They also are more affectionate with their children and their spouses. They also have the lowest rates of domestic violence of any group in the United States."

How do Paul's instructions regarding the family fit in with the flow of this epistle? They indicate that Christ is the source of fullness in the home as in every dimension of life (cf. Eph. 5:21–33). They're a specific example of how to live out our redemption in Christ. They're an illustration of what happens when we let the peace of Christ rule in us and the word of Christ dwell in us. But how does authority work when we're all one in Christ? To say we're equal at the foot of the Cross (3:11) doesn't eliminate family and social order and responsibilities. These still exist, although they, like every area of life, have been transformed.

Wives are to submit to their husbands "as is fitting in the Lord," because it's the right thing to do (v. 18). What's new is that this is presented as their choice. Husbands are to love their wives and not be harsh with them (v. 19). What's new is that men have no right to abuse their authority. Children are to obey their parents in all things (v. 20). What's new is that such obedience is respected or seen as valuable in God's eyes. Parents, especially fathers, are not to embitter or discourage their children (v. 21). What's new is again that parents have no right to abuse their authority. The ideas of submission and obedience reflect the relationships within the Trinity itself, and should be a source of peace in our relationships that brings glory to God.

Apply the Word

One recent Christian movie that presents a vision of how redeemed family life and manhood might look is *Courageous*, produced by Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Georgia. Casting Crowns recorded the movie's theme song. In the movie, a police officer and his friends experience a series of events that cause them to reflect on their roles as fathers and husbands. There's drama, action, comedy, and preaching: <http://courageousthemovie.com>.

Colossians 3:20 Ephesians 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. - Colossians 3:20

TODAY IN THE WORD

Civil rights leaders had planned a march in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. The sheriff, Bull Connor, was legendary for his brutal methods, and few people at the organizing meeting were volunteering—until the children stood. When some said they were too young, Rev. James Bevel asked, "Are they too young to go to segregated schools? Are they too young to be kept out of amusement parks? Are they too young to be refused a hamburger in a restaurant? Then they are not too young to want their freedom." Over one thousand children marched in Birmingham, facing fire hoses, police dogs, and imprisonment. Their courage was captured by television cameras and began to reshape national views on civil rights.

In our reading, Paul was giving instructions to the church in Ephesus on how to live together as the body of Christ. And he included children in his discussion of Christian relationships. Children are not too young to receive instructions about holy living, nor should they be excluded from life in the church.

This teaching would have been rather revolutionary at the time. First, for children to be addressed at all was shocking, since they had no rights or privileges in society. Second, the book of Ephesians instructs children to obey their parents, but the command includes the provision "in the Lord." This obedience doesn't stem from the parents' "ownership" of the child, but rather because this obedience brings glory to God. He ordains the structure and relationships of the family, and obedience is ultimately an act of submission to Him.

Next, Paul connected this command back to the Law given by God to Moses (see Deut. 5:16). Obedience is connected to being blessed by God and being in a position for Him to work through us. Finally, Paul addressed fathers with an exhortation on parenthood. Parents have authority, but the point is not to browbeat or "exasperate" their children. It is to "bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (v. 4).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you came from a godly home, these verses may bring warm, comforting memories. But if you didn't—or currently live in a dysfunctional family—you might feel frustrated knowing that your family doesn't measure up to these standards. We've seen unhealthy families throughout our study, and one thing is consistent: God works despite our failures. He cares about families, and He has the power to heal bruised and broken relationships. You can trust Him to heal the pain of your past or repair the damage in your present family.

Colossians 3:23 Ecclesiastes 2:24-26; 5:18-20

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. - Colossians 3:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

Buddy Pilgrim, who is a founder of Integrity Leadership and a former corporate executive, says the most important principle for Christians who want to enjoy biblical success in the workplace is to have a sense of God's calling in their vocation.

That sounds very good; but in the day-to-day business of work it's much more difficult to keep this perspective. Millions of people ""punch a clock"" on the job every day with little or no sense of a higher purpose to their work. The sad thing is that there are many Christians among those millions. But God is intensely interested in how we handle the occupation that consumes most of our waking hours from Monday to Friday.

The book of Ecclesiastes emphasizes God's involvement in our work from the standpoint of finding satisfaction in what we do. This kind of contentment is a gift from God, the Bible says, and it comes most readily to those who sense His calling and His blessing on their work.

Because our job is such a big part of our responsibility to manage God's resources, it's important that we find out what He has equipped and called us to do. As Larry Burkett says, ""If 5 p.m. on Friday is the best part of your week and 8 a.m. on Monday is your worst, God probably has something else in mind for you."" God's will for us is fulfillment, not frustration, in our work.

The great thing about biblical principles of work is that they apply to all of us, whether we manage a multinational corporation or a household. Qualities such as honesty, integrity, and diligence are basic to being good managers of God's gift of meaningful work--and by the way, there's no such thing as meaningless ""busy work"" in God's kingdom!

Another side of this issue is making sure we use our God-given abilities and interests to the full. For some of us, that may mean staying where we are and praising God for His clear leading. Other believers may want to consider some Christian-based career testing that would help them identify the best way to use the gifts and talents God has entrusted to them.

Whatever the case, it is God's will that we as His children enjoy our work, and use it to further His kingdom--for His glory and our eternal benefit.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Larry Burkett's ministry, Christian Financial Concepts, has much helpful, Bible-based material on the subject of work.

You'll find information on this topic in your local Christian bookstore. If you have older teenagers, we especially encourage you to procure a career guidance system that can help them find God's direction. And wherever you will go tomorrow to report for work, why not stop right now to thank God for your job, and ask Him to help you fulfill today's verse this week in your work?

Colossians 3:22–4:1

In order to interpret accurately today's reading, it's important to understand that slavery in New Testament times was not like slavery in American history. The latter, sometimes called ""chattel slavery,"" was premised on virulent racism that asserted that one race was so inferior as to be subhuman, and therefore slaves could be bought and sold like animals. In Paul's day, slavery was often a temporary state to pay off a debt, or based on a class system. Nowhere does Paul endorse the ungodly idea of one human being ""owning"" another. In fact, his approach to the master-slave relationship contradicts abuse of power.

As with family relationships, Paul saw the need for social order and responsibilities, but he didn't simply sign off on the prevailing cultural notions of his day. Slaves were instructed to obey their masters, but this wasn't to be a matter of mere power. Instead, doing so would demonstrate their spiritual integrity (3:22–24). To do their work well even when unsupervised would show that they honored a Master who was above their ""earthly master." Since they were part of God's family and set to receive an ""inheritance"" of salvation, they had excellent reasons to do their best for Him! The reality of the matter was this: ""It is the Lord Christ you are serving.""

Furthermore, Paul didn't see slaves as "property" without rights—quite the opposite. Like husbands and parents, masters were warned not to abuse their authority. The phrase "earthly master" was a reminder to them as well of the reality of a heavenly Master. Since God is just and shows no favoritism (3:25), masters were explicitly ordered to "provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven" (4:1).

Paul always saw the social and spiritual as intertwined: "Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For the one who was a slave when called by the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave" (1 Cor. 7:21–22).

Apply the Word

In light of today's devotional, the best contemporary analogy or application for this passage concerns the workplace. We, too, should do our work completely, with integrity, and with the right spiritual motives. We, too, should work as for the Lord and not for people. Though we may chuckle over Dilbert cartoons and call ourselves "cubicle slaves" or "cogs in the machine," our work is yet another way in which we can live out the truth of the gospel of Christ.

Colossians 3:22—4:1

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. - Colossians 3:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

One day a man stopped at a construction site and asked the three workers he saw what they were doing. The first man said he was cutting stones for the building, just as he had been told to do. The second worker said he was working so he could get a check and pay his bills. But the third worker pointed up toward the unfinished building and said, "I'm building a cathedral for the worship of God."

