

Colossians

It is generally accepted that Paul wrote this letter from Roman imprisonment around the year 60-61. I say generally accepted. There are some scholars that question whether or not it is authentically a letter from Paul.

The main reason is that Paul addresses a heresy in this letter that was generally not widely known until sometime later. I believe that this is a weak argument. The heresy – which we will explore – had to start somewhere and sometime. I believe that in this letter we simply have the earliest known record of this heresy.

When we last met in November, we studied Philemon. Philemon and Colossians are companion letters (along with Ephesians and Philippians). Meaning they were written at or near the same time and from the same place.

We learned in our study of Philemon (which is available from our website), that Philemon was a leader of a home church that met in Colossae. So, both Philemon and Colossians were delivered together.

Chapter 1

1:1 – Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

Paul begins with a customary greeting in verses 1 & 2, and then into a longer thanksgiving beginning in verse three.

Paul calls himself an apostle of Jesus Christ, a title he uses in 1 & 2 Corinthians, Ephesians & 1 & 2 Timothy.

Speaking of Timothy, we call all of the letters associated with Paul as Paul's letters. But some of them, like this one, are actually Paul & Timothy's letters.

2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians & Philemon are actually from Paul & Timothy. We don't think of Timothy as actually contributing to those letters, but most likely he did.

Timothy's contributions to those letters may help to explain why some of the syntax and language used is often a little different – and that is something that causes scholars to debate the authenticity as a letter from Paul.

Well – the letters themselves tell us that many of them are letters from Paul & Timothy.

For those who are unfamiliar with Timothy, he was a pastor and a missionary companion of Paul. The Book of Acts tells us that Timothy's father was a Greek and his mother was Jewish.

He was from Asia Minor, where Paul encountered him on a missionary journey. Timothy joined Paul on his journey's after Paul and Barnabas parted ways.

1:2 – To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

Colossae – **map**.

Colossae was a city about 100 miles east of Ephesus, in Asia Minor. Unlike most of Paul's letters, it doesn't appear that Paul had ever visited Colossae.

I'm reading from the NIV, which said – To God's holy people.
Older translations have – To the saints.

You may remember from a sermon series from 2020 – the word we translate as saints was the Greek word (Hag-ee-os).

It meant holy, but holy meant sacred, set apart for God's use. The word saints had nothing to do with perfect people or people who performed miracles.

You and I are called to be saints – holy people – set apart for God to use.

1:3 – We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God’s people

We always thank God – who is the we? Paul & Timothy.

Paul calls God the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is going to address false teachings in this letter, and this identity is important and will be mentioned again in this letter.

The end of verse four in the NIV has for all God’s people. Again, other translations have saints.

So they heard of their faith and love. Now he adds this about faith ...

1:5 – The faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the *gospel* ⁶ that has come to you.

Their faith and love comes from the hope that is stored up in heaven. Remember, biblical hope is an expectation. So, in essence, this is saying that they receive faith and love because they know what the future holds.

This is a wonderful way to look at life in the here and now. Regardless of circumstances we should be people of faith and love because we know how the story ends. And we know how our story ends. Of course our ending here is really just our beginning.

Paul writes about the true message of the good news. This is leading up to his words about the true gospel/good news.

1:7 – You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant,^[c] who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸ and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

If you watched my last study, we covered Paul’s letter to Philemon. We were introduced to Epaphras at that time.

Philemon 1:23 – Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings.

Epaphras is mentioned twice here in Colossians, and was instrumental in working with Paul to establish the church in Colossae (Although Paul had not been there). In Philemon we're not told why he is a fellow prisoner. Perhaps, he was arrested in Rome for Christian activities, or Paul is using the term spiritually.

Paul calls Epaphras a fellow servant. Literally, a fellow bond servant. A bond servant was someone who had sold themselves into slavery.

Like Paul. Epaphras was sold out to Jesus.

Verses 9-14 are Paul's (and Timothy's) prayer for the Christians in Colossae. Here in verse 9 we get the main point of this prayer – and it's an important point! If you watched my sermon this morning, it will sound familiar.

Paul prays that they will grow in the knowledge of God.

1:9 – For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives

Paul and Timothy were missionary's, we think of that as their ministry, and it was. But they shared in a ministry with all believers, and it's a ministry of which we can all share – the ministry of prayer.

Knowledge of God and of God's will is not only helpful – it is essential for Christians.

1:10 – so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

In this verse Paul gives several reasons why he is praying for their knowledge of God. First, this knowledge of God will help their actions to match their beliefs.

Second, growing in the knowledge of God is pleasing to God.

Third, so that their loves would bear fruit. Mature Christians are fruit bearing Christians.

1:11 – being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience,

The verb tense found within this prayer is ongoing. In other words, being strengthened doesn't stop. We don't reach a point where we have achieved all we can achieve.

Indeed – endurance and patience is prayed for here. You can have great patience for a while, but something in life is going to test your patience. So, we pray that we will continually be strengthened with God's power.

Did you catch that in this verse? To be continually strengthened with all power doesn't mean all of our power. No, power according to his/God's/Jesus' glorious might.

If you're needing and praying for endurance an/or patience – pray for God's power within you to supply you with what you need.

1:12 – and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

Paul & Timothy's final petition for the Colossians is that they would acknowledge God's goodness to them.

That goodness of God most assuredly includes God qualifying us to share in God's inheritance. It is God who has qualified us – not ourselves.

Ephesians 2:8 – it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Finally, Paul mentions the kingdom of light. Paul was a Jew, and according to the Jewish people, God & the knowledge of God, the goodness of God, was symbolized by light while sin and ignorance of God was symbolized by darkness.

We see that theme of light and darkness throughout the Bible, both old and new testaments. We see it over and over again in John's gospel and letters.

1:13 – For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness. The word here translated as dominion is translated in various ways. Domain of darkness – Power of darkness – Authority of darkness. The word can even be translated as influence – influence of darkness.

The kingdom of his son. There are two kingdoms. There is the kingdom of the world – of the darkness. And, there is the kingdom of Light, the kingdom of Jesus.

Ephesians 2:1 – As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air ...

Ephesians 6:12 – Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Verse 14 ends Paul's prayer – in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. The word often translated as redemption can also be translated ransom. I like it translated as ransom. We are ransomed from the powers of the dark world – the powers which have a hold of those who are not in Christ.

Jesus paid the ransom with his body.

Hosea 13:14 – “I will deliver this people from the power of the grave;
I will redeem them from death.
Where, O death, are your plagues?
Where, O grave, is your destruction?”

