

Grace . . . in Christ

by Dr. Manford George Gutzke

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Salvation Through Christ

Colossians 1:1-4

Salvation is the work of God, by which a sinner is delivered from sin, transformed in his heart and brought into personal communion with God as his heavenly Father. And all this is done not because that soul is worthy or because that particular person has done anything good, nor because of some reward that is to be given to him, but by the grace of God. God does this through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ who came, died rose again and now intercedes on our behalf. In other words salvation really is the work of God through Christ Jesus.

You will remember that the angel Gabriel told Joseph before the Lord Jesus was born, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus : for he shall save his people from their sins." Salvation is something that God does. But I want to bring to your attention the fact that the soul must receive what God has done and is doing. That is to say the soul must accept Christ who came for us and is offered for us. The soul must yield to God who calls us to Himself. The soul must believe in Him who offers Himself to us and for us. And so we can say, as Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, "By grace are ye saved through faith."

Faith is something actually taking place in the believer. Faith is the response of the believer to the Word of God as it was preached to him. In the book of Romans Paul says that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," It is necessary for a person to "hear" the gospel, There is something to be understood and something to be believed. But once we are saved, what else is there?

I want to draw to your attention to the fact that, in the plan of God and in the way God does things when you believe in Him and commit yourself to Him, you can then begin to grow in faith and in your understanding of God's purposes for you.

The Apostle Paul was a preacher. And what do you do when you preach? You tell, then you explain what you're telling until people understand the idea, the meaning of it all. This is what Paul is doing in the epistles of the New Testament. This is what he is doing in the book of Colossians. He is explaining the truth of God, the work of God. Why? So that we who read and believe can understand what God has in mind to do; and we can believe what God offers and promises to us; and, as we believe more and more, we'll grow, we'll become stronger in faith, giving glory to God, and we will have more blessing.

In this epistle to the Colossians we will see that Paul is emphasizing that salvation, which is the work of God, comes to us through Jesus Christ. Paul is strengthening our faith and building us up by explaining what Jesus Christ actually does for us and what He means to us. And Paul is careful to point out to us that Jesus Christ who became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth, actually was God in Himself.

Notice in the salutation by Paul, the way he opens this epistle to the Colossians, how much is packed in here. Only two verses are involved, but they are very important. We read: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother." This word "*Timotheus*," actually is Timothy, of course.

Now notice: ". . . an apostle of Jesus Christ." The men who were apostles were men who were sent. They were the authorized agents, something more than just servants, or perhaps laborers. But the idea of an apostle is that he is a man who conveys a responsible word. It's like one of our ambassadors in a foreign country. We might have a good many Americans in the country of Brazil in South America, but there is only one man down there who is our ambassador. And this man who is down there as an ambassador is a man who carries the authority to speak for the government of the United States in dealing with the government of the country of Brazil. This makes him an ambassador. There is a sense in which every believer is an ambassador of Jesus Christ, but in a very real sense Paul was an apostle; perhaps we

would call him a "senior ambassador." He was a "sent one" with a commission, by the will of God. Now, actually there is more in that phrase "by the will of God" almost than there is in the word apostle. When Paul says he is an apostle "by the will of God" he means he was commissioned not of man, and not of himself, but by God. He was in this work and writing this letter, not because he was smart, not because he was good, not because he had unusually clever ideas, not because he was a great thinker, but because God wanted him to do it. And what he has to say is going to be said to us with all the authority of God Himself.

"And Timothy our brother." It is a most interesting thing to have Paul call Timothy "our brother" in this way. When he is writing to Timothy himself in the epistles you will find that he calls him "mine own son in the faith." But here he calls him "brother." He is a fellow worker, although he was in a certain sense almost like a convert. He was called into the service by the Apostle Paul, yet in actual service Paul looks upon him as a fellow worker and a brother.

"To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse." Now the word saint refers especially to being set apart for God. It is a word that has reference to your relationship to God. The saint is a person who has been set apart unto God.

"And faithful brethren." Notice that they are called "brethren." When Paul uses the expression it should not be taken apart from the phrase that follows . . . "in Christ." Now a brother in Christ is another person who has been born again. I can be a brother in Christ to all other born-again people; they are also my brothers in Christ. This is a phrase that refers to the fellowship that exists among believers. As a human being among other human beings on the face of the earth, I can look upon those others in the flesh as brother human beings. But as a Christian I am a brother in Christ to all others who are truly in Christ.

Paul calls them "faithful brethren." I am quite sure the word faithful would include the idea that they were dependable people, trustworthy people. But I don't think that's the meaning of this word faithful as Paul uses it here. I think it is more along the line of saying "full of faith." That is, they are believing men. At any rate, Paul is writing to a specific group of people, people who have been set apart unto God, people whose hearts are filled with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Grace is something that God does for you out of His own good will. "Grace be unto you" is a way of saying, "May Almighty God do for you what you need to have done in you out of His goodness and mercy."

"And peace." This is what you have when God works in your soul. That's the consequence.

"From God our Father." Watch very closely. Paul is not saying, "from God our Creator." He is not saying, "from God, the Ruler of the universe." He is saying, "from God our Father." And he is bringing out the fact that this is a special kind of grace and a special kind of mercy that results in a special kind of peace that belongs to those who have been born again.

If you, by any chance, do not feel that you yourself are involved here, just remember this is not intended to shut you out. This is intended to be honest and straight-forward. But if you are not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you certainly wouldn't be able to claim any of the benefits, would you? Not if you are not a believer. You do have benefits of God's goodness – His common grace – because you are a human being. In some ways God does things for everybody, but there are things God can do to and for the people who have received Christ that He can't do for people who haven't received Christ.

As our Father, God gives us a special kind of grace and we have a special kind of peace from God our Father, not in His role as Creator, but as the Savior.

"And the Lord Jesus Christ." Now you can notice how you have the Lord Jesus Christ linked up with God our Father. Sometimes people wonder is there anything in the Bible that teaches that Jesus Christ was God or was equal to God. Well, right here you have it. You have grace and peace to you from God our Father *and* from the Lord Jesus Christ. These go right together.

This has been a brief look at a typical salutation by the Apostle Paul. You can learn much more if you will give these two verses further study on your own. But now let us go on to verse 3.

"We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." When Paul says we give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you," what he's saying here is that God is the source of the blessing that we have. "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 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." He acknowledges God as the source of all blessing. Here again notice that it is "thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul emphasizes by repetition. He is not referring to God as Creator, or as Judge, but as Father. In other words, these thanks are given to God from within the born-again situation. He is our Father because we have been born again by Him and in Him.

"Praying always for you." Were the Colossian Christians not already saved? Were they not already reconciled to God? Yes, they were, but there is more in the Christian life than just being saved from hell. It's a wonderful thing that you're saved from destruction, but don't stop there. You're saved from destruction that you might live with God forever, that you might enter into the joy of the Lord. There is more to come for a person after the soul has been regenerated in Christ Jesus.

"Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus." If Paul and Timothy heard it, someone must have said it. This refers to the matter of testimony. I happen to have lived nearly all my life among a people who are very slow to give testimony of their personal faith in Christ Jesus. And I have often wondered to myself why we have been satisfied to remain silent when all through the Bible you find the admonition, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." How are people going to hear the good news? How are they going to believe the gospel if we, the redeemed, don't bear testimony concerning our faith and the blessing of God as a result?

"Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus." What made those Colossian Christians happy and what made Paul happy and blessed and thankful was their faith in Christ Jesus, which was the source of their salvation. Notice that he wasn't thanking God because he had heard what good works they had done. No, he was thanking God because they trusted God in Christ Jesus.

"And of the love which ye have to all the saints." Love is not passive sentiment, but it's action on behalf of those you love. And when Paul heard that these people were actually doing things on behalf of others he rejoiced. They did things on behalf of "all the saints," not just to their personal friends, not just to special people, but to all those who belonged to Christ.

The Grace of God In Christ

Colossians 1:5-14

The Colossian Christians were young Christians, new Christians, people who didn't have a long background of years and generations of families that were believers. Many had been won out of rank, pagan thinking. And Paul wanted to assure these young Christians that he was thankful to God when he heard of their faith and of their love. That's a very interesting thing. He doesn't particularly thank God for their performance. He does not especially refer to certain things that they managed to do. Now mind you, their faith would show up in their performance and their love would show up in their work, but when the Apostle is talking about thanking God he is not looking at the things they did. He is not looking at the things they said, but he is noticing the spirit in which these things were done.

He had heard of their faith, and that meant they had given testimony in one way or another. Their faith and their love and their hope had been testified. Now, for many of us the word *testify* is almost out of our vocabulary. A good many of us would hardly know what to do if someone should ask us to give our testimony. Some of us wouldn't be able to say anything. We wouldn't know what was meant by testimony. Well, all that the word means is that it refers to what a witness says, to what a witness says on the stand. If you call a witness to the stand and you ask him for his version of the problem in hand, you say, "What did you see happen?" He tells the court what he saw happen or heard happen and that's his testimony. What did this witness do when he went into court and was called up? He testified. That's the idea. When a Christian gives his testimony he simply tells what happened, how he got converted, or why he thinks and acts as he does.