Some people think it's easy for preachers to say they're doing their work for God's glory. But all of us should view our employment that way. The apostle Paul told Christian slaves to serve their masters as if they were serving Jesus Himself--because that's exactly what they were doing.

You might find it a little uncomfortable to realize that the closest New Testament analogy to the employer-employee relationship is slaves and masters. But the evils of slavery aside, it was in fact one of the main means of employment for people in the first century. The wisdom of God's Word is evident in these timeless principles that apply to any setting.

Besides, it doesn't matter which side of the labor-management line you're on, because we're all slaves of Jesus Christ. Believing slaves who served their masters as if serving Christ experienced a special liberation, the freedom to serve the Lord to the best of their ability.

We need that liberating freedom as we go to work today. If we're just working for "the boss," we've got our focus in the wrong place. If Christian employers and business owners think of themselves as rulers of their own kingdom, they need a new vision of their "Master in heaven."

One reason the Bible commands us to serve God with all our hearts is that He is a very gracious employer. God rewards faithful service, whether it's on the assembly line or in the manager's office. So we don't have to worry about fighting for every penny coming to us.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Moody's former president George Sweeting tells of a business friend of D. L. Moody's who owned a meat packing plant. When asked what he did for a living, the man would answer, "I serve Jesus, but I pack pork to pay expenses."

MULTIPLE DEVOTIONALS COLOSSIANS 3

United in Christ's Resurrection by W. H. G. Thomas

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

The apostle first calls attention to his readers having been "raised together with Christ" (ASV). The English word "if" is employed here

in its sense of "since"--"in view of," and the verb is in the indicative mood, so that Paul is clearly assuming this resurrection as a fact, admittance of no doubt. That is to say, these Christians were raised spiritually when Christ was raised physically; and this identification was the foundation of their spiritual position. The resurrection is variously presented in the New Testament as at once a proof, a pattern, a power, a promise, and a pledge. It is the proof of our acceptance of Christ's death and of our acceptance with Him (Rom. 4:24-25): it is to be the pattern of our holy life (Rom. 6:4); it is also the power for Christian character and service (Eph. 1:18-20); it contains the promise of our own physical resurrection (1 Thess. 4:14); and it is the pledge of our life hereafter (John 14:19). In the present passage our resurrection is associated with Christ's because we are united with Him in such a way that, whatever He did, we are regarded by God the Father as having done also (2:12; Rom. 6:8).

Habit Trails of the Soul by Tony Beckett and Woodrow Kroll

Isaiah 37-38, Colossians 3

Key Verses: Colossians 3:1-2

Show me three things and I can probably tell what is important to you: your checkbook, your calendar and your home. The first will show me what you do with your money, the things that you value enough to spend your earnings attaining. The second will show me what you do with your time, that in spite of how busy you might be, these are things for which you still find time. The third will show me your interests. Items accumulated or displayed, even the books and magazine on a coffee table, can reveal your interests.

The things that we devote time and money to have captured our minds and our hearts. Thinking about and being involved in those things results in habit trails developing in our souls. We just seem to keep returning to those thoughts, those things.

First and foremost in our habit trails needs to be the things of God, the things of above. Paul tells us to set both our hearts and minds on things above. It is easier, more natural, to think about and love earthly things. After all, we can see them, hold them, collect them--love and think about them. Yet that is exactly what we are to do with the things of God--love and think about them, not totally to the exclusion of other things, but with a priority.

As we discipline our hearts and minds to fall in love with and think about what God teaches us from His Word, this will happen. Consider your habit trails. Are they of things above or below?

A good first step is Bible memory. Memorize Colossians 3:1-2. Then ask God to help you develop heavenly habit trails.

Everyone's Responsibility by Mary Wilder Tileston

Your life is hid with Christ in God.--COLOSSIANS 3:3

Put on therefore a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving each other; even as the Lord forgave you so also do ye.

--COLOSSIANS 3:12-13 (R. V.)

IT is not the deed we do,
Though the deed be never so fair,
But the love that the dear Lord looketh for,
Hidden with holy care
In the heart of the deed so fair.

--HARRIET MCEWEN KIMBALL

THESE are duties which belong to us alike, whatever our outward lot be, whether rich or poor, honored or despised, amid outward joys or sorrows. For as our life is hidden in Christ, so have we all an outward and an inward, a hidden life. Outwardly, we seem busied for the most part about common things, with trivial duties, worthless tasks. Inwardly we are, or ought to be, studying how, in all, to please God, walking in His sight, doing them in His Presence, seeking to know how He would have them done. So amid trivial things we may be, nay men are, in every station of life, pleasing God, that is, leading angels' lives, in that they are doing His will on earth, as the angels in heaven. They are "servants of His, doing His pleasure."

--EDWARD B. PUSEY

Constant Presence by Thomas R. Kelly

"...your life is hid with Christ in God"

(Col. 3:3).

There is a way of life so hid with Christ in God that in the midst of the day's business one is inwardly lifting brief prayers, short ejaculations of praise, subdued whispers of adoration and of tender love to the Beyond that is within. No one need know about it. I only speak to you because it is a sacred trust, not mine but to be given to others. One can live in a well-nigh continuous state of unworded prayer, directed toward God, directed toward people and enterprises we have on our heart. There is no hurry about it all; it is a life unspeakable and full of glory, an inner world of splendor within which we, unworthy may live. Some of you know it and live in it; others of you may wistfully long for it; it can be yours.

Practicing Your Position by Theodore Epp

Colossians 3:5-11

It is wonderful to realize that, as believers, we live by the power of Christ's resurrection life. As we do this, we are letting Christ live again in the sense that He is living out His life through us.

This is what Paul desired for the Ephesian believers, for he prayed that they might know "what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:19,20).

This ties in beautifully with Paul's statement in Colossians 1:27: "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

It must be remembered that we are not robots, operated by push buttons. We are beings with the power of choice, and we must decide to apply these truths to ourselves.

God wants us to surrender to Him as an act of faith. When we do this, God works on our behalf. This is not necessarily only a New Testament truth. The psalmist wrote: "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass" (Ps. 37:5).

Philippians 2:12 and Galatians 5:16 also indicate that we are to work out the salvation that has been worked within us and that we are to live by means of the Spirit.

Paul stressed to the believers in Colosse--and to us--that, as a result of their standing in Christ, they had a great responsibility to "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

"For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

The Life That Is New by Theodore Epp

Colossians 3:5-11

In Colossians 3:10,11 Paul revealed three truths about those who have put on the new man.

First, they have a divine nature. Each person who trusts Christ as Saviour has "put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (v. 10).

It is not just that a person wants a new nature--he has a new nature. We translate our position into daily living as we say yes to Christ and no to sin.

Second, those who have trusted Christ as Saviour also have a new unity: "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free" (v. 11).

The new unity transcends all races, social positions, cultural differences--even economic and political status. Such distinctions belong to the old man, not to the new man.

And because God makes no distinctions between the categories mentioned in verse 11, neither should we who know Jesus Christ as Saviour.

Third, those who have trusted Jesus Christ have a new relationship: "Christ is all, and in all" (v. 11). This is a new relationship where Christ is in absolute control.

Is Christ in control of your life? Not just in control of something, but is He in control of all things? Is He truly "all, and in all"?

"And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:22).

Overflowing Kindness by Frederick William Faber

"Put on therefore, as the elect of God ... kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering..." (Col. 3:12).