1 Timothy 2:5 – For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

Verse 15 begins a new section that runs through verse 23 that focuses on the supremacy of Jesus.

1:15 – The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

The word we translate as image means a representation. Consider the representation. Literally the word is re-presentation. Jesus is the re-presentation of God here on earth.

Jesus is God in human form. God with us, Emanuel.
God, who had not been seen with human eyes, was made visible in Jesus.

The phrase – firstborn of all / over all creation – has been the subject of considerable debate. Some have tried to interpret this as saying that Jesus was God's first creation, and after that everything else was created by or through Jesus.

Taken that way – Jesus was created and is not equal with God. However, most have interpreted firstborn to refer to supremacy, or priority. Interpreted this way – it says that Jesus is supreme over all creation.

John 1:1 – In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1 continues in verse **3** – Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

Which we have in Colossians 1:16.

1:16 – For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

Remember, this section is about the supremacy of Jesus. In this verse, Paul shows the all encompassing nature of Jesus' creative power.

Note that not only were all things made by Jesus, they are also created through Jesus and for Jesus.

Romans 11:36 – For from him and through him and for him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.

1:17 – He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Remember the controversy over verse 15 – the firstborn over all creation. Here, Paul makes it clear that Jesus existed before all things.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews (Some claim to be Paul), wrote the same thing.

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

1:17b – in him all things hold together.

Not only is Jesus/God responsible for creating all things, He is also the reason all things continue to exist.

Jesus is the creator and sustainer.

Paul will now move from Jesus being the maker and sustainer of all creation, to the Christian Church.

1:18 – And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

First, Jesus is the head of the body, the church. Paul often called the church the very body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:27 – Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Ephesians 4:11 – So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

As the head of the church – all who are in the church are under the authority of Jesus. Our very lives should reflect the commands of the one in authority.

That includes the command to love one another as Christ has loved us.

Paul gives two additional qualities we find in Jesus. He is the beginning. Again, this shows Jesus' equal status with God – Jesus is God. It also shows his role in creation.

Then, Paul refers to Jesus as the firstborn from among the dead. Remember, from verse 15 we had the phrase the firstborn over all creation. We understand that to mean that to speak to supremacy. Jesus reigns supreme over all creation.

As firstborn from among the dead – again, not only is Jesus the first to receive resurrection power, Jesus reigns supreme over all who receive eternal life.

If there were much doubt about what Paul is inferring, he adds: so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

1:19 – For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

The theological point we have here is the incarnation. That is, in Jesus the fullness of God dwelt. A mystery of our faith is that Jesus was fully human and fully God.

John 1:14 – The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

1:20 – and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

In this verse we first have our reconciliation. Our avenue to become right with God is found through Jesus, our Christ.

Romans 5:10 – while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son ...

Secondly, we have the reconciliation of all things – of all of creation. This is not universalism – meaning all people regardless of repentance.

But it does mean the spiritual as well as physical realm.

Note Paul says in verse 20 – to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Does this mean that there exists the avenue of reconciliation for demonic spirits, or evil powers?

Of course! This whole section has been about the supremacy of Jesus. If Jesus is not supreme over the spiritual forces of evil, what chance do we have?

You might say – hey, those spiritual forces of evil are enemies of God – how could they ever be reconciled?

Well, let’s consider the next verse.

1:21 – Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of^[g] your evil behavior.

The KJV has – And you that were sometime alienated ...
The Greek would be – at one time alienated.

In Pauline theology, and therefore in Christian theology, all people are either alienated with God, or at peace with God through Jesus Christ.

Alienated from God does not mean someone is inherently a bad or evil person, but we are either in Christ or we are not. And if we are not in Christ then we are alienated from God.

So, I go back to the previous verse in which Paul wrote – to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Our alienation from God is no different than the alienation of the spiritual forces that are alienated from God. This is not to say that the spiritual forces of evil aren't all that bad – it is to show how bad it is for us, or anyone, to be alienated from God.

Alienation is separation from God's family.

1:22 – But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation

Three things that the death of Jesus has done for us are given here.

First, Jesus died so that we could be holy. Literally, set apart. Set apart from what? From that which is alienated from God – from that and those that are not in the family of God.

John 1:12 – Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God ...

Secondly, Jesus' death makes us blameless. The word is usually translated in this verse as without blemish. However, the Greek word, (am'-o-mos), also means blameless. Older translations correctly have blameless.

Third, Jesus dies so that we could be above reproach, or free from accusation. To understand this, we must note that anything that can be accused cannot be part of God's family, for God is holy.

Through Christ, we have become free from accusation.

I know that once saved always saved is an ongoing topic of discussion and of some debate. I believe that there are plenty of passages in the Bible that address the security of our salvation, and the passage we are reading right now is one of those passages.

Let's read verse 22 again and continue with verse 23.

1:22 – But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation

1:23 – if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.

We will be free from accusation IF we continue in our faith. Faith is the key to salvation. We can be secure in our salvation as long as we are people of faith.

Some translation translate that IF as since. However you translate it, I believe that the intent is the same. We are made holy in Jesus Christ through faith in Jesus.

1:23 – if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the *gospel*. This is the *gospel* that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Remember, this letter is from Paul & Timothy. Here he emphasizes that was is written in that verse, and in the verses in the section to come, are from Paul.

It's doubtful that Paul believed that every living person in his world had heard the good news of Jesus. However, he is poetically referring to its rapid spread during the past couple of decades.

Paul just stated that he is a servant of the good news. Now starts a section emphasizing his ministry. A ministry of suffering!

1:24 – Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

Paul wrote this letter from Rome while under house arrest. Even under such conditions, he can still rejoice. This is reminiscent of James 1 ...

James 1:2 – Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,^[a] whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Paul could rejoice in suffering because he knew that the end result was glory in God's presence. Is that the end we are working towards? Or, do earthly ends dominate our minds?

Paul rejoiced in suffering for Jesus, and in suffering for those that had faith and who would come to faith in Jesus.

There has been debate about what Paul means by ...

1:24 – Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions ...

Was Paul saying that that the suffering of Christ was not enough – that something was lacking? Not at all.

Jesus sacrificed himself for the world. The Church did not exist when Jesus suffered and died. Paul's sufferings were for the church – the building up of the church.

I don't believe that Paul was in any way suggesting that Jesus didn't do enough, but I do believe that Paul was emphasizing his service to the church. A service that caused him to suffer.

In some way, we are all called to suffer for the sake of the Body of Christ.

1:25 – I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people.

Paul wrote that he became a servant or minister by the commission given to him by God. The word we translate as commission can – and maybe should be – translated as steward.