Paul had heard about the faith of those people in Colosse, and he had heard about their love, and he had heard about their hope. How did he hear? The way he heard it was that he had been told. And how would it be told? It would be told in testimony. It had been talked about so that Paul could hear it and rejoice. I am giving a little extra emphasis to this matter, because I think that for many of us our spiritual experience actually suffers for two reasons. In the first place many of us never hear personal testimony. We just never get a chance to hear a Christian get up and tell what actually happened to him. Another reason we oftentimes lack in joy and in blessing is that we don't testify ourselves. We don't get up ourselves and tell it. Sometimes when I bear witness to the things which God has done in my own heart and soul, the story that I tell is so simple I'm sure there are many people listening who say, "Well, I've had that happen to me." But I'm also sure that their faith is strengthened when they hear of another having the same experience. If you tell it, if you speak out about it, someone else would be blessed. Believe me, the testimony of a new born soul carries great weight. Now look at verse 5 in Chapter 1 of Colossians.

"For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven." This refers to the confident expectation of what God will do. "Which is laid up for you in heaven" does not necessarily mean you're going to get it after your body is laid in the grave . . . post-cemetery, so to speak. You don't have to wait until after the funeral and you get to heaven, before you're going to have this hope. No, just remember that while heaven does, by the grace of God, continue on in the next world, real heaven is true now. "Our Father which art in heaven" . . . NOW. And you can look up unto God in heaven and you can be seated in the heavenlies now. This hope which is laid up for you in heaven does not refer to the future. It's available right now in the presence of God, and the hope you have is not for some future job. Nor is it hope for some great influx of profit in your business. It's not for a new gain of some sort. That's not the hope that you have. The Christian person has a hope, day in and day out, of God's personal and immediate presence and help in daily living. This is the hope that is laid up for you in the presence of God. Put the "presence of God" in place

of the word *heaven*.

"Whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." This, by the way, is a clue to the kind of preaching that Paul did. When Paul preached, the people who were listening gained understanding of this hope which was laid up for them in the spiritual world in heaven.

"Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you." This refers to the gospel. Apparently this gospel which comes to you, and bears fruit, does not bear fruit so much through changed external conditions or changed cultures. The fruit is in the hearers.

There are some very earnest people telling us that if Christian people would just do the will of God, the fruit would show up in the community; the fruit would show up in the outward affairs of the world. But that's not what Paul is talking about here. The gospel brings forth fruit also in you. And here is a clear guide to understanding missions. Sometimes there's a big difference of opinion whether missionaries should go over into the foreign field to change the ways that people have – change the culture, change the organization of society, bring in new ideas for the community as a whole – or whether the missionaries should go over there for the sole purpose of reconciling those souls to God that they might enter into the spiritual blessings which God has for them. Paul would certainly take the second view.

"Since the day ye heard of it [that's the gospel], and knew the grace of God in truth." That's how people hear and know about the gospel. It is preached. It is known as a result of preaching. It was by the faithful preaching of the gospel of God in Paul's day – and before, and since – that people came to know it. And "knowing it" means to appreciate and to esteem it.

"As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow-servant [one of Paul's fellow workers who came from Colosse], who is for you a faithful minister of Christ." Paul wasn't the only preacher. In this case Epaphras (and in some places he is called Epaphroditus) was called a minister, a servant, because he preached the gospel and shared it with these people. The word *minister* is very much the same as the word *waiter* in a restaurant. You know the waiter brings the food and sets it on the table. Well the minister brings the food and sets it on the table over the pulpit. And you're there and as you feed on it you are feeding on the Word of God.

"Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit." This was when Epaphras came back to Paul, telling of their witness and their testimony. Epaphras told Paul of their love as demonstrated by the way in which they actually helped other people as they themselves were led by the will of Christ. They put themselves out on behalf of other people and when Epaphras saw it he rejoiced and came home and told Paul something like this: "Those folks over there, they've really got it! Those people over there in Colosse, they're real Christians, because in believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and in obeying Him they went out of their way to help people." This is what happened within months after they heard the gospel. This was the early result of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

What I am trying to say here is that living the Christian life and being a Christian is not the result of a prolonged educational experience. That's not the way it comes. It comes to you in your heart when the Holy Spirit of God within you shows you the things of Christ and you begin to work accordingly.

"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." This is the goal of the praying that Paul did for these young Christians. This was what he asked for, that they might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. Whenever you see the word wisdom in Paul's writing, put it down in the margin of your Bible that he is referring to good common sense. He wants them to be filled with the knowledge of the will of God so that they would know just what God wanted them to do. We have some enthusiastic Christians who, when they first become Christians and are filled with the joy of the Lord and are filled with the fullness of the Spirit, they get ideas of their own and you'd be surprised how many of them will start out on strange things. They'll do queer things and unbalanced things, and they'll feel so good about it because they're doing these things

the way they feel toward the Lord. But you need more than just joy. You need more than zeal. You need wisdom – good common sense. How Christian life is increased, how it is profited, and how the fruit increases when there is good common sense coupled with faith.

"And spiritual understanding." This is insight into the will of God, the kind of understanding you have when you're conscious of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and you're acting as you would in the very presence of the Lord Jesus Christ . . . that kind of understanding is what Paul wanted them to have. In verse 10 he'll tell you why.

"That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." The only way you can walk worthy is when you have the things of God in mind. Again we see that walking worthy is not so much a description of the outward acts and the outward deeds. You don't walk worthy because you go here or go there. You don't walk worthy because you share in this project or you share in that project, or you give money here or you give money there. It's why you do these things. Why do you go where you go? And why do you act as you act? That you might walk worthy of the Lord. You'll be worthy of the Lord if what you do is done for Him.

"Being fruitful in every good work" will take anyone of us into every good thing in the community. We'll not only work in the church and in the Sunday School, but with the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts and the Red Cross and the hospital associations, the hospital aides. . . . You will work in the PTA; you'll work with the community garden clubs. You'll do anything and everything in the community that is for the benefit of other people. A Christian should take part in these things. And this leads into verse 11.

"Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long suffering with joyfulness." You see, if you're going to walk worthy of the Lord, you're going to have to do so consistently. You're going to have to stay at doing it. If you are active in any given project or in any given work, whether it is Sunday School teaching, or whether it is Red Cross work, or whether it is working in the PTA – any kind of job that you have at all – and if you're going to do it in a worthy fashion, one of the things is that you're going to be dependable. You're going to be there all the way through. That takes patience. You're going to stick with it, regardless of how people act, and regardless of how they treat you, because – believe it or not – some people are not going to like it when they find out that you're doing this for the Lord's sake; you're not doing it to make money, you're not doing it to advance the community, you're not doing it to advance your school, you're not doing it to make your town a better town; you're doing this for the Lord's sake. People will have attitudes toward you. They will take exception to you. But you won't stop. You'll continue, and for that you need to be "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power." This is the power that will raise you from the dead.

"Unto all patience and long suffering with joyfulness; Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." The inheritance of the saints in light refers to the very presence of God in your soul. And you can be "meet" or worthy of that.

Now I want you to notice in verses 13 and 14 what it is that will make you worthy to be a partaker. It's what you do. There will be something about you. Look at verse 13: "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness." That's a big idea, but believe me, something like the resurrection is taking place in you. You're no longer the old man; you've been made a new man. You are no longer thinking like a human being, you're thinking in the Lord, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." This action on the part of the Lord is what made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance.

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." And now we are back to the basics of the gospel. Paul never lets his readers and his hearers forget that everything for the Christian swings on the hinge of the gospel – and it all centers around what God has done for us.

Keep in mind that beginning at verse 4 and running on through verse 14 you have a wonderful description of the Christian, and the exercise of his faith, and his hope, and his calling. You should study

that, read it, go back and forth over it, and remember this is what is possible for you. You actually can have in your own soul the things that pertain to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ Above All

Colossians 1:15-20

Have you ever realized how necessary Christ Jesus is to the experience of anybody as a Christian? When a person becomes a Christian it is such a natural thing for him to think in terms of what he himself is going to do. And many people have an idea that accepting Christ is a matter of taking up a line of life, a way of working, a way of doing things.

It is fully possible for a person to be in a church service and hear an evangelist and respond to the evangelist's appeal, and then come out and tell people, "Well, I'm going to do better from now on." Or he may say, "I decided tonight to turn over a new leaf."

We can be generous in our heart and in our spirit about such a person; but you know this is not sound so far as spiritual experience is concerned, because the most important element in a Christian's experience is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

What Paul is doing for the Colossian Christians is to magnify, to lift up and by his words to glorify the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, for Christian experience, for spiritual health and growth, you cannot have too big an opinion about Jesus Christ. He is the greatest. He is the most, and that really isn't slang when you say about the Lord. In the words of the Old Testament He is the fairest of ten thousand to my soul, but even now He is above all, over all and through all, and this is what Paul is going to emphasize.

Paul is talking about the Son of God in verse 15, "Who is the image of the invisible God." Now, that word *image* in the Greek means "the express image." He is the exact likeness. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. The phrase, the firstborn of every creature, refers to His human body in the incarnation, and it actually means that He is above all other creatures. At the very top of everything that ever existed is the Son of God, who is the image of the invisible God.

"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things [not just wood and stone, but all things . . . people, all things . . . government . . . influence . . . ideas. . .all things] were created by him, and for him. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the first born from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." Take a pencil or a pen and circle the word all in these verses. And notice Paul ends by declaring that all things were created by Him and for Him. This was the purpose of creation and He is the Creator. All things were created by Him and they were created for Him. They were done in order that the works of the Lord Jesus Christ might come to pass.

