



THE GOSPEL

According to

PAUL

STUDIES IN PAUL'S SHORTER LETTERS TO CHURCHES

Philippians

“Christ *in* the Church”

WITH CLASS QUESTIONS FOR EACH LESSON

By: Reg Ginn

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PAUL

Galatians:

THE GOSPEL AND THE LAW

“...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” (Galatians 2:16)

Ephesians:

THE GOSPEL AND THE CHURCH

“And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” (Ephesians 1:22,23)

Philippians:

THE GOSPEL IN THE CHURCH

“...that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:10,11)

Colossians:

THE GOSPEL AND CHRIST

“To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:27)

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PAUL

PHILIPPIANS

“Christ *in* the Church”

“...that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:10,11)

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” (Philippians 2:12)

INTRODUCTION TO PHILIPPIANS

The Author: Although Timothy and Paul are both included in the salutation of this letter, it is clear from the language in the letter that Paul is its author. The pronouns “I,” “me,” and “my” appear consistently throughout the epistle, beginning from verse three, and signify that this is a personal communication from the heart of the apostle Paul.

The Recipients: The “saints” in the city of Philippi were not addressed as *individuals* but rather as a *collective*, the *church* in Philippi. Most of the remarks and precepts in the letter were, of course, to be applied to individual lives, but the behavior specified for the saints was attached to their membership in the church universal and in the local church at Philippi in particular. This is suggested by “saints” being addressed “*with*” *the bishops and deacons*, who filled offices in local congregations. Webster defines “with” in twelve different ways, all connected with “associations.” Perhaps “association in respect of sphere of activity” best suits the “association” established by Paul in his greeting. The statements that “*you* have done well that you shared” [in Paul’s distress] and “no *church* shared with me...but *you* only” together demonstrate that the local congregation at Philippi was the target audience of this letter (Phil. 4:14,15).

The Time and Place of Writing: Philippians is one of Paul’s “prison epistles.” References to his “chains” (1:7, 13, 16), “the palace guard” (1:13), and “Caesar’s household” (4:22), establish that he was being held by the Roman government at the time the book was written. We remember that Paul was imprisoned at least *three* times by the Romans, twice in Rome (Acts 28:16; 2Tim. 4:6), and once in Caesarea (Acts 23:35). The Caesarean imprisonment lasted a minimum of two years (Acts 24:27), and the first Roman confinement followed for another “two whole years” (Acts 28:30). A disagreement persists among scholars about the place from which the book was written. Most hold to the traditional view that it was from Rome that Paul wrote, but a sizable number believe that he penned his letter from “Herod’s Praetorium” in Caesarea before he was sent on to Italy (Acts 23:35). Significant arguments can be raised in support of both positions, and the date of authorship, of course, varies with each position.

The Caesarean imprisonment occurred about 56-61 A.D. and the Roman confinement was between 61-63 A.D. The letter was likely sent to Philippi toward the end of whichever captivity was in fact involved.

The History: Paul first came to Philippi during his second preaching trip after being forbidden by the Spirit to preach in Asia. He responded to the appeal of a vision to preach instead in Macedonia and came to Philippi, the “chief city” of that region (Acts 16:6-12). He found Lydia, a seller of purple, and her household at a place of prayer and converted them with gospel preaching (Acts 16:13-15). A short while later, Paul and his companion Silas were thrown into prison upon false accusations made against them by men who felt threatened by the message of Jesus. On the same night of their confinement, God shook the prison with a great earthquake, and their jailor and his house obeyed the gospel after hearing the “word of the Lord” (Acts 16:16-34). The preachers were offered their freedom by city officials who became frightened at having allowed a Roman citizen to be bound and beaten without a trial (Acts 16:35-40). Upon their release from jail, Paul and Silas visited briefly in Lydia’s house and soon thereafter left Philippi for Thessalonica (Acts 16:40-17:1).

Having completed his second missionary journey, Paul set out again to strengthen all the disciples in Galatia and Phrygia. Subsequently, he came to Ephesus, Greece, and Macedonia. There he apparently had his last personal contact with the Philippians as he sailed from their city toward Jerusalem, where he hoped to arrive by Pentecost (Acts 18:23; 19:1ff; 20:1-6). The only other reference to Paul’s experiences in Philippi is found in 1Thessalonians 2:2, where he speaks of having “suffered” and having been “spitefully treated” for preaching the gospel in Philippi. He seemed to think it important that the Thessalonians understand that such ill treatment had not deterred him from performing his duty to the Christ who had already sustained him through many difficult circumstances.

The City: The ancient city of Philippi was founded by Philip, father of Alexander the Great, after he had conquered Thrace. He gave it his own name. After Macedonia was subdued by Rome, Philippi became a Roman colony, a settlement of citizens whose mission was to duplicate Roman society and its lifestyle in a distant land. The city was located at the site where Brutus and Cassius were defeated in battle [42 B.C.] by Octavianus [Augustus Caesar] and Antony, terminating the republican form of government that had been in control of the empire. As a Roman colony, the city early enjoyed nu-

merous advantages over many other settlements. Its citizens were not subject to the governance of the provincial authorities. Instead, they were regulated by their own local magistrates. Strict enforcement of Roman law was an important priority to a colony's citizens, and Latin was the official language of the populace. Although the original settlers of Philippi were of Italian origin, by the time of Paul's arrival other nations were well represented in its population. While its exact national composition cannot be known, there probably were few Jewish residents there. Apparently, there was no synagogue in Philippi, and it is said that a synagogue could be established with as few as ten Jewish members.

The Church: In many respects, the church at Philippi was unique. David Lipscomb says this about it:

No other church ever gave Paul more joy and satisfaction. In no other part of the empire were there Christians in whom he found such comfort in visiting, or to whom he had more delight in writing. The Philippians had evidently noble qualities before they became Christians...From first to last they seem never to have given Paul an anxious thought. No wonder he called them "my joy and crown."

Albert Barnes adds these thoughts about this admirable church:

There is, perhaps, no one of the epistles of the apostle Paul which is so tender, and which abounds so much with expressions of kindness, as this. In relation to other churches, he was often under the necessity of using the language of reproof. The prevalence of some error, as in the churches of Galatia, the existence of divisions and strifes, or some aggravated case requiring discipline, or some gross irregularity, as in the church at Corinth, frequently demanded the language of severity. But, in the church at Philippi, there was scarcely anything that required rebuke; there was very much that demanded commendation and gratitude. Their conduct towards him, and their general deportment, had been exemplary, generous, noble...It is important to remember these circumstances in the interpretation of this epistle. It breathes the language of a father, rather than the authority of an apostle; the entreaties of a tender friend, rather than the commands of one in authority. It expresses the affections of a man who felt that he might be near death, and who tenderly loved them; and it will be, to all ages, a model of affectionate counsel and advice.

To the church at Colossae Paul wrote, "To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is *Christ in you*, the hope of glory." Christ dwelling in the Colossians seems to have been a *goal* yet to be reached by them. But in the Philippians it was a *reality* already achieved. The church at Philippi was an impressive example of what it really means to have...

"THE GOSPEL [CHRIST] IN THE CHURCH"

The Overview:

THE GOSPEL *IN* THE CHURCH-- ITS FRUITS

- Chapter One:
1. Perseverance in good works. 1:5-7
 2. Attraction to “excellent” things. 1:8-11
 3. Boldness in spreading the word of God. 1:12-18
 4. Responsiveness to and appreciation for God’s workers. 1:19-26
 5. Willingness to sacrifice for the cause of Christ. 1:27-30

- Chapter Two:
1. Unity among members. 2:1-4
 2. Personal humility in each member. 2:5-11
 3. Desire to serve as God’s agents to worldly men. 2:12-18
 4. Respect for God’s servants for their works’ sake. 2:19-30

- Chapter Three:
1. Vigilance about true and false teachers. 3:1-11
 2. Eagerness to follow appropriate examples. 3:12-16
 3. Refusal to follow inappropriate examples. 3:17-21

- Chapter Four:
1. Attention to commendable attitudes. 4:1-7
 2. Concern for personal growth. 4:8-9
 3. Liberality in supporting the Lord’s work. 4:10-20

Note: Quotations and references are from the New King James Version of the New Testament, unless otherwise noted. Abbreviations used:

KJV-- King James Version
NKJV-- New King James Version
ASV-- American Standard Version
RSV-- Revised Standard Version
Conf.-- Confraternity [Catholic]

PHILIPPIANS

Chapter One

Verses 1,2-- Paul's greetings to the Philippians:

1. Only in this letter and in 2Thessalonians does Paul refrain from referring to himself as an “apostle” of Jesus Christ. It has been suggested that it was more as a friend and brother in the Lord than as an authority figure that he wanted to approach these Christians with his message of gratitude and encouragement. The deep affection and respect felt by the Philippians toward Paul made it possible for him to appeal to them through his own example of service rather than through his power of apostleship.
2. Paul wanted his letter to motivate these saints to “complete the good work” that the Lord had begun in them at their conversion (vs. 6). It was to his own “good work” and to the work of others that he pointed in demonstration of how important that goal was for them. He wrote of “fruit” from his own labor (1:22), of being “poured out as a drink offering” on their behalf (2:17), of the “work of Christ” done by Epaphroditus (2:30), and of women who had “labored” with him in the gospel (4:3). Most of all, of course, he held up Jesus as the highest example of the fact that God’s eternal plan can be fulfilled only through those who are willing to sacrifice themselves for His cause on earth (2:5-11).
3. Not only did Paul wish to emphasize the necessity of service in the life of every Christian but also to stress the vital role that personal holiness plays in the effectiveness of each member of the Lord’s church. Accordingly, he urges that the Philippians should make their love abound, approve things that are excellent, be sincere, and be filled with the fruits of righteousness (1:9-11). Also, they must exhibit humility (2:5-8) and become blameless and harmless among their associates (2:15).