God appointed Paul to be a steward of the good news. In biblical times, a steward was a trusted servant / slave / charged with the care of his masters property.

The property Paul had been entrusted with – as he points out in verse 25 – was the very word of God in its fullness.

In verse 26, Paul calls the Word of God a mystery which had now been revealed. In Romans 16:25, Paul also called the word of God a mystery that had now been revealed.

How had it been a mystery? Before Jesus came to earth, no one knew exactly how God planned to fulfill the prophecies of the messiah. Certainly, Paul hadn't understood. He lived his life expecting a different kind of Messiah, that is why he spent some years persecuting the church.

But, by the grace of God, Paul came to understand the mystery.

Ephesians 3:4 – In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

1:27 – To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Paul says – to them – who are the them he is referring to? There are two thoughts on this. First, they are those, like him, who had become a servant to the church. In particular, he was referring to the apostles and evangelists who had led the church through its infancy.

Secondly, they are those who are hearing and coming to understand the mystery of the good news. Certainly the Gentiles, and some of the Jews.

The glorious riches of this mystery is Christ in you and I!

1:28 – He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

In this verse, Paul gives four ways in which he, and those like him, were communicating the message.

First, by proclamation. This would be by evangelistic preaching.

Second, through admonishing – which meant to warn them. The word in the Greek can also mean to counsel them. This would include the teachings we read from Paul that would help people live a Christian life.

Admonishing, warning, counseling, would be what those who had accepted the evangelist teachings would then receive.

Third would be teaching, or instruction. This would be further teaching on the Christian worldview. Things like, what does it mean that Jesus is our Lord.

And fourth, Paul, and those like him, desired Christian maturity for those that called upon the name of Jesus.

Ephesians 4:11 – Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature.

1:29 – To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

The NIV that I am reading says I strenuously contend. Not the best translation. The word is labor, toil to the point of weariness.

Chapter 2

Tonight we will look at chapter 2 of Paul & Timothy's letter to the Christians in Colossae. Remember, last week I mentioned that there was a heresy, false teachings, that were happening in Colossae, and this will be addressed in this chapter.

2:1 – I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally.

Paul is speaking of his burden – his spiritual burden – that he has for the Christians in Colossae and Laodicea. He writes about how hard he is contending for them. Other translations have – how hard I am striving for you – what great conflict I have for you.

The Greek word here is *agona* – and we get the word *agony* from this word. This reflects the burden that Paul carried for the Christians.

Laodicea is mentioned. Laodicea was 12 miles west of Colossae. Remember Epaphras, who was instrumental in founding the church in Colossae, he also helped to establish the church in Laodicea. We will read about that in chapter 4.

2:2 – My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,

The primary goal of Paul's letter was encouragement. He wants to encourage them spiritually. In chapter four, Paul will go on to say that he has sent to them a man named Tychicus on their behalf (Paul & Timothy) in order that he may encourage them.

The NIV in verse two has *united in love*. Your translation may have *knit together in love*. That is what the Greek says. Paul is trying to paint a word picture of the unique unity that believers should share.

And, this word picture seems to indicate that that the receiving of the full riches of the understanding of Christ is achievable only through unity.

Paul wants them to understand the mystery of God, that is, Christ. Paul uses the word mystery four times in this letter. The mystery is Jesus, our Christ.

Remember, the mystery was how can we be saved? How can we be right with God. The answer is Christ, and that is why he words it the ways he does: in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,

This mystery is no longer hidden.

2:2 – My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

So, Jesus is the mystery.
Jesus is the one in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
The mystery that is no longer hidden from us.

2:4 – I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.

2:5 – For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

Fine sounding arguments. Literally – persuasive speech. Paul is directly addressing a problem that existed in Colossae. The word that he uses for deceive is very specific. The teachers he will write about were not confused – they were purposely being dishonest.

2:6 – So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him,

Literally, it says continue to walk in him, which was a Jewish phrase that meant to live like and think like him.

In chapter one, Paul wrote about the superiority of Jesus, and the forgiveness of sins. Since Jesus is Lord of all creation – and since Jesus has offered us salvation – Jesus must be more than our Savior. Jesus must be our Lord.

And we ought to live like and think like our Lord.

The false teachers in Colossae emphasized works and personal sacrifice as the means to pleasing God. Good works are an important aspect of the Christian faith, but these should spring forth from our faith – not as a reason to make God happy.

In fact, Paul already spoke about how to please God back in chapter 1.

Colossians 1:9 – We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, ¹⁰ so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and **please him in every way**: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience,

The knowledge of God – which increases our faith – is what pleases God.

2:6 – So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, **2:7** – rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Some important images here in verse seven. We must live life acting and thinking like Jesus. This can only happen if we begin by being rooted in him. If you are a gardener, or a botanist, or forester, you are probably familiar with the word rhizome.

Rhizomes are an underground root system that grown horizontally underground. Rhizomes are really hard to dig up.

The Greek word for rooted in this verse is rhizoe – from which we get rhizome.

The implication is that we must first be firmly planted in Christ.

Then we are told to be built up in him. The Greek word meant to build upon the foundation. Our foundation is the roots we put down. Then we build upon it.

V. 7 – rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith.

Being rooted is essential / foundational. But, not all. Then our faith must be built up and it must be strengthened.

Some translations have established in faith – the Greek word means to be made secure.

V. 7 – rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught.

Who taught them? Not Paul, remember he had not been to Colossae. It was Epaphras. He was mentioned by name in 1:3 and will be again in chapter 4.

In verse eight, Paul begins his direct attack on the false teaching that was happening in Colossae.

2:8 – See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy

V. 8 – KJV – Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit,

V. 8 – RSV – See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit

So whichever translation you prefer, we have some philosophy and we have some deceit. Philosophy in the Greek was love of wisdom. Paul is not attacking philosophy in general – although for centuries philosophy was frowned upon by the Church.

Note that the word philosophy is qualified in whatever translation you use by a word that we translate as deceit or deceptive.

2:8 – See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces^[a] of this world rather than on Christ.

We understand human traditions, but what about the elemental spiritual forces of this world?

There has been some debate as to what Paul meant by this term. It was a term used in the ancient world to depict a couple of things. First, it was used to depict things such as the wind – the air – the sun and the moon – things that pertained to the created and natural world.

Although sometimes it referred to things such as angels, and Paul will touch on this later in this chapter.

Whichever way it is interpreted, Paul seems to be saying that in the false teaching in Colossae, there were things that seemed to have been lifted up over and above Christ.

2:9 – For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,

Keep in mind that Paul's letters were written long before the church had any creeds. The creeds were written so that Christians would have correct theology. They were something that could be repeated, said in unison, and would enforce proper doctrine.

