

The following Bible Study Notes have been prepared for use in a series of six consecutive weeks of Bible Studies in the context of Bible Study /Prayer Meetings held in Cambuslang Parish Church in the Spring of 2018, led by David Beveridge, an elder of that church.

In the event six meetings was nowhere near enough to cover even briefly all that is contained in this wonderful epistle, and so the notes appear in their entirety in this booklet.

The focus of these studies will be **Paul's Letter to the Colossians**.

Before we begin the study proper let us ask some basic questions.

What is the Bible?

We might answer the question this way; the Bible is the story of how God has arranged to save His people. Salvation from sin is the primary concern of the Bible.

The Bible from Genesis to Revelation focuses on one character and that is Jesus Christ.

The Bible has two main divisions called The Old Testament and The New Testament. The Old looks forward to the coming of Christ and the New describes all that follows after Christ. The coming of Christ is the fulcrum or pivotal event in the history of time and space.

The Bible consists of 66 books; 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. Christians believe that the books were written by men inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, and that the Bible is therefore inerrant and infallible, in its purpose to lead people to salvation, by faith in Jesus Christ.

The great divisions of the Bible may thought of like this:

PREPARATION: THE OLD TESTAMENT

MANIFESTATION: THE GOSPELS

PROPAGATION : THE ACTS

EXPLANATION: THE EPISTLES

CONSUMMATION: THE REVELATION {Schofield]

Why study the Bible?

Simply reading the Bible, book after book, chapter after chapter and verse after verse, while enabling the reader to see the grand sweep of God's saving arrangements, will not yield the benefits which are to be realised from the effort of comparing scripture with scripture and of asking questions of the text. In order for ordinary folk like us to do this privately, we do well to purchase a good Study Bible, which will enable one greatly to achieve this. Honest study will result in riches and blessings that cannot be quantified.

How to study the Bible ?

Christians believe the Bible is THE WORD OF GOD. Study therefore should be begun with prayer asking God the Holy Spirit to humble the heart of the student, to illuminate the mind and give insight and understanding. Of these gifts humility may well be the most important. The Word of God should be approached reverently.

What scripture says about itself is “ All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”. KJV 2Timothy 3:16.

I believe we do well to take that to heart as our starting point.

So then to our study in the book of Colossians

Colossae was a small city situated in the Lycus valley in what is now southern Turkey. In the past it had been an important trading hub, but had later been eclipsed by Ephesus. When this letter was written it was part of the Roman province of Phrygia in Asia. Paul did not establish the church in Colossae, but rather it was founded by a man called Epaphras, who was converted during Paul’s three-year stay in Ephesus. A report by Epaphras to Paul concerning the state of the church in Colossae was the reason why this epistle was written.

We read Colossians 1:1-12

Colossians 1:1,2

Paul, an apostle (special messenger, personally chosen representative) of Christ Jesus (the Messiah, the Anointed) by the will of God, and Timothy our brother. To the saints and faithful believers in Christ (who are) at Colossae.: Grace to you and peace (inner calm and spiritual well-being) from God our Father. AMP

The first question we need to ask is “Who is this Paul?” The first time we meet him in scripture he is not called Paul. He is called Saul. That is his Jewish name. In Acts 7:58-60 Saul is a young man witnessing the martyrdom of Stephen. He holds the robes of Stephen’s murderers as they stone him to death for blasphemy, and Saul approved wholeheartedly. Filled with righteous indignation against the upstart fledgling church he set about persecuting the church with unrestrained ferocity, absolutely certain that he was doing God’s will. So consumed was Saul with his hatred of believers that he went so far as to obtain letters of authority from the high priest in Jerusalem giving him permission to persecute any followers of the Way in Damascus.

But we must retrace our steps:

He was born in Tarsus in Cilicia (Southern Turkey), but brought up in Jerusalem and received his religious training under Gamaliel { a leading authority in the Sanhedrin, a doctor of the law and referred to as Rabban, our teacher as opposed to Rabbi}. Paul was an Israelite, a Hebrew of the Hebrews of the tribe of Benjamin, circumcised on the eighth day, concerning the law – a Pharisee. He was also a Roman citizen. Philippians 3:5.

So far as his credentials were concerned, he was the perfect Jew. As far as zeal for his religion was concerned he was utterly committed and punctilious in his duties. He knew the law inside out and his hatred for Christians was limitless. He describes himself after he was converted, as a persecutor of the church, 1 Corinthians 15:9, and in 1 Timothy 1:12-15, a shameful, outrageous and violent aggressor, the chief of sinners, and all the time believing he did God’s work and will.

So what happened as he made his way to Damascus?

Confronted by a blinding light emanating from the glory and majesty of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, Saul was thrown to the ground with the words “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Acts 9:3 KJV boring into his mind. Utterly disarmed and blinded, Saul, was led to Damascus where he would have his sight restored by a believer called Ananias who would also tell him that he was to proclaim the gospel to all, but especially the Gentiles.

This was the beginning of Saul’s ministry. After a time preaching in Damascus, he would go into the Arabian desert, south of Judea. We do not know for how long, but it is reasonable to assume that he spent a great deal of his time being taught by the Holy Spirit and formulating what would become the theology and doctrine that would inform the church forever.

It is difficult to appreciate the energy which Paul (the Greek form of Saul) possessed. We have space only to glimpse what he did in the course of the rest of his life. From 35 to 68 AD he carried out three missionary journeys, a final journey to Rome and to martyrdom. During that he seized every opportunity to witness to the saving power of Jesus. The author of 13 books of the New Testament which are the bedrock of the church’s doctrinal teaching. In 2 Corinthians we read of Paul’s hardships in his service to his lord, and we note them here, bearing in mind that when he related these hardships he had another 11 years of life ahead of him. This is what he says in 2 Corinthians 11:16-33.

¹⁶I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. ¹⁷What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool. ¹⁸Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. ¹⁹For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! ²⁰For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. ²¹To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!

But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. ²²Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. ²³Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. ³² At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, ³³ but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.ESV

An apostle of Christ Jesus. What is an “apostle?” The Greek word means “one who is sent” or a messenger. Within the context of the New Testament Church it has the meaning of one who is specifically commissioned by Jesus to carry His Gospel to the world. The word is properly applied to those who were His first followers (the Twelve) along with Paul who was commissioned by the risen Christ after His Ascension on the Damascus Road. This is the restricted use which we are most acquainted with, but it is used in several other places to simply mean one who is sent, and indeed in Hebrews 3:1 the Lord Jesus Himself is described as having been sent (apostolon) by God the Father.

We shall study the words “Christ Jesus” later in this study, but for now we focus on:

By the will of God.