There is far more in that passage than we can absorb right now. But let me tell you that God did not make the world, and then the world got into trouble, and then He sent Jesus Christ to save the world. That's not the way it goes. The Lord Jesus Christ, who is God's Son, has been with Him forever, in all eternity. And God, with His Son in view, had in mind – so to speak – to create a multitude of brethren like Him, to produce beings like His Son. This was to be done by creating the world, putting man in it and then as man was started in the flesh and would fail in the flesh, God would save him out of the flesh by the power of His resurrection into the spiritual world and produce in these saved men the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the purpose of the whole business. God isn't being frustrated at any turn. When He started the creation of this whole universe what He had in mind was just what He is doing – producing beings like His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

"And he is before all things." That English preposition before is a translation of a Greek word with the idea "ahead of," meaning greater than, more than, above all. He is before – the most important of all

things – and by Him all things consist. That's a word that has greatly intrigued me and throughout the years I have thought about it many, many times. "By him all things consist." Now let me say that it would be good English and good language if you were to say that in Him things exist, if you wanted to put it that way. Our very existence is from God. But this word doesn't refer to the origin of our existence; it refers to our actual being, our living, our consisting. And so, the word here is consist. "By him all things consist." What this really means in everyday language is this: all things hold together, and He is the one that holds them all together . . . it is His power that does it.

"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead." Paul is referring to something that occurs over and over again in all of his writings: he speaks of the church as the body of Christ. When you say He is the head of the body you have to think immediately and then put in right away "the church" so you'll understand what he means. What is this? What is this church? Well this church is the company of all of those who have in Christ Jesus been raised from the dead. They belong to Him because they have received Him and identified themselves with Him by faith and have committed themselves to Him so that His grace is worked in them to their resurrection from the dead and to their being born again in the spiritual. They are part of Him, members of His body. He is the vine, they are the branches. Now all of these beings who have been resurrected out of the dead into life – the church – form the body of Christ. He is the head. He is the director. He is the head in the same way your head is over the members of your body and directs the foot and the hand in the work you do.

But when the Scripture says that He is the head of the body, it is not so much referring to His functional relationship of direction as His positional relationship. The head is the most important and He is the head of the body, the most important of the church, who is the beginning. The church is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead – above all – because in Christ Jesus God is going to raise out of the natural into the spiritual that which will be forever. The Lord Jesus is the first one, and the church is His body [in earth, in the incarnation, in heaven, in His spiritual being].

"That in all things he might have the preeminence." That's what Paul is emphasizing at this time. The Lord Jesus is the very highest. He is above everything. Why is Paul doing this kind of thing? Because this is your Lord and Savior. This is the One in whom you trust.

Sometimes when I get into conversation with people, especially into contrary conversation with them, and they try to tell me various things in various ways, and I bring in something about the Lord Jesus Christ, they say, "Well, that's an idea." I stop them. No, that is the whole thing. That isn't just an idea. That isn't just something to add to the four other things you've got. This is everything. This is the total. And what that means for me is that if I know that if I am standing where the Lord Jesus Christ wants me to stand, nothing else matters. Did you get that? Nothing else matters when you are in the will of the Lord Jesus Christ. He won't make you proud, but He actually will take you to Himself. And you'll be His. That's going to cost you things as we will see. If you're going to stand with Him that way, people won't like it. And they'll turn on you. That's what He endured, because He was in the will of His Father, and that's what you'll endure. "That in all things he might have the preeminence."

"For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell. And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself." He is the source of all fulness. All the fulfillment of God's will is in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe me, anything God is ever going to do He is going to get done through the Lord Jesus Christ. "Having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things to himself." All the things that are in Christ Jesus, everything that is going to last for eternity, is related to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. And now notice how he ends that up. "By him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven." There can be no doubt as to the meaning of Paul's emphasis. And I tell you that even for an unbeliever reading this passage there isn't any question what Paul had in mind: Jesus Christ is tops. He is above everything else.

Let your eye run down in the chapter to verse 27. "To whom God would make known what is the

riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." We have just been talking about how great Christ is. Well now, with this great Lord in you, brother or sister, that's everything you need.

I want to repeat this: it's a very natural thing for a person to feel that if he is going to be blessed he is going to have to work for it. Thus, if we are blessed we get proud and if we don't think we are blessed we get discouraged, because we thought we were going to make the grade. That's really a futile idea. You see we don't really know what to do and we wouldn't know how to do it even if we knew what to do. And we wouldn't want to do it if we knew how to do what there is to do. We're not built that way. It's the gospel that is spiritual. Blessing is received as a gift by the grace of God. You don't work for it; it's given to you. And we're to realize that this blessing of God is mediated to us in Christ Jesus, through Christ Jesus, by Christ Jesus.

Let me illustrate from every day life how Christ Jesus is actually the only hope of any glory I will ever have. Suppose I have my car stuck in a ditch. I am sure that's a very ordinary thing. And I send for help. The garageman sends a tow car to help me. The tow car is the center of the whole operation. Believe me, if the tow car makes it, I get out; and if the tow car doesn't make it I don't get out. It doesn't make any difference what the garageman thinks. It doesn't make any difference what I want. It doesn't make any difference what the bystanders would like. Everything depends upon that tow car, that wrecking car. In that kind of sense Christ Jesus in my Savior. If He saves me I am saved. If He doesn't save me, it doesn't happen. Understanding is involved, of course. I need to know something about the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes. But the operation is performed in me by the Lord Jesus Christ, by the Savior.

Remember how John, in writing about this fact, reported the Lord Jesus as saying, "Apart from me you can do nothing?" Well, this is the idea; and, it's a snare to think that anyone can actually be saved by what he does. It's most important to realize that no one can by himself work out his own salvation in himself. And don't bring up that passage in Philippians which says you're to work out your own salvation. The rest of the matter is that "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Some years ago, when I was a student in California, I had a conversation with a student at Oxidental College – which is a very fine college on the Pacific Coast in the vicinity of Los Angeles. When I was having a talk with this young college man, I myself was a young man preparing to go to the mission field. We were having conversation, and as we had talked along and I had told about the Lord Jesus Christ in my life, he made a comment something like this: "You seem to hang everything on one hook. There's just one nail in the wall for you and that's Christ Jesus." Then he turned to me and said, "Now that nail gives way. Suppose it isn't true about the Lord Jesus Christ. What then?" I answered him as quickly as anything. It seemed so clear. "If that nail gives way, I'm sunk, that's all." Then I said to him, "Wait a minute. Suppose it holds. Suppose it doesn't give way. Then what?" So rather reluctantly he said to me, "Well, then I guess you'd be saved." I said, "That's exactly what I mean. By the way," I said to him, "what's your hook? What's your nail that you're hanging on?" You know what? He didn't talk much more, because you see he didn't want to talk about that for himself.

And now I would like to say to you for your own thinking, if you're a dejected or defeated Christian, you're looking inwardly on yourself. You say, "Oh my goodness, I failed in my Christian life." Wait a minute. If you were depending on the Lord, were you doing the work? On the other hand, if you're very proud of your accomplishments, you think, "Oh man, I'm successful." Wait a minute. Do you think you did it? Either one of those attitudes is bad, I'll tell you right now. If things shouldn't work out the way you have in mind, if things shouldn't develop the way you want them to, let's say that this is the way God lets it be. Or perhaps things do work out the way you want; let's still say that's the way God did it. Remember, the Lord is the head over the body.

Christ, The Hope of Glory

Colossians 1:21-27

There is a special kind of danger ahead for anyone who has put his trust in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul puts it this way: "Beware lest any man spoil [rob] you through philosophy and vain deceit" (Col. 2:8). These words bring to our minds a very important aspect of spiritual experience, that this is the beginning of something.

Verses 21-29 of the first chapter of the book of Colossians are all one sentence, and in it Paul is emphasizing the nature of our spiritual experience in Christ Jesus – what it means to really belong to Him. Let me illustrate by using the closest parallel in human life, marriage.

Marriage could begin in a church wedding ceremony. And after the ceremony was over the minister would pronounce a man and woman "husband and wife." They come out of the church after the reception and people throw rice at them and old shoes, and the happy couple rides away in a wedding procession, and that's it. But there's more to marriage than that, as anybody knows. That was only the beginning. The happiness and blessedness of that young couple will depend on the way in which they carry out what they promised in the marriage ceremony.

So it is with a Christian. When a person becomes a Christian and turns to the Lord Jesus Christ, something is started. It's something new and something different. This is what the Apostle Paul is talking about in Colossians.

In verses 21 and 22 of the first chapter, Paul refers to this start in your Christian life: "You, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled. In the body of his flesh through death . . ." There was a time when your thoughts were not the thoughts of God. And, by the way, they wouldn't have to be vile thoughts. They could be just regular thoughts, the kind of thinking that people would normally do.

What I have in mind here is to be seen in Romans 10:1-3. Here's what the Apostle Paul has to say about his fellow Jews: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. [They really want to do what they think is right in God's sight, but they are not doing it right; not according to knowledge.] For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."

Now, these people were alienated in the course of trying to do good things. Some people are alienated by sins of indulgence and sins of carnality, but it is quite possible for a person to be alienated when everything that's being done is very cultural and very refined. It can be intellectual. It can be philosophical. And it can be personal, and psychological. You can be so filled with the thoughts of man and the thinking of man that you leave out altogether what God does for you in Christ Jesus.

So, when Paul says that "you were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works," this does not necessarily mean immoral. This can be just as true of moral people. It is absolutely possible for a person to be a moral man and not know the gospel. You can be a good man, as men go, and not know the Lord Jesus Christ.