We must first ask ourselves what kindness is. Words, which we are using constantly soon cease to have much distinct meaning in our minds. They become symbols and figures rather than words, and we content ourselves with the general impression they make upon us. Now let us be a little particular about kindness, and describe it as accurately as we can. Kindness is the overflowing of self upon others. We put others in the place of self. We treat them as we would wish to be treated ourselves. We change places with them. For the time self is another, and others are self. Our self love takes the shape of complacency in unselfishness.

We cannot speak of the virtues without thinking of God. What would the overflow of self upon others be in Him the Ever-blessed and Eternal? It was the act of creation. Creation was divine kindness. From it as from a fountain, flow the possibilities, the powers, the blessings of all created kindness. This is an honourable genealogy for kindness. Then, again, kindness is the coming to the rescue of others, when they need it and it is in our power to supply what they need; and this is the work of the Attributes of God towards His creatures. His omnipotence is for ever making up our deficiency of power. His justice is continually correcting our erroneous judgments. His mercy is always consoling our fellow-creatures under our hardheartedness. His truth is perpetually hindering the consequences of our falsehood. His omniscience makes our ignorance succeed as if it were knowledge. His perfections are incessantly coming to the rescue of our imperfections. This is the definition of Providence; and kindness is our imitation of this divine action.

God's Kindness by Theodore Epp

Colossians 3:12; Titus 3:1-7

The believer is to put on "kindness" (Col. 3:12). This refers to a gentle, gracious disposition.

When I think of this quality, a particular godly leader comes to mind. Years ago another leader in the area did him much harm and sought to ruin his reputation. In a board meeting with this godly leader some of us expressed concern about what this other person was doing to him.

This godly leader then made a statement I shall never forget: "I have determined in my heart to show love and kindness toward this Christian leader with all that I have." And he did. This is what kindness is all about.

A biblical illustration of showing kindness is seen from the life of David. The former king, Saul, had despised David and sought to kill him several times.

But David never took advantage of Saul; in fact, Saul's son Jonathan became his closest friend. After the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, David asked, "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (2 Sam. 9: 1).

It was then brought to David's attention that Jonathan had a crippled son, Mephibosheth (v. 3). David sent for Mephibosheth, and 2 Samuel 9 concludes by saying, "So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king's table; and was lame on both his feet" (v. 13).

In addition to providing for Mephibosheth continually, David also restored to him the land that had been confiscated from Saul. This was true kindness in action.

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32).

Show Love by Mrs. Charles E. Cowman

"Put on as the elect of God, kindness" (Col. 3:12).

There is a story of an old man who carried a little can of oil with him everywhere he went, and if he passed through a door that squeaked, he poured a little oil on the hinges. If a gate was hard to open, he oiled the latch. And thus he passed through life lubricating all hard places and making it easier for those who came after him.

People called him eccentric, queer, and cranky; but the old man went steadily on refilling his can of oil when it became empty, and oiled the hard places he found.

There are many lives that creak and grate harshly as they live day by day. Nothing goes right with them. They need lubricating with the oil of gladness, gentleness, or thoughtfulness. Have you your own can of oil with you? Be ready with your oil of helpfulness in the early morning to the one nearest you. It may lubricate the whole day for him. The oil, of good cheer to the downhearted one--Oh, how much it may mean! The word of courage to the despairing. Speak it.

Our lives touch others but once, perhaps, on the road of life; and then, mayhap, our ways diverge, never to meet again, The oil of kindness has worn the sharp, hard edges off of many a sin-hardened life and left it soft and pliable and ready for the redeeming grace of the Saviour.

A word spoken pleasantly is a large spot of sunshine on a sad heart. Therefore, "Give others the sunshine, tell Jesus the rest."

"We cannot know the grief
That men may borrow;
We cannot see the souls
Storm-swept by sorrow;
But love can shine upon the way
Today, tomorrow;
Let us be kind.
Upon the wheel of pain so many weary lives are
broken,
We live in vain who give no tender token.
Let us be kind."

"Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love" (Rom. 12:10).

Meekness:Strength Under Control by Theodore Epp

Numbers 12:3; Galatians 5:22,23; Colossians 3:12

In reviewing Isaac's life, we should also take special note of his spirit of meekness. All through his life his temperament was of a passive nature rather than of an active or aggressive nature.

In childhood he was subjected to the insults of Ishmael, but there is no record that he became angry about them. As a young man he was taken to Mount Moriah to be offered as a sacrifice, and in meekness he surrendered and made himself available.

He did not even choose his own wife, as she was chosen for him through his father's arrangements and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Isaac also accepted the rebuke of Abimelech in meekness. There were no reprisals. He and his men yielded whenever they were wrongly driven away from the wells they had redug.

Isaac's meek spirit brought forth praise from even his enemies. They testified concerning his great power and might and their realization that the Lord was with him.

The world thinks little of meekness, yet it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:23). The Apostle Paul urged all Christians: "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand" (Phil. 4:5).

Meekness involves the self-sacrifice of our own desires and interests. Because Isaac gladly gave up his own personal desires, it pleased God to refer to Himself as "the God of Isaac."

"For thus saith the Lord God,... In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength" (Isa. 30:15).

Turn Your Eyes Out by Mary Wilder Tileston

Put on therefore, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving each

other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye.

COLOSSIANS 3:12,13 (R. V.)

THE discord is within, which jars

So sadly in life's song;

'Tis we, not they who are in fault,

When others seem so wrong.

FREDERICK WM. FABER

SELF-PREOCCUPATION, self-broodings, self-interest, self-love,--these are the reasons why you go jarring against your fellows. Turn your eyes off yourself; look up, and out! There are men, your brothers, and women, your sisters; they have needs that you can aid. Listen for their confidences; keep your heart wide open to their calls, and your hands alert for their service. Learn to give, and not to take; to drown your own hungry wants in the happiness of lending yourself to fulfil the interests of those nearest or dearest. Look up and out, from this narrow, cabined self of yours, and you will jar no longer; you will fret no more, you will provoke no more; but you will, to your own glad surprise, find the secret of "the meekness and the gentleness of Jesus"; and the fruits of the Spirit will all bud and blossom from out of your life.

Beware of False Peace! by Theodore Epp

Colossians 3:13-17

We must beware of false peace. Some who do wrong may have a peace about it, but it does not come from God. As someone has said, "Peace of heart alone is not always the peace of God."

A significant test to apply to determine the origin of the peace is this: If I have peace in my heart about a matter, do I also have peace with others in the Body of Christ concerning it?

Understandably, not everyone will agree on any single issue, but if only the person himself thinks he is right, he has reason to question his decision. If we are out of the will of God, we will bring discord and disharmony to the Body of true believers.

I realize the difficulty in assessing who is a true believer, especially in a group situation. Sometimes those who are part of the group do not evidence salvation themselves.

Other times, some may clearly evidence salvation but give little evidence of mature judgment in things related to the Christian life.

One of the best safeguards against a false peace is simply making sure that you have the desire to please Jesus Christ in all that you do.

If it is your concern "that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18), you can trust Him to bring conviction and a lack of peace when your life is not honoring to Him.

"Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Ps. 119:165).

Religion That Changes Us by Mary Wilder Tileston

And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness. --COLOSSIANS 3:14 (R. V.)

THOU hatest hatred's withering reign;

In souls that discord maketh dark

Dost Thou rekindle love's bright spark,

And make them one again.

--PAUL GERHARDT

WE have cause to suspect our religion if it does not make us gentle, and forbearing, and forgiving; if the love of our Lord does not so flood our hearts as to cleanse them of all bitterness, and spite, and wrath. If a man is nursing anger, if he is letting his mind become a nest of foul passions, malice, and hatred, and evil wishing, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

--HUGH BLACK

Love me always, boy, whatever I do or leave undone. And--God help me--whatever you do or leave undone, I'll love you. There shall never be a cloud between us for a day; no, sir, not for an hour. We're imperfect enough, all of us, we needn't be so bitter; and life is uncertain enough at its safest, we needn't waste its opportunities.