In order to appreciate what is in Paul’s mind when he uses this phrase we can look at the first few verses of Galatians: Chapter 1 verse 1 says this: **This letter is from Paul an apostle. I was not appointed by any group of people or any human authority, but by Jesus Christ himself and by God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead.** AMP

Again in Chapter 1 verse 15 we read:

But even before I was born, God chose me and called me by his marvellous grace. Then it pleased him to reveal his Son to me so that I would proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles. AMP

We should think deeply and prayerfully about this statement because it acknowledges a truly wonderful fact about God, which is that He knows us all before we are even born. We see the same idea in the 139th Psalm verses 13-16. **For You formed my innermost parts; You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks and praise to you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was formed in secret, and intricately and skilfully formed [as if embroidered with many colours] in the depths of the earth. Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were written all the days that were appointed for me, when as yet there was not one of them [even taking shape]** AMP

We should realise that God is omniscient and that His will is sovereign. God is never surprised or caught off guard or dismayed nor is His will ever frustrated. This is a great mystery which should be considered with reverence and humility, for we cannot with our little minds, search and understand all that is in the mind of Almighty God.

To the saints and faithful believers in Christ at Colossae.

What is a saint? The bible makes it clear in both Old and New Testaments that a saint is a person who is “set apart”, dedicated to God, made holy. separate. In Hebrew the word is *chasid* (pronounced as in loch) and *qadosh*, while in Greek it is *hagios*. We might ask is there a difference between “saints” and “faithful believers”. The answer is no because one becomes a saint by believing faithfully in the Lord Jesus Christ. Saints are not examples of sinless perfection, but people who have been transformed by being “in Christ”. Being “in Christ” makes them holy, because they have His righteousness imputed to

them. That is to say they are counted righteous and made right with God by believing on Jesus.

Grace to you and peace [inner calm and spiritual well being] from God our Father.

This greeting was employed by Paul in all of his letters with the exception of 1st and 2nd Timothy wherein he inserts the word “mercy”.

What is grace in the context of the Bible? Should we require a definition for this word we could do worse than state that: Grace is the Free and Unmerited Favour of God. You will find, that if you substitute these words in almost every case in Scripture it will highlight in greater relief the meaning of the passage you are reading.

In fact the entire creation, visible and invisible, is the result of the grace of God, but specifically in the sphere of salvation our definition is absolutely apt. This is made clear, for instance, in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians 2:8

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, for good works which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. ESV

It is important to notice, that the initiative in this saving work lies entirely with God and not within us. It is also important to note that the Greek construction means unequivocally that “faith” is also a gift. You and I do not *naturally*, possess faith- it is a gift.

We will return again to the “The grace of God” but for now we look at this word “peace”. What kind of peace? In using this word in his salutation, Paul is actually praying that his readers will experience the peace of the Lord Jesus. In order to understand this “peace” we need to understand what Jesus meant by it, so we look at John 14:27 where Jesus says:

Peace I leave with you; My [perfect] peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled nor let it be afraid. [Let My perfect peace calm you in every circumstance and give you courage and strength for every challenge.] AMP

The first thing to realise is that these words are addressed to his disciples including all who would believe on Him. These words have no currency or meaning for unbelievers, because the peace which is bequeathed, comes with, and out of faith. In fact peace is one of the greatest gifts of faith in Jesus. This peace is a peace which takes up residence in the heart and mind. When Jesus said these words He knew that His church would soon undergo and continue to undergo throughout history, into this present day, times of great adversity and persecution. So the Lord’s invitation to allow His peace to calm and reassure us is as important today as when He first uttered the words. Paul reassures us that this is the case in Philippians 4:7 **And the peace of God [that peace which reassures the heart, that peace] which transcends all understanding, [that peace which] stands guard over your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus [is yours].** AMP Laying hold of that peace can be challenging when life seems to be crumbling all around us, but remember that He who said these words has overcome the world John 16:33. **I have told you this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.** NIV But how to realise this peace? The fact is, when you believe on Jesus and trust on Him, and commit your all to Him the gift is already given. It is yours, so do not look at your troubles; lay hold of the fact that peace is already yours.

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. NIV Luke 11:9

Chapter 1 Verses 3-8

Thanksgiving and Praying

In Paul's letters we frequently find two particular combinations of ideas grouped in threes:

Firstly, we find Father and Son (verse 3) and Spirit (verse 8).

Secondly we find Faith, Love and Hope (verse 5). These triplet ideas clearly existed in Paul's mind as essential groupings in his thinking, and we can see this demonstrated in 1 Corinthians 13:13 **And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.** NIV

More colloquially: **Three things will last forever – faith, hope and love – and the greatest of these is love.** NLT And again in 1 Thessalonians 1: 3.

With regard to the Triune God we look at Romans 8:11 **If the Spirit of him [God the Father] who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.** ESV

Each of the above combinations of ideas is worthy of lengthy study in itself but at this point, we will simply note that they form an intrinsic part of Paul's thinking, and focus on the topics of our heading.

Thanksgiving: This is an activity unknown to the unbeliever. They cannot thank God for they have no God to thank. Their world is a world of chance and fortuitous occurrences. Luck or the lack of it determines their sense of wellbeing. That ephemeral, random and unreliable quality- common decency or "humanity" informs their day- to-day world-view and determines whether or not things are going well or badly.

Not so believers in the Triune God. They know that there is an Almighty God in Three Persons who reigns supreme over the universe and that He counts them and their life, precious, beyond their imagination. They know that His love is so great for them that His Son died for them to deliver them from bondage to sin and that He inhabits their very being to lead them on their journey by the indwelling of His Spirit, and bring them at last to be with Him for eternity. They receive every token and gift of His love with gratitude and are keen to give Him the glory in thanksgiving and praise. They wake in the morning aware that they are still with Him {Psalm 139:18} and commit their day to Him to order their life through that day in accordance with his will.. {Psalm 86:11}. They revel in the countless providences which have brought them to where they stand now, and their hearts are full of love for Him.

Is that your experience, dear reader? It was certainly the Apostle Paul's. In this letter his joy is tangible when he hears of the faith of the church in Colossae. There is no greater thrill than to hear of someone you have helped on the road of faith, growing in that faith and going on to greater things. But notice the tender concern Paul has for this church which he did not found, yet they are close to his heart. We have already seen, when we read in 2nd Corinthians 11 of Paul's tremendous sufferings for the Gospel. In verse 28 he says: **Besides those external things, there is the daily [inescapable] pressure of my concern for all the churches.** AMP And yet he was full of thanksgiving.

There is not scintilla of our lives which we do not receive from God. He gives us everything. Thanksgiving should be the most spontaneous and normal response we have to God.

Prayer: Prayer changes things. All of God's believing people have prayed to Him since men began to call upon the name of the LORD from the time when Seth begat Enosh [Genesis 4:26.] Praying is communication with God, wherein the believer brings their needs, anxieties, requirements, supplications, aspirations, hopes and dreams and intercessions and lays them before God at the throne of grace [Hebrews 4:16.] It is the approach of the spirit of the believer to the very presence of Almighty God, and he may approach boldly, for Jesus, who is our Great High Priest sits at the right hand of God, and lives forever to make intercession for His sheep.

Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 **Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**

How do I pray without ceasing? When someone becomes a believer, they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who influences their whole personality, so that they exist in an atmosphere of constant awareness of God's presence and influence upon their life. In all of life's vicissitudes their first response is to bring the situation before God.