But when people, whatever their former condition, come to God through the blood of the cross, they are "reconciled in the body of his flesh through death." Reconciled . . . meaning the Lord Jesus Christ brought them into communion with God, no longer alienated (separated) from Him. By that act on Calvary's cross, the Lord Jesus Christ did something that brought these people into communion with God. By yielding His own body to be crucified, He not only delivered us from sin, but also He brought us into

communion with God. Something in my continuing spiritual experience was actually done on Calvary's cross: not that His death at Calvary would so affect my feeling that when I look at Calvary I would just be so moved in sympathy that I would decide to be good; but that He established me as fit for communion with God.

Now read the whole thought together: ". . . yet now hath he reconciled. In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight." Being brought into the presence of God, holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight is not the result of thirty years of good living. This is not the result of a long series of educational processes that will turn me out to be a good man. By His dying on Calvary and being raised from the dead He actually did what was necessary to bring me into the presence of God: holy, which means altogether committed to God; unblameable . . . sin having been taken away and forgiven; unproveable, because I don't have any ideas of my own, just the Lord Jesus Christ's thoughts in the sight of God. Christ Jesus undertakes to bring me, to bring you into the saving relationship with God.

There is much we do not understand about this. But at the same time there is enough we can understand to know we owe everything to Him. We sing a song like this, and it emphasizes, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness."

Well, there you have it. My whole confidence of standing in the presence of God is because Christ Jesus died for me. John, in his first epistle, puts it this way: "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (I John 5:12). It's just as simple and as plain as that.

The sentence continues in verse 23: "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel . . ." This phrase begins with the word *if* and this is another one of those places where you have to understand language, because in the Greek the word *if* – as used here – is not so much questioning (maybe you will, maybe you won't). No. This is *if* in the sense of inasmuch as, insofar as you continued in the faith, grounded and settled. What does it mean to continue in the faith? It means to keep on believing in the indwelling Christ. Now that's the thing. That's what you believe. You believe Christ died for you and He was raised from the dead for you. He is in the presence of God for you. He sent forth His Holy Spirit for you. All right, that's the faith. Now continue in that. "Grounded and settled" means that you will actually remain there.

Let me say this again and again: Christian life and experience may begin in a crisis; there may be a precise moment when you accept Christ; maybe you'll know about it, maybe you won't. The matter of accepting Christ Jesus as Lord may begin in a crisis, but it is lived in a process. It goes on and on and on from there. The young woman in the marriage ceremony said, "I do." And then for the next forty years she did. That's what I mean. It's the way you live after you start.

"And be not moved away from the hope of the gospel." Do not shift in your thinking. Remain constant in your commitment. The hope of the gospel is to have Christ operative in you, that you might have the fruit of the Spirit.

Now Paul talks about himself a little bit in verses 23 and 24. "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you." You see, after he had spoken of that in verse 23 and so on, he speaks about the hope of the gospel and in talking about the gospel he says, "Which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." This is a very clear way and a very definite way of describing Paul's own ministry. He says, "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you." These are the sufferings that he endured for preaching Christ. This is not the sufferings he endured because of his physical condition, not the sufferings he endured because of the weather, not the sufferings he endured because of accident. He is referring to sufferings he endured for preaching, because he preached the gospel and was buffeted on that account.

"And fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ . . ." Some aspects of being yielded to

the living Lord are still in operation. If I yield myself to the Lord Jesus Christ I do this we'll say one time, but the commitment goes on and on and on. Actually, you yield and you yield and you yield, and you keep yielding, morning, noon and night all the way through. There is a dying of the flesh, of self, that must go on for my soul's sake. I must actually be dying constantly in order that I might live.

Paul was doing this for the Lord's body's sake, which is the church. The minister who is preaching the gospel to me must enter into my spiritual experience and be ready in himself to share this very denial of self, in order to convey the power of the gospel to me. As in the body, when one member suffers, all other parts of the body actually share in it. Thus, if I suffer, the other members of the body of Christ also suffer.

"Whereof I am made a minister [of the gospel], according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you to fulfill the word of God." This was Paul's relationship to the gospel, and I ask myself whether this shouldn't be a current concept of the function of preaching. Paul was made a minister to fulfill the Word of God. Paul was to deny himself, to accept all the things that happened to him in an afflicting way as a Christian, and accept this in order that the church might prosper. To fulfill the Word of God, to carry out the plan of God to its ultimate purpose, to achieve the design of God, to accomplish the will of God, the natural desires are to be reckoned dead in order to take up living in the Spirit. This is the teaching we're going to see over and over again.

"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations . . ." *Mystery* means the hidden truth." We'll come across it a number of times. The word *mystery*, as used in the Bible, refers to something that was true all the time but folks didn't know it.

For a length of time I lived in Texas, and in east Texas is the part of the country that, from an agricultural point of view, is not a rich country. It is hard to grow corn and hard to grow cotton, and the land itself is not worth very much. Well, what people didn't know for a long time was that underneath is one of the richest oil fields in the world. That oil down there remained a mystery – hidden, but there for a long time until someone drilled into it, and then we had a "new" oil field. Well now, that's the way it is with "the mystery that hath been hid from ages and from generations." It has been there all the time, but hidden . . . "but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." And this is the hidden truth.

It had not previously been understood that the way God would accomplish His purpose was that He Himself would live in His people. This is the purpose of God that is now revealed to the Gentiles through the gospel: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Whenever you think about Christ you are to think how this is God's chosen way of working out salvation unto righteousness. How? By living in us, by being in us . . . just as He was in the body of Jesus of Nazareth, incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. He wants to be in your body working out His will. "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

I often interpret the word *glory* to mean "when God gets the job done." And the only way in which God will get the job done is through Christ in you. The whole purpose of the New Testament is to show you that God Himself in you will actually work to get the job done.

Now do you understand the danger that there is for a Christian who puts his trust in Jesus Christ? It may seem peculiar to talk about danger after one is a Christian, and yet this is like the new dangers that come *after* you begin any new operation. It will seem queer to you, but let me put it to you this way: did you ever buy roller skates for your children? Well, did you ever recognize that when you put those children on roller skates you exposed them to new dangers? Remember? You know about the first time they had a bicycle. Do you realize that when a youngster gets a bicycle and starts riding he is running into new danger? Or perhaps a car. Have you ever had any teenagers in your family who started driving the family car? Did you have any concern about this? You'd better have; things could happen. Do you realize that the moment you sit behind the wheel and start driving the car you're exposed to new danger? Suppose I learn-

ed to fly an airplane? Don't you think that the moment I would get up there flying an airplane I'd have dangers that would be different from driving a car on the street? That's different from riding a bicycle, which itself is different from using roller skates, of course.

After a soul commits himself to the Lord Jesus Christ to live in Him, there are dangers. There's the danger of turning back, or faltering. Do you remember that occasion when the Lord Jesus was walking on the water, coming to the disciples in the boat, and when they saw Him they were frightened. But He said, "It is I; be not afraid." And then Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." And Jesus said, "Come." And Peter went. Then, do you recall that after Peter started to walk on the water he saw that the wind was boisterous and he began to sink. There you have a case where one begins in faith and then falters in doubt. This is what Paul is talking about.

Paul was very aware of this danger and he was going to help Christians as much as he could, being a minister. So, likewise, we ought to try and help one another. Let us pray for one another: the old nature is still living in us and we need grace every day to overcome the danger of being ensnared in the wiles and doubts of the flesh.

"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1).

Walking In Christ

Colossians 1:28-2:15

If you have faith in Christ Jesus and keep it operative, you will not need any other thing for living in Him. You are complete in Him. This does not mean that upon accepting Christ any person is at once a mature Christian. It doesn't mean that there isn't anything to grow into, but rather that all any person will ever need in order to become a real Christian is already in Christ.

In the preceding chapter we took note of the fact that there is a very real kind of danger or peril that comes to the person who puts his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Until you have put your confidence in Him, your life is lived only as a human being on earth. You have your problems, and you have your outcome, and the wages of sin is death. But after you become a Christian, something new is open to you. You have new opportunities and new privileges – and you also have new problems, and, in a sense, a new danger.

What constitutes these problems? Why should they exist? It's because the Christian has something going on in him that the person who is not a Christian doesn't have. The Christian has in him the new man and the old man. You have in you the old man which is your human nature, and then you have the new man which is born again in Christ Jesus. The Apostle Paul, having this in mind, exercised himself as a minister and as a preacher to help his people in the inevitable conflict they would be engaged in between the old man and the new man, between the flesh and the spirit, between that which is human and that which is of Christ.

Paul warned his people about danger ahead. In Colossians 1:28 he puts it this way. "Whom we preach [speaking of Christ in you, the hope of glory], warning every man, and teaching every man . . ." What is he warning them about? Is he warning them about troubles that will occur in the financial world? Is he warning them about troubles that will occur so far as business is concerned or social life is concerned? No, he is warning the Christian about the old man that is in him. There is always the danger that when your attention is distracted and you forget that the old man is still in you, the human nature in you will take charge. And, if this happens, you will be led away from the things of Christ.

Paul is warning every man and teaching every man because the things of the Lord Jesus Christ need to be learned. You're not born with them. No matter how well meaning you may be, you won't know the things of the Lord Jesus Christ unless you learn them. That's the main reason why we are interested in teaching the Bible, why our ministry, through The Bible For You, is to share Bible knowledge with you. We truly believe that the entrance of God's Word giveth light, and that the more Scripture you know the stronger you can be. But when we're preaching and teaching we are not taking time to talk about the old man. We don't take time to tell you how to take care of your physical body, or how to take care of your financial affairs, or how to take care of your community life, or what politics you should follow. That's not the kind of thing we're concerned with. We are called to teach men with reference to the things of the Lord Jesus Christ. The things that pertain to Him.

"Teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." The word perfect means full grown, mature. I always think of an apple tree. An apple tree is perfect when it is bearing apples; yet, it was an apple tree from the time it started growing. When it was a little seedling and it just pushed two leaves up through the ground, it was an apple tree. And when it was just a little sapling six inches or eight inches tall, it was an apple tree. And so, all the way through it was an apple tree . . . when it was a foot tall, two feet tall, three feet tall, six feet tall. But it may not yet have had any apples on it. And gradually it became a mature apple tree and began to bear fruit. And then you have the apple tree

full grown. That's the word *perfect*. Perfect in Christ Jesus means "full grown and mature." And for a Christian it means that the spiritual is in control of the physical.

But these two natures, the old and the new, struggle with one another. "Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." And if you want to have in mind what the nature of that struggle is like, I will remind you that the Lord Jesus Christ combined in Himself both that which was natural and that which was spiritual. He had a body of human nature and at the same time He had His spirit as the Spirit of God. And they were both in Him. You realize this when you read of His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Whenever you wonder whether or not a Christian could have any problems, just you go to Gethsemane and see the problems of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul knew that Christians would have a problem, the problem of yielding themselves personally, yielding themselves in their own personal ego. Yielding requires real strength spiritually to be able to do it. Paul shared in the spiritual agony of those who were following him. He knew the problems they would have: daily self denial, daily self crucifixion, constantly being offered up unto death that they might live. And so we find Paul saying, "I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." In what sense would Paul be labouring? Well, he would be trying to help these people to keep their eyes fixed upon the Lord Jesus Christ and to want to do His will instead of their own.

In Chapter 2, the Apostle says, "I would that ye knew how very much I am exercised on your behalf." This is a pastor who is concerned about the members of his flock, some of whom may be inclined to become worldly, or inclined to become, shall I say, involved with their own personal affairs. Now notice that Paul goes ahead and tells you what conflict he has. He is actually fighting for their souls against the powers of darkness.

"That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Now let us look more closely and see what Paul's prayer was about and what this struggle on his part was about. When you think of Paul's desire that their hearts be knit together I think the best illustration I can bring to your mind is in terms of a broken bone. When the two parts are fitted together, then they grow together; they knit together. And this is what happens between people.

In human nature, in the flesh, we are all broken into smithereens. Every man is for himself. We are all individuals going off our own way, every man going his own way, like sheep that have gone astray. But when we come to Christ Jesus we are brought together. And He fits us together like the pieces of a broken bone, and we become knit together. We grow together in love. That's the meaning of being knit together in love; like the healing of a fracture.

"Unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God." When you are knit together in love and you have communion with the Lord, you really begin to understand the ways of God. And there is something to be revealed to us in God that's not known to the world. Remember what I told you previously about the word *mystery*. The mystery of God means the hidden truth of God. There is something true about God the Creator of the whole universe that, apart from the gospel, you would never know: the Creator of the universe actually wants to live His life in human beings who will trust in Him. This is accomplished when He becomes your Father and you become His child through Christ Jesus. He demonstrated to the whole world and the whole universe how His Son could, in Jesus of Nazareth, actually be both God and man. That's the very essence of Christian truth, and this is the thing which, when you understand it, will give you rich, full assurance of your salvation. As the Spirit of God was in Jesus of Nazareth, so is the Spirit of God in you as you yield yourself as an obedient child. This is the "mystery of , God, and of the Father, and of Christ."

Having mentioned Christ as part of the Godhead, Paul says in the third verse, "In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." And notice these treasures are not gold and silver. It's not

what will make you worldly rich, not what will make you worldly powerful, but the treasures of wisdom (good, common sense) and knowledge (clear understanding). Once you get to know the way God works in Christ Jesus, then much of the ways of God become clear to you and you begin to understand.

"And this I say [everything he has just said from 1:21 through 2:3 concerning Christ in you], lest any man should beguile you with enticing words." Paul was afraid that his followers would be fooled by people who would suggest that this new love toward other people, and reverence toward God, and the display of decency and honesty, would be a credit to their human nature; and that would be enticing to think about. You're just so good now that you're decent. You're just so good now that you're kind. You're just so good now that you've become so decent. You've become so good now you're meek and humble. You can see that's an enticing line of thought; but it's not true.

"Yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order." He means by this, "I can see how it's going with you. I am with you in spirit. I can feel your life the way you live it, and I rejoice in it as I behold your order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ." The yieldedness of those Colossians to the will of Christ was a joy to Paul, because they stayed with it; they were persistent in their attitudes.

And now in verses 6 and 7 he gives them an admonition. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him." This is a very profound principle. In other words, walk the way you talk. You say that Christ is in you. Then act that way.

"Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." There is always in the world a tendency on the part of some to explain all the results of the gospel in a human way, and this can be very misleading. A person can, in humble confession of sin, turn to God, and be forgiven . . . and be blessed. God will help him, and this man will start living and walking with God. And then comes the great temptation for this man to start taking the credit himself, thinking that he is living and walking with God because he himself has become good. This is a great snare and this is what Paul is anxious that they should avoid. It is Christ in you who is good.

And so, in verses 8 and 9, Paul continues his warning. "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit." That word spoil can be understood better if you say "despoil." In other words, beware lest any man rob you of what you could have. How would they rob you? "Through philosophy and vain deceit." Philosophy is what we call rationalization . . . hunting reasons for things, and explaining things in a human way. And "vain deceit" means fooling yourself into the idea that you're the one that's good.

"After the tradition of men." Perhaps you will be tempted to explain away the power of the gospel by saying, "The reason why I go to church is my father went to church and my grandfather went to church. We're a church-going family." Instead you should be saying, "The reason why I go to church is to worship God." You could go to church because the Lord led you, which would be enriching. If you say you go to church because you've always gone, that denies the influence of the Holy Spirit in your life. And this robs you.

"After the rudiments of the world." The rudiments of the world are your appetite, your imagination and your vanity (see 1 John 2:16). And there are some people who will appeal to you along those lines; and if they do and get you to act that way, they will rob you of your spiritual possibilities.

"Not after Christ." If you let yourself be led away by the rudiments of the world, you are not following Christ . . . and you will be robbed as a result. But, if you are following Christ, it's a case of deny self, take up the cross, and follow His will. Is this worthwhile? Look at verse 9: "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Paul means everything that is available in God is in Christ. And Christ was God in bodily form. In verses 10-15 there is a rather involved statement, but it is not too complicated in its meaning. I can give you a simple meaning at the very outset: you are complete in Him. Why? Because of all that He did, and because of all that He is, "the head of *all* principality and power."

You are circumcised in Him, which means you're committed to God; you're buried with Him in

baptism, which means that you layoff your sins and layoff your old nature in Him. You are risen with Him – your new life is alive with Him evermore.

And then Paul goes on to say, in verses 13 to 15, "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses [you have complete forgiveness through God's grace]; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us [you are, by the cross, delivered from the law which otherwise would condemn you], and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers [Christ Jesus robbed the devil of his prey, as it were, when you turned to Him. If you're a Christian he is despoiling Satan, actually taking away what Satan had], he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it [by raising you from the dead – a fact that will be openly demonstrated one day soon]."

All of this was done in Christ Jesus. So, when you believe in Him and put your trust in Him, you have everything. You don't need anything more. And, as you yield to Him, you will be walking in Christ.

Risen With Christ

Colossians 2:16-3:4

The whole gospel moves in an area of complete and total difference between that which is spiritual and that which is natural or human. Not only is the believer in himself different but *things* are different. As a matter of fact everything is different.

When I go out fishing I oftentimes go in a rowboat and I use a paddle or a pair of oars to move myself around. Once in a while I have the privilege of riding in a boat that has an outboard motor, and if you have ever been in one, you'll know that the moment you start the motor and it begins to operate you haven't any more use for the paddle. You can lay your paddle or your oars inside on the floor of the boat.

And so it is with reference to this thing of being a Christian. When once you accept the Lord Jesus Christ, the things around you are just different than they ever were before. You are born again and you see the world through new eyes – spiritual eyes. However, we're still subject to error, and we can still neglect our walk in Christ.

Now, in the latter part of Chapter 2 of the book of Colossians, Paul exhorts the believer to avoid the error of being impressed by what looks like religious conduct on the part of other people. This is very important, very serious, and at the same time it's very subtle, if you will let me say that. You can't just see it on the surface. And I think that an unbelieving person, the man in the world who doesn't know the Lord Jesus Christ, will never notice this. He'll wonder what we're talking about. He'll think we're making a big to-do about nothing.

The natural man, any ordinary human being, if he will be honest, knows that there is a God. It's only the fool that says in his heart there is no God. James says, in a rather blunt way, that even the devils believe there's a God, and they tremble. Natural man can know that there's a God and he can know that this God is a judge; and he can know that this God would judge conduct. As a matter of fact he can know that the Ten Commandments are the law of God. He can even have in mind that he wants the blessing of God, and, as a natural man, he can plan to act as a believer would act. He can watch the people who call themselves Christian and actually imitate them. Such imitation usually is based on rules and regulations of conduct.

Some people can really put on a convincing display so far as outward conduct is concerned. It's like an artificial rose made with wire and silk, or made with wax or plastic, perhaps, and you know that it can be more nearly perfect than a real rose in your garden. It can even be perfumed. But it won't be real.