--JULIANA HORATIA EWING

Inner Peace by Mary Wilder Tileston

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to the which also ye were called in one body; and be ye thankful.

COLOSSIANS 3:15 (R. V.)

MAY faith, deep rooted in the soul,
Subdue our flesh, our minds control;
May guile depart, and discord cease,
And all within be joy and peace.
ST. AMBROSE

THE repose, the quiet balanced rest which marks our Lord's perfected life, is intended to grow more and more steadfast in those who are truly His; not the repose of indolence, not the calm arising from absence of trial and lack of temptation, a mere accidental freedom from inward struggle or difficulty, but the repose which lives in the conquest of passion, in the crucifixion of self, in a subdued will, in the reconciliation of every thought with a perfected obedience, as the whole inner being, entranced in God, yields itself in delighted harmony with His perfect mind. Such repose is attained through the continual progress of a life of grace, as it gradually overcomes the restlessness of nature, the excitements of self, the disturbance of temper or passion, the fruitless impatience of the will.

T. T. CARTER

Peace, when "ruling" the heart and "ruling" the mind, opens in both every avenue of joy.

SARAH W. STEPHEN

The Arbiter is Peace by Elisabeth Elliot Col 3:15

When there are disputes or differences of any sort between people, there are four possible results: estrangement, an armed truce, compromise, or reconciliation. The first of these is the reason for a good many divorces. The second accounts for many unhappy marriages. The third may seem the best that can be hoped for. The fourth is what Christians are called to, always. In marital disputes, or those between labor and management, an arbiter is sometimes called in, often after much wrangling and bitterness. An arbiter has absolute power to judge and decide.

There is another arbiter, too often forgotten. "Let Christ's peace be arbiter in your hearts; to this peace you were called" (Col 3:15 NEB).

Wouldn't it make an astonishing difference in our fellowship with one another if we would let that peace arbitrate, if we would remember the promised parting gift of Christ, "My peace I give you," and the command to live at peace with all?

But, we ask, how? How does it work? The context in Colossians shows us:

You are God's chosen race, his saints; he loves you, and you should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other as soon as a quarrel begins. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, to keep them together and complete them, put on love. (Col 3:12-14 JB)

Are we willing to follow Him here? He will help us if we are. He will calm the troubled waters.

The Peace of God in Our Hearts by W. H. G. Thomas

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts..." (Col. 3:15).

What does the peace of Christ do? Primarily it gives assurance of acceptance with God (cf. Rom. 5:1), and the protection of God (cf. Phil. 4:7, Gr., "shall garrison," a paradoxical use of a warlike term). But here Christ's peace is to be received into the heart as the arbiter deciding the course and ruling the life (Gr., "umpire"). A similar idea and practically the same Greek word is found in 2:18, as we have seen, where the apostle is warning his readers not to let anyone judicially deprive them of their reward as though they were unworthy. This word, translated here "rule," suggests that which settles differences, especially where there is any conflict of thoughts and feelings. Under such circumstances "the peace of Christ" is to decide; and if it be asked how peace is able to do this perhaps the explanation is that just as peace with God is the result of our acceptance of Christ as Savior (Rom. 5:1), so the experience of peace in the soul, in union with Christ and through the presence of the Holy Spirit, will at once settle every difficulty, resolve every conflict, and show us what is the will of God. In this case there is a special reason for such divine peace--the essential unity of the body of Christ, the Church, and to this peace, we are told, every believer has been called. When we are one with Christ, in whom God "called us with an holy calling" (2 Tim. 1:9), and also one with Christians, "called in one body," as Paul says here, there is no question as to the great power of divine peace in our lives. We read of "government and peace" (Isa. 9:7), of "righteousness and

peace" (Ps. 85:10; cf. Isa. 32:17), and of "grace...and peace" (Titus 1:4). Until these prevail universally, however, "the God of peace himself" (1 Thess. 5:23, ASV) will be with us, keeping us meanwhile "in perfect peace" (Isa. 26:3).

Within You by Robert S. Candlish

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly ?" (Col. 3:16).

Let the word of Christ so dwell in you. Let it be Christ himself, dwelling in you; Christ himself, the living word. Let his word, or himself the word, dwell in you richly; moulding, fashioning, vivifying, regulating, your whole inner man; all its powers, faculties, affections; its susceptibilities and sensibilities; its movements of will. Let his word, let himself in his word, give his own tone and temper to all your emotions of joy and sorrow; of fear, or anxiety or love, or hope. Let all within you be thus imbued, not stiffly and artificially, but spontaneously and gladly, with the word of Christ dwelling in you richly by the Spirit; and so becoming Christ himself dwelling in you as the word of life. Then, let there go forth from you, not stiffly and artificially, but spontaneously and gladly and lovingly, streams of overflowing benignity and benevolence; rich and gracious influences of holy zeal and love and joy; to the glory of God, celebrated in songs of praise; and the edifying of the church, in wise teaching and admonition.

Do All Things For Jesus' Sake by Mary Wilder Tileston

Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.
COLOSSIANS 3:17

YEA, through life, death, through sorrow and through sinning,
He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed:
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning;
Christ the beginning for the end is Christ.

F. W. H. MYERS

LET this be thy whole endeavor, this thy prayer, this thy desire,--that thou mayest be stripped of all selfishness, and with entire simplicity follow Jesus only.

THOMAS À. KEMPIS

Do what is pleasing to Jesus Christ, and neglect nothing which pleases Him.

LORENZO SCUPOLI

To "do all things in the name of Jesus" is the lesson of a life; do not be angry with yourselves, nor despair of ever learning it, because thou art slow to learn the first few syllables. When thou hast learned to do all things to Jesus, it will shed pleasure over all dull things, softness over all hard things, peace over all trial and woe and suspense. Then will life be glad, when thou livest to Jesus; and how sweet death, to die in Jesus; with Him, and to Him, and in Him, to live for evermore.

E. B. PUSEY

Colossians 3:17

Practicing God's Principles by Theodore Epp

Proverbs 3:1-8

God has given us some basic principles to guide us in any situation. One of these is 1 Corinthians 10:31: "Do all to the glory of God." We cannot sin to the glory of God. Let us be sure that whatever we do is for His glory.

Another principle is Ephesians 5:20: "Giving thanks always for all things." If we cannot thank the Lord while we are doing a certain thing, then we should not do it. At the same time, let us be thankful Christians for all God does for us.

A third principle is Colossians 3:17: "Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Suppose you wonder, Should I go to this place? Could you go there in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ?

A fourth principle is Philippians 4:6: "In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." We are to pray about everything.

If we cannot do what we plan to do for the glory of God, if we cannot give thanks for it, if we cannot do it in His name, if we would not

feel right in praying about it, then we should not do it.

This means we must be saturated with the Word of God so that the Holy Spirit can bring the Word to our remembrance to guide us through every phase of life.

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

Serve His Will by Mary Wilder Tileston

And, whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.

COLOSSIANS 3:23

IF you love Him as I want you to do, you will offer Him the whole use of your day, as you open your eyes to the light of each morning, to be spent in active service or silent suffering, according to His good pleasure. You will not select the most agreeable task, but His task, whatever it may be; you will not disdain humble service, or be ambitious for distinguished service; you will lie, like a straw, on the current of His will, to be swept away and be forgotten, if it pleases Him, or to be caught up by His mighty hand and transformed thereby into a thunderbolt.