Chapter 1:10-14

There is purpose to Paul and Timothy's prayers for the Colossians. It is that the Colossians **might 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, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.**

Notice that there is a strong ethical purpose to the life of a Christian. We are not saved to live for ourselves, but rather to bring forth fruit, by doing what God requires of us. Whenever I write words like these, I ask myself if I am truly doing what God requires of me? Do you ask yourself the same question? In addition to this we are to grow in the knowledge of God. What does that mean and how is it done? One of the primary means of growing in the knowledge of God is to study His Word. If we would know the mind of God and His will for us we must study his Word and stay close to Him through prayer. Praying like a child coming to a loving Father. Seeking what? - Strength and Power to be able to endure what lies before us. Whether in our daily calling or if we are called to special service for God, realising with joy, the immense privilege and astonishing kindness of God who has rescued us from the thralldom to sin and Satan.

There are two words in verses 13 and 14, which are so descriptive. They are "Rescue" and "Redemption".

Rescue implies deliverance from a very clear and present danger. There is the possibility of catastrophe and great loss. Think about a ship which is caught on a lee shore in a storm with no power or sail to enable it to claw off the land and make sea room. It is dark and the wind is relentless and constantly drives

her on shore. The captain and his men have done all they can. They have laid out anchors all of which have failed to stop the inexorable drift to the rocks and disaster. Then suddenly out of the black night, through driving wind and rain the lifeboat appears, and by great skill and daring, with no thought for their own safety, the crew of the boat are able to save the men and convey them to the safety of the shore. That is rescue. That is what Christ Jesus has done for helpless sinners like us. Do you believe that?

Redemption Carries with it the idea of purchasing something back which has been either given or been stolen away. At one time there were many pawnbrokers. In hard times people would take their precious things or even ordinary things to the pawnbroker for money. They would hand them in, receive a ticket then if they were able to buy them back later they could redeem them by buying them back for more than they sold them.

Similarly people who had been captured and sold into slavery could sometimes be redeemed if the money could be raised to meet the demands of the slave owner. We call this a ransom. This is what it is like for mankind. We are sold into slavery to sin and we are helpless to buy ourselves out. No amount of effort can achieve liberty. But here is the thing; Jesus has paid the price of our redemption by offering Himself as a ransom for our sin. We should not take this lightly, it cost God the Father His beloved Son to pay the price of your sin and mine and all we have to do to obtain our liberty is to believe that Jesus has died for us. Mark 10:45 **For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life a ransom for many**

Chapter 1:15-20

Scholars inform us that these verses probably formed a prayer or hymn of the early church declaring the supremacy and pre-eminence of Christ. Whether that is the case or not these words provide one of the most sublime, comprehensive, and doctrinal descriptions of the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this passage we are permitted to reverently approach the very Godhead - the Triune God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These Three are one. And this is the greatest mystery of all; that these three Persons are co-equal in all respects and of one being yet not co-mingled. They exist eternally in mutual love and co-operation, constantly satisfied with their perfections and in their different operations.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him, to reconcile to himself to all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Colossians 1:15-20 NIV

We deal first with the words the **image of the invisible God**. This means that Jesus is the exact expression and representation of the invisible God. God the Father cannot be seen. Christ Jesus has come that we might have a vision of God and apprehend and comprehend to some degree His Self. In the Gospel of John Chapter 14, the Apostle Philip states **"Show us the Father and that will be enough for us" NIV**. Jesus replies, **"Anyone who has seen me has seen**

the Father. How can you say 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me?" NIV. Because of this we can say that in Christ only is God to be realised since He is in God the Father and the Father is in Him. Any other representation or conception of God is an idol.

Now we look at the words **the firstborn of all creation**. This does not mean that Christ was created, but rather that he has pre-eminence over all creation. The use of the term "firstborn" in this way, can be seen in several places in Scripture for example in Psalm 89:27 referring to David as the "firstborn" meaning he would have pre-eminence over all the kings of the surrounding area.

In the very next **verse [16]** it states that all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible were created by Him and for Him. In other words Christ is the Agent of creation, and the lawful Owner of all things and He Himself is the Goal of creation. [Hebrews 1:2]

Moving on from here, our passage states in **verse [17]** that Jesus is before all things and in Him, all things hold together. This speaks to eternal pre-existence of Jesus and makes it clear that all things exist as they are now by His Being and Word. We can see this in John 1:1,2.

Were the Word of God to be withdrawn for an instant, all that we are aware of, including us ourselves would cease to exist. The universe would be no more and this present reality would no longer exist.

We must also examine these words: **Thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities**. The various powers named here, refer to angelic and spiritual forces which also form part of creation. The differences between, or detailed description of, these powers are not given in Scripture. Some are good and some are evil. None was created evil but some rebelled and became evil and will be discussed later in the study. By emphasising the incomparable pre-eminence of Christ above these angelic powers he is refuting the claims of false teachers who were teaching that Christ was created. This false teaching was leading the Colossians to depart from the pure Gospel and teaching that angelic forces were to be placated. To quote from the Reformation Bible Notes on Colossians: "*The Colossians appear to have come under the influence of a combination of Jewish and pagan piety presenting itself as a philosophical system (2:8) and insisting on submission to various astral or cosmic powers*"

And he is the head of the body, the church.

In the New Testament the Church is frequently referred to as the Body of Christ. The metaphor is apt because the church is comprised of those who have believed on Him and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Church exists to continue the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. John 14:12 **I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.** NLT

Mark 16:15 **And then he told them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to everyone".** NLT

The Church is referred to as the body of Christ in: Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 10:17, 1 Corinthians 12:27, Ephesians 4:12, Hebrews 13:3, Ephesians 5:23, and in Colossians 1:24 which we shall come to.

Verse 19 The Amplified Bible is helpful here in expanding the meaning of the "**fullness of God**". For it pleased the Father for all the fullness {of deity – the sum total of his essence, all His perfection, powers and attributes} to dwell

{permanently} in Him (the Son). To say that the fullness of God dwells in Jesus is to say that Jesus is fully God. If we should try to describe the fullness of God then we need to think about His omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence; His righteousness, purity, sovereignty, His self-existence (aseity), His immutability, His infinity, His Unity. The fact that He is Love. (1 John 4:16)

Verse 20 and through the intervention of the Son to reconcile all things to Himself, making peace [with believers] through the blood of his cross; through Him [I say] whether things on earth or things in heaven. AMP Remaining with the Amplified Bible, in this one verse we are encouraged to investigate several complex teachings. Firstly, the phrase “reconcile all things” in the Greek means to reconcile utterly – it is a most emphatic form of the verb. When Adam fell, {Genesis 3:17} not only all Mankind but also the entire creation was cursed because of his rebellion, and we can see that this is the case because in Romans 8:19:22 it states that the whole of creation was unwillingly made subject to decay and now waits, in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. We cannot overestimate the disastrous effect of sin not only on mankind but also on the whole of creation itself. What will not be reconciled, are those who reject God’s gracious offer of reconciliation in Christ Jesus, and those fallen angels, principalities and powers which are constantly and eternally hostile to God. Jesus spoke very strongly and frighteningly about the results of not accepting the gracious offer of God. (Matthew 7: 13,14 ;21-23, 18:8-9, 25:30,46, Mark 9:42-44,48, Luke 13:27-30, John 3:18, 5:28).