Verses 3-8-- Paul's affection for the Philippians:

1. He thanked God for every memory he had of them (vs. 3).
 - a. What a remarkable congregation of Christians this church must have been! All churches have their strengths and their weaknesses. No church is perfect, because *churches are people*, and people are *imperfect*. We cannot believe that the church at Philippi was a perfect church, but its members must have been far above the average. Paul was no “amateur” at assessing the quality of Christians, and his every memory of them was a good memory.

- b. Paul's commendation of the Philippians was not based on the shallow reactions of undiscerning people. It was not because of the personal friendships he had formed while among them, nor was it the amount or quality of "church work" that might have engaged the members during that time. Instead, his feelings sprang from much more spiritually significant reasons.
2. He experienced joy when he prayed for them (vs. 4).
- a. Paul prayed constantly and intensely for all the brethren among whom he had labored in the gospel. He realized that hard work, although essential to success, is never *enough*. Only a "joint effort" with the Lord can accomplish the spiritual goals we set for ourselves and for others.
 - b. The apostle's prayers for most churches came out of the "deep concern" he had for their faithfulness and progress in the gospel (2Cor. 11:28). And with good cause.
 - (1) The church at Rome was confronted by "divisions and offenses" coming out of misunderstandings about the roles of grace and works in man's salvation, poor attitudes among "strong" and "weak" brethren toward one another, wrong conclusions about the responsibility of Christians to civil government, and several other serious problems.
 - (2) The Corinthian disciples were besieged with *numerous* obstacles to their development into an "ideal" church. They faced issues of sectarianism, immorality, marriage obligations, misguided worship, and a long list of other destructive controversies.
 - (3) The Galatian churches were torn by questions about commitment to Jesus and His gospel or to Moses and the Law.
 - (4) The faith of many Colossian saints in the preeminence of Christ had been seriously eroded by the false teachings of worldly wisdom and of Jewish traditionalism.
 - (5) The church at Thessalonica was deeply troubled by misinformation about the second coming and faced problems of unsaintly conduct among some of its members.
 - c. It must have brought joy to Paul's heart to think of a church whose problems were minimal and whose greatest need seemed to be to "abound still more and more" in the good qualities that already characterized it (vs. 9-11). Like Paul himself, they had not yet "apprehended" but were "pressing on" to their prize in Christ (3:13, 14).
3. He was grateful for their support of his evangelism (vs. 5).
- a. Their help had begun from the "first day." Lydia, Paul's first convert in Philippi, "constrained" Paul and his companions to stay in her house following her obedience to his preaching (Acts 16:15). Her hospitality was continued after the apostle's release from prison in the city (Acts 16:40).

- b. We are not told exactly how long Paul stayed in Thessalonica to preach the gospel there. Luke mentions “three sabbaths” upon which teaching was done in the Jewish synagogue (Acts 17:1,2). The apostle’s visit to the city, however, included a longer time than that, because later he twice made reference to having secured employment by which to support himself (1Thes. 2:9; 2Thes. 3:7-10). But in addition to his own earned income, Paul received help from the church in Philippi at least two times, if not more (Phil. 4:15,16).
 - c. The Philippians had not allowed their interest in Paul’s welfare to diminish over the years since his earliest association with them. Moreover, they had repeatedly come to his assistance “until now” as he waited patiently and wrote to them from a Roman prison (2:25).
4. He had great confidence in their faithfulness and perseverance (vs. 6).
- a. The apostasy of his converts brings much pain to the heart of any sincere preacher. Paul experienced his share of disappointments about disloyal disciples [e.g., 1Tim. 1:20; 2Tim. 4:10]. He was fearful lest he had labored for the Galatian churches in vain (Gal. 4:11).
 - b. No such anxiety nagged at him about the prospect of salvation for the Philippians. The dropout rate might have been high in other places, but Paul had reason to believe that these Christians would be found “keeping on keeping on.”
5. He shared God’s grace with them in doing God’s work (vs. 7).
- a. God’s grace [favor] always comes to those who do His work (1Pet. 4:10,11). Paul gloried in his own salvation and in the salvation of others that resulted from the grace of the Lord (Titus 3:7).
 - b. He and the Philippian saints had shared in two kinds of work in particular, and they could expect consequently to share in God’s grace.
 - (1) The defense and confirmation of the gospel. The Philippians had been faithful to “hold forth” [*epecho*-- “to hold towards...present”] the word of life in an effort to save others (2:16--ASV), and Paul’s life was consumed in taking the truth to lost men. Using the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17) against the forces of evil was their mutual endeavor.
 - (2) Wearing the chains of a Roman prison. Paul was not ashamed of wearing shackles on his body because he had dutifully preached the message of the gospel. He knew, and others were coming to know, that he wore his chains, not for crimes he had committed but “in [because of] Christ” (vs.13). To their credit, neither were the Philippian Christians ashamed to be identified with this prisoner. They had come to his aid time and again in giving him both material and moral support in his difficult circumstances. It was as if they considered his chains as their own.
6. The greatest expression possible of Paul’s regard for these disciples was that his af-

fection for them was mirrored in the love that Jesus has for His children, and that is a love so extensive that it is impossible for man to comprehend it (Eph. 3:19).

Verses 9-11-- *Paul's prayer for the Philippians:*

1. He prayed that their love might abound, not just *more* but *more and more* (vs. 9). Love is more than an emotion; it must be validated by performance: "...let us not love in word or in tongue, but in *deed* and *truth*" (1John 3:18). Both love for man and love for God must be expressed through overt behavior. "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me" (John 14:21). "But whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?" (1John 3:17)

Christians must express their love toward others within the context of *knowledge* and *discernment* [*aisthasi*-- "intelligence"]. Not every case of need is a call for love to take action [e.g., "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2Thes. 3:10).] Abounding [growing] love requires abounding opportunities to express love, so it is appropriate to pray for those opportunities. But abounding love must be governed by knowledge [facts about worthiness] and discernment [reaching sound conclusions from known facts]. Prayer for opportunities should include requests for the tools that will allow us to judge the merits of those opportunities.

2. He prayed that they would approve *excellent* things (vs. 10). "Excellent" [*diaphero*-- "to differ"] things are things approved for us by the Lord. The knowledge and discernment specified in verse 9 will enable us to support only causes that are consonant with truth. [See 2John 10,11.] The naturally outgoing hearts of the Philippians might be especially vulnerable to the deceptions of unworthy men and their projects.
3. He prayed that they might be sincere and without offense (vs. 10). What we consider to be expressions of our love to others may actually be nothing better than expressions of our fear of failing to behave as we should. We may respond to situations from a feeling of "have to" rather than "want to." This emotional pitfall is a continuing danger in our service to God as well as to man. Sincerity must always be the determining factor in everything we do. Anything less is an *offense* to God and to man.
4. He prayed that they might be filled with the fruits of righteousness (vs. 11). Those include the desirable qualities specified in the "fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22, 23. They largely involve our attitudes and behaviors toward other people. They require determination and cultivation by most of us before we can be "filled" with them. Such demonstrations of *genuine* love will glorify and praise both the Father, whose wisdom attached them to the Christian walk, and the Son, who best exhibited them when He lived among men on the earth.

Verses 12-18-- *Paul's confidence in God's providence:*

1. God had turned adversities into advantages (vs. 12). This declaration by the apostle

might have been hard for the disciples to comprehend at first. How could such seemingly *bad* things actually turn out to be *good* things for Paul and the cause of Christ? How could Paul's imprisonment be a *furtherance* rather than a *hindrance* to the spreading of the gospel?

2. The "things that had happened" to Paul can be divided into things that happened before he arrived in Rome and things that happened after.
3. Some events prior to his arrival *obviously* had contributed to the advancement of the gospel (vs. 12).
 - a. Paul's unlikely conversion from enemy to advocate made a tremendous impact on the Lord's plan to "preach the gospel to every creature" [e.g., Acts 9:31].
 - b. Paul's diligent and energetic activities to evangelize wherever he could resulted in the salvation of great numbers of lost people [e.g., Acts 18:8.]. His labors in the pagan city of Philippi were especially meaningful to the Philippian church. [See Acts 16:11-40.]
4. Other things that had happened before he came to Rome were *not so openly* positive, but they did result in furthering the gospel.
 - a. Paul's arrest in Jerusalem by the Romans (Acts 21:31-33). Not only was he saved from certain death at the hands of outraged Jews by his arrest but also it set in motion a process by which his long-held plan to preach in Rome would be realized (Acts 19:21; 23:11). "And *so* we came to Rome" (Acts 28:14-- ASV). The destination was the same as Paul had planned, but the execution of his plan was entirely different!
 - b. Paul's detention by the Romans following his arrest (Acts 22:29,30). The Roman commander could have released his prisoner after discovering that he was a Roman citizen, but he wanted to know *for certain* what Paul had done. That decision kept God's plan active and opened the way for further events that would contribute to the preaching of the gospel in Rome and elsewhere.
 - c. The several trials before Jews and Romans from which the apostle could have been released, except for the personal agendas of his captors and adversaries [e.g., Acts 24:27].
 - d. The appeal of Paul to be tried before Caesar (Acts 25:11,12). When it was evident that Festus was about to deliver him into a trap set by the Jews, Paul had no choice but to appeal to Caesar for trial. But the cruel Nero was was not the most likely person from whom Paul could expect a fair and impartial hearing. Soon after Paul's release from imprisonment, Nero would accuse the Christians in Rome of setting fire to the city. Obviously, Paul escaped death at Nero's hands "by the skin of his teeth."
 - e. The ill-fated voyage and shipwreck on the journey to Rome (Acts 27). Numerous survivors of these seemingly negative events must have been deeply impressed

with the power of a God who could deliver them from harm and with Paul's close connection to that God. The people of Malta witnessed the miracles of an apostle when Paul healed their sick, and in turn they provided the things necessary for the continuation of his journey. It is likely that either or both groups were favored with hearing the gospel as these events transpired, and it may be that some of them were then or later converted as a result of their experiences with this remarkable prisoner. That would surely have "furthered" the gospel.