ELIZABETH PRENTISS

Let us pray Him, therefore, to shed abroad in us the mind that was in Christ; that we may offer up our-selves to be disposed of as He sees best, whether for joy or sorrow; to be slighted, or esteemed; to have many friends, or to dwell in a lonely home; to be passed by, or called to serve Him and His kingdom in our own land, or among people of a strange tongue; to be, to go, to do, to suffer even as He wills, even as He ordains, even as Christ endured, "who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God."

HENRY EDWARD MANNING

Colossians 3:23-24

Women in the Work World by Elisabeth Elliot

Because I want to be faithful to what Scripture does say I often refer to that passage which tells me, as an older woman, what I am supposed to say to younger women: Titus 2:3-5. But, they want to know, is it wrong for a single mother to work? Is it wrong for a woman who has no children at home to work? Is it wrong for a woman to work because her husband insists on it? The last question is not quite so difficult, since a wife must submit and trust the results to God. I cannot answer the first two. So, for you who so far have found it necessary to work I want to offer some encouragement and comfort.

"My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19, NIV). Just remember that God must be the judge of your needs. Being wise, powerful and loving, He can be fully trusted to do just what He says.

You only know what you have to do today. None of us knows the future. Be faithful today--do your work faithfully, thoroughly, honestly, and gratefully. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Colossians 3:23-24, NIV).

Be a lady. Betty Greene, pilot during World War II and later with Mission Aviation Fellowship, told me, "I made up my mind if I was to 'make it in a man's world,' I had to be a lady." A true lady is recognized and respected by men. Keep your honor, your distance, and your close touch with God. He will protect you.

If you are truly abandoned to the Lord, He will show you if/when He has a different assignment for you. Stay in touch with Him.

Colossians 4

Colossians 4:2 Ephesians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. - Colossians 4:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

O my God, since thou art with me, and I must now, in obedience to thy commands, apply my mind to these outward [tasks], I beseech thee to grant me the grace to continue in thy presence; and to this end do thou prosper me with thy assistance, receive all my works, and possess all my affections.—Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*

It's easy to dismiss Colossians 4:2 as a nice ideal but an impossible reality. For many the idea of praying unceasingly may call to mind desert hermits or medieval monks--an image hopelessly out of sync with everyday pressures. Today's prayer, however, was uttered by a very busy man who wanted to experience God's presence, even in his work place.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Brother Lawrence's approach is simple. Having first filled his mind with thoughts of God in private prayer, he proceeded to his work in the monastery's kitchen. "There ... he spent all the intervals of this time, as well before and after his work, in prayer... As he proceeded in his work he continued his familiar conversation with his Maker, imploring his grace, and offering to him all his actions."

Although his first attempts were difficult, Brother Lawrence eventually developed a "habitual, silent, and secret conversation of the soul with God." Many others, such as Oswald Chambers, Frank Laubach, C. S. Lewis, have described similar approaches.

Why not conduct a "prayer experiment" over the next few days? Using external prompts, such as your favorite color or notes posted throughout the house, utter short, one-sentence prayers of thanksgiving to your Heavenly Father each time you see the prompt.

When you become aware of needs or feel anxious about something, try one-word prayers, such as "safety" or "health." As you proceed, try to become more aware of Jesus' presence.

Colossians 4:2 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. - Colossians 4:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to a recent newspaper article, people are returning to the habit of praying in restaurants. The article cited a poll by the Princeton Survey Research Associates which found that sixty percent of people surveyed said they pray aloud before eating in public.

We should applaud any sign that people are practicing prayer in greater numbers. Those who regularly offer thanks for their food, no matter where they are, reveal a habit of the heart that Paul commands in these familiar verses.

But "'Pray continually'" (v. 17) seems like a stretch when you read it, doesn't it? The text does not, of course, demand us to spend twenty-four hours of every day on our knees.

But in seeking God's will for us in prayer, we need to be careful not to weaken the force of Paul's words. Verse 17 comes in the middle of a string of rapid-fire exhortations that help us understand his intent. We can pray continually in the same way that we can always be joyful.

We don't have to be smiling all the time to be characterized by joy. We all know people who emit joy the way the sun emits rays. They choose to live this way. The joy of Christ is the atmosphere that sustains them.

In the same way, God wants prayer to be the atmosphere we breathe, the attitude of our hearts. A person who lives in a continual attitude of prayer is someone who can give thanks in all circumstances (v. 18).

Does today's text suggest anything about how much we should pray? It sure does. Giving thanks in everything by itself is going to consume a good part of your time! And in special times of need or concern, you may literally find yourself praying continually in the sense that your prayer burden is never more than a heartbeat from your conscious thoughts.

Let's face it. Praying too much isn't a big problem for most of us. It's all that we can handle just to cultivate the prayer habit that God wants of us. But we have a prayer Helper in the Holy Spirit. Let's not "'put out'" the prayer fire He wants to kindle in us.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

One way to help develop a habit of prayer is to change some of our standard thinking.

For example, we usually treat the "'Amen'" at the end of our prayers like a period at the end of a sentence. In other words, prayer is over, so let's move on to the next thing. But instead of a period, try thinking of your "'amen'" as a comma--simply a pause in the conversation. You may have to go on to work or to your duties at home, but you can bring the atmosphere of your prayer place with you.

Colossians 4:2-4

Francis McDougall grew up overseas with a military father. After earning a medical degree in 1839, he worked at an ironworks, then was ordained in 1845. In 1847, he sailed from England for Borneo as a pioneering medical missionary. Francis and his wife, Harriette, ministered among three groups of people—the Muslim Malays who ruled Borneo, Chinese traders who had settled there, and the indigenous Dyak people. Though they faced difficulties such as severe illnesses and the deaths of their own children, they persevered in serving and were able to bring many people to the Lord.

Exploring the history of Christian missions is a great way to prepare ourselves to join the Colossians in praying for the spread of the gospel, as Paul requested in today's reading. The epistle is winding down and we've now come, as is often the case with Paul, to a hatful of concluding exhortations. The first is, "Devote yourselves to prayer" (v. 2). The spirit of prayer is both "watchful and thankful," that is, vigilant for the truth and grateful to God for His gifts of truth and grace.

Paul followed up his exhortation with specific prayer requests—that God would open doors for the gospel to spread, and that He would enable Paul and his team to proclaim it clearly when the opportunities came (vv. 3–4). Paul's missionary ambitions were pursued in submission to God's sovereignty. He understood that the worldwide spread of the gospel (1:6) was because of God's power and plan, not human activities. That's one reason why he wasn't worried about being in chains in Rome.

Not only was God in control, but the "mystery of Christ" for which he had been imprisoned was more than worth it.

In these circumstances, we might request prayer for physical freedom, but Paul didn't even mention it. The phrase "as I should" reflects his high sense of responsibility with regard to the sacred significance of his message. The matter uppermost on his mind was the truth of the gospel, both in his ministry and in the lives of the Colossian believers.

Apply the Word

Consider your personal prayer life. The verb "devote" (v. 2) indicates a habit or an ongoing orientation, not a one-time event but an attitude in which we persevere. Somewhere in our hearts and minds, as part of our growing spiritual maturity, prayer should always be happening (see 1 Thess. 5:17). If we're not sure what or how to pray, the prayers of Scripture make excellent models. For example, we might imitate Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9–12.

Colossians 4:3 Philippians 1:1-2

Pray ... that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. - Colossians 4:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Roman Empire encompassed most of the known civilized world in New Testament times. The city of Philippi, named after Philip II, father of Alexander the Great, was a prosperous city located in Macedonia. In fact, it was only ten miles from where Paul had landed when he responded to his Macedonian vision (Acts 16:6-10).

We know that Paul visited Philippi at least twice, on his second and third missionary journeys (Acts 16:11-40; 20:1-6). Lydia, the first Christian convert in Europe whom the Bible names, lived in Philippi and showed hospitality to Paul and his companions. Paul and Silas were imprisoned there briefly, but God released them through a miraculous earthquake. As a result, the jailer and his family trusted Christ!