The early church had none of that, and doctrine that wasn't proper certainly crept in. Much of what Paul writes in to combat such false doctrine.

The person of Jesus was always something of debate in the early church. Was Jesus God, was Jesus just a person that had spiritual powers?

In this letter, Paul has already written in **1:15** – The Son is the image of the invisible God.

Remember – that means Jesus is the re-presentation of God. We can't see God, but we have seen Jesus.

Here in verse nine, Paul writes that the fullness of God lives in Christ. He doesn't say it lived in Christ when Christ walked the earth. The fullness of God was, is, and ever shall be Christ.

Titus 2:13 – we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great *God and Savior*, Jesus Christ.

2:10 – and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

Beginning in chapter 1 we read about the supremacy of Jesus. Here, we have it again as we read that Jesus is the head over every power and authority.

So, whether the elemental spiritual forces in verse eight meant the natural elements or angels – Jesus is over those, as well.

This verse began with – in Christ you have been brought to fullness. In the Greek it is literally – you have been fulfilled.

What Paul – and Timothy – are getting at here is that we do not need anything other than Jesus. This is pointed towards the false teachings that are happening in Colossae.

The study of philosophical thought is fine – but it is not necessary to be fulfilled in Christ.

2:11 – In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh^[b] was put off when you were circumcised by^[c] Christ,

Because circumcision was so important to the Jews, often they would use the word circumcision to mean the whole law. This is one of those places where circumcision represents the entire law.

Verse 11 is saying that Jesus did for us what the law can not do.

What matters is knowing Jesus, faith in Jesus, living in / walking in / Jesus, not anything physical we could do to our bodies.

2:12 – having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

For a Christian – baptism replaces circumcision. Paul uses imagery here to refer to our being buried with Christ.

Something new – something other than circumcision of the flesh – was called for long ago by the prophets, including ...

Jeremiah 4:4 – circumcise your hearts,
you people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem

Please note – Paul is in no way saying that baptism is a requirement for salvation. It was accepted that all new believers would be baptized as a public sign of repentance – dying to sin.

Baptism serves as a symbol of dying to the old self and beginning a new life in Christ.

Recognizing that his Colossian listeners would have been baptized, Paul acknowledges it as a replacement for circumcision.

He adds – we are raised with Jesus through our faith.

The next verse explains that the death we have been raised from is the death to sin.

2:13 – When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you^[d] alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,

Our spiritual condition before faith in Jesus is that we were dead in our sins.

Romans 6:23 – the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in^[b] Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 2:4 – But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

2:13 – When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh –

The word for flesh is the Greek word sarx – It means human nature – Paul uses this word throughout his letters for sinful nature.

So, the uncircumcision of your flesh refers to a state of non repentance. When we were dead in our sins we had not yet repented of our sinful nature.

2:14 – He forgave us all our sins,¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

In this verse, Paul notes several aspects of the forgiveness that we have through Jesus.

First, our sinful record has been cancelled. We read legal indebtedness – other translations have cancelled our bond – or ordinances against us.

In the Greek it was a legal term – when a person was in financial debt the person who was owed the money could have you put in prison. They would have recognized this term as such a debt being removed.

We are told that Jesus has taken our indebtedness away – or set it aside. We are more than pardoned. Those who put their faith in Jesus have their sins removed from God's sight. God can't hold them against us because they have been removed – set aside.

Then we are told they had been nailed to the cross. We must remember that the cross was a brutal image – one of terror. The cross meant death. Our sins have been nailed to the cross – they are dead to us.

2:15 – And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Remember from verse 8 – elemental spiritual forces^[a] of this world rather than on Christ. This verse refers to that. The cross defeated those spiritual forces, certainly referring to the spiritual forces of evil.

This verse has nothing to do with earthly powers and authorities.

How did Jesus make a public spectacle of them? By triumphing over death.

The book of Ephesians – which we will study next – has a lot to do with these forces.

Ephesians 3:10 – His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 6:12 – For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

The power of Christ within us is stronger than those powers.

1 John 4:4 – You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

2:16 – Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.

Paul has written that our relationship with Jesus is not based on physical things such as circumcision. Here, we read that it is also not based upon annual or frequently observed rituals. Nor, is it based upon what we eat or drink.

This was often addressed by Paul in his letters, most notably in 1 Corinthians and Galatians. So, it seems to have been an ongoing problem in the early church.

It's an ongoing problem still today.

Do this – don't do this – worship this way – don't worship that way –
Baptize this way – don't baptize that way –

On and on it goes.

You want to worship in a traditional manner – then do so and don't let anyone criticize you. BUT don't criticize those who don't.

You want to worship in a contemporary manner – then do so and don't let anyone criticize you. BUT don't criticize those who don't.

Remember, Paul is addressing some false teaching in Colossae – so obviously these sorts of things were being criticized by those false teachers.

Among other things, Paul mentions a sabbath day in this verse. Perhaps there was some descension among gentile converts who generally observed the Lord's Day as

Sunday for that is the day that Jesus rose from the dead and the Jewish converts who would observe a sabbath on Saturday.

2:17 – These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Referring to the Old Testament requirements mentioned in verse 16, Paul writes that they were a shadow of the things to come. The Greek word that we translate as shadow can also be translated as sketch or outline.

The Old Testament law was only an outline of what was to come. What was to come is found in Christ.

Jesus himself said in Matthew 5:17 that he was the fulfillment of the law.

2:18 – Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind.

As Paul often does, here he uses an athletic reference. What we translate as disqualify you was a sports term for someone disqualified for an infraction of a sporting rule.

We gather that some Christians were ‘disqualifying’ other Christians because they didn’t adhere to certain Old Testament rules and regulations.

The NIV that I am reading from reads delights in false humility. Some translations have insisting on self debasement. In this instance, false humility is a better translation. Perhaps he was referring to the practice of self denial as a form of Christian worship.

The self denial of so called ascetic Christians, and the worship of angels, was something that the Church would deal with decades later. This is why some claim that this letter is not authentically Paul’s because those things were more common at a later time.

No need to say this isn’t Paul’s (and Timothy’s) letter based solely on this. Again, just because this practice wasn’t common until some decades later, it’s no reason to say it didn’t happen in Colossae during Paul’s lifetime.

The self denial would have been practices such as prolonged fasting, a vow of silence, or a vow of celibacy. While there is nothing inherently wrong in such practices, to disqualify other Christians because they do not observe such things – and taking pride – false humility – in such things is wrong.