5. Some events following Paul's coming to Rome had also advanced the Lord's cause.
 - a. The unusual living arrangements allowed him. Not many prisoners would have been permitted to "dwell by himself" in his own "rented house" for two whole years and to receive "all who came to him" (Acts 28:16, 30). This concession by the Roman authorities made it possible for Paul to preach and teach about Christ and His kingdom "with all confidence" (Acts 28:31). We can only guess at how many people learned the truth about salvation because of these exceptional circumstances.
 - b. The whole palace guard and "all the rest" had been impressed with the injustice done to Paul and with the remarkable attitude he manifested toward those who held him prisoner (vs. 13). They soon understood that he was being held, not for some shameful crime he had committed, but because of his deep convictions about the Christ. We would suppose that this intriguing situation prompted inquiries that led some of these people to investigate the teaching that was its cause.
 - c. Most of the brethren became more bold in defending the gospel (vs. 14). Paul's boldness in spite of his confinement had been a source of encouragement for some to speak out on behalf of Jesus when otherwise they might have chosen safety in silence. His example had been the spark that ignited the determination of the Philippians to stand up and be counted for the gospel that had saved their souls. These brethren preached Christ from "good will."
 - d. Not everyone supported the truth before the Roman authorities from good motives (vs. 15). We cannot know just who these men were or what tactics they employed in preaching Christ, but we are told that envy, strife, and selfish ambition were behind whatever they were doing. Their ultimate purpose was to cause additional trouble for Paul in his imprisonment.
 - (1) Perhaps these were disciples (?) who had become jealous of the attention given to the apostle who was showing remarkable courage in the face of adverse conditions. Their preaching came from a spirit of competition that was determined to garner for themselves some of the admiration being directed toward Paul for his efforts.
 - (2) Further speculation can be focused on the intention of these false brethren to cause harm to Paul. It is possible that they sought to bring him mental dis-

gress when he became aware of their activities and the motives behind them. Or, they might have preached in such an offensive manner that Paul's captors would become even more determined to silence his voice forever.

- (3) Good was being accomplished both by those who preached Christ sincerely out of love and by those who preached Him from impure motives. The power of truth can sometimes reach men's hearts amid the most unfavorable conditions.
 - (4) Paul rejoiced in the fact that lost people were being exposed to the saving power of the gospel (Rom. 1:16,17). He realized that even if men obeyed the preaching of insincere preachers, their salvation was just as real as if their teachers had been as devoted to righteousness as he was.
6. In all that had happened to bring him to this place and to these surroundings, Paul could see the *providence* of the Lord. Things that seemed out of control were really all the time under the control of God. His will overrode the efforts of men to hinder His cause, and His plan for Paul and for the gospel was executed exactly as He intended, despite those efforts. Indeed, "...we know that all things [that enter into salvation] work together for good to those who love God..." (Rom. 8:28).

Verses 19-26-- *Paul's confidence in God's faithfulness:*

1. Paul "knew" [was confident] that circumstances controlled by God's providence would eventually result in his own "salvation" in either of two ways:
 - a. He would be released from his confinement in the Roman prison and would be able once again to preach the gospel wherever the Holy Spirit might direct him. This would be salvation on a physical level;
 - b. He would eventually be put to death by the Roman court and would thereby be released forever from the trials and sufferings that his apostleship had brought to him over many years. This would be salvation on a spiritual level.
2. This confidence was possible because of his implicit trust in God's faithfulness to supply whatever was needed for his ultimate good. The Lord's past performance in caring for Paul was a firm basis upon which to rest his assurance of "salvation." He could always say with conviction, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day" (2Tim. 2:12).
3. As usual, Paul solicited the prayers of the Lord's people on his behalf. Those prayers would contribute heavily to the appropriate resolution of his imprisonment, and the Holy Spirit would "supply" [arrange] circumstances that would implement whatever God had planned for him.
4. There would be no shame ahead for Paul, regardless of the outcome of his trial. If he were to be released, it would *not* be because he had been fearful enough of death to recant his faith to save his physical life. If he were to be executed, he would die the

death of a martyr, unafraid and unwavering in his defense of the gospel. This exchange of a temporary physical life for an eternal spiritual life would be a welcome opportunity. Moreover, he could stand shameless before other men as he went willingly to his execution, for his boldness in keeping faith with Christ would elicit admiration, not shame, as thoughtful onlookers considered the things that had led to his death.

5. In either eventuality, Christ would be magnified in Paul's body. If freed, he would boldly proclaim the name of Christ and lead others to His salvation. If executed, he would even more boldly declare the trust he had long before placed in Christ for just such a time. That, too, might lead others to surrender their bodies [and their spirits] to Christ in the same way that he had done many years earlier.
6. As an apostle, Paul was an "ambassador" [official representative] of Christ to lost men. Whatever years of life might follow his release from prison would be spent in doing the work of Jesus wherever he might be sent. If Paul lived, Christ would also "live" in that work. But if death should deny more time for Paul, he would suffer no loss of anything worth holding on to. Rather, he would gain the possession of eternal life, a treasure far more valuable than anything the world might give him. [See Mark 8:35-37.]
7. The choice was not really Paul's. God would resolve his situation in whatever way was best for the cause of Jesus in the world. Paul was merely a tool in the hands of God. Still, whatever the Lord chose for him, he would also make that his own choice when he learned what decision God had made.
8. Until he was informed about God's plan for him, Paul could only entertain personal thoughts and feelings about his future. And his thoughts and feelings were *mixed*. He could still offer valuable service to disciples in Philippi and elsewhere by further teaching and strengthening them in the truth. It was surely "more needful" for them that Paul be freed. On the other hand, his personal choice was a "no-brainer." To die would be to live eternally with Christ, and that would definitely be "far better" for him.
9. Whether it was better for Paul to live or to die was a decision too hard for Paul to make, and without doubt he was thankful that God would make it for him. The Lord's decision would be the *best* decision for everyone!
10. While he waited on the Lord, the apostle pondered over what the ultimate outcome of his situation would be. His human judgment leaned toward a resolution favoring release and additional evangelizing. The need of the Philippians and other Christians for spiritual progress and joy in the faith seemed to him to overshadow any benefit that might come to others from his death. As always, Paul placed the needs of others above his own (Phil. 2:4).
11. Paul was confident that their love for him would generate great rejoicing if they

should hear that he had been released from prison. Only one thing could possibly make them happier: if released, he would come to them again and renew the tender association they had previously enjoyed.

Verses 27-30-- Paul's challenge to the Philippians:

1. It was the welfare of the Philippians, not his own, that was uppermost in Paul's mind. Whether he should be freed or kept in confinement awaiting death, their *spiritual* relationship with God was far more important than his own *physical* standing with the Roman government. The most urgent decision for him was not what would happen to *him*, which would be decided by God and the Roman authorities, but what would happen to *them*, which they would decide for themselves.
2. The basic decision to be made by the saints at Philippi was to let their conduct be "worthy of the gospel of Christ." In one sense, no one can ever be worthy of the many blessings of the gospel. "So likewise, when you have done all those things which are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty'" (Luke 17:10). But in another sense, every Christian is charged to live so as to attract others to the gospel, "...showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn ['to add to the beauty, splendor, or attractiveness of'] the doctrine of God our Savior in all things" (Titus 2:10).
3. Giving attention to several matters would enhance their worthiness.
 - a. Standing fast in one spirit. In every man there is either a spirit of truth or a spirit of error. The former is distinguished by a willingness to accept the apostles' doctrine; the latter rejects their revelation (1John 4:6). Later, Paul will acknowledge their obedient spirit; they had "always obeyed" (2:12). This spirit must continue if their conduct was to prove "worthy of the gospel of Christ."
 - b. Striving together for the faith of the gospel. It is necessary to present a positive example in our conduct before other people. But is equally important that we "strive" ["to labor hard"] for the faith of the gospel. This striving has *two* components: (1) we must strive in study to learn all we can about the content of the gospel (2Tim. 2:15); (2) we must also strive ["contend, battle"] for the authority of the gospel against its foes who doubt its veracity or who manipulate its teaching for their own selfish purposes (Phil. 1:17).
 - c. Refusing to be intimidated by adversaries. His fearless teaching of the gospel during his present imprisonment had been a good example for some of the brethren in Rome who became bolder in their stand for truth in the face of danger (1:14).
 - (1) Paul had proved on numerous occasions that fear of harm could not deter *him* from proclaiming the truth when and where it needed to be preached:
 - (a) Soon after his conversion, the Jews plotted to kill him, but he continued to speak boldly and to dispute with unbelievers (Acts 9:23, 29);

- (b) He was stoned at Lystra for preaching against idolatry but immediately resumed teaching the gospel in nearby Derbe and in many of the cities of that same district (Acts 14:19-25);
- (c) He was jailed in Philippi for casting out a spirit of divination, but even while in the stocks of an inner prison, he and Silas prayed and sang hymns as if danger were no issue in their behavior (Acts 16:25);
- (d) At Ephesus a mad throng of idol worshipers wanted to kill him because he had condemned their religious enterprises, but he was eager to confront his would-be assailants and defend his position (Acts 19:30,31).
- (2) The opposition raised by their adversaries was “proof” of their “perdition” [*apollumi*-- “a perishing, ruin, destruction”]. The Lord has stated in fearful terms just how serious it is to resist His revelation. [See 2Thes. 1:6-9.]
- (3) Simultaneously, the oppression of righteous men by the wicked serves to “prove” their fidelity and worthiness of the gospel for which they suffer. Their steadfastness is a validation of their commitment to their Savior who endured so much suffering for them. [See 2Thes. 1:4,5.]
- (4) It should be encouraging to persecuted saints to know that God is totally aware of their troubles and will call their persecutors to account for their deeds (2Thes. 1:6).
- d. Regarding suffering for Christ to be an opportunity. Not many think of their trials as opportunities. Yet, Paul declared that the Philippians had been granted two great privileges: (1) to believe and be saved by the gospel; (2) to suffer for the sake of Jesus and His gospel.
- (1) An informed view of trials and afflictions will help us to see them in a different light. Tribulations are effective to help us grow stronger in our faith and to more firmly establish us in our dedication to the truth (1Pet. 1:6,7). Opposition keeps us from becoming negligent and unconcerned about our role as the people of God. Paul took pleasure in his persecutions, distresses, and other obstacles that might have discouraged many. His view of those things was, “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2Cor. 12: 10). Since every Christian is subject to trials that test his faith (2Tim. 3:12), it behooves us to embrace our problems as opportunities “granted” by God to help, not hinder, us in our efforts to get to heaven (2Tim. 3:12).
- (2) Paul’s sufferings were much more extreme than those being experienced by the saints at Philippi. However, suffering in any degree was certainly not pleasurable to any of them. But every trial must be gladly endured if it was to provide its intended benefit. They had *seen* how he handled problems in their own city (Acts 16); they had *heard* of his behavior in a far-off Roman prison.