Through the blood of his cross: The Old Testament Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy give very specific and detailed instructions as to how sin was to be dealt with under the Old Covenant. The sacrificial system which was set up, under God’s direction foreshadows the Ultimate Sacrifice [Hebrews 9:11-15, 10:1-10 Read] which Jesus would make on the cross at Calvary.

Chapter 1: 21-23

Verses 21-23 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. 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 - if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved 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. NIV

In these verses Paul makes it clear that the Colossians (and all who are not in Christ) were at one time alienated from God by their thoughts and actions. This is the “unregenerate state” in which we all are until we are enabled to see our need and to receive what Christ has done for us. For the most part the world is hostile to God, and actually all unbelievers are rightly described as “enemies”- and such were we! [Psalm 2:1-4] We do not have to do intensive research to see that this is the case. But; and it is a big “but”, we who believe on Him are reconciled to God by Christ’s physical body, he having died instead of us. If Christ had not possessed a physical body then his sacrifice would have no relevance for humankind. Jesus had to have a body like ours in order to receive the punishment due to us; He had to be born of the flesh in order to completely identify with us. A Saviour who could not be tempted in

the same way we are, would have been no use, but Jesus was tempted as we are yet without sinning. This is very important, because in this statement, Paul is refuting the error that those who were disturbing the church in Colossae were promoting, that Jesus Christ had not come in the flesh but was a spirit only. This is a heresy, which in time would be given the name Gnosticism. However Paul continues – if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel we shall be presented to God, holy in His sight without blemish free from accusation. What a wonderful gospel this is, and this is the gospel which Paul and the other apostles and followers of Jesus were preaching to the entire known world. This work goes on today throughout the entire world and is met with differing reactions in different places.

Chapter 1: 24-29

The verses 24-29 of Chapter 1 and up to verse 5 of Chapter 2 are variously described as Paul *ministry* or his *labour* for the church. He begins with a curious statement which requires careful exegesis. He refers to his own sufferings “filling up” what is lacking with regard to Christ’s afflictions for his body, the church. Now of course he is not referring to the perfect finished work of redemption that Christ wrought on the cross of Calvary. Christ’s sacrifice was perfect in every way and utterly complete in its efficacy, and efficacious in every respect to atone for sin. [Hebrews 10:14]. That is not in question. What Paul is signalling here is that the outpouring of pain and suffering endured by Jesus at the hands of evil men in a fallen world would not stop with Christ’s death and resurrection, but would continue into Paul’s life and indeed into the future life of the church. And suffering and persecution has been a mark of the true church ever since. At the moment the church in this country is not suffering outright persecution from outside, indeed many of the church’s troubles are self-inflicted. We should not be complacent however, for this country can no longer be described, by any stretch of the imagination, as a “Christian” country, for it is not; quite the contrary. On all sides we see the steady undermining of Biblical truths and values and a vigorous campaign by humanism and secularism and other religions and philosophies to curtail the promulgation of the gospel. Nevertheless, it is within this context of antagonism and ridicule that we are called to exercise a ministry of declaring the good news just as Paul was. Proceeding through this section Paul refers to “the riches of the glory of this mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” Verse 27. In several places in this epistle Paul uses the word “mystery”. Scholars inform us that he did so in order to refute the so-called “mysteries” which those who were trying to introduce false doctrines into the church were encouraging the believers to embrace. Their argument was that only those who possessed the special knowledge of these mysteries could aspire to salvation. This of course was entirely at odds with the free offer of salvation in Christ Jesus. [At the end of this study we shall include a note about the false teachings of this form of Gnosticism]. In the Bible the word mystery invariably means something which has hitherto been hidden but is now revealed. In this case, this mystery referred to is this; that Christ the Messiah, who had been anticipated in the Old Testament {Isaiah 42:6, 45:21-22, 49:6, 52:10, Psalm 22:27} had come in the flesh, and having secured the redemption of His people, dwelt in His people by the Holy Spirit. In achieving this, the division between Jew and Gentile

was removed, for salvation would be obtained by grace through faith irrespective of nationality, in accordance with the sovereign will of God. With great tenderness Paul continues to relate the struggles he and his companions have in order to “present everyone perfect in Christ”. The word he uses for struggle is the word from which we derive “agony” and speaks to the extreme effort he makes for believers by physical effort and prayer, always acknowledging that it is the energy of Christ which works in him and through him. Incidentally it is the same word which describes the agony of the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Luke 22:44

He goes on Verse 28,29 : So we tell others about Christ , warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the wisdom God has given us, we want to present them to God perfect in their relationship to Christ. That’s why I work and struggle so hard, depending on Christ’s mighty power that works within me. NLT Notice that Paul uses the phrases “warning everyone and teaching everyone” In doing so he defines the twin aspects of a faithful presentation of the Gospel. On the one hand there is *warning* which speaks to the evangelical proclamation of the word of salvation delivered by preaching, whilst on the other hand he speaks of *teaching*, which highlights the need for doctrine to be taught and explained. A ministry which does not contain both elements is unbalanced and will cause a group of believers to become either too emotional or too cerebral.

The word *perfect* really conveys the idea of completeness or maturity since perfection will not be possible until we come at last to heaven, however one wonders if Paul in his mind’s eye sees a day when the results of his extraordinary labours will be acknowledged by Our Lord. I am speculating.

This letter was written from prison in Rome. We are informed that Paul was incarcerated in the Mamertine prison which was entered by a hole in the roof to discourage escape. Prisoners in the Mamertine could be almost certain that execution was their ultimate fate, so it must have been profoundly frustrating for Paul whose only way of influencing the development of this church and that of Laodicea was by these letters and by his ardent prayers. But for us there is a powerful lesson: **firstly that the written word stands and influences long after the writer has gone, and secondly that faithful prayer powerfully affects change both in people and situations.**

We will finish this particular section of study by simply recording the words of the Apostle as given in the New Living Bible Chapter 2:1-5

Chapter 2: 1-5

I want you to know how much I have agonized for you and for the church in Laodicea, and for many other believers who have never met me personally. I want them to be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love. I want them to have complete confidence that they understand God’s mysterious plan, which is Christ himself. In him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I am telling this so that no one will deceive you with well-crafted arguments. For though I am far away from you, my heart is with you. And I rejoice that you are living as you should and that your faith in Christ is strong. NLT

And then again in the English Standard Version - I include the two translations to allow you to compare the difference between a dynamical equivalent translation which the NLT is, and a more literal word for word translation.

1For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, 2that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, 3in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. 5For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. ESV

Paul had never met the members of the church in either Colossae or Laodicea, (or us for that matter), yet he uses a most powerful Greek word – *agona* from which we obtain our word agony to describe his travail to ensure that Christ be formed in their hearts and minds. His language is interspersed with words designed to counter the false teaching which was being introduced into these churches, whereby false teachers were telling the people that only those who had knowledge of special mysteries and inaccessible wisdom, unavailable to all except to the “elite”, could be saved. This type of heresy has always plagued the church and still does. The warning, which Paul gives to these Lycus Valley Christians applies equally to us. Compare this elitist mystery religion with the openness of the Gospel wherein the Apostle encourages the Colossians to be “knit together in love” a very expressive of the union of believers in Christ Jesus. And it is in Christ that all real treasures of wisdom and knowledge are to be found. That which was hidden has now been revealed, and that is the true meaning of Mystery.