Then Paul mentions the worship of angels. Quoting Deuteronomy 6:13, Jesus said in **Matthew 4:10** – “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”

We suppose that some of the false teachers were teaching a form of mysticism and philosophy which insisted that special visions from angels were essential to the Christian life.

In verse 18 Paul wrote – Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen – this would refer to visions.

Paul calls such people in verse 18 unspiritual. That sounds strange since they were claiming to be spiritual. Well, unfortunately, this is the kind of spirituality that many in our country today – and many Christians today – seek.

We are to be spiritual – but what we see, what we hear, and what we understand is to come only from God’s Holy Spirit.

2:19 – They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Again we have the Church referred to as the Body – implying the Body of Christ. Jesus is the head of the Church, the body.

Growth in God, growth of the Body, does not happen due to rituals or in the case in Colossae – by certain observances – but by the will of God. That’s what this verse tells us and that is an interesting concept to consider.

If the church in America is not growing, it is because God is not causing it to grow. If that is true – and this verse would imply that this is true – then something must be wrong with the church in America.

Something to consider. If the church in America is not growing, then again as this verse implies, it is because we have lost touch with the head of the body.

2:20 – Since/If you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: ²¹ “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”?

This verse would lead us to believe that the elemental spiritual forces are not the sun and moon and such, but the powers of darkness in this world.

Those forces want to pull us away from true Christianity – and abundance of life – by the continual observance of do’s and don’ts. When our faith becomes religious practices we have moved away from true life in Christ.

Here me – religious practices are not wrong, but we must always know why we do what we do – and we must always look beyond the practice/ritual. We do not worship the rituals, we worship God alone.

If there are those who say that Christians must observe the Old Testament rules – have them read this passage from Colossians. This is exactly what he is addressing.

2:22 – These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings.

There are many human commands and teachings based on Scripture that are not useful to the Body of Christ. Not when they are done for the sake of earning points with God, or trying to please God.

Be very careful when you are told that ‘real’ Christians must do this or that. Or when you must worship a certain way, or you must observe certain days.

Things based on human commands and teachings are destined to perish.

2:23 – Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

They have the appearance of wisdom. Yes, they do. People who follow very restrictive religious rules may look holy to others – and they may be – but it's what is on the inside not the rules and regulations that make it so.

You can be very religious and wrong. That's not a knock against being religious. It's what is on the inside – it's the motives – that matter.

If extended fasting brings you closer to God, then great, but you can't impose that rule on others and expect the same results.

If worshipping a certain way brings you closer to God, then great, but you can't impose your way on others and expect the same results that you receive.

Chapter 3

In chapter two, Paul (and Timothy) wrote about baptism replacing circumcision. They wrote about how baptism symbolizes the believers death to sin. But, they also wrote about being raised – in a spiritual sense – with Jesus.

This being raised with Jesus by dying to sin happens in the here and now. If we have been raised with Christ through our baptism and by dying to sin – what does our resurrected life in the here and now look like?

This is what we are looking at here in the beginning of chapter three.

3:1 – Since/If, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

The NIV has set your hearts on things above. Perhaps that is in line with the intent of what is written – but in the Greek it is simply seek the things above.

Verse two is simply – think about the things above.

Regardless of the translation – verses 1 & 2 tell us to seek and think about the things above, where Christ is – implying godly things.

Philippians 4:8 – Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Before we look at 3:4, remember **2:20** – Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world.

Romans 6:6 – we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with,^[a] that we should no longer be slaves to sin—⁷because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

When we accept Jesus as our Savior, when we repent of our sin, we have died to sin.

3:3 – For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

For you died – Again, Paul is speaking of our dying to sin. But what does it mean that our life is hidden with Christ?

The Greek word we translate as hidden – kroop to – is most often translated as hidden, but it can mean laid up with – or concealed with. In other words – Jesus has us now.

3:3 RTT – For you died to sin, and Jesus has you now.

I know that many Christians will often focus on the end times, but for you and I, we are already living in the end times. Jesus has already got us. Whether he returns for us before our flesh dies or not doesn't matter – we're already his.

This verse is qualifying what verses 1 & 2 say –

3:1 – Since/If, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

3:3 – after all, you already died to sin and Jesus has you now.

3:4 – When Christ, who is your^[a] life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

We want to be with Jesus for eternity – well, this great transformation has already taken place!

Jesus already has us – Jesus is our life here and now – and when we finally see Jesus face to face we will be with him in glory! This is good stuff!

Yes, Paul expected the return of Jesus at any moment, and it's been a couple of thousand years. But, Paul shared that verse with the Colossians for security and for a blessed expectation.

This is our security and blessed expectation, as well.

Verse five has a therefore – always consider what comes before a therefore. In this case, verses three and four tell us that Jesus has us now, and for eternity in glory.

3:5 – Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

It says put to death some things. Put to death.

Luke 9:23 – “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”

Taking up our cross is literally putting things to death. We throw that phrase around too loosely – my cross to bear.

We all need to be bearing a cross and daily put to death the things of our earthly nature.

Sexual immorality – the Greek word is porneia. Generally it meant sex outside of marriage, commonly translated as fornication.

The interesting thing about this Greek word, of course we get the modern word pornography from it. But, also the Greek word was derived from a word that meant to sell off – and the most literal definition of the Greek word is the selling off or surrendering sexual purity.

Impurity – sometimes translated as uncleanness. The interesting thing about this word in the Greek, it is anti catharsis. Cantharis is a cleansing, this is that which would keep us from being cleansed. (within).

Remember, this chapter started off with setting our hearts and minds on the things above. When we don't, it keeps us from being cleansed.

Lust – also translated as passion, or as the KJV has it – inordinate affection. The Greek word – pathos – is best translated as passion.

We can think of this as inappropriate distractions that one might seek. Things that lead us away from the things above.

Lust doesn't always pertain to sexual things. People can have an inappropriate passion for material things, fame, money, success, and the list could go on and on.

Evil desires – Again, this certainly doesn't pertain only to sexual things. Anything that we desire that is outside of God's desire for us, is an evil desire. The KJV translates this as evil concupiscence (Kon coop eh sence), which would indicate something sexual. However, that is not the meaning of the Greek. It can be, but not necessarily.

I stress this because we - not correctly – but we tend to place a higher degree of evil on the sexual sins. Lusting after stuff and desiring stuff and things we shouldn't have are sinful, sexual or not.

Greed, which is idolatry – covetousness, which is idolatry: The word we translate as greed or covetousness is an interesting word. It literally means to seek an advantage. I guess the best way to translate this into modern English is – it's looking out for number one.

And when we think of ourselves as number one – we have made ourselves an idol.