1. Paul addressed his letter to _____, _____ and _____.
2. He thanked God for their _____ in the _____ from the _____ day until _____.
3. He was confident that a _____ would be _____ in them until the _____ of _____.
4. Paul wanted _____ to abound in _____ and _____.
5. The Philippians should approve _____ things and be filled with the _____ of _____. Where are these things listed? _____
6. Paul's "bad" experiences had actually _____ the _____.
7. The whole _____ could see that his _____ were "_____ " and not because of some crime he had committed.
8. Some were preaching _____ from _____ and _____, while others were teaching from _____.
9. Was Paul discouraged by the first group? Why or why not?
10. He knew that _____ would be _____ by his _____, whether by _____ or by _____.
11. What outcome of his trial would be better for Paul? Why?
12. What outcome would be of more benefit to the Philippians? Why?
13. The _____ of the church members should be _____ of the _____ of _____.
14. Opposition by adversaries of the gospel proved what *two* things?
(a) _____ (b) _____
15. What *two* things had God "granted" to the church at Philippi?
(a) _____ (b) _____

Chapter Two

Verses 1-4-- If there was anything that gave Paul some concern about the members of the church at Philippi, it possibly involved some less-than-ideal relationships among certain of them. While he exhorts Eudoia and Syntyche (4:2) to “be of the same mind in the Lord,” there is no way to judge the seriousness of their disagreement. Other teaching in the letter dealing with unity and single-mindedness may be *preventative* rather than *restorative*. Paul’s treatment of these matters suggests that there probably were no unusually disruptive forces at work in the congregation at the time of writing.

1. “Therefore” indicates a connection between the previous exhortation to show conduct “worthy of the gospel of Christ” (1:27) and the various behaviors encouraged in this chapter.
2. “If” raises no doubt about the existence of these blessings available to faithful Christians. The word can be understood in the sense of “since there is.”
 - a. Consolation [*papaklesis*-- “exhortation, encouragement”] in Christ. Disciples can be greatly encouraged to consider the well-being of others by recalling the example set by the Lord in His tribulations on earth in our behalf.
 - b. Comfort [*paramuthion*-- “speaking closely”] of love. We are comforted in any unpleasant situation to know that Christ’s love speaks to us as His beloved and assures us of His support. We can solve any problem through the strength of the Lord (Phil. 4:13).
 - c. Fellowship [*koinonia*-- “sharing in common”] of the Spirit. Encouragement comes not only from heavenly sources but also from brethren around us. The Spirit insists that we “bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:1). Who would not be encouraged in time of trouble when a host of brethren are close at hand ready to help us?
 - d. Affection and mercy. Even when we get ourselves into situations requiring others to help get us out of them, our own foolishness and unworthiness won’t deter the love and mercy of fellow Christians from coming to our rescue.
3. Although every memory of the Philippians brought *joy* to Paul, there was room for their commitment to become even stronger through a deeper love for good people and good things (1:9). That, in turn, would fulfill [increase] Paul’s love and appreciation for these disciples.
4. The main thing that would make their discipleship complete was to be like-minded--literally, “thinking the same thing.” Such agreement is possible when people seek the same guidance in what they believe and in how they feel toward others.
5. Two things were necessary for likemindedness among God’s people:

- a. Having the same love. Nothing is more important to building proper relationships within the church. “Let love be without hypocrisy” (Rom. 12:9). “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God” (1John 4:7). “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1John 4:11);
 - b. Being of one accord [*sumpsuchos*-- “fellow souled or minded”]. Paul urged the Corinthians, “... that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1Cor. 1:10). Accord among brethren is achieved by this “same mind,” a term [“thinking the one thing”] which is repeated in the verse for emphasis [Kenneth Wuest].
6. There is *no* room in the Lord’s work for competition among the workers. Ambition [the desire for self-advancement] and conceit [vainglory-- “empty pride”-- ASV] usually reveal themselves when they lurk behind the performance of a good work. A beautiful deed is easily marred when motivated by less-than-beautiful intentions. Much like the inappropriate eating of the Lord’s Supper, doing otherwise good things for inappropriate reasons will result in God’s condemnation rather than in His approval of what is done (1Cor. 11:29).
 7. Humility [“lowliness of mind”] toward oneself and a high esteem [*hegeomai*-- “to lead before the mind”] for others are the proper reasons for any act of service. Where choices must be made, the Christian considers the well-being of someone else to be more deserving of his attention than are his own needs. Such a self-sacrificing attitude is extremely difficult to cultivate even in the most sincere disciple and is, perhaps, the one characteristic that most distinguishes the divine essence from the human. Doubtless, it is the *one trait* that would, when applied to the problems that arise among us and hinder the cause of righteousness in the world, most quickly and completely solve nearly all of those problems.
 8. Disciples are not forbidden to look out for their own interests. The correspondence between working and eating (2Thes. 3:10) demonstrates that we must care for our own needs lest we become the objects of others’ care. It is a matter of “not only... but also.” Still, urgency is on the side of what we can do in behalf of someone else.

Verses 5-8-- There were possibly many examples of brethren both at Philippi and in other places who had displayed in their treatment of others the qualities that some in this group needed to improve. There was no one, of course, who came close to the example of Jesus in placing the interests of others before His own. And so, Paul employs the illustration of the Lord’s sacrifice on Calvary to impress the less generous members of their duty to do better. Wuest calls these verses “perhaps the greatest Christological passage in the New Testament that sounds the depths of the incarnation.”

1. The magnitude of Christ’s sacrifice of His own interests for those of a world of lost

and degenerate creatures is impossible for the human mind to comprehend. But we *can* grasp the fact that it was enormous, and we can appreciate it for what it means to us spiritually.

2. We can also understand that His *perfect* selflessness should serve as the goal toward which our *imperfect* relationships with others must reach. The mind [*phroneo*-- “to think in a certain way”] to “let be” in us will not indwell us without a lot of effort on our part to treat our fellows with more consideration. Progress may come in small increments, but persistence eventually will be rewarded.
3. The enormity of the Lord’s action is analyzed in verses 6-8.
 - a. Prior to His appearance in the world, He was in the “form” [*morphe*-- “the special or characteristic feature”] of God. This term indicates that the very *essence* of the Person of Jesus was *divinity*, not humanity. Gifford observes that “*morphe* is therefore properly the nature or essence, not in the abstract, but as actually subsisting in the individual and retained as long as the individual itself exists.” The theories that subvert the eternal divinity of Christ are patently false. He did not throw off His God-nature to assume a man-nature, nor did He reclothe Himself with divinity after His humanity was crucified on the cross. Our inability to understand or explain the incarnation does not make it any less *real!* “In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1,14).
 - b. The Word [second Person in the Godhead (Col. 2:9)] did not consider His own divine essence [“equal with God”--the *same* nature as that of the Father] as something He would “grasp” [ASV; RSV] or “cling to” [Conf.] when human man needed a God-man to rescue him from his condemning sin.
 - c. Man’s desperate situation was enough to prompt the Godhead to choose the Word [Christ-- “chosen”] to become man’s Savior. But to do that, the glory of existing only in divine form had to be surrendered [“emptied”]. When the human form was assumed in the virgin birth, a dual form then characterized the Lord during His time in the world. This was the *first* step taken by Christ Jesus in making the necessary sacrifice of Himself for the good of others.
 - d. The *second* step was to “take” [His own choice] the “form” of a servant. This form of a “servant” [*doulos*-- “bondservant; slave”] was the most extreme exchange of status possible. Going from Ruler in heaven to ruler on earth would have been a real “demotion” in glory. But descending to the status of slave was a far greater sacrifice than we can imagine.
 - e. Taking on Himself the form of a servant also involved taking the *likeness* [“appearance”-- vs. 8] of men. That would have occurred with *any* choice for the incarnation. However, the selection of servant rather than someone served would present *two* opportunities for the Christ to accomplish heaven’s plan:

- (1) The Savior would be in a lowly social position that would impress upon men the magnitude of His personal sacrifice and the need for them to make appropriate sacrifices for others;
- (2) Human flesh of any sort would enable certain things essential to man's salvation to be done:
 - (a) Divinity cannot be tempted (James 1:13). Only humanity is attracted to sin. Jesus' victory over temptation [e.g., Matt. 4:1-11] was a necessary example to demonstrate to man that his own spiritual growth is dependent on similar victories (James 1:12);
 - (b) Jesus, despite many temptations, "committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth" (1Peter 2:22). Thus, "in the likeness of sinful flesh...He condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). No man can claim that the temptation to sin is too great for men to overcome [See 1Cor. 10:13.]. The blame cannot be placed on the sin rather than on the man. Jesus, in the *same* susceptible flesh as the whole of the human race, proved once for all that no excuse can be made when man falls to his temptations. There *is* no excuse, and man is deserving of due punishment when he allows his weaknesses to lead him into violating the law of the Lord (Rom. 6:23).
- f. The *third* step that Jesus chose to take in sacrificing Himself for mankind was to humble Himself. This humiliation was in addition to the "emptying" of Himself to become a man. That was humbling to His divinity. This was humbling to His humanity. He accomplished this second humiliation in several ways:
 - (1) He denied Himself the ordinary comforts enjoyed by most human beings. In some respects He had less than foxes and birds (Luke 9:58);
 - (2) He exchanged the role of being served to the role of servicing. Divinity is naturally served by humanity, but humanity can either serve or be served by its fellows. The Lord elected the former role for Himself. He also encouraged His disciples to fill the role of servant to others [e.g., John 13:1-17];
 - (3) He became obedient. Obedience is an act of humiliation. The lesser normally obeys the greater. Christ's voluntary obedience to the Father's will in all things was significant testimony that He had humbled Himself far beyond anything that should be expected (John 6:38; etc.);
 - (a) It should be observed that Jesus' obedience to His Father's will is the greatest possible statement that could be made about the importance of our obeying God's commandments. Albert Barnes comments:

It was a characteristic of the Redeemer that he yielded perfect obedience to the will of God. Should it be said that, if he was God himself, he must have been himself the lawgiver, we may reply that this rendered His obedience the more wonderful and the more meritorious. If a monarch for an important purpose places himself in a position to obey his own laws, nothing could show

in a more striking manner their importance in his view. The highest honour that has been shown to the law of God on earth was, that it was perfectly observed by him who made the law-- the great Mediator.

- (4) He became obedient unto [the point of] death. Death is the ultimate sacrifice that man can make on a human level. There was no hesitation on Jesus' part to freely give His own life for the life of mankind. That sacrifice was immeasurably magnified by the fact that its beneficiaries were totally undeserving. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Furthermore, it is humbling for any man to have his life *taken* from him by other men. Although Jesus actually *laid down* His life because man could not take it from Him (John 10:17, 18), His death bore the *appearance* of a humiliating experience;
- (5) He became obedient to death on the cross. Crucifixion was possibly the most humiliating death possible to inflict on a man. It involved unimaginable pain and suffering that challenged even the Lord's courage (Matt. 26:39). It was a death inflicted on the worst of criminals and represented the ultimate expression of justice served upon evildoers. It was *ipso facto* "proof" to onlookers that Jesus Christ was an impostor and was deserving of this terrible punishment (Mark 15:27-32).

Verses 9-11-- Jesus' self-sacrificing behavior did not go unnoticed by His Father. It was for *joy* that the Savior went to the cross, enduring its agonies and despising its shame (Heb. 12:2). Certainly, it was not the *experience* of the cross that brought joy, but the *reward* of the cross.

1. The Father highly exalted Him to sit at His right hand of power in heaven (Heb. 1:3). Such a place of honor had never been occupied by any other, not even by the angels (Heb. 1:13).
2. The Father gave Him "the" [only] name which is above every other name. The name [the essence of a person's being; reputation] of Jesus is acknowledged by heaven itself as being far more glorious and worthy of praise than the name of any other being-- any worthy being already in heaven, any worthy being still on the earth, or any worthy being now dead and awaiting the resurrection ["under the earth"]. The worthiness of the best of angels or the best of saints pales into insignificance when compared to the inestimable worthiness of Jesus, who alone did what no other could do-- redeem a perishing humanity.
3. Heaven's plan decreed that not only would Jesus receive the ultimate reward of His faithfulness but also that His accomplishment would be acknowledged by every creature capable of giving Him due praise. Every knee and every tongue will testify to the excellence of the *name* of Jesus Christ, if not now, then later (Rev. 6:15-17).

Verses 12-18-- Paul's implication from his previous example of Jesus' self-sacrifice is that those who emulate His behavior will also receive great rewards for their actions.

Therefore, he moves on to various matters that would impact their ultimate salvation.

1. Continue to obey God's law for Christians. The record of the Philippians in this respect was very good. Paul knew from personal association with them that they had displayed a healthy attitude toward the Lord's authority. This must continue even when no one was "looking over their shoulder" to monitor their performance as Christians. Commitment, not pressure, would be enough to move them to continued faithfulness.
2. Christ accepted a role of great responsibility in heaven's plan, and He fulfilled His obligations without exception. So also must His disciples discharge their own duties as members of His church. We "work out our role as the saved" as He worked out His role as the Savior (Heb. 5:8,9). Both roles would be impossible without our obedience to the will of God.
3. The salvation to be worked out is not the initial remission of sins upon obedience to the gospel (Acts 2:37,38). This is the *eternal salvation* [life] that is ahead for the faithful (Matt. 25:34,46). It must be "worked out" [pursued to its conclusion] "with fear and trembling" lest we "come short of it" (Heb. 4:1). These admonitions certainly indicate that Christians can fall away and be lost if they fail to give due attention to their responsibilities to the Lord (2Pet. 2:20-22).
4. God is pleased when His people are diligent in their work. He constantly "works" in us [through His revelation and through His providential arrangements in our lives] to lead us to *desire to do* His will and to *be able to do* what we *want to do* to serve Him.
5. Attitude is as important in serving God as performance. Unwilling service, accompanied by murmuring, disputing, and other expressions of unwillingness, will render performance totally without merit.
6. Contrariwise, willing and cheerful obedience will make Christians *blameless* [unworthy of being blamed] and *harmless* [*akeraios*-- "pure, sincere"] in their service. They will do no one harm, and they will be [compared to those who complain and criticize] without fault in what they do and how they do it.
7. The world in which Christians serve their Lord is a world filled with wickedness. It is "perverse" [*apostrepho*-- "turned aside, corrupted"] and "crooked" ["untoward"-- KJ V]. It is important that the image we present to the world is better than that presented by the world. In that way, Christians stand in sharp contrast to the world, and their good deeds will be appreciated as "lights" of decency and truth even by people of corrupt habits. Jesus promised as much in Matthew 5:16.
8. Good works often provide an entree to teach the gospel. The Philippians were told to "hold fast" [NKJV] or "hold forth" [ASV] the word of life [the gospel] before sinners. Of course, the gospel cannot be "held forth" unless it is first "held fast" by those who would teach it to others.

9. The obligation of Christians to “hold forth” the word to a lost world is often neglected in spite of its great importance in God’s scheme of redemption.
 - a. The church is a special people who should “proclaim the praises” of the Lord who called us out of darkness into light (1Pet. 2:9).
 - b. We are kept on earth to let our lights shine before the world (Matt. 5:16) and to make known the wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10).
 - c. There are no others to carry out this vital mission.
 - d. The truth is “held forth” by our example of life, by word of mouth, and by our support of others who advance and defend the gospel throughout the earth.
10. Careful attention to their responsibilities would bring about their own salvation and the salvation of many other people (1Tim. 4:16). The apostle anticipated great **JOY** in the day of judgment from the knowledge that he had been instrumental through the Philippians in bringing the precious gift of eternal life to many souls. His sufferings for the gospel in and out of prison would not have been in vain.
11. Even *if* his present confinement ended in his death, the reward of souls would be worth the price. He would rejoice and be glad for the opportunity he had been given. The saints, too, should be happy that both they and he had been used as instruments of salvation in the hands of the Almighty God.
12. Paul’s imagery relates to the practice both under the Law and under pagan ritualism of pouring out a drink offering on a sacrifice before it was burned on the altar. The sacrifice would be ineffective unless the drink offering was first made. Similarly, the faith and the service of the Philippians were a sacrifice to the Lord on their part. If the ultimate success of their sacrifice became somehow dependent on Paul’s own sacrifice of his physical body to the Roman sword, he was more than willing to be “poured out.” “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13).
13. These references to “**JOY**” and “rejoicing” in connection with Paul’s death call attention to the numerous times those and similar terms appear in this epistle. One may count some *sixteen times* that they are found in these four chapters. No wonder that the Philippian letter is often called “*the epistle of JOY.*”

Verses 19-24-- It was typical of Paul to think of others even when he himself was in difficult circumstances. He had on his heart every day a “deep concern for all the churches” (2Cor. 11:28). This concern explains why he interrupted his discussion of the duties of the Philippians in order to write to them about his own personal situation and how he had wanted to learn about theirs.

1. Timothy had accompanied Paul to Rome and had remained there during the time of the apostle’s imprisonment. He was included in the salutation of this letter (1:1). His loyalty to Paul and to the gospel was unquestioned. His value to the kingdom had been the subject of prophecy, and since joining Paul he had been faithful to

“wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience” (1Tim. 1:18,19).