Chapter 2:6-12

As we proceed further into Chapter 2 the Apostle Paul is at pains to point out the danger of being led astray by enticing words and plausible arguments. The pitfalls that he was concerned about in his day are of a similar species to those that we face in our own. In a way we face even greater difficulties in maintaining our faith, because science and secular thinking has been successful in persuading the greater part of humanity that God does not exist at all! The concept of a Being who is a loving Creator and Sovereign King of the universe – eternally - is for the most part utterly inconceivable and unacceptable to the majority of mankind. If they acknowledge a greater power at all it is not the God revealed in the Bible. Because of this Paul encourages the Colossians and by inference us also to be steadfast in our faith in Christ being assured that since we received Christ Jesus as Lord so we should continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him. This allusion to being rooted in Christ brings to mind the Lord's description of Himself as “The True Vine”, and informs us about how we are to live in this time. {See *The “I AM” statements of Jesus* John 15:1-17 which we have looked at in another study}

It is important as we continue with this study to bear in mind, that there is real purpose undergirding all the apostle Paul is saying, and that is that the church at Colossae was being infiltrated by people who were introducing ideas which were dangerous and heretical, and which would, if not checked and refuted, undermine the entire principal of the grace of God manifest in the finished work of Christ Jesus, in whom are hidden all the treasures and wisdom and knowledge of God. Or put another way: For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. Verse 2:9.

The type of errors that these heretics were putting forward took two forms. On the one hand they sought to insist that elements of the legalism of the Jewish faith (such as circumcision and dietary regulations) should be imposed on Gentiles, and in addition to this there were other ideas that proposed that only those who had attained a certain degree of knowledge of so called “mysteries” would obtain salvation. Paul vigorously dispenses with any such ideas and reminds the Colossians, quoting from the Old Testament [Deuteronomy 10:16, Jeremiah 4:4,] of the true nature of circumcision – that it was and is, a circumcision of the heart. That is to say circumcision (either physical or spiritual) was a sign of the covenant of grace in both testaments and represented the new relationship within which the believer now stood with God. This is made very clear in Verses 11 and 12, where we read in the NLT “When you came to Christ, you were “circumcised” but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision – the cutting away of your sinful nature. For you were buried with Christ when you were baptised. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.

Chapter 2: 13-23

From Verse 13 to the end of Chapter 2 Paul gives us a truly wonderful and thrilling picture of what Jesus achieved for sinners on the cross, and in so doing clearly teaches how the observance of the law cannot secure salvation.

13You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. **14**He cancelled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. **15**In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.
NLT

13When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, **14**having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. **15**When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. NIV

By comparing the two different translations above of these verses we obtain a good idea of what Jesus has achieved for sinners who have believed on Him. The state of the unbeliever is truly desperate for his state is described as “dead” because of sin. A dead body is unable to do anything for itself. It is unaware of its condition because it has no awareness – it is dead and in a state of progressive decay! Notice that it is God who makes the sinner alive. It is His initiative, which brings about a change of heart that causes a person to turn from death to life, from unbelief to faith in Christ, and it is God who forgives the sinner. It is God who nails the charges recording our transgressions of the law to the cross of Christ. In so doing God in Christ made a spectacle of those powers (Satan and fallen angels) that would hold mankind in thralldom.

This achievement of Jesus enables us to rejoice in the true bounds of Christian freedom wherein we are no longer under the law but under grace. This

freedom does not lead to lawlessness but rather an indwelt desire to please our God and Saviour because the believer has a new heart. The words of Charles Wesley's Hymn "*Oh for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemers praise*" encapsulate some of these ideas for example:

**He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me.**

The original poem from which this hymn was drawn runs to many verses and was written on the first anniversary of Charles Wesley's conversion.

From Verse 20 to the end of the chapter, the Apostle censures those Colossians who have allowed themselves to be led away on paths of false teaching, by observing food restrictions, prohibitions about things not to be touched, and other man-devised regulations. Such things have no currency for a child of God and no effectiveness in defeating sin or sinful behaviour.

Chapter 3: 1-11

As we move from a consideration of the supremacy of Christ in all things and Paul's rebuttal of all the false doctrines and human regulations we have considered above, he now proceeds to exhort the Colossians to holy living. We can see that this idea flows directly out of all that has been discussed in chapters 1 and 2, but particularly from the resurrection life in which the Colossians should now be dwelling. Verse 1 **Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.** This phrase "raised with Christ" takes us to the nub of the matter here. When a person believes in Jesus and trusts Him and Him alone for their salvation they become a new creation. **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.** 2nd Corinthians 5:17.

The implications of this are clear, that what was acceptable and desirable to that person before they came to Christ is no longer acceptable or desirable because they have been radically renewed in their heart and personality. So Paul goes on to state the kinds of things that are no longer appropriate for a believer and instead points to heavenly things, **Verse 3: For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.** That is to say that the old unregenerate you died. That sinful self which continually defaulted to follow sinful desires has gone, and is no more, and the new self which not only turns away from sin, actually has life in Christ now and eternally. That is why believers are described variously as believing *in* Christ, *on* Christ and *into* Christ. Does this mean that believers never again sin? No it does not for, because of the weakness of the flesh, there remains a remnant of sin which if you like, acts as a goad or constant rein to bring the believer back to the Saviour when they have sinned and repent of that sin. Paul made this clear in his epistle to the Romans 7:18-20

...18I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh; for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19For I do not do the good I want to do. Instead, I keep on doing the evil I do not want to do. 20And

if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it... Berean Study Bible

Paul exhorts believers then, to “put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature”. Verse 5. In framing his instruction in this way, Paul implies that believers have it within their will and ability, availing themselves of the power of God, to resist the attacks which they will encounter in the normal business of living. As the Apostle James puts it in Chapter 4:7

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Believers are no longer helpless pawns of Satan but have the ability through the power of the risen Christ to resist and overcome his attacks.

What then are those things which the Christian is to resist? We notice that there are two groups of five areas of sin which belong to the earthly nature of believers and which can mar the relationship of the child of God with their Lord.

The first category are stipulated thus: Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. This is sin which arises from the lower nature of mankind. All sins actually debase the image of God in Man, and all sins actually hurt Man. 1Corinthians 6:18 - Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a man can commit is outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

That greed or covetousness is included in this grouping, speaks to the base and disgraceful nature of greed, which is clearly stated as being idolatry. That which displaces God from the seat of a person’s affections is idolatry. There has probably never been a generation more preoccupied with both sex and greed than the one now living. Never before has it been so easy to indulge the base and vile appetites as it is today through the Internet, and the constant assault of consumerism on peoples’ desires and appetites. Paul says we are to put such things to death so that they do not have dominion over us. How is this done? Simply by praying to God, pleading by the power of the shed blood of Christ, that He remove the desire for such things from the heart, and believing that He, who could raise the dead and cure all manner of diseases can also cure ours. Remember this is being addressed to believers.