Verse six mentions the wrath of God. I don't believe that Paul was limiting God's wrath directed only towards the things mentioned in verse five, but those sins were representative of sin in general.

In fact, I know that what was listed in verse five wasn't an exhaustive list, because he adds more to the list in verse eight. Note that when Paul begins this new list he qualifies it as – such things as these – implying that there were more.

3:7 – You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

We will break these down as we did in verse five. However, why is Paul going through and listing all of these things?

Because the life of a believer – your life and mine – should be characterized by a different lifestyle than that of non believers.

Salvation is by faith – but the Christian life is a changed life, different from the world's.

Anger – The word can also be translated as impulsive. The implication is impulsive, undisciplined outburst. Please note that anger is not inherently wrong. There are some things that we should become angry about. It is the undisciplined outbursts of anger that are sinful.

Rage – sometimes translated as wrath. Is not anger and rage the same? No. The first we translate as anger refers more to the emotional side and the word we translate as wrath implies an action.

Malice – The word we translate as malice implies the desire to bring harm upon someone. Or, the desire for something bad to happen to someone.

Think about this for a moment. This doesn't mean we put this away for the folks close to us but keep it for the really bad people.

We must put away the desire for harm to befall upon anyone and everyone, for that is the new life in Christ.

Slander – The KJV has blasphemy. Blasphemia is the Greek word. This would include insults, lies, or even gossip. Yep, gossip is not a characteristic of the new life in Christ.

Filthy language – or foul talk. This would be language that was intended to be offensive.

3:9 – Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

The word translated as lie meant more than telling a little fib – it meant to deceive and mislead. This verse calls for total honesty and integrity in our lives.

The fallen world is sinful – and sin is the great lie. The great lie was part of our old self. The new self is continually being renewed. That's what we are told in verse ten.

This renewing in the image of our creator – who we have been told in chapter one is Jesus – is ongoing throughout our life.

3:11 – Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

What a wonderful picture of the church in Colossae. The city of Colossae certainly had all of these groups, so it was likely that the church did, as well.

Circumcised and uncircumcised was just another way to say Jew and Gentil.

Barbarians was a term that Greek speaking people used to describe people who did not speak the Greek language. As a result, they were viewed as being uneducated, and usually had the most menial of jobs.

Well, some things haven't changed.

Scythians were people who lived along the Black Sea and Caspian Sea. They were considered the worst of the barbarians.

The slaves mentioned here was the most common kind of slave – a bond servant. Usually a person who had sold themselves into slavery.

The free were usually the rich, or at the very least people who were better off economically.

Now, Paul takes all of these socio – economic groups and what he says next is a theological and political statement.

“But Christ is all, and is in all.”

This is powerful! If anyone is in Christ – then national, ethnic, cultural or social identity are never adequate to define who they truly are.

The social markers we have created to divide are removed when we are in Christ. Social markers are of the world. We are of Christ.

We've been given characteristics of life to avoid. Now, we will receive some instruction on how to live.

3:12 – Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Before we look at these characteristics – let's look at the words used to preface these characteristics.

First, they are God's chosen people. Some translations have – as God's elect. This is not predestination. What is elected is God's way of salvation. Whenever anyone put's their faith in Jesus, and lives/walks in him – they are part of the elect.

God has chosen Christians to be light in the darkness. To live holy lives. That's what we are chosen for! We are about to be given other ways in which the chosen should live.

Paul also calls them holy. As I spoke about this morning – ἅγιος – set apart by (or for) God, holy, sacred.

This goes along with Chosen – chosen to be set apart and used for godly purposes.

Dearly loved – the root word is agape – God doesn't love us because - God loves us without conditions.

Clothe yourselves with compassion – How in the world did the KJV get put on bowels of mercies? Well, it really wasn't stretch from the Greek.

One rendering of the Greek could be clothe yourselves with hearts of compassion.

We would say hearts of compassion because we associate the heart with such emotions as love, joy, compassion. The Greek word, however, was splakna – which literally meant our innards, gut.

The Greeks believed the stomach was the seat of emotions.

The phrase – I've got a gut feeling – that's where it comes from.

Anyway – compassion. The Greek can be compassion, pity, mercy.

Kindness – the word can be translated as goodness. It can be used in the sense of moral goodness. This would speak to integrity.

Humility – literally, lowliness of mind, modesty.

Gentleness – This is not about being timid. It means controlling our strength and power. Maybe we get angry, but we respond with gentleness.

Patience – This and others in this list closely reflect the list found in Galatians 5 – the fruit of the Spirit.

Indeed – these, too, are the fruit of the spirit.

3:13 – Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Let's get personal – do you have that family member that you love, but they take some extra grace to be around? Yep – we all have them!

The word we translate as bear with is actually endure.

We are to endure one another. The Church is supposed to be a family, and as we endure certain family members, we endure one another in the church.

The word we translate as forgive literally means to show grace. We show grace as God has shown grace to us.

3:14 – And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

In verse 12 we are told to clothe ourselves with certain characteristics. Here, we are told over all the other things we are to put on, we cover ourselves with love.

In 1 Corinthians 12:31, Paul called love the more excellent way. In this letter, Paul has already mentioned love three times, and he will again in a few verses.

It is, no doubt, the most important Christian characteristic.

Love, as we are told here, is the only thing that can produce and maintain unity, or harmony, depending upon your translation.

3:15 – Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Beginning in verse 12, Paul gave eight positive characteristics of the Christian life. In this verse he adds two more things for Christians to pursue.

First, he calls Christians to live in peace. Galatians 5 tells us that peace is part of the fruit of the spirit. Colossians 1:20 told us that we have peace through the blood of Jesus. Here, we are told to let that peace rule in our hearts.

We are not called to argue and fight with one another, but to live in peace. Now, this peace isn't necessarily happy feelings. After all, we were just told to even endure one another! That's why he adds here that we are members of the same body.

Then, Paul adds for Christians to be thankful. We find this over and over again in Paul's letters.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 – give thanks in all circumstances

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

And, he will again in this chapter.

3:16 – Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

What a powerful verse – and a powerful picture of the Body of Christ – the Church.

First – we should live life with the message of Christ richly dwelling within us. This is living biblically.

Richly – can also be translated as abundantly. The message of Christ should always be in our hearts and on our minds.

With this message of Christ dwelling within us, and living in peace with one another as we were told in the previous verse – we should teach and admonish one another.

We tend to think of the word admonish being something harsh. It's not. We can also translate this word as counsel or warn. While we might think – hey I can do that! We should also be open to this admonishing from others directed towards us.

This teaching and admonishing isn't done on the basis of what we think – it's done with wisdom. The Greek word for wisdom – sophia – meant with insight, and in this context given to us through the Spirit.