- 2. Paul planned to send Timothy from Rome to Philippi to gather information about the welfare of the church there. There was no one whom he trusted more to represent accurately his feelings to the brethren at Philippi and elsewhere. Timothy was “like-minded [lit., “like-souled”] with Paul.**
- 3. This would not be the first time that Paul would use Timothy as his messenger. He had sent him from Athens to the church at Thessalonica to encourage them as they faced persecution from their adversaries. Timothy returned with good news about their faith, love, and tender affection for Paul (1Thes. 3:2,6). The young preacher seems also to have gone from Ephesus to Corinth in Paul’s behalf when the apostle was unable to make a personal visit to the Corinthians (1Cor. 16:10).**
- 4. There was no other companion qualified for this task, in Paul’s opinion. Only Timothy was truly dedicated to the cause of the Lord to the extent that he would always place the interests of the kingdom ahead of his own. Others would seek what was best for themselves. That seems to be a harsh assessment of the character of whoever the “others” were, but it was how Paul expressed his estimate of their unsuitability to do the job that needed to be done. Some suppose that these “others” were unsuitable only because they were unwilling to travel so far to Philippi under the prevailing circumstances. Others believe that it was character, not timidity, that disqualified them.**
- 5. During Paul’s confinement in Rome, numerous companions were with him and provided assistance to him in various ways. We may wonder whether they were included in the number judged by Paul as untrustworthy to be sent to Philippi. Remarks by David Lipscomb might be helpful:**

It seems that when this epistle was written Paul was separated from most of his intimate friends and fellow workers, and that only two of these are mentioned-- Timothy and Epaphroditus. But we learn from other epistles written from Rome that there were several other brethren with him during this portion of his imprisonment. It is almost certain that Luke and Aristarchus were in his company, and that they remained with him until after the epistles to the Colossians and Philemon had been written, and they show that Mark, Aristarchus, Justus, Ephaphras, Demas, and Tychicus had been added to their number (Col. 4:10-14; Phile. 23,24). It is probable that before this epistle was written most, if not all, of these had left Rome on different missions assigned to them by Paul. Tychicus had been sent to Colossae (Col. 4:7,8), and it is likely that he was accompanied by Ephaphras and Mark who was at that time contemplating a visit to that district (Col. 4:10). So, if these were away from Rome, engaged in the Lord’s work, they were not included in the number who “seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ.”

- 6. Timothy’s character had been “proven” to the Philippians, and they could have as much confidence in him as Paul did. Timothy was known personally to many at Philippi, having accompanied Paul and Silas when the gospel was first preached in that city (Acts 16; 17:14,15). He had obviously made a favorable impression on the disciples while he was among them.**

7. Timothy's heart was certainly well-known to Paul. He had served with the apostle in Christ's work as a son would serve with his father. Mutual respect, affection, and unwavering loyalty characterized their relationship.
8. Timothy's mission to the church at Philippi would be undertaken just as soon as Paul could determine what the outcome of his impending trial before Caesar would be. We cannot know how matters really stood at that moment, but the apostle's outlook seems now to be more optimistic than when he wrote a few verses earlier, "...if I am being poured out as a drink offering..." (2:17).
9. Paul's "best scenario" [release from prison] would make two things possible:
 - a. He would be able to send Timothy to Philippi "at once";
 - b. He would also be able to make a personal visit to Philippi.

Verses 25-30-- Another of Paul's companions at Rome was Epaphroditus, who had been sent by the church at Philippi with a gift to supply his need while in prison (4:18). Some have confused him with Epaphras, but Epaphroditus was the messenger of the saints in Philippi, and Epaphras was a messenger to Paul from Colossae and was "one of them" (Col. 1:7; 4:12).

1. We know something about Epaphroditus as a Christian when Paul calls him a brother, a fellow worker, and a fellow soldier, all terms reflecting the high esteem in which he was regarded by the apostle.
2. Epaphroditus had come to Rome from Philippi to "minister to" Paul's need. He had brought "things" that were considered by both Paul and God as an "acceptable sacrifice" and a "sweet-smelling aroma." God was pleased that the Philippians' love for Paul had remained strong over the years since he had first preached the truth to them.
3. While in Rome, Epaphroditus had fallen ill with some undisclosed but very serious sickness. At one point he almost died. More than that, he longed to go home and be with loved ones. It distressed him to know that his brethren at Philippi had learned of his illness and were themselves distressed by that report. He felt a need to let them know of his progress toward recovery.
4. As soon as Epaphroditus was well enough, Paul had sent him home to relieve the anxiety of the Christians who were waiting for news about his health. The good news of his recovery would not only gladden their hearts but also would in turn make Paul feel much better to know that their hearts were relieved from the care they had suffered.
5. The apostle acknowledged the role of the Lord in Epaphroditus' illness and recovery. His sickness was severe enough that the disciples in Rome had feared for his life, but God's mercy had intervened and his health had returned. The patient was not the only beneficiary of God's mercy. Paul's sorrow, first generated by the unpleasant

experiences of imprisonment, would have been greatly increased by the death of so fine and faithful a disciple as Epaphroditus.

6. Epaphroditus' return to Philippi would be the source of great happiness-- to the brethren to whom he had been returned and to the apostle who could now be glad that the saints were no longer saddened about the health of their brother and friend.
7. Men such as Epaphroditus were to be highly regarded in the church because of their faithful service in the Lord. [See 1Thes. 5:13.] He had risked his life, and almost lost it, because he had placed the progress of the gospel above his own health and safety.
8. It is significant that Paul had not employed his power of healing [e.g., Acts 28:8,9] to intervene in the case of Epaphroditus. His account of the sickness clearly shows that the healing was not miraculous and that the outcome was for a while uncertain. Another Christian, Trophimus, was left at Miletus sick and unhealed (2Tim. 4:20). Timothy had a stomach problem and other "infirmities," none of which were alleviated by miraculous means (1Tim. 23). All of which demonstrates that miracles were not intended to heal personal disabilities but to enhance the preaching of the gospel (Mark 16:17; Heb. 2:4).

1. What *five* blessings in Christ should have brought about unity among the Philippians?
a. _____ b. _____ e. _____
c. _____ d. _____
2. Nothing should be done through _____ or _____,
but in _____ of _____.
3. Christ Jesus existed in the _____ of _____; His status of being _____
with _____ was not _____.
4. What were the “steps” taken by Christ to become man’s Savior?
a. _____ b. _____
c. _____ d. _____
e. _____ f. _____
5. He was _____ by God and given a _____ above
_____.
6. Every _____ will _____ and every _____ will _____ Christ.
7. Christians must _____ their own _____ with _____
and _____.
8. In the midst of a _____ and _____ generation, Christians
shine as _____ in the _____.
9. Paul spoke of his death as being _____ as a _____.
10. _____ served with Paul as a _____ with his _____; his
character was _____ to be faithful.
11. _____ was a messenger from _____ to _____
to Paul’s _____; he became _____ almost to _____.
12. His return to Philippi would bring joy both to the _____ and to _____.

Chapter Three

Verses 1-3-- Paul's "finally" does not mean "the end," for he continues his writing for two whole chapters and uses another "finally" in 4:8. W.E. Vine, in his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, explains Paul's usage of "finally":

The apostle Paul uses it frequently in the concluding portion of his epistles, introducing practical exhortations, not necessarily implying that the letter is drawing to a close, but marking a transition in the subject-matter, as in Phil. 3:1, where the actual conclusion is for the time postponed and the farewell injunctions are resumed in 4:8. See also 1Thess. 4:1 (KJV, "furthermore"); 2Thess. 3:1.

1. There was good cause for the Philippians to "rejoice in the Lord." Their concern over the health of Epaphroditus would be alleviated when they received this letter which he was bringing from Paul. God's mercy had been extended to all of them in this brother's remarkable recovery (2:27).
2. Other important admonitions were needed by these faithful saints in addition to those already given earlier in the epistle. Their sense of responsibility to be faithful should be heightened by their awareness of the Lord's goodness to them when He healed Epaphroditus. Their spiritual safety was uppermost in Paul's mind as he considered what more they needed to hear from him.
3. He decided to repeat some of the "same things" he had told them either at an earlier time or earlier in this letter he was now writing to them. Some warnings had been given "often" and were worthy of repetition (3:18).
4. Peter also thought it right to "stir up" the minds of brethren about certain truths, even though they knew them and were "established" in them (2Pet. 1:12-15).
5. The Philippians should give extreme caution about Judaizing teachers who had already come or who might yet come into their midst with the troubling doctrine that sought the subjection of Gentiles to the Law of Moses. [See Acts 15:1; Gal. 3:11.]
6. These false brethren [Judaizers] could be characterized as:
 - a. Dogs. This term of derision had often been used by Jews to express their contempt for the Gentiles (Matt. 15:26). It is somewhat ironic that it is here applied to Jews. The unworthiness of these human "dogs" was directly associated with the uncleanness of the animals. The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible describes these dogs:

During the earlier period of Bible history the dog is described as prowling about the streets and suburbs of cities (Ps. 59:6, 14), feeding on what was thrown out to it (Exo. 22:31), licking up blood when it was shed (1Kings 22:38; Ps. 68:23), or devouring dead bodies (1Kings 14:11; 16:4; 2Kings 9:35,36); even sometimes congregating in packs, to surround and attack human beings (Ps. 22:16, 20)...On account of their food and habits, they were deemed unclean; and to call one a dog was a gross insult (1Sam. 17:43; 2Kings 8:13). The term dog is applied in a figurative sense to those who are incapable of appre-

ciating what is high or holy (Matt. 7:6), who introduce false doctrines with cynical effrontery (Phil 3:2), who, like a dog returning to its vomit, go back to sins which nominally they had renounced forever (2Pet. 2:22; cf. Prov.26:11), or who are so vile as to submit to lust like dogs (Deut. 23:18);