Moving on to the next group of sins, from verse 8 - But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Whereas the previous list of sins primarily affected the person themselves, this list focuses more on social interaction with others. Not only do these sins undermine the character of a believer internally but they also detract from the believer’s witness to those around them, and of course this leads very naturally onto Paul’s next injunction to speak the truth to each other. Not only to fellow believers, but to everyone. Christians belong to the God of all Truth, and their conversation with the world should be on the basis of candour and reliability. Verse 9,10 - 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have taken off the 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... Berean Study Bible. The referencing here of taking off the old self and putting on the new self speaks to the new creation which the believer becomes on coming to faith in Christ. The idea of putting on Christ is to be found in several places but we can see the idea of someone being unacceptable in God’s sight in Matthew 22:12 in the parable of the Wedding Feast where the one guest who is not clothed in the wedding garment

supplied by the King is easily identified and is cast out from the company of celebrants. The message is clear that the sinner who is not covered by the imputed righteousness of Christ, cannot be looked upon by God. We see this idea in Habakkuk 1:13 **Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?** This extract of course also teaches the forbearance of God toward sinners, and the holy boldness in which we might sometimes communicate with our God. Again in Romans 13:14 it says - **Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.** The Greek makes it clear that this is a transaction carried out once in time and is called *conversion*, or *being born again*. On the other hand the new self is being renewed and will continue to be renewed until the believer is glorified at death. This ongoing process is a continuing work of the Holy Spirit and is called *sanctification*. So we can see that it is entirely appropriate that the believer is exhorted and enjoined to behave in every part of their life, in a godly and holy way, eschewing all evil thoughts and activity. On the basis of this renewed life and continuing journey of holiness Paul is able to say that all cultural, national and differences of rank and status are done away with and all who are in Christ are one without distinction, because Christ is all and is in all. Verse 11.

Chapter 3:12-17

Verse 12 begins with the connecting word “therefore” so we may assume that what follows is based upon and flows out of what has preceded. Paul now addresses the Colossians in their status as **God’s chosen people, holy and dearly beloved**. This is perhaps best understood from the words of Jesus Himself in John 10:27-30: **My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”**

Paul then returns to the concept of “putting on” or clothing one’s self – this time he enumerates virtues which should adorn God’s people.

It will be noticed that these virtues do not stand in isolation but rather share a degree of overlap in meaning so that a compassionate person will inevitably demonstrate kindness and a humble person will normally exercise gentleness and patience. So we shall simply provide brief definitions of the words here.

The word translated “**compassion**” means to be moved to pity over the distress or ills suffered by another. **Kindness** - a readiness to do good even though it may be undeserved. To be kindly disposed to another.

Humility – a willingness to subdue pride and assume the attitude of one who serves. **Meekness** – Primarily an attitude of submission to God and an acknowledgement that all His ways are right and just and apt and appropriate for our lives as believers. It also extends to our interpersonal relationships with others and exhibits itself in a willingness to realise that even when we are on the receiving end of difficult behaviour on the part of others we recognise that God may well use such incidents to teach us.

Longsuffering – Is that quality of self-restraint which does not hastily resort to anger or impatience or despair. The Scots word “thole” conveys the idea, better than simple “patience”.

Moving on from this encouragement “to put on” these virtues, Paul now shows how they are to be exercised in the daily interactions between believers, emphasising the overarching principles of **forgiveness**, and **forbearance**.

We are to forgive in the same way that the Lord forgave us – that is to the uttermost. All of these virtues are bound together and indeed have their source in LOVE.

We have already looked at the word **Peace** in the introduction to this letter so we will simply remind ourselves that this peace is the bequest of God in Christ Jesus upon the sinner who believes with saving faith upon Him. It should be borne in mind however, that if there is a peace it has been purchased at great price and is the victory that Christ has won against sin, Satan and the powers of darkness. That is the basis of this peace. To exist in this peace and to enjoy the benefits of this peace wherein there is no longer enmity between believing sinners and God is to be a member of the body of Christ. To this end believers have been called, and for this astonishing, glorious fact we should be truly thankful.

Paul then encourages the Colossians to absorb the spoken words of Christ and to allow His words to inform and control all of their daily living.

Remember that, at this time, the New Testament was in formation through letters like this and the Gospels were not yet in a form such as we have them.

I suppose that the Colossians, along with other fledgling churches, would have exchanged the words of Christ passed on to them by the Apostles and early evangelists. In so doing they would teach and admonish each other with His wisdom. Moreover Paul encourages the singing of Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. We will not try to define too closely the differences in Pauls mind which these praises implied, but we may be sure that the singing of Psalms was an ancient practice, and it is possible that a “hymn” might be a concise statement of doctrine {such as verses 15-20 of Chapter 1 of this letter} whilst spiritual songs might be just that - singing praise to God!

The fact that Paul repeats his exhortation to be thankful, should make us doubly aware that this activity – thanking God – is of the highest importance.

Chapter 3: 18- Chapter 4:1

Paul now moves on to provide rules for living in Christian households, and begins with the relationship between husband and wife. Before looking at his instructions in detail it is important to first recall the role of women within marriage in both Jewish and Graeco/Roman cultures. Briefly, the life of women was severely curtailed in comparison to men. Jewish custom expected women to remain for the most part within the confines of the home with strict limitations on personal freedom. They could not as a rule be called as witnesses in a law court nor could they worship with men. In the main only the daughters of Rabbis could be educated to the age of thirteen and there were limitations on the owning of property. They could be divorced at the whim of the man for as trivial reason as burning the dinner! Their Gentile sisters fared little better if at all, with married women fulfilling the role of child bearer and home manager under the absolute authority of the husband, whilst a wealthy man might have both mistresses and concubines. If a woman became cast out or disconnected from her male protector her existence was perilous and may well end up in prostitution, exploitation or death.

Scholarship has unearthed a great deal of information about the life of women

in both Jewish and Graeco/Roman cultures of the first century which can be summarised by saying that they were looked upon almost as things to be owned and used and of little intrinsic value. This attitude may well account for the fact that there was a disproportionate number of men to women brought about in part at least by female infanticide, crude abortion and insanitary childbirth.

Contrast all this with the teaching of Jesus, which constantly emphasised the value of all human life and affirmed the status of women by prohibiting divorce. The attitude of Jesus to women was transformational, primarily because He offered eternal life, but also because He gave them abundant life now, valuing them for who they were as individuals and equal with men in their membership of His body – the *ecclesia* – those called out of the world. A few examples will serve to illustrate this:

Luke 7:11-17 The raising of the son of the widow of Nain demonstrates the amazing tenderness of Christ for this woman who was bereft of all support.

Luke 8:43-48, the healing of the woman with a chronic issue of blood displays Christ's revolutionary disregard for rules of ritual cleanness.