That's the background for the book we're studying this month, Paul's letter to the Philippians. It was most likely written about 61 A.D., while Paul was imprisoned in Rome. At this time he was not actually in a jail—he was allowed to live under house arrest in rented quarters (see Acts 28:14-31). Although constantly guarded, he was free to spread the gospel and to write letters.

In the opening greeting to the Philippian church, Paul revealed the true identities of those in leadership. He called himself and Timothy "servants" (Phil. 1:1). Rather than use an impressive-sounding title or office, he chose the humble term of servant.

Equally important is how Paul addressed the Philippians—"saints." He was not referring to their "saintliness," for they were far from perfect. He was referring instead to their "set apartness"—the fact that God had chosen them for Himself (see Ephesians 1:4-5). He also specifically mentioned the overseers and deacons, the only time in his letters where church leaders are singled out in the "address."

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Thank you for embarking with us this month on what is sure to be an exciting book study. Paul's epistle to the Philippians holds key spiritual lessons, exhortations, and truths for today!

Colossians 4:5-6; Ephesians 5:15-18

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. - Colossians 4:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

The days between Christmas and New Year's are unlike any others. It usually takes several days for the glitter, the gifts, and the guests from Christmas to find their place. And just when we've dealt with that, we are faced with a new year. Since the holidays

often leave us a little fatigued, it's easy to coast through the final days of the year without giving them much thought.

We suggest another way to approach this important time of preparation: making the most of every opportunity God gives us to serve Him this week and strengthen our hearts for 1999.

We have some good studies ahead to help you do that, starting today as we turn back to the book of Colossians and finish Paul's powerful teaching on the supremacy of Christ. We'll stay with Paul the rest of the way, closing out the year with two special challenges from his writings. Who better to spend time with this week than the great apostle?

In the final chapter of Colossians, Paul is showing how Christ's Lordship in our lives should impact our relationships. His concern in verse 5 is the way our faith impacts 'outsiders,' unbelievers who are not yet members of Christ's body, the church.

Since Christians in Paul's day were a relatively new minority in a distinctly pagan world, it was critical for believers to 'make the teaching about God our Savior attractive' (Titus 2:10). That's important in every generation, of course, because our lives are either a magnet or a repellent when it comes to our witness before non-Christians.

The opportunities to communicate the gospel to those who don't yet know Christ and serve others in the body are abundant. We don't have to search for them. Our challenge is to make the most of the openings God brings our way.

Since God's kingdom opportunities can come at any time, we need wisdom to recognize them and react accordingly (see Eph. 5:15, 17). It's interesting that Paul mentioned our speech as a primary example of wise living (Col. 4:6). If we can use our tongues wisely in 1999, we're on our way to a great year!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

While many people struggle to control their speech through their own efforts, we have a divine helper who is ready to take control of our lips and our hearts.

'Be filled with the Spirit' (Eph. 5:18) is a foundational command and principle that can revolutionize your life in 1999. Notice that the very next words in verse 19 deal with the way we talk. The Holy Spirit can help us make our words 'full of grace.' Why not submit your heart to Him today, asking God to fill you with His love and power in the year ahead?

Colossians 4:5–6

Announced one news source: "The 36th week of 2009 will forever be known as 'Trout Week' in North America." What happened? Two world-record trout were caught in the same week! First, Sean Konrad caught a rainbow trout weighing 48 pounds from Lake Diefenbaker in Saskatchewan, Canada. He broke a record that had been held by his own twin brother. Four days later, Tom Healy caught a German brown trout weighing 41 pounds, 7 ounces from the Manistee River in Michigan, breaking a record that had stood for seventeen years.

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people" (Matt. 4:19). This is what Paul had in mind in today's reading. Just as he himself was committed to sharing the gospel, he wanted the Colossians to catch the same vision. The three imperative verbs in verses 5 and 6 boil down to an exhortation to witness. "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders" reminds us that the church is the body of Christ, His testimony to a watching world. As Jesus Himself

said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). Paul was cautioning the believers not to do anything such as follow false teachers or get sidetracked on sensationalistic controversies that would compromise their witness.

"Make the most of every opportunity" encourages the Colossians to be watchful and eager for the open doors Paul had mentioned two verses ago. Nothing should stop them from proclaiming Christ—and coming from a man in prison, that exhortation meant a lot!

"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt" is a good idea in general, but an excellent idea when it comes to witnessing and apologetics. When we're questioned about our faith, we need to know "how to answer everyone" in ways that stand firm for the truth but are at the same time gracious and polite (cf. 1 Peter 3:15–16). "Seasoned with salt" means that we share the gospel with winsomeness, not a contentious spirit.

Apply the Word

Once we truly grasp the mystery of God's revelation in Christ, we can't wait to share this good news with others! We who've been rescued from the "dominion of darkness" into Christ's "kingdom of light" have been given the joyful responsibility of telling others how it happened. Pray for an opportunity to share the gospel with a colleague, neighbor, or loved one soon. Pray that God will prepare your heart and your speech to be full of grace as you testify about His saving work.

Colossians 4:7–9

In early 2011, the United States Postal Service (USPS) was near financial collapse. In the first quarter alone, the USPS reported losses of \$2.2 billion, and it was expected to lose \$7 billion by the end of the year. It did even worse in 2010, losing \$8.5 billion, and has lost about \$20 billion since 2007. The future looks no brighter, as additional losses of \$42 billion over the next four years are predicted. The USPS cut jobs, closed offices, and called for a federal bailout, pointing out that it carries an estimated 171 billion pieces of mail annually, or about 40 percent of the world's total mail.

Unless things improve, one of these days we, like Paul, might need to ask friends to deliver our mail! As Colossians continues to wind down, Paul next conveyed personal news and greetings (v. 8). Two friends and ministry partners, Tychicus and Onesimus, were delivering this letter to Colossae. Tychicus is described in both personal and professional terms as “a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord” (v. 7). Not much else is known about him, except that he was Asian and accompanied Paul on his missionary journey through Macedonia and Greece (see Acts 20:4). His name also turns up in the epistles of Ephesians, 2 Timothy, and Titus.

Somewhat more is known about Onesimus (v. 9). A runaway slave who had stolen from his master, Philemon, he had headed to Rome in order to disappear into the urban crowds. Instead, he was converted through Paul's ministry and became one of Paul's companions.

To treat Onesimus as a friend was a revolutionary step, since runaway slaves could expect no mercy in that society. Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon, who was a fellow believer and apparently part of the Colossian church. In his brief epistle to Philemon, Paul pleaded for his friend's freedom, but he wanted Philemon to do the right thing on his own, not by apostolic command. No doubt this situation was on Paul's mind when he wrote the commands studied on February 23.

Apply the Word

Before trusting Christ Paul was a zealous and legalistic Pharisee (Phil. 3:5–6). When he met the Lord on the road to Damascus, his life was transformed. Instead of persecuting believers, he began planting churches. Instead of observing ethnic and cultural boundaries, he burst through them. His former friends must have been shaking their heads—a rabbi befriending a runaway Gentile slave? In Christ, Paul had discovered the power of genuine friendship (Prov. 17:17).

Colossians 4:7-10

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. - Romans 12:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

When he was criticized on several occasions for not exercising 'more vigorous leadership' as president, Dwight Eisenhower had an interesting response. The idea that all power rested in one person, and that the president could do it all alone, was 'baloney,' Eisenhower said. 'We must work together.'

As a lifelong soldier, 'Ike' knew the value of teamwork and cooperation in reaching a goal. Paul was a team player, too a wonderful example of someone who valued his fellow believers and didn't try to do the job alone.