- b. **Evil workers.** The nature of these false teachers was to *work*. They followed the pattern set by certain scribes and Pharisees in Jesus' time who "travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves" (Matt. 23:15). Like their father, the devil, they "walked about like a roaring lion, seeking whom they may devour" (1Pet. 5:8). To ignore the danger they posed to God's children was to face imminent destruction;
 - c. **The mutilation.** This term [*katatome*-- "a cutting off"], of course, related to the Jewish rite of circumcision. As practiced under the Law, it involved a cutting of the flesh that represented a pledge of commitment to the service of Jehovah. It was an important part of every Jew's religion. But after the Law was nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14), it became an empty act (Gal. 5:6). More than that, it degenerated into an occasion for sin when overzealous Judaizers tried to use it to subject the faith of Gentiles to their warped tradition (Acts 15:1). As employed by them, this cutting of the flesh was not Biblical circumcision at all, but merely a *mutilation*. Webster gives "maim" as one meaning of "mutilation," which in turn means, "To deprive of the use of a member, so as to render a person less able to defend himself." Being victimized by undergoing "circumcision," careless people would become more vulnerable to numerous other errors as well.
7. The surest defense against a false "circumcision" was an understanding of the true circumcision. Paul would have the Philippians know what he had written to the Romans: "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not from men but from God" (Rom. 2:28,29). These **spiritual Jews** had *three* characteristics:
- a. **They worshipped God in the Spirit.** Their devotion was not guided by the Law and its ordinances but by the authorized instructions of inspired teachers like Paul (1Cor. 14:37). Judaizers still focused on the literal temple as the place for worship (John 4:20); true Christians focused instead on the heart (John 4:24);
 - b. **They rejoiced in Christ Jesus.** Partisan Jews had rejected Jesus as their Messiah. They insisted that He was yet to come and would be manifested to them in a way entirely different from the earthly tenure of Jesus of the gospel. Like Peter in his yet-to-be-enlightened mind, they wanted to "make here three tabernacles: one for You [Jesus], one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (Matt. 17:4). But our devotion must be to Jesus *only* (Matt. 17:8), for He is *the* Way, *the* Truth, and *the* Life (Jn. 14:6). Our rejoicing is in Him alone, for only He provides blessings (Eph. 1:3);
 - c. **They had no confidence in the flesh.** Many Jews placed absolute confidence in

their connection to Abraham and in their fleshly descent from him (John 8:32,33). *In Christ*, however, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one...” (Gal. 3:28). Any person seeking an advantage through fleshly credentials displays a total lack of knowledge about salvation through the gospel (Rom. 1:16,17).

Verses 4-11-- Individuals whose religious practices are contrary to those authorized in the revelation of God often are eager to find ways to rationalize their positions against plain teaching in the scriptures. Paul’s adversaries often attributed insincere motives to him in hope that his apostolic proclamations would become suspect in the minds of those to whom they were directed (2Cor. 10:7-11). Members of the church at Philippi should guard against such tactics, lest they commit a serious offense against the gospel and be led astray from its warnings about trusting in fleshly advantage.

- 1. No one should charge Paul with insincerity in his stand against trusting in the flesh. His position did not originate in his own personal situation but in the revelation he had received directly from heaven (Gal. 1:11,12). If fleshly credentials could still give an advantage with the Lord, Paul would have been far ahead of most people, for his Jewish “resume” was virtually unmatched among his fellows (Gal. 1:14). He would have been the first to support flesh over spirit.**
- 2. Several characteristics qualified Paul as a “pureblooded” Jew:**
 - a. He was circumcised when eight days old according to the covenant God made with Abraham prior to the giving of the Law (Gen. 17:12). This rite was to be a *sign* of the relationship between Jehovah and Abraham’s descendants (Gen. 17:11). The practice was incorporated into the Law of Moses (Lev. 12:3). Proselytes could be circumcised at any age (Exo. 12:48), and Ishmael’s descendants were circumcised at thirteen years, as their progenitor had been (Gen. 17:25). But Paul was neither proselyte nor Ishmaelite. He was of the “stock of Israel,” descended in the chosen blood line from Abraham’s heir of prophecy [Isaac] (Rom. 9:7);**
 - b. He was of the tribe of Benjamin. This tribe had remained with the kingdom of David when Israel broke away in rebellion and disobedience. In Benjamin, along with Judah, had been preserved the law and the worship prescribed by Jehovah. Remnants of those two tribes had returned from Babylonian captivity to restore the kingdom and the ordinances of earlier days. Considerable pride was attached to membership in Benjamin;**
 - c. He was a Hebrew of [the] Hebrews. Both his parents were Hebrews. He was not a Hellenist who had exchanged Hebrew ways for those of another culture. His education had been at the feet of Gamaliel, an eminent teacher of the Law and its traditions (Acts 22:3; Gal. 1:14);**
 - d. He was a Pharisee. The Pharisee party seemingly originated before the time of the Maccabean war in reaction against the Hellenizing of many Jews who were**

adopting the Grecian culture and a less rigid adherence to the Law of Moses. Those of the Pharisaic persuasion had played a prominent role in the defense of the Law during Jerusalem's occupation by the profane Antiochus Epiphanes between 175-162 B.C. Unlike the Sadducees, the Pharisees maintained a staunch position with respect to traditional Jewish beliefs. "For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection--and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both" (Acts 23:8);

- e. He was zealous for the Law and persecuted the church in its behalf. He once thought that he ought to do "many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9) and "persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women" (Acts 22:4). Even as his conversion was imminent, Paul was on a mission to persecute the people of God (Acts 22:5f.). He was the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that some persecutors would think that killing the saints was their way of serving Jehovah (John 16:2);
 - f. He was "blameless" when it came to keeping the Law. He was able to declare before the Jewish council, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1). Few men, in good conscience, could make such a statement. Of course, Paul never considered himself to be a perfect man without any sin (Rom. 7:9), but he was so devoted to keeping the *letter* of the Law that no man could fault his performance in the ordinances and traditions of Pharisaic practice.
3. Such personal merits and accomplishments as he listed had indeed advanced him in the Jews' religion (Gal. 1:14) and would have been considered by his fellow Jews to have placed him high on Jehovah's list of favorites. They were "gain" to him religiously, politically, and socially among his countrymen.
 4. However, the converted Saul soon saw that every "gain" in the Jews' religion was really a "loss" in the religion of Christ. Things that had *advanced* him now *hindered* him from full dedication to his newly-found Lord. Perhaps the apostle is making some reference to accounting procedures where assets are weighed against liabilities to determine net profit or loss. Following his conversion, his spiritual balance sheet had cried out loudly to him about what choices must be made if he intended to be faithful to his calling as an ambassador of Jesus to the world.
 5. What he had once seen as "gain" was now nothing more than "rubbish." The *knowledge* ["seeking to know"] of Christ had become top priority for the apostle. The value system of Saul the Pharisee had undergone radical changes in Paul the Christian. "Knowledge" [*gnosis*] is akin to the Greek verb *ginosko*, which frequently means a relation between the person knowing and the object known. "What is 'known' is of value or importance to the one who knows, and hence the establishment of the relationship" [W.E. Vine]. Paul now understood that the Person of Christ was "excellent" in every respect, and his old ways were eagerly and gladly thrown away as things totally worthless to a pilgrim on his way to heaven.

6. “Gain” for Paul was now in Christ rather than in the things he had formerly valued. A twofold meaning is attached to “gain.” Once he had “gained” [attained] a saving relationship with Jesus, he would possess true “gain” [*kerdos*-- “make a profit”].
7. Gaining Christ would result in “being found” in Christ. Kenneth Wuest says that these words probably signify, “turn out actually to be.” They have a similar occurrence in Gal. 2:17, “we ourselves are found to be sinners.” Paul wanted all men to see by observing his life that he was “in Christ.”
8. He would demonstrate his attachment to Christ by displaying in his life the righteousness outlined in the *gospel* he now preached rather than in the *Law* upon which he had once depended for righteousness. Previous to his conversion, he had tried to *earn* a righteous state by meticulously keeping the ordinances of the Law of Moses (Gal. 1:14). Now, he depends on faith in the Lord for his righteousness. He had tried self-righteousness and it had disappointed him (Rom. 7:8-11). God-righteousness was, on the other hand, entirely satisfying!
9. His new righteousness through faith would bring a rich reward.
 - a. He would know Christ. As indicated earlier [verse 8], “to know” Jesus Christ was to enjoy a Savior/saved relationship with Him. The strength of that association had already been demonstrated numerous times [e.g., Acts 14:19,20; 28:3-6, etc.] and the comfort it gave him was inestimable (2Cor. 1:3-5).
 - b. He would know the power of the resurrection. He told the Romans that Christ’s resurrection was “powerful” proof of His Sonship (Rom. 1:4). Moreover, His resurrection empowers our own spiritual resurrection to free us from the guilt of past sins and to shield us from the clutches of new transgressions (Rom. 6:4-9). He could witness in his own experience how tremendous was the power of spiritual resurrection to change human behavior (1Tim. 1:13,14).
 - c. He would know the fellowship of His sufferings. One cannot appreciate the trials faced by Jesus on our behalf until he has personally experienced suffering on the Lord’s behalf. Paul had gone through a lion’s share of adversity for the sake of Jesus and His gospel, and his “fellowship” [joint participation] with Christ in suffering for the sake of man’s salvation could not be questioned (2Cor. 11:23-33). Perhaps no other man has ever been able to place a true estimate on the value of Jesus’ sacrifices as Paul could. In the greatest possible way he had emulated the Lord’s death on the cross by “dying” himself again and again for Jesus’ cause.
 - d. He would attain to the resurrection from the dead. In common with all obedient sinners, he had already been raised from baptism to a new life (Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:5). Now, he looks forward to a final resurrection to *eternal* life. Being *in Christ* gave him a hope that he also desired for the Philippians (Phil. 1:10,11). His sacrifices, and theirs, were all worthwhile in view of the great reward promised for faithful lifelong service.

Verses 12-16-- These disciples at Philippi seem to have been an exceptionally good church. There was a minimum number of corrections needed for improvement, and their service to Paul and to the Lord was exemplary (Phil. 4:14-16; 1:5,6). However, there is always danger in becoming proud and overconfident in our labors for Christ (1Cor. 10:12). These saints must not make the mistake of “measuring themselves” by themselves or by others (2Cor. 10:12). To impress this lesson, Paul uses himself as an example of exercising caution and perseverance in pressing toward heaven. His implication is that others need to do the same.