John 4:1-42 Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman at the well at Sychar. This is an astonishing break with the mores of that culture. He amazes her firstly, by requesting a drink from her which no Jew would ever have done since Samaritans were regarded by Jews as unclean; then by offering her living water which would slake her soul-thirst forever; next by relating her true marital status of living with a man out of wedlock, and finally He declares to her that He is the Christ! By her testimony many Samaritans came to faith in Jesus.

Within this context Paul says "Wives submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord". Why; since we have just been discussing Jesus egalitarian treatment of women? The Greek word here for "submit" or "be subject to" is *hupotasso* it means to place under. It recognises Paul's conviction that the man should carry out the function of leader (protector and teacher) within the family, being responsible and accountable to God in his execution of that duty. Paul relates this function to the creation narrative: 1 Corinthians 11:8 **For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.** Reading on, Paul goes on to emphasise the complementarity of man and woman, but then again in 1 Timothy 2:13,14 he returns to the creation narrative: **For Adam was formed first then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.** Is there an implied constitutional weakness, which Eve passes on to her daughters? Certainly Adam, having all of mankind potentially in him as the federal head, passes on his constitutional weakness-sin! (1 Corinthians 15:22)

If we continue to look at the Genesis account of the Fall we come to these words said to Eve in 3:16 **I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.** These words suggest the *desire* of the woman is nothing to do with sexual desire, but rather to dominate the man (compare same word for *desire* in Genesis 4:7). The marriage ideal of complementarity envisaged by God is frustrated and replaced by conflict between the sexes with each effectively seeking to dominate the other, the man with less subtlety, by acting as a tyrant.

Of course this is precisely what Satan excels at. He is *diabolos* – one who divides and separates. One who creates division and trouble, employing

every weapon of his not inconsiderable arsenal to frustrate and spoil God's plan. We know that in this he will be ultimately unsuccessful; Jesus Christ has seen to that, by His death and resurrection, but in the meantime the innate predilection of humankind to sin provides a continuing and fertile seed bed of possibilities for Satan to exploit.

Interestingly in 1 Timothy 2:15 Paul says: **Yet she will be saved through childbearing-if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.**

Notice the change from singular to plural "she" to "they" implying this will be the experience of all believing women.

This verse seems to provide an antiphon to what we read in Genesis 3:16. This does not teach that salvation of a woman comes by childbearing, for it states clearly that she must continue in faith, however it does seem to indicate a closing of the circle of the curse pronounced by God on Eve and her daughters, wherein their pain, their unconditional loving care for their children, and life-long maternal concern for these children, effects a work of grace in a believing woman's soul which a man cannot experience. It is almost like a special compensation from God. (I am speculating).

Moving on, the Apostle directs his attention to husbands to whom he says: **Husbands love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.** The instruction is for husbands to *love* their wives. What does that mean? In order to understand Paul's teaching more completely we must go to Ephesians Chapter 5:25 **Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.** So in the same way that Christ gave Himself up sacrificially for the church, laying down His life for it so should husbands love their wives. They are to love sacrificially, selflessly, generously, unstintingly and utterly. The fact that Paul sees the need to instruct husbands not to be harsh with their wives seems to imply that harshness may well have been a particular feature of the treatment of men to their wives in this time. Resentment for the responsibilities marriage could well have lain at the seat of this instruction, and if it does then it speaks to our time too. These instructions are absolutely current and as appropriate to us as they were for the Colossian men.

Now the Apostle moves on to children and highlights the need for children to *obey* their parents **in all things**. Verse 20. Obedience in children is not only pleasing to God but actually comes with the promise of blessings – for the children. Why should children obey parents? Well to begin with children need to learn. They have to be taught. They do not possess the skills necessary for survival and so in Paul's day and ours they need guidance which is not on a "*Voluntary – if you want to*" basis, but rather on the basis of "*This information I am passing on will help you and may well save your life!*" basis. Children also need to know the bounds of their freedom. They do not and cannot have the freedom to do exactly as they want, and the results of "tolerant and permissive parenting" are everywhere to be seen – and endured, in our day! Parents have the awesome responsibility of being God's representatives in the work of rearing their offspring and the task should be undertaken with this in mind, remembering always that what we put in to a child will inform and shape the character of the adult they become forever.

Turning to fathers, in their office as head of the family and therefore responsible for its well being and survival Paul says: **Fathers do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.** The Amplified Bible is able to expand this thought as follows: **Fathers, do not provoke or irritate or exasperate your children [with demands that are trivial or unreasonable or humiliating or abusive; nor by favouritism or indifference; treat them tenderly with loving kindness], so they will not lose heart and become discouraged or unmotivated [with their spirits broken].** The amplified list provides us with quite a set of instructions which we who are fathers should take on board and seek to carry out. Essentially this is about good leadership, inspired by love.

The Apostle now has a word for those who are either slaves or bondservants. The Greek word is *doulos* and can mean either. Let us realise that Paul was not condoning slavery but was dealing with a situation wherein it is reckoned up to one third of the population of the Roman Empire was comprised of slaves. Paul could never have addressed this issue head on, but he could and did sow the seeds which would undermine the system terminally. {Even in our day slavery and people trafficking has not disappeared}. His message to servants however, stands good even now and can be applied to all of us. We are all in some way or another servants, and it behoves us, in whatever sphere of life or activity we find ourselves, that we remember we ultimately, as believers, serve the Lord Christ. For this reason our service should always be of the highest quality. If we keep that in mind in all that we do in our families, work, or wherever we are we shall some day receive the accolade **“Well done, good and faithful servant”**. Matthew 25:21. This brings us to the end of Chapter 3 but it is clear that the first verse of Chapter 4 belongs to Chapter 3 for it reminds everyone that no matter how important and powerful we may be, or consider ourselves to be, we all have a Master in heaven to whom we all must give account.

Chapter 4:2-6

In Chapter 4, Paul begins to wind down his letter and as he does so his primary thought is to encourage his readers to pray devotedly and persistently, we might even say doggedly. Paul clearly sees prayer as the primary weapon in the Christian's armoury. But he instructs them (and us) to pray watchfully and with thanksgiving. We should be watchful in two ways; firstly by remaining alert. Remember how the disciples fell asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane and again on the Mount of Transfiguration? We are so weak, it is easy to fall asleep in prayer and miss some momentous revelation! Secondly we need to be alert for answers to prayer. We pray and often we miss the answer, but there is *always* an answer to prayer made in faith. And this leads directly on to thankfulness. How often we fail to thank God for not only for answer to prayer but for every moment of our lives. He owes us nothing but gives us everything.

Notice that Paul, as he continues, does not pray for himself. He could have prayed to be released from prison; prayed that he could have a little peace and rest; that he could be cured of whatever the “thorn in his flesh” was. But he does not; instead he asks that the Colossians pray that he might be given opportunities to proclaim the Gospel and that he is given the ability and skill to proclaim it. It should be the prayer of every man that dares to speak for

God, that he is given the opportunity and the power and the words to change peoples' hearts and turn them to Christ.