The foundation of all of this is worship. Worship is essential! Worship brings us closer to God and to God's Spirit.

3:17 – And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Inn this chapter, Paul has given 11 negative traits to avoid, and 11 positive traits to seek. In this verse he summarizes and throws in an all encompassing – whatever you do.

Whatever we do – we are to do it in the name of Jesus. The name of Jesus should shape all of our thoughts, words, and all of our actions. This is thinking and living biblically.

Again, we are to give thanks – thankful for the opportunity to live and act in the very name of Jesus Christ, our Savior!

In the rest of the chapter, we are given specific instructions for Christian homes. Directions are given for husbands, wives, children and even servants.

3:18 – Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Well here we go! This has certainly been a verse that has caused much trouble in the Christian world – and mainly because it is not understood properly. The Greek word we translate as submit - (hoop-ot-as'-so) – is an interesting word.

It can have a slightly different meaning depending upon whether or not it is used in a military or non military context. Clearly, this is a non military context.

In a military context it meant to follow the direction of the commander.

In a non military context it meant more of a cooperative effort.

Wives are not being called inferior to their husbands in this passage, but rather they are called to be cooperative helpers.

Paul, and the New Testament, actually lifted the place of women in society.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul wrote about about women preaching. He wrote about them prophesying – which was preaching.

In Galatians 3:28, Paul said that there is no longer male nor female, that we are all one in Christ.

And, speaking to husbands and wives ...

Ephesians 5:21 – Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

3:19 – Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

If we understand this verse in the context of the Greek world during that time, we would understand that Paul is again lifting the place of women.

First – love your wives. The word for love is agape – unconditionally.

In the context of that time, a wife was for bearing children and taking care of a home. It was no scandal or even immoral for a man to find sexual pleasure outside of the marriage.

Men could eros love their wives. Which was more of a sexual love, but they could find that love elsewhere, as well.

In this verse men are given two commands. Love their wives unconditionally, and don't be harsh with them.

Certainly men of that time – and unfortunately throughout time – have been harsh and even abusive with women. This was not to be the case with Christian men.

The word that we translate as harsh also meant to make bitter. Husbands – you're your wives without condition and don't do anything that would make your wife bitter towards you could be an understanding of this passage.

That would include behaviors in our outside of the marriage that would make them bitter.

Ephesians 5:25 – Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

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

Of course, we are familiar with the commandment to honor your parents – which by the way – was written for adult children to honor their aged parents.

However, here, children are commanded to to obey their parents. Paul says the same thing in Ephesians 6:1.

3:21 – Fathers,^[c] do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

This command closely resembles what Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:4. The NIV here says do no embitter. Other translations have do not provoke.

The Greek word could be translated as either. Literally it meant not to stir up.

Regardless of how it is translated, the rest of the verse would show us that fathers are supposed to encourage their children.

Discouraged in this verse is literally lose heart.

Verses 22-25 are directed towards slaves. It may seem strange to us that more is given to the slaves than to husbands, wives, children. The truth of the matter is that the overwhelming majority of the Christians were slaves.

Those addressed in this section were bond slaves, the most common type of slave in the Roman world. These were people who had sold themselves into servitude to another. Well over 50% of the Roman empire consisted of bond servants, or former bond servants.

You didn't look for a job you liked and put in an application. You found something you could do and you sold yourself to the master of the company or house. If you worked hard enough, eventually you would be able to purchase your freedom – or work for a predetermined number of years.

For families, this was the most secure way of providing for your family.

When we read this section, and others like it, you can't compare bond servants with the slavery we had in this country. I'm not defending the Roman practice of bond servants, just that it was an economic practice that the bond servants would seek out.

Some have asked why Paul did not seek the abolishment of bond servitude. Keep in mind, that Paul believed in the imminent return of Jesus. His sole concern was that people would come to know Jesus. Fighting an entrenched economic practice would have taken away from others coming to know Jesus.

3:22 – Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

3:23 – Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,

This is pretty much the same advice that Paul gave to all Christians in verse 17 ...

3:17 – And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Paul is writing about living a life of integrity. Don't work hard for show only when someone is around – be that person all of the time.

For you and I, we ultimately have only one judge over all that we do.

3:23 – since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Bondservants were not entitled to any inheritance from their employers. From a material point of view, being a bond servant gave no hope for any type of retirement.

This verse reminds us all that this life does not have our real and ultimate reward.

3:25 – Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism.

Paul is speaking about our eternal inheritance here, as he was in the previous verse. Also, he is talking to bondservants who were trapped in a horrible economic situation.

They lived through some horrible injustices. They must have asked – where is the justice in this life.

Sadly, so some – for many – there is little justice in this life. It is in the life to come.

Remember, Biblical writers did not write in chapter and verse. That didn't come about until after the printing press and it wasn't a biblical scholar that put them in.

So, chapter 4:1 should be part of this section.

4:1 – Masters, provide your slaves/bondservants with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Mistreatment of a bondservant was socially acceptable. Christians are not to be bound by what's socially acceptable.

Chapter 4

Last week we finished at the end of 4:1. Remember, verse one of chapter four is actually part of the same paragraph that ended chapter three. Chapter and verses were not put in by the writers, but by book makers in the 16th century.

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

Verse 4-6 are the end of the substantive material, the rest being greetings. Here we are told to be devoted to prayer. This doesn't mean to pray when we get up, at meal time, and before we go to bed. Prayer should be an ongoing dialogue with God.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 told us to pray without ceasing – or perhaps, pray without remission.

In this verse we are told to be watchful and thankful as we pray.
Watchful for what?

The phrase be watchful can be translated as be alert. We should be alert for opportunities to pray. There is always someone to pray for.

We should also be thankful as we pray. As we grow in prayer – grow in dialogue with God, we will find it easier to stand in the will of God. This will lead to a growing sense of gratitude for all that God has and is doing for us.

4:3 – And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

So here is the man (along with Timothy) who wrote and influenced about half of the New Testament, and he was asking for prayer. If Paul needed prayer – we certainly need pray!

Our church supports several missionaries in a financial way, and now to a larger part with the Sollors family. We must – like the church in Colossae – make prayer for these missionaries a part of our lives.

4:4 – Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

Consider this verse – how many of the great Bible verses that we know – know of – maybe memorized – were written by Paul? Yet, he asked that he might clearly proclaim the gospel.

We, also, should pray for ourselves and for one another that we would and could be able to clearly proclaim the good news for those who need to hear it.