Paul's heart for his coworkers is really on display in the closing verses of Colossians. Paul concluded many of his letters with personal greetings and instructions. The temptation for us is to hurry through these sections, the way we might do when we're reading a biblical genealogy.

But that would be a mistake, because the people around Paul have much to teach us about the Christian life. Tychicus (vv. 7-8) is a good example of this. He was one of the men to whom Paul entrusted the delivery of the Colossian letter. That was a major assignment, not just a messenger service, given the value of this Spirit-inspired epistle.

Acts 20:1-4 reveals that Tychicus also faced life-threatening circumstances as one of Paul's companions. Let's pray that in 1999 we might have the dependability and courage of Tychicus.

Another name mentioned in Paul's final greetings, Onesimus, should be familiar. He was the former runaway slave and thief who was the subject of Paul's letter to Philemon. Put Onesimus with Mark (v. 10), who had deserted the apostle (Acts 15:36-40) but eventually made up for it with his work of Christ, and there's encouragement enough for anyone to keep trying.

Aristarchus is the other name in today's reading. He was imprisoned along with Paul in Rome at the time of this letter. What an encouragement this man must have been to Paul! We can be challenged and motivated by Aristarchus's willingness to 'endure hardship' for the sake of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:3).

No one could accuse Paul of trying to do it all by himself. He needed every fellow worker God gave him, just as we need our fellow believers today.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

One way you can express appreciation and value to others is by your faithfulness in saying 'thank you' for the gifts and greetings you received during Christmas.

Most people consider thank-you notes to be just a social nicety. What about approaching this year's Christmas thank-you's as an opportunity to express your love for valued friends and share a blessing with them? An extra sentence or two on a note will only take a minute but your thoughtfulness could encourage someone for a long time!

Colossians 4:10–15

Joseph Stowell, president of Cornerstone University, wrote of his friend, Duane Litfin, retired president of Wheaton College: "Dr. Duane Litfin is without a doubt my best friend. I will be forever grateful that, in the providence of God, our journeys merged early on. For years Duane's friendship has been a treasured source of timely encouragement, shared wisdom, mind-probing and provocative interactions, and lots of fun. Many years ago, while browsing through an antique store with our wives in Marshall, Michigan, Duane and I spotted two bronze statues, the kind of small statues that you might see in a library. We decided to buy them, naming one of them David and the other Jonathan. We exchange them each Christmas as an expression of the delightful bond that our friendship provides."

Godly friendships, especially in ministry, are a gift from God, as Paul also knew. In today's verses, he passed on greetings from several friends (vv. 10–14) and sent additional greetings to the nearby church in Laodicea (v. 15).

Paul listed three Jewish friends (Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus) and three Gentile friends (Epaphras, Luke, and Demas). Aristarchus was a "fellow prisoner" and part of Paul's ministry over a period of many years, including the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19), the missionary journey to Europe (Acts 20), and the shipwreck en route to Rome (Acts 27). Mark was the cousin of Barnabas and a successful "reclamation project" following a poor showing on his first missionary journey (Acts 15:36–41). We don't know the full story, but he had clearly regained Paul's trust by this time.

Luke we know as a doctor and as the historian-author of Luke and Acts. Demas, unfortunately, later betrayed the gospel (2 Tim. 4:10). Epaphras, as we've mentioned, was the founder and pastor of the church at Colossae and perhaps also the churches at Laodicea and Hierapolis (cf. 1:7). Since he was the one who had likely brought Paul the information concerning the false teachers, he merited a longer description as "wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured" (v. 12).

Apply the Word

Paul saw great value and experienced great joy in these friends and ministry partners who were able to be with him during his Roman imprisonment. The bonds of brotherhood in Christ transcended racial and religious barriers. Throughout Scripture, the power of godly friendships and mentoring relationships is an ongoing theme, including Moses and Joshua, David and Jonathan, Jesus and His disciples, and Paul and his team. May we follow their example!

Colossians 4:11-14

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. - Hebrews 13:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

Few Christian leaders in any generation have suffered the criticism, attacks, and outright slander that Charles Spurgeon endured. Some of this was inevitable, since Spurgeon was a world-renowned preacher and the leading pastor of his day in England. Much like the apostle Paul's enemies, Spurgeon's critics attacked his gospel message and accused him of self-seeking motives. During one stressful period, Spurgeon wrote to a friend: 'Friends firm. Enemies alarmed. Devil angry. Sinners saved. Christ exalted. Self not well.'

Paul could have written these same words from his cell in Rome. We want to focus on the firm faithfulness of his friends in the ministry, and encourage you to be this kind of friend and blessing to your spiritual leaders in the year ahead.

One of Paul's dear friends was a man named Jesus, a common Jewish name in that day. This man was also known as Justus, one of Paul's three Jewish companions along with Mark and Aristarchus. Justus and these other two were such a 'comfort' to Paul that the apostle used an unusual word to describe them. These men were literally a 'relief' to Paul.

We learned early in this study that Epaphras was probably the founder of the church at Colosse (Col. 1:7). Like Onesimus, Epaphras was one of the Colossians, a faithful minister of Christ who loved his fellow Christians so much he was 'wrestling' for them in prayer (4:12).

Epaphras knew the Colossians (and their Lycus Valley neighbors in Laodicea and Hierapolis, v. 13), needed to resist the false teachers and stand firm in Christ. His heartbeat for these believers was the same as Paul's.

We know this because the apostle used the same word, translated 'wrestling' in 4:12, to describe his own efforts in Colosse ('struggling,' 1:29). And just as Epaphras prayed and worked hard to help the Colossians stand firm in their faith, this was Paul's desire for them as well (2:5).

Luke was another dear friend who supported Paul. The apostle's friends were firm with the sad exception of Demas, who folded in the heat of battle and later deserted Paul for 'this world' (2 Tim. 4:10).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We're convinced you want to stand firm and not fold when it comes to supporting your spiritual leaders in the new year.

You can make that commitment today by resolving to pray for your pastor and other leaders on a regular basis in 1999. It might help to designate a particular day each month when you will pray for these men and women. You could even go ahead and mark this day on each month's page of your 1999 calendar. The regular reminder will help you keep an important commitment.

Colossians 4:15-18

Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. - 1 Thessalonians 5:11

TODAY IN THE WORD

A Christian college student in China who was able to get a Bible reported an incredible desire among the other dorm residents to see and read the precious book. The hunger was so great that each person was only allowed to borrow the Bible for a certain number of hours because someone else was eagerly waiting for a turn to read and memorize as much of God's Word as possible.

Can you imagine all the churches in your community trying to share one copy of the Scriptures among themselves? It's safe to say that people would listen very carefully to the reading of Scripture when it was their church's turn to borrow the precious book.

Such was the situation in the first-century church. There was only one original of the Colossian letter, hand-delivered to the church by Tychicus and Onesimus with Paul's express wish that it be read aloud to the church. This was the primary way God's Word was communicated for hundreds of years.

In this case, Paul had a further word from the Lord for the Colossians. It was contained in a letter he had written to the Laodiceans a circular letter that many Bible teachers believe was Ephesians. Whatever the case, these two groups of Christians were instructed to exchange letters (v. 16) and double the benefit of Paul's revelation to the church.

Paul had a few more people in Colosse to address, including a man named Archippus. He may have been the son of Philemon (Phile. 2), and was a leader in the Colossian church. For some reason, Archippus was not completing his ministry which was important if the believers at Colosse were to be completed or brought to 'perfect' maturity in Christ (Col. 1:28).

Paul then closed with a personal word of greeting to authenticate the letter, and a prayer for God's grace to be with the Colossians. He summarized his own situation with the simple request, 'Remember my chains.' Not much more needed to be said, since the Colossians would understand what this meant.