But clearly, in Paul's mind this compulsion to share the Gospel is not limited to a select few, but should be the prayer of all who seek to spread the Gospel. Christians are to try to recognise moments when they can share their faith in wise and winning ways, trying always to convey the winsomeness of Christ Jesus, by their words and behaviour.

Chapter 4:7-18

As we come to the end of this letter we are presented with a list of characters who figured large in the life of this great Apostle and we will content ourselves with a thumbnail sketch of each of them in so far as we have information about them.

The first thing we notice is that they were willing to run great risk by being overtly associated with Paul. Their dedication to him personally must have been total with one or two exceptions, and their compulsion to spread the Gospel must have given them a steely resolution to meet danger and oppression with great fortitude. The conditions in the prison would have been indescribable and visiting and seeing to Paul's needs would have required an extraordinary degree of love and selflessness.

The first person named is **Tychicus** who is described as a much loved brother, faithful assistant and fellow bond-servant. In Acts 20:4 we are told that Tychicus hailed from the province of Asia and formed part of the group of Paul's companions who accompanied him in Macedonia. He appears again in Ephesians 6:21,22, again being referred to as a "dear brother and faithful servant", with a commission similar to the one he has in this epistle, of being a letter bearer, information carrier and encourager. In an age when communication was made by letter borne by a trustworthy carrier and by word of mouth, this man's contribution was great indeed, and served to enable Paul in his desire to remain in touch with, build and nurture the early church.

Onesimus is the next mentioned again being described as a faithful and dear brother. We learn more about Onesimus in the tiny book of Philemon. Philemon had owned Onesimus as a slave but Onesimus had escaped and having met and been converted by Paul, while Paul was in prison, Philemon:10 became a dear brother in Christ whom Paul describes as his "very heart" Philemon :12. It is in this epistle that Paul requests and requires Philemon not only to take him back no longer as a slave but as a brother in Christ. This is a truly radical departure from what could normally expected for the treatment of runaway slaves, and shows how Christianity was challenging and would continue to challenge and alter the very structure of the Roman Empire.

The next character Paul mentions is **Aristarchus**, who came from Thessalonica, in Macedonia. We meet him in four places in Scripture: Acts 19:29, Acts 20:4, Acts 27:2 and Colossians 4:10. From this we are informed that he was seized along with Paul during the riot in Ephesus, accompanied Paul through Macedonia, and sailed with Paul to Rome during which voyage they were shipwrecked, staying for a while in Malta, where he witnessed Paul healing many, before coming to Rome. The last time we see him is when Paul

states that he is with Paul in prison in Rome. Whatever Aristarchus was he must have been tough, resolute, devoted to Paul, and utterly convinced of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Many would have deserted when the riot took place; many would have wilted with the long marches over the Greek archipelago and only an extraordinary man would have shared a prison cell with someone - voluntarily!

Mark (also called John) the cousin of Barnabas, is well attested by the church fathers as the author of the Gospel of Mark. It is believed that that gospel is really the recollections of Peter the Apostle in which Mark, who followed Peter in his ministry, wrote down all that Peter could remember about the words and actions of the Lord. Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas of the First Missionary Journey but left them from Pamphylia to return to Jerusalem for an undisclosed reason which Paul did not deem sufficiently important, resulting in his being refused a place on the Second Missionary Journey. This caused Paul and Barnabas to separate. Mark was later reinstated in Paul's good estimation, because he is here with Paul in prison, with the possibility of being sent to take up a post at Colossae. John Mark may well have been led to Christ by Peter, for we find him being described by the Apostle in 1 Peter 5:13 as "my son Mark". There is an interesting brief interlude in the Gospel of Mark described in Chapter 14:51,52 which says "A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind". This event concerning an unnamed young man has all the hallmarks of an autobiographical recollection and it has long been thought that this young man was Mark. Whether this is the case or not, we owe Mark an inestimable debt of gratitude for his Gospel, for in its 16 Chapters it conveys the Gospel of Jesus with driving immediacy and urgency.

Of "**Jesus who is called Justus**" we know nothing except that he was deemed worthy of a mention among this catalogue of heroes. This is so often the case in service to the Lord. There are those (most of us) who hardly get a mention, but the Lord knows each one, and He is no one's debtor and will reward according to His justice.

We have already met **Epaphras** in the introductory notes. Here Paul rehearses his credentials as a servant of Christ who is always wrestling in prayer for his people see Chapter 4:12-14. Having been converted by Paul, Epaphras went on to evangelise the towns of Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis, and may well have exercised some form of general oversight over the three churches. In Paul's commendation of Epaphras he mentions three important facets of Christian witness. Firstly that the Colossians might *stand*; secondly that they might be *mature*; and lastly that they might be *assured* in all the will of God. These three topics could easily provide the basis of an excellent sermon on Christian warfare.

We are now reminded that **Luke** is also with Paul. The Church has universally accepted Luke as the author of the Gospel which bears his name, and the Book of Acts. Luke's authorship was not challenged until the 19th Century when virtually nothing was beyond the criticism of the various schools of Higher Criticism. Luke was not an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus but his Gospel it is believed, faithfully records the gospel that Paul

preached. We are indebted to him for the third of the Synoptic Gospels, which together, provide cross bearings of comparison enabling us to obtain a “synoptic” view of the life and ministry of Jesus. Similarly, his account in the Book of Acts supplies first hand information on the beginnings of the early church following the resurrection and transfiguration of our Lord. It is absolutely priceless. Paul describes Luke as the “dear doctor” or “beloved physician”, so he must have occupied a place close to Paul’s heart. It is interesting to speculate on how often Luke must have been called upon to treat the disciples as they marched and sailed over the Middle East in their mission to spread the Word of God. And here from the prison in Rome we may be sure that Luke’s professional services were needed when light, fresh air and good food were at a premium.

The next name comes with a sad note, for **Demas** who is here in the prison with Paul, did not remain faithful, for we find him deserting Paul and heading off for Thessalonica “in love with this present world” 2 Timothy 4:10. Did he just tire of the constant hard life they shared - the constant danger; the perilous association with Paul? How many of us would have stood the course alongside the great Apostle? Very few I think. We should be slow to judge from this distance of time, for Paul like our Lord demanded total commitment, and the example of Demas challenges us to preach a sermon on the cost of following the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are almost at the end of these character sketches in Paul’s list of greetings. We hear now of a woman or possibly a man, called **Nympha or Nymphas** we are not sure, who made their house available to be used a meeting place for believers. There were no “churches” as such and believers met where they might. If Nympha was a woman (the ESV is inclined to believe she was) it speaks volumes of her generosity of spirit and willingness to serve her Lord in any way she might. It also assumes that, contrary to the norm she was a woman of some standing, and is recorded here to remind of the vital role of women in the church.

As he brings his epistle to a close Paul makes it clear that the letters he is writing to specific churches are to be shared with other churches, and in so doing gives us a warrant for the general authority of Scripture, which is codified in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 **All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.** KJV

Before closing, Paul cannot resist one more instruction “**Tell Archippus. See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord**” NIV

This tiny entry might have been written for any one of us; or indeed all of us. As a last word it is the encouragement we all need to stay the course and give our very best to the Lord.