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

Part of presenting the good news of Jesus is how we treat others – how we talk to them – how we talk about them. With that in mind, we should make the most of every opportunity we have when we are with outsiders – non Christians.

Paul wanted them to make the most of every opportunity in part because he believed that Jesus would return at any moment, and time was short.

Friends, times is always short. No one knows the length of their days. Make the most of every opportunity.

4:6 – Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

So far in this chapter we have Paul presenting evangelism as a work of prayer, a work of clear communication, a matter of wisdom making the most of each opportunity.

Here, in verse six, we are told that evangelism should be gracious. What about the seasoned with salt? What does that mean?

In Paul's day, salt was very valuable, even used as currency. It was valuable because it was about the only way to preserve meats for any length of time. Of course, it could season things, as well.

Our words should preserve the message of Christ. Preserve it – not tear it down by unkind words. The truth of Christ should flavor our speech – flavor it favorably.

4:7 – Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant^[a] in the Lord.

Paul is now wrapping up his letter and begins to mention various Christian friends. Tychicus seems to be the one who delivered this letter, and was accompanied by Onesimus (Philemon).

Tychicus also delivered the letter to the Ephesians. He is also mentioned in 2 Timothy, Titus, and Acts.

We are told that he is a fellow servant in the Lord. The word was fellow bond servant. Just as many of the listeners to this letter were bond servants – who had sold themselves into service / slavery – so had Tychicus sold himself out for the Lord.

4:8 – I am sending him (Tychicus) to you for the express purpose that you may know about our^[b] circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.⁹ He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

Obviously, Tychicus had been in Rome for some time, and knew Paul's situation well. We live in a time of instant news, instant communication around the world. And even so, rumors abound.

Imagine the rumors in those days when it would take weeks for the real news to travel from Rome to Colossae. So, Tychicus is bringing the real news.

Onesimus has returned with Tychicus. Remember Onesimus? He was a runaway slave, who's master was Philemon, a leader of a house church in Colossae. If you missed that study, it was the book we studied just before Colossians, and is available on our website, Facebook video page – maybe YouTube.

4:10 – My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)

In verses 10-14, we will read of six believers who were with Paul in Rome. Here, we have the first two, Aristarchus and Mark.

Aristarchus is likely the same man mentioned in Acts 19, 20 & 27. He was a sometime traveling companion of Paul, most likely an evangelist. He was present in the riot in Ephesus, and as Paul traveled through Macedonia and Greece.

Paul describes him as a fellow prisoner. It's not believed that he was under house arrest, but was serving Paul and stayed with him. However, we know from the Book of Acts that he had been a prisoner with Paul at other times.

Mark is most likely the same Mark mentioned throughout the New Testament, sometimes called John Mark. This Mark traveled with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey.

The Book of Acts tells us that after the first missionary journey they had some sort of falling out. However, it seems as if those fences have been mended.

Mark was a close associate of Peter. Peter even call him his son in 1 Peter 5. He also wrote the gospel that bears his name. The earliest gospel narrative that we have.

Luke, who will be mentioned in a few verses, used much of Mark's gospel to build his own account.

4:11 – Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews / men of circumcision / among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me.

Jesus/Justus, Aristarchus, and Mark were the only Jewish Christians with Paul. A man named Justus is mentioned twice in Acts, but it's not believed to be the same man.

We would gather that the remaining men mentioned in this letter are all Gentiles converts.

What about Timothy who had already been mentioned? No, his mother was Jewish but his father was a Gentile.

4:12 – Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

Epaphras is one of you – he was a Colossian. Back in chapter 1:7 we were told he started the church in Colossae. At some point he had travelled to Rome, and was there when this letter was written.

We are told that he was always wrestling in prayer. The root of the Greek word we translate as wrestling comes from the word agony, or agonizing. Epaphras was doing some serious, intense prayer!

4:13 – I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Obviously, Epaphras was an evangelist of some note. Not only had he founded the church in Colossae, but perhaps the church in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Laodicea is mentioned two other times in this letter, and was one of the churches that were written to in Revelation.

Hierapolis is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible.

Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis were part of a tri-city area. The area is in modern Turkey.

4:14 – Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings.

Paul mentions two more Gentile Christians. First is Luke, the beloved physician. I don't know why the NIV doesn't put that qualifier in here – the beloved. It's in the Greek.

The Luke wrote the Gospel that bears his name and the Book of Acts. Neither had been written at the time Colossians was written. He was often a traveling companion of Paul.

If you studied the Book of Acts with me, you may remember that some sections about Paul are written as 'we traveled from ...' Remember, those are called the – we passages.

Demas is also mentioned. Demas and Luke were also mentioned in Philemon.

Unfortunately, things didn't remain cozy between Demas and Paul.

2 Timothy 4:9 – Do your best to come to me quickly, ¹⁰ for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.

4:15 – Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

Laodicea was about twelve miles from Colossae.

Nympha was probably a somewhat wealthy woman – as the wealthy people had homes large enough to host a church. Remember, there were no church buildings, and all gatherings were in homes.

We're not sure where Nympha's home church was, but it is assumed it was in Laodicea.

We can't infer that Nympha was the leader of the church, but it may have been so. All we really know is that a church met in her home.

4:16 – After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.

Most of Paul's letters – the letters to churches – were meant to be circulated. For one thing, there were often multiple home churches in any one city. One church would have the letter read aloud to the congregation, and then the letter would travel to the next home church.

We have mention of a letter that Paul wrote to the church in Laodicea. We don't have that letter. There have been several fakes throughout the centuries, but nothing that has proven genuine.

Some scholars have suggested that the letter to the Ephesians is the same letter as the letter to the Laodiceans – that it was a circular letter that had made it's way from Ephesus to Laodicea. Not really much to support that theory.

Suffice it to say that there were probably a number of letters from Paul to various churches that did not stand the test of time.

Remember, a careful reading of 1 and 2 Corinthians suggest that there were at least two other letters written to that church.

4:17 – Tell Archippus: “See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord.”

The final person – a Gentile convert, that Paul mentions in Archippus. We gather from the letter to Philemon that Archippus was the son of Philemon and Apphia. From what Paul said about him in that letter – calling him a fellow soldier – and what he says here about Archippus completing the ministry he received from the Lord – it seems likely that Paul had met him at some point.

4:18 – I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

As I've mentioned before, Paul dictated his letters. He would often, as he does here, add a personal note written in his own hand.

Paul asks them to remember his chains. We know he was under house arrest. Was he in literal chains, or did this simply refer to his imprisonment – we don't know. Regardless, he was not free.

Paul's last words were Grace be with you. The word grace literally meant a kindness. In Christian circles it was understood to mean the Grace of God.