Now let us look into Colossians 2:16 and 17. Paul says, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." Paul is saying to these people that they should not let anybody upset them by criticizing their failure to keep the regulations and customs that other people have set up. One reason why Paul has to put in this exhortation and tell us to be careful that we're not upset by such criticism is that a humble Christian will accept the criticism. That's one of the things we have to be very careful about. You take a person who is a humble Christian and you criticize that person, and, generally speaking, you'll put them into a state of confusion. They won't know what to say. You might think this is a confession of guilt on their part. But no; they just never thought of such a thing. They also know how weak they are and they think it's just quite possible they really might have come short. Paul is saying to these Christians: don't let anybody dampen your spirit and discourage your heart, as it were, by criticizing you because they think you don't act right about certain things. Now, notice what these are; meat – what you eat; drink – what you're drinking. Many people will just make a great big to-do if someone else were

to drink wine. Some people will criticize you if you drink coffee. And then with regard to a holy day, there are some people will judge you if you don't treat Christmas like they think Christmas ought to be treated. Or if you don't treat Good Friday the way they think Good Friday ought to be treated. Now mind you, all of these things – the carefulness concerning your food, the carefulness concerning your drink, the carefulness of your conduct in public on special, shall I say, religious holidays – these things are a shadow of things to come. Such outward customs imply total commitment, but I want to point out that you could observe these customs without being committed.

"Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels." That word *voluntary* means a person has done something of his own will.

There are people who actually can make up their minds to act like Christians, and they can do this for selfish motives. I have seen some people who, I am sure, were just as designing as any politician you ever saw, and you can see them suave and meek and obsequious and unctuous in their procedure. They can be so humble; they can be so deferential. They can just, as it were, get on their knees before you, but all the time they're doing this they're doing it in imitation of what they think a Christian would do. Let me say to you again, a man can make up his own mind to act like a Christian and he can do it for selfish motives. This does not make him a Christian.

I told you that this would be hard to follow. There are people in the world who will never understand what I am talking about. But I think a Christian would know when I talk about a pious impersonator, a person who is acting like a Christian, but really isn't one.

Listen to Paul: "Let no man beguile you [fool you and get your reward away from you] . . . in a voluntary humility [being humble on purpose, willing to be humble, making up one's mind to be humble] and worshipping of angels." There are people who have no appreciation of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on their behalf, yet they can talk to you fluently about the spiritual world and about the forces of the spiritual world.

"Intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind." You'd be amazed how many unsaved people feel perfectly confident to discuss the Christian experience. Again and again and again I hear such people talking about the Christian experience as if they knew. I have heard people discuss the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and discuss His experiences. Just the other day I heard a man talk about the temptation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it was just the kind of talk that a man would make if he was thoroughly versed in psychology (which is a study of human nature). Knowing human nature thoroughly, this man undertook to interpret the temptation of the Lord Jesus Christ from that standpoint. I don't know how many people would see through this. Paul is saying, don't let anybody fool you in any kind of talk about spiritual things if that person does not recognize the Lord Jesus Christ as the head of all. If a person doesn't submit himself to the Lord Jesus Christ, doesn't accept the Lordship of Jesus Christ, then don't you have anything to do with his thought and his mind.

Now look at verses 20 to 23. "Wherefore, if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances . . . ?" This is one of the most difficult passages for us to understand, but it is very, very important. You know, it's most confusing when there are people around who act like Christians for personal reasons, but they're not Christians. This is really difficult. There are people who can be interested in conduct problems, and they want to do the right thing and the good thing and be decent and clean. They engage in welfare projects, they want to help the community. They want to help the poor. They want to help the illiterate. They want to help everybody like this, and they want peace. They'll work in peace. They even want peace for the whole world. There are people who get quite excited about this thing, and yet they're not in Christ.

What I mean is that these people are not doing this thing because Christ is moving them to do it. They are trying to accomplish it as human beings. They look upon all such benefits in society as being the result of good human conduct, and this is what they are trying to promote. So, Paul is saying here, if you

have given yourself over to Christ, and you've been delivered from human-based efforts, don't let yourself be snared into following people who, *in a human way*, promote procedures which may seem to serve good causes.

I think you would have to say that most well-intentioned people are certainly not indulging themselves. They're actually disciplining themselves. They may even feel that it is necessary to hurt themselves in order to accomplish some good end. I can remember hearing about certain people out in the western part of the country who abused themselves. They actually whipped themselves with whips because they wanted to show their appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ and His death on Calvary.

Now, far be it from me to talk lightly about such people, but let me tell you that you could do that kind of thing and still have no more in you than the earnestness and sincerity that a pagan would have over in China or in India who would submit himself to all kinds of physical torture, trying to be good in the sight of God. So far as the Christian is concerned, this has no benefit at all. What's more, a Christian should not have to be concerned about how he is going to act. If he is risen with Christ, then it is Christ in him handling and controlling his action.

Now look again at verses 20-23: "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?" And Paul goes on to say, "Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship [that is, they actually do look as though you really made up your mind that you were going to do the right thing] and humility, and neglecting of the body [there *can be* disciplining of the body]; not in any honour to the satisfying the flesh."

There are people who conduct themselves in a way that you would have to admit is self-denying (we call them ascetic in their procedures), but it's all their own human effort. You know there are some people who attend church because that's what they're supposed to do. They read the Bible because they think it's a good thing to do. So they make this a rule. Prayer – that's a good thing – so they set themselves to pray. Be humble – that's a good thing – so they cultivate humility. Deny the body – that's a good thing – and they won't indulge themselves. Not anyone of these things are bad, mind you. But not even all of them together are good enough. A man could be a real Christian who never saw the inside of a church. You see, church attendance isn't what makes a Christian.

Some years ago there was a Hindu who traveled all over the United States of America and attracted much attention; and every now and again you would hear some enthusiastic person – sometimes a minister – who would say that this Hindu was the greatest Christian who ever lived. But this particular man was not a believer in Jesus Christ. He knew the gospel. He knew about the Lord Jesus Christ, and he appreciated the Lord Jesus Christ as a man, but he didn't believe in Him as Lord and Savior. Yet, that man's personal conduct was one of a rigorous regimen. He denied his body. He didn't eat what we ate, and he didn't dress as we dress. He went around barefoot, and he made a show of himself in this country. And any number of people would be ready to tell you that he was a great Christian. Why? Because he did these outward things. Now Paul would tell you that if he didn't submit himself to the Lord Jesus Christ he was nothing. Many other things could be brought to your attention, and they are all along the same line. What Paul is anxious about is that Christian people, real believers, should not be taken in by these outward, human efforts to do certain things for God's sake. In the final analysis, these things are just a show.

Now look in Chapter 3 and begin at verse 1. Paul continues the same line of argument. After having spoken negatively, as he did in all the latter part of Chapter 2, he goes on to say, "If ye then be risen with Christ [this word *if* is not a doubt, not a questioning, but a condition. You can say the word *since* . . . since you be risen with Christ, or you can say the word *inasmuch* as ye have been raised with Christ], seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." What are those things which are above? Righteousness and joy and peace. You look for those things. For "Christ sitteth at the right hand of God" in eternity, united with God.

"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." And I want to tell you right now that this makes a tremendous difference. One of the greatest experiences I ever had as a young Christian was when I was on a baseball team and the situation came up where I felt I could not go on and play with them under certain conditions. I had battled with that for hours and I had a couple of sleepless nights trying to figure out what I should do, and suddenly this verse came to my mind: "Set your affection on things above – not on things on the earth." And I realized right then and there that baseball was on earth and I really loved it and my whole problem was that I loved to play ball so much. And when I put baseball over against the Lord Jesus Christ and looked at the two of them right together, which would I have? It wasn't very hard to put baseball away.

"For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory ." Your new life, your spiritual life, your everlasting life is in Christ's care and keeping – in the hollow of His hand where it is safe and clean and pure. And when the day of His revelation occurs, when He is seen and recognized by every eye as King of kings and Lord of glory, you as a believer will be with Him. You will be a joint-heir with Him of all heaven's glory . . . risen with Christ.

Serving Christ

Colossians 3:5-15

One's inner attitude determines one's proper outward conduct. Put off the old man. Put on the new man. In these two phrases the Apostle Paul simplifies the whole problem of living the life that is in Christ.

The Christian, the person who is related to Christ Jesus by faith, lives in two worlds. We call the one natural, the other spiritual. We mean by the one earth, by the other heaven. We call the one *this world*, and we mean by the other a place of communion with God. Now in the natural world we are human, and as human beings we have all the interests, the habits, the achievements, and the good and bad things that go with human beings. Everything in civilization, everything in culture, everything in art, everything in science. . .all these things are in the realm of human interest. They are in this world. They are natural. A "spiritual" person is one who has been born again, a child of God in Christ. This is different from the natural – not contrary to, not in opposition to, but different than . . . over and above. Everything in the life of a Christian comes from the living Lord Jesus Christ.

Now in Colossians, in the first two chapters, the Apostle emphasized that Christ is over all, in all, through all, for all, by all; He holds everything together. Christ is above everything. And then Paul went on to say that the believer in Christ – the person who belongs to Christ like the bride belongs to the bridegroom, like the queen belongs to the king – the believer in Christ *has* all.

And now, in the last two chapters of the book of Colossians, Paul shows how this will affect the believer. Because the believer lives in two worlds, the natural and the spiritual, he has two natures. The one we call flesh, the other we call spirit. But these two natures are not of equal value. It's true that a man has a body and he has a soul, and each of them, body and soul, have interests of their own. They're both there, but they are not equally important. The Lord Jesus Christ pointed this out when He said, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37). In Colossians 3:5-7 notice how Paul writes.