We're finished with Colossians, but not with December. As we get ready to make the final turn in the Christian race for this year, let's pray that God will help us finish well.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Back on December 1, we encouraged you to read all of Colossians in one sitting and mark key passages.

Now that we have completed our study, why not read these four chapters again today before moving on? If you didn't mark key passages in your earlier reading, you may want to do so now especially those verses God used in your life. Try reading Colossians as if your Bible were the only one available, and you had to give it back in a few hours!

Colossians 4:16-17

Reading Scripture aloud seems to be a slowly vanishing art. Many churches don't do it, instead opting to project the biblical text onscreen. In others, the Scripture reading is merely a brief interlude between the offering and the sermon. If this seems regrettable, you might be interested in The Word of Promise Audio Bible. Famous actors such as Richard Dreyfuss and Marisa Tomei employed their voice talents to bring Bible stories and characters to life. The script is the New King James Version of the Bible, with professional voices, original music, and sound effects used to create a theater-quality sound production 90 hours long.

Paul's epistle to the Colossians was originally communicated to the church via public readings. They didn't have photocopiers, of course, nor could the Apostle just post it on his blog. Instead, once his friends Tychicus and Onesimus had delivered the letter, it would have been read aloud to the congregation. After that, Paul instructed, they should trade letters with the church at Laodicea (v. 16). Colossae was perhaps ten miles up the Lycus River from Laodicea, with Hierapolis another dozen or so miles away on the other side. For Epaphras to pastor in all three cities would not have required too much travel.

The Laodicean letter has not survived, leaving behind a tantalizing mystery about what Paul wrote. This is also a lesson for us concerning the inspiration of Scripture and the process of canonization (figuring out which books were part of the Bible). Here we see epistles written at the same time by the same apostle to neighboring churches, delivered at the same time by the same people, and yet only one of them is God's inspired Word. Had the other letter been as well, the Holy Spirit would have preserved it for us.

Paul's message to Archippus to "complete the ministry you have received in the Lord" is direct but not specific, so we don't know the exact nature of the work he was called to do (v. 17). We do know, however, that he was urged to continue being faithful to the ministry he was given by God.

Apply the Word

"Complete the ministry" is good advice for all believers! And we have the complementary assurance from Philippians 1:6: "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion." God is working in us just as He calls us to work for Him—all to the glory of His purposes. Thank Him for His ongoing work in your life, and commit to faithfully pursuing the work He was given you.

Colossians 4:18

Last March, 13,266 teachers and students at the University of Santo Tomas in the Philippines set a Guinness World Record for making the largest human cross ever assembled. They stood inside marked-out areas, wearing black or white clothing depending on which area of the design they stood in, in order to create a huge, living picture of a cross. They did so for Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Easter season, as well as to symbolize their stand against abortion. Prayers and worship songs were part of the world-record attempt. Seen from above, their black-and-white cross was a beautiful and breathtaking spectacle!

The beauty of Christ and the triumph of the Cross are at the heart of the book of Colossians. To close it, Paul may have taken the pen from a scribe and written the final verse in his own hand as a means of authentication (v. 18). In any case, it amounts to "Sincerely, Paul." He mentioned his imprisonment not to gripe, but so that the Colossians would be impressed one more time with the power

of the gospel. Though he sat in chains as the prisoner of a world superpower, the gospel of Christ continued to have the power to sustain him and was more than worth the sacrifice. The gospel has a power that transcends any form of earthly power, even that of the Roman Empire. Paul longed for the Colossians to live out their redemption in Christ with purity, passion, gratitude, and steadfastness.

This epistle has taught us that Christ is fully God and fully man. He's the Creator and Head of the church. He accomplished our salvation and brought us from darkness into light. He has reconciled us to God and to one another, and He continues to sanctify us until the day we're presented perfect (1:28). The truth of the gospel is a foundation for the Christian life. Because of it, we can walk by faith in love, rooted in Christ, as His death and resurrection transform every dimension of our lives in ways that attract others and glorify God. One day we shall behold the beauty of Christ face to face (1 Cor. 13:12)!

Apply the Word

Every letter and email we write is an opportunity to do what Paul did—wish someone the grace of God. Many people are in the habit of putting quotes as part of the automatic "signature" in their emails. This is the last impression the reader gets of that person. In Paul's case, our last impression is of the apostle in chains, uncomplainingly sharing a benediction of grace with his readers. How can we as recipients of God's grace do any less?

Effort in Prayer by Mary Wilder Tileston

Continue in prayer, and watch in the same. COLOSSIANS 4:2

BUT if distractions manifold prevail,
And if in this we must confess we fail,
Grant us to keep at least a prompt desire,
Continual readiness for prayer and praise,
An altar heaped and waiting to take fire
With the least spark, and leap into a blaze.
RICHARD CHENEVIX TRENCH

WHEN the set time comes round for prayer, it may be, and often is, the case that the mind is de-pressed, and finds it a hard struggle to raise itself up to communion with God. Your purpose is to hold communion with the Infinite Wisdom and Infinite Love; can you do this, or even attempt this, without coming away from the exercise brighter, calmer, happier, stronger against evil? Make a vigorous effort to throw your whole soul into some very short petition, and the spirit of inertness and heaviness shall be exorcised. But if not, and thy mind be dry to the end, do not disquiet thyself. If only thou makest a sincere effort to draw near to God, all shall be well. He sees that thou hast a will to pray, and accounts the will for the deed.

EDWARD MEYRICK GOULBURN

Pray hardest when it is hardest to pray.

CHARLES H. BRENT

Fire on the Prayer Altar by Theodore Epp

Colossians 4:12,13

We often pray out of a sense of duty, paying a sort of lip service to what we believe. The average prayer meeting today is a sad event for this very reason.

Sometimes we who are there scold those who are absent, and we look down on them. Sometimes those who attend the prayer meeting feel themselves to be better than those who do not. This attitude hinders real prayer.

We are inclined to say the same things over and over again without really ever getting down to the real business of praying.

Prayer is one of our weapons against sin. But if we remain indifferent to the seriousness of sin, our prayers will lack fervor, and we will not care about those who are lost or the interests of God. We just do not know how to pray.

Paul told us in Romans 15:30: "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me."

Paul encouraged his readers to pray fervently and to strive in prayer. This involved agonizing and wrestling in prayer.

Ephesians 6:12 says, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

When these things confront us, we need to know how to pray fervently. That is why Paul said in Ephesians 6:18, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Eph. 6:18).

Be In Prayer by Henry Allan Ironside

"...always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Col. 4:12).

Prayer, is first of all, communion with God. Our blessed Lord Himself, in the days of His flesh, is seen again and again leaving the company of His disciples and going out into some desert place on a mountain side, or into a garden, that His spirit might be refreshed as He bowed in prayer alone with the Father. From such seasons of fellowship He returned to do His mightiest works and to bear witness to the truth. And in this He is our great Exemplar. We need to pray as much as we need to breathe. Our souls will

languish without it, and our testimony will be utterly fruitless if we neglect it.

We are told to continue in prayer. This does not mean that we are to be constantly teasing God in order that we may obtain what we might think would add most to our happiness or be best for us, but we are to abide in a sense of His presence and of our dependence upon His bounty. We are to learn to talk to Him and to quietly wait before Him, too, in order that we may hear His voice as He speaks to us. We are bidden to bring everything to Him in prayer, assured that if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us. But because we are so ignorant and so shortsighted we need ever to remember that we are to leave the final disposal of things with Him who makes no mistakes. Without anxiety as to anything, we may bring everything to Him in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, making known our requests in childlike simplicity; then, leaving all in His hands, we go forth in fullest confidence as our hearts say "Thy will be done," knowing that He will do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.