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth." Then he names a number of activities, all of which are evil, but all of which are natural. They all represent some form of wrongdoing which follows out our natural wrong bents that are within us. "For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them." This is not to say that everybody does all of these things to the point of complete indulgence. When Paul speaks of fornication, he doesn't mean that every natural person is entirely immoral. That's not the idea. "Uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry," doesn't mean that everyone does all these things or even anyone of these things one hundred per cent, but it means that the potential for these things., these actions, these activities, are actually in our hearts. They are inside the individual and they come out of him normally and naturally. Paul says mortify these. You can get a better meaning of the word *mortify* if you think of the word mortician or undertaker. Actually the word *mortify* is based upon the idea of death, and when it says "mortify" it means put to death. You can't very well translate it into English and say "deadify," but that's what it would be. It is to count as dead, make dead, deaden, reckon dead your members which are upon the earth. Not once, but all the time. Be continually reckoning yourself dead. In other books, when Paul is writing about this, he speaks about crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof, the desires thereof. This is an inward operation. This is an inward attitude. It is reckoning yourself dead in Christ. Nobody but God knows whether you do that, whether you actually yield yourself like a dead person into the hands of God.

And now Paul speaks about matter of outward conduct: "anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy

communication out of your mouth, Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds." You can break these old habits of conduct if you have done what Paul admonishes in verse 5. If you have mortified your fleshly conduct and attitudes, and reckoned yourself dead, you can quit being angry; you can quit wrath; you can quit malice; you can quit your blasphemy; and you can quit the way you talk; and you can quit lying. You can quit yourself of these things if you count yourself dead. This has to do with the old man, the old nature.

"And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all." I hope you don't get tangled up with all those different classifications that Paul just mentioned (verse 11). Actually what he is saying to you is that human distinctions don't matter when Christ is all and in all. But notice how this idea is phrased: "Put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge."

This is a good time perhaps for us to look at a word that is being used a great deal in our language today. You'll find it in a lot of the literature and a lot of the writing that goes on about Christian things. Many people use the word *renewal*. An older word that was more commonly used was revival. And I suppose many people think that renewal is a substitute for revival, but actually each of these words has its place; they are two different words. The word *renewal* has proper reference to regeneration. It has a creative aspect. It's when you become a new creature. It doesn't mean refresh. It doesn't mean remade. It doesn't mean reformed. It means a new man. It means being born again. And you can talk about the renewal of people, if what you're talking about is bringing them out of the natural into the spiritual, if you are thinking in terms of bringing a person out of the old man into the new man. If you are thinking in terms of having people born again, having them converted and brought to Christ, then use the word renewal (see 2 Cor. 5:17). The word properly goes with the activity of evangelism. When you evangelize people who are not Christians and get them to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ they will be renewed in Him.

The word *revival* is a more limited word and refers to a more special operation that goes on in believers. If you want to see a good instance of this, turn in the book of Revelation to the third chapter and look at the first six verses. There you will read about a church called Sardis, and God's Word says, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." And then the Lord talks about how this church can be revived. That's what you do with a person who is a believer, but who has strayed away from the Lord. For any believer in God and believer in the Lord Jesus Christ who has foolishly followed prodigal waywardness and has wandered away from God, the word is revival. This is what you use for a person who is a Christian.

Sometimes I wonder whether the great emphasis upon the word *renewal*, which everyone seems to feel is such a good word today, isn't actually a concession and isn't actually almost an admission – that what people really need is to become Christians. Then use the word *renewal* by all means. But if you're speaking about Christians who need to be brought closer to God, the proper word there would be *revival*.

And now I want you to notice verses 12 to 15. This is a remarkable description of what the Christian person should have. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God . . ." That means chosen of God – chosen in the Lord Jesus Christ. The big thing a Christian person should remember is you're never a Christian by yourself. Put that down and keep it in your mind. You don't have to work in Christian ways until you're good enough to come to God. No, you can't do that. The only way in the world you can live the Christian life is by looking into the face of the Lord Jesus Christ and letting the Lord Jesus Christ be in you. This alone makes you "holy and beloved;" holy in the sense that you're a hundred percent given over to God, and beloved in the sense that you've received from God His grace and mercy in Christ Jesus.

You are to put on, "bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another." This expression in the English, "bowels of mercies,"

is rather an inelegant expression for us. Normally speaking, you and I wouldn't think in this way, but it has to do with the prevailing psychology of the times. You and I would say, show a heart of mercy, or have a heart of kindness, and wouldn't think anything of it at all. But do you know that in the Old Testament days they often used the kidneys that way. Or perhaps even the liver was referred to in that way. Isn't it an interesting thing that each one of these organs are inside your body, your trunk, where your sympathetic nervous system is centered. If you get nervous or excited, or if you're grieved or distressed, it always affects you in the body. It doesn't affect you in your mind. If you have difficulty thinking something out, or you're trying to work out a problem in algebra, or trying to figure out a puzzle of some kind, your head can ache. But I want to tell you right now, if you've just found out that a friend has betrayed you, or you put your trust in somebody who has failed you, your insides hurt. The Greeks would have said your bowels hurt. And the Hebrews would have said your kidneys pained. But, for us, we would refer to the heart. And so, in this passage of Scripture in verse 12, you can just put in the word *heart*.

We are to forbear one another, and forgive one another . . . "even as Christ forgave" us. And how did Christ forgive me? Well, He certainly didn't forgive me because I was good. And He certainly did not forgive me because I promised to be better. And He certainly did not forgive me because I measured up to some standard. He forgave me out of His grace and out of His mercy.

And what does *forgiving me* mean? He gave me a new start. He held nothing against me. He gave me an opportunity to come along with Him, and in Him to grow up with Him. And we're to treat each other that way . . . in mercy, and kindness, and humbleness of mind, and meekness, and long suffering. This doesn't have to come to you spontaneously. You can do this thing deliberately. You can deliberately be kind. You can deliberately be humble as a Christian. You can deliberately be meek. You can deliberately be long suffering, and deliberately you can forbear one another and forgive one another. You can do this on purpose because you want to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. You're not doing it in order to belong to Him, but because you do belong to Him. Let me tell you one thing: the Spirit Himself from within you will move you into this as sure as you live. He will push you in this direction if you will let Him do it.

"And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." That's the real word *charity*. Sometimes people will call it love; that's all right. But don't let the word *kindness* get out of it. This actually has in it the idea of kindness toward other people. This is your general principle that is to cover everything, and when Paul speaks of the bond of perfectness, the word *bond* is a bit like this: suppose you were bundling up to go out in the cold weather. Have you ever had that experience? Have you ever lived where it takes a lot of clothing to stay warm and you put on, we'll say, a shirt, or a waist; you put on a sweater, and you put on a coat, and you put on an overcoat. And then you tie a belt around you to keep everything in place, to keep everything together; that's the bond, and it goes on last, perhaps as a mark of completeness, maturity, perfectness.

"Perfectness" doesn't mean that you never do anything wrong. This means you're full grown, or complete. When you really get to be a mature Christian you'll be kind, that's just all there is to it. As a real Christian you'll never get any kind of permission to be cruel. You never will. And if you are cruel or harsh, I do not know anywhere in the Bible that you're going to find any sort of kindness from God to you. Don't do that. Just simply don't do it. Grow up. Children are cruel. Don't be a child. Be a full grown Christian and be kind. That's one of the marks of perfection. It's the bond of maturity. It's being grown.

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful." We Americans can understand this word *rule* very well. You know what the actual Greek word is? Umpire. Let the peace of God umpire in your heart. In other words, in any given situation that arises, let the umpire be the peace of God. Ask yourself, is this going to promote the peace of God? Is this the thing that the peace of God would do? And the umpire that says, "this is safe," or "that's out," the umpire that calls three strikes and you're out, should be the peace of God. This is the principle that is to control if we are to truly serve Christ.

Fellowship In Christ

Colossians 3:16-4:18

Would you understand if I said the main thing in living the Christian life is yielding? The Apostle Paul said, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts . . . Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." These are the words with which Paul guides the thinking of the Colossian Christians into fruitful ways in their spiritual experience.

He has already told us that there is what I call a heavenly dimension in each Christian's situation. No Christian person living in this world is ever without an open door into heaven. A Christian lives always in the presence of the living God. There is for a Christian no roof over him. The skylight is open so to speak. So far as the Christian is concerned he can lift up his face and look into the heavens at any time. Christ Jesus not only died to save us, He not only is in heaven to intercede and to pray for those who believe in Him, but He is currently present, right here, amongst us and in us, and active, to live and to work in each believer. And through His indwelling we find ourselves with new attitudes that actually reflect and are generated in grace. These are attitudes that are in keeping with the truth that we are actually living in Christ Jesus.

In our preceding chapter we talked about Colossians, Chapter 3, verse 15. This is where Paul stops talking about our active role and starts talking about the passive aspect of our new man.

"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts." How would you let the peace of God be in your heart? Where does the peace of God come from? Is it not from His forgiveness? Is it not from being justified? We have peace with God, being justified by His grace. "Let the peace of God [let the reality of your being forgiven and reconciled to Him] rule in your hearts." Whatever inward thoughts you have, decide every issue in the light of being a forgiven soul. Remember this. You've been forgiven. Well now, act accordingly.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." Here again, so far as you're concerned, you just let it happen to you. If you're a Christian, you just let this thing happen to you; it'll come to you. If you wonder where you'll find the Word of Christ, the easiest, quickest way is to read the Scriptures, the Bible. Really, that's it. Let the truth of the Bible, the truth of the Scriptures, dwell in you. Notice that word dwell. Don't let God's Word slip through your mind; don't let your thinking sweep across the page of the Bible. Dwell on it, and it will dwell in you. Receive this word that you have in the Scriptures, these promises. Hold them. Keep them in your thinking. Meditate upon them. Hold them there.

"Dwell in you richly in all wisdom." Let your meditation bring out the full meaning, in good common sense, of the very thing that you are thinking about.

"Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." This is a wonderful tribute to the significance and the importance of music in the life and the experience of a believer. Songs repeat the well known truths. When you sing a song over and over again you will find if you look at the words that there are certain words you are repeating over and over and over again. Those songs repeat like teachers do. They teach and admonish one another, exhorting one another, filling the heart with thoughts of spiritual achievement. That's what comes to you in singing; and as you read these psalms, and sing these hymns and spiritual songs, you'll be singing with grace in your heart to the Lord. And that will be letting the Word of Christ dwell in you.

If you have some great promise of Scripture that comes to you and that you think about, then you will sing about it. It will come to you over and over and over again. "Crown Him with many crowns." Sing it. Sing through 4 or 5 verses of it. And let it come to you. It will be helpful to you. And by the way,

if you can't sing, and you're having your own private devotion, let me tell you what to do. Get a hymn book and read it. Just read these songs that you know so very well.

Some years ago it was my privilege to be down in the country of Brazil, and while I was there I noticed with very great interest the conduct and the behavior of the people who had become Christians. I noticed that these people very commonly would carry with them a copy of the Scriptures, it's true. But more often than the Bible even, they carried the hymn book. Can you imagine that? That had a little pocket hymnal and you would find them riding the train or perhaps riding a bus and it wasn't an unusual thing to see a laborer reach into the pocket of his denim overalls and take out a hymn book as he was sitting there in the bus, and go over those hymns. I tell you it's good for you. So you make good use of your hymn book for your own personal spiritual encouragement.

In verse 17 you get again a directive, a command as to what to do. "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." You're to do all the name of the Lord Jesus. When you speak in the name of the Lord Jesus, that's where your strength comes from, that's where your wisdom comes from. You are to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. You'll be guided and you'll be strengthened and you'll be given understanding as to how to do what needs to be done through the Lord Jesus Christ. So whatever you do – in word or deed – pick it up and do it in the strength, in the consciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Giving thanks to God and the Father by Him." This will be the source of grace that you have. It is from "God and the Father." I want you to notice how Paul says here, "Giving thanks to God and the Father." You ask, isn't that the same person? Yes, but in a certain, special way. He is your Father in the sense in which you have been born again, in the sense that He is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ who is in you. He is your God in the sense that He is the God of the Holy Spirit who is actually moving in you. You are to give thanks to God and the Father, the one whose son, whose child you are – your heavenly Father. This is the language of the Holy Spirit. This is the way the Holy Spirit will move you.

There are people who make a great deal of thinking about God and think of God as the creator. That's very important. Many people think of God as the sovereign, the controller and that's very important. And there are a good many people who think of Him as the judge and that is important. And in our day and time we think of Him as the benefactor; a great many people will talk to you and will give you to understand that God is doing good to all people and that's all true. But a Christian primarily thinks about God as the Father of His Lord Jesus Christ.

And now we are to see how this whole principle, this whole way of living in the Lord Jesus Christ is going to actually come into action. It's important to remember now, in the exhortations that follow, what is said to wives and to husbands and to children and to fathers and to servants and to masters, that these exhortations are exhortations to Christian people. Don't misunderstand me. Anybody could have them just like the gospel. Whosoever will may come to the Savior and become a Christian, but if a person doesn't want to and hasn't come, then salvation is not for him, as you very well know. And so it is here with reference to these exhortations. I think we need to be careful that we do not let the natural mind of the world pick these ideas up and work on them and present their views. The natural mind will never understand the meaning of these exhortations; these are only to be understood insofar as you belong to the Lord. The Lord belongs to you, is in you and you're right now in the presence of God and in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord." And we don't need to spend a long time on that. What that means is, yield the executive leadership in the family to the man. Yield yourselves, submit yourselves, insofar as leadership is concerned, to your own husband. Now this may require grace, but if you're a Christian and you're trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, you'll have grace. Trust the providence that brought you two together in the first place. After all, you're not trusting every man. You're not submitting to every man. You're submitting to your own husband. You had a choice

about that. That's the man you chose. That's the man you gave yourself to. Now trust the providence that brought you two together. "As it is fit in the Lord." And by the way, this may not be such a great risk. After all, the Lord may have led you into the very situation that you're in. Now play the game. Let Him be the director and you work along with Him.

"Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them." This might seem to some people a very superficial thing and there are people in the world, I know, that would smile; but so far as you and I are concerned it can be very meaningful, especially if you were to compare it with a similar passage in the book of Ephesians. Look at Ephesians 5 :25 where you will read, "Love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." That's what Paul means. When Paul says to love your wife, he is not referring to sentimental emotion. He is not referring to approving your wife, or esteeming your wife, or adoring your wife. He is asking you to help her . Love her the way Christ loved you. Christ gave Himself for you to help her. So, husbands, give yourself to your wives to help her.

"And be not bitter against them." Now this is referring to a very common emotional attitude. It's a very common thing for a person to have a feeling of disaffection to someone else who is with them who is supposed to be following them and supposed to be working along with them. Now I don't need to go further on this. Let me just tell you right now that it is recognized over and over again in Scripture, as it is known in actual everyday experience, that it's an easy thing to get a bad feeling about the people who are supposed to be working with you. If you're supposed to be in charge and someone is supposed to be following you and doing what you asked him to do, it's an easy thing to get to feel bitter about those people, because they don't always seem to follow you. They don't always seem to want to do what you want them to do. And it can get tiresome, and annoying. It refers, as I say, to a very common emotional attitude.

By the way, when you have looked at this for wives and husbands, I want to point out to you that both husbands and wives can find the full exercise of their whole spiritual life right in their own home. If you would want to have anything that would strengthen you for your work and your life there in your home, why not do this . . . have confidence in providence. It brought you together. And depend upon the grace of God; that will strengthen you. This is the way it operates, and if you work it this way, you'll be blessed.

In each case, in both the wife and the husband, there is a common tendency that needs to be repudiated. So far as the wife is concerned, there is a tendency to do what she sees fit to do, to do her own will. She needs to overcome that and yield herself. The husband is inclined to have hard feelings about someone that is supposed to do what he says and doesn't do it. Conquer those hard feelings; don't let them dominate your situation. Do this for your wife's welfare.

"Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." Why would it be well pleasing unto the Lord? That's the way the Lord Jesus did. That's exactly the way He lived. He did always the things that pleased His Father, and it would be pleasing to the Lord to find children obeying their parents. All children, I know, should obey their parents, but especially children who are trusting in Him. children who have the grace of God in their hearts. When the Bible says "parents," it means far more than your biological father and mother. It means your schoolteacher. It means your director. It means the policeman at the street corner. If you're working in an office, it means your boss. Obey the person who is over you in all things. This is well pleasing unto the Lord.

Now Paul talks to fathers, and this means far more than biological father. It refers to anybody in a position of directive control. "Provoke not your children to anger." The Christian person who has the place of leadership has a responsibility not to conduct himself in such a way as to irritate those who are working with him and provoke them to wrath. This requires a performance in which the father will not do things that would provoke a child. For instance, it would be provoking if a father asked a child to go to church regularly and the father doesn't go to church regularly himself. If the father wants the child to be very

careful in his conduct, the father must be careful in his own conduct. Otherwise, that's enough to provoke a person who is being directed.

And then there's inconsistency. When a person in the place of leadership is going along and one day is like this and the other day is like that; or, without any explanation or without any warning he suddenly changes direction, and so on, it can provoke the people who are following.

A Christian person should be careful to conduct himself in such a way that he does not provoke the people who are following . . . "lest they be discouraged." I think sometimes of children that I have seen in various aspects in various places and their parents are forever finding fault. There's nothing that child can do that isn't wrong, and the parent never speaks to the child except to correct. That's discouraging. When the person who is in the place of appraisal and responsible direction never sees or recognizes or comments on anything good, but just points out the things that aren't being done right, that's a discouraging thing and a Christian shouldn't do that.

Now in all of this there is no suspension of the social process. But this is bringing in what we can the dynamic for getting it done.

Much of the rest of this I am going to have to leave with you to study for yourself. It is not complicated, and you now know the 'basis of Paul's approach. You will read about servants – they are to obey in all things. And then they are told whatsoever they do they're to "do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.

Masters are to give unto their servants "that which is just and equal" . . . fairness, justness and equity. "Knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven." Here are adequate principles for labor and capital. So far as labor is concerned, do a good job. So far as capital is concerned, give them fair wages.

And so you can see that there is a great deal of wisdom in the book of Colossians . . . wisdom that is applicable to situations in which the Christian finds himself today. The various aspects of living in Christ Jesus never change, and day by day we should be in fellowship with Him. And in the same spirit we will find fellowship with each other. Christian people do not have to go it alone. We don't have to be that wise. We don't have to be that strong. We don't have to be that good. We don't need to go it alone and our Christian life doesn't depend on our being perfect in ourselves. We have a Savior and He is our Lord. We receive Him, rest ourselves in Him, yield ourselves to Him, follow Him, trust Him, and we are blessed by Him.

And all of this is ours because Christ in us is the hope of glory.