1. Surely, if anyone could boast of “having it made” spiritually, it was Paul. He considered himself to be equal to any other apostle and to have labored more faithfully than any of the rest (2Cor. 11:5; 1Cor. 15:10). But in spite of his accomplishments in the gospel, he could not rest on his laurels. Finally laying hold on the salvation for which he had been called would depend on continuing to “press on” [*dioko*-- “to pursue” as in a foot race], regardless of how *easy* or how *tough* the going might be.
2. One rule [with two parts] governed Paul’s race toward the crown of eternal life:
 - a. Forget the things that are *behind*. He had much to remember about his work in the Lord’s kingdom. He had achieved numerous victories over the enemies of God. But giving too much attention to them might draw him into complacency and to a false conclusion that he had done enough. After all, he was now an old man and battle-scarred. Perhaps it was time to “slow down.” On the other hand, he had also experienced some disappointments, especially in some of the relationships he had formed as he labored in the gospel [e.g., Acts 15:36-40; 26:28]. Too much reflection on these might be discouraging to any further effort and lead to inactivity. In either case, nothing could be gained by dwelling in the past;
 - b. Reach forward to the things *ahead*. Opportunities are always available, and judgment will be based on the *whole* of our lives, not just a part (2Cor. 5:10). Paul’s “reaching forward to those things which are ahead” seems to indicate that he was reasonably confident of release from prison and of additional doors of opportunity that might be opened to him in future days. He would work as hard to be successful in those endeavors as he always had done in his past labors.
3. One motive helped him to persevere. This race toward heaven was no hundred-yard dash, run with the greatest speed and soon over. Instead, it was a marathon, long and grueling in its running. Endurance rather than speed would determine winners in this contest (1Cor. 9:24-27; Heb. 12:1). There would be plenty of time to think and to weigh the cost of the pain of the race against the prize that awaited the victor... plenty of time to grow weary and quit! But reaching the goal [finish line] and grasping the crown of victory kept athletes in the chase [cf., Heb. 12:1,2].
 - a. Rewards of fame and glory, olive or laurel wreaths, and other such incentives were motive enough for runners to try their best to reach the finish line and the prize.

- b. Paul had his spiritual eye on a prize far superior to any sought in worldly games. He coveted the “upward call” offered by the Lord in exchange for a good race (2Tim. 4:7). Jesus’ call to each contestant is “Come unto Me” into a heavenly home where He offers “rest” forever from the toils and cares of the race course (Matt. 11:28).
4. As many as were mature [perfect (ASV)--*teleios*-- “having reached its end, finished”] would recognize the divine wisdom in Paul’s instructions about “keeping on keeping on.” The “school of hard knocks” usually gives us a good education about how useless it is to work hard for something and then abandon our efforts before the task is done. Life’s pathway is too often strewn with the disappointments and frustrations that accompany our deserted dreams. Spiritual maturity also helps us to realize that spiritual rewards always go to the one who stays the course (1Cor. 9:24).
5. Spiritual immaturity might render some temporarily unable to see the value of perseverance. The cost of the struggle might seem too great for those whose affections were still focused on the things of this earth (Col. 3:1,2). The apostolic advice: “Be patient and open-minded. God will give you ample opportunity to mature in your outlook until you, too, can perceive the value of enduring unto the end. It might be from your own God-guided personal experiences, or it might be through further study and reflection on the truths of divine revelation, but through prayer and the desire to do the right thing, you *will* become like-minded with all others who are determined to reach the gates of the heavenly city.”
6. God deals with people as they are and works to bring them to where He wants them to be. At Philippi, as everywhere else, there were disciples of varying levels of maturity. More advice from the apostle: “Do your best to grasp the importance of hanging on to your faith and to your faithfulness regardless of the circumstances in which you find yourselves. But never forget-- whatever may be your rate of progress toward the goal of heaven, that is the only goal in life that matters, and the prize of victory is well worth any and every sacrifice that must be made.”

Verses 17-19-- Christians who are engaged in running the race toward heaven face two serious dangers: (a) The danger from within of not overcoming our temptations and discouragements and losing the internal battle between good and evil. “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice” (Rom. 7:19). (b) The danger from without in the form of false teachers and other obstructive influences that would mislead us from the pathway of truth and goodness. [See 1John 4:1.] Paul has already dealt with the first issue; now he will turn to the problem of evil workers who have always posed a serious threat to the salvation of God’s children.

1. There would be *two* classes of teachers who now or later would seek to influence the Philippians with their teaching: sound teachers and false teachers. It was essential

that the disciples know the differences between them.

2. Paul himself was certainly a teacher whom less-dedicated church members could imitate in this matter of persevering toward heaven. By personal example and by repeated oral and written instructions, he had impressed upon them and others [e.g., 1Cor. 11:1] the importance of not letting up in any area of their service to the Lord. His consistent behavior in this regard offered a “pattern” [*tupos*-- “a blow” to make an impression or mark] by which they could measure their own steadfastness.
3. There were other members and/or other teachers among them who would also serve as good examples of constancy. These should be “noted” or “marked” [*skopeo*-- “to look at carefully”] as worthy of imitation by any members who were less diligent in their efforts than they should be.
4. Other teachers and their disciples were guilty of setting examples that must *not* be followed. They were numerous, and they were everywhere. If the church at Philippi had not already encountered them, it certainly would. Paul had previously warned about the danger they posed to the faith of Christians, and now his heart breaks and he is driven to tears to observe that much of his personal alarm about these persons had gone unheeded by saints in some places. Souls were in jeopardy because of these reprobate disciples.
5. Who were these *enemies of the cross*? Some believe that they were the Judaizers who had been condemned as the “mutilation” (verse 2). Others think that they were not Jews but “professed Christian Greeks of Epicurean tendencies.” Wuest explains:

The Epicureans represented a Greek school of philosophy which taught that the satisfaction of the physical appetites was the highest aim of man. They had allowed their Christian liberty to degenerate into license (Gal. 5:13). They did not understand God’s grace and thus thought lightly of continuing in sin (Rom. 6:1,15). They were engrossed only in self-indulgence (Rom. 16:18). A swing away from legalism would land such a person into antinomianism, namely, lawlessness. Paul, acquainted with the Greek classics, writing to Greeks who knew their own literature, speaks of these as having their own belly as their God. He probably was thinking of the Cyclops in Euripides who says, “My flocks which I sacrifice to no one but to myself, and not to the gods, and to this my belly, the greatest of the gods: for to eat and drink each day, and to give one’s self no trouble, this is the god of wise men.”

6. Regardless of their identity, these pretenders were not *friends* but *enemies* of the cross, and they must not be allowed to deceive struggling disciples. [See 1John 4:1.] Any alliance made with them was a treaty with spiritual death and damnation.
 - a. Their [eventual] end was destruction, not salvation. Only God’s vengeance awaits those who “do not know God.” They will be punished with “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2Thes. 1:8,9). Who would want to accompany them there?
 - b. Their god was their belly. Dedication to physical life and to those things that sustain it were top priorities for these people. They lived as if this earthly life were

- everything and as if they had no souls with which to serve their Maker. The “belly” rather than the heart was the prevailing focus of their existence.
- c. They gloried in their shame. They were proud of doing things of which they should have been ashamed in a decent society. They even dared to boast to others about their decadent behavior, as if their sordid deeds somehow lifted them above those who chose a more moral path.
 - d. Their minds were set on [“who mind”-- ASV] earthly rather than spiritual things. The Greek *phronema* [“what one has in mind”] implies “moral interest or reflection, not mere unreasoning opinion” (Vine). In other words, they practice sin because they have *decided* that sin is the lifestyle they *prefer* for themselves. They have made a deliberate choice between moral and immoral values.
7. In contrast, Paul’s attention was devoted to *heavenly*, not *earthly* things. Heaven, not this earth, was to be his home [citizenship] in eternity, and heavenly things were of greatest concern to him. He wanted the Phillipians to have similar interests, too.
8. Paul’s example was very different from the example set by these false and dangerous teachers.
- a. Paul identified himself with an enduring citizenship [home] in heaven offering eternal blessings for their spirits; others focused on the fleeting citizenship [home] of earth with only short-term fleshly gratification for their bodies.
 - b. Paul was living in patient endurance and hoped to be taken from the earth to live with His Savior in an eternal heaven; they were impatiently devouring the pleasures of a temporary world that would soon be destroyed by the Savior (2Pe. 3:10).
 - c. Paul gladly ignored the pleasures of his physical body for the prospect of receiving a glorious spiritual body like the Lord’s; they were content to supply the needs of a dying physical body that would soon be decaying in the grave (2Cor. 4:16).
 - d. Paul’s trust for a spiritual body was in a faithful God who had proved over and over again His power to fulfill every promise to His disciples; the trust of false men was in an unstable world that was powerless to provide any lasting benefit to its inhabitants (Isa. 24:4).

1. Repeating warnings to the Philippians was not _____ to Paul and was _____ for them.
2. Paul called false teachers _____, _____, and _____.
3. The true circumcision had *three* distinct characteristics:
 - a. _____ b. _____
 - c. _____
4. Paul recited *seven* physical advantages he enjoyed. What were they?
 - a. _____ b. _____
 - c. _____ d. _____
 - e. _____ f. _____
 - g. _____
5. He counted all these things _____ for the _____ of the _____ of Christ and regarded them as _____.
6. Paul's _____ was not from the _____ but through _____ in _____.
7. Paul wanted to "know" *three* things:
 - a. _____; b. _____; c. _____
8. Paul did *one* thing: he _____ what was _____ and _____ to what was _____.
9. He warned about _____ of the _____ of Christ and described them in *four* ways:
 - a. _____ b. _____
 - c. _____ d. _____
10. Paul's _____ was in _____, from where he was _____ waiting for the _____.
11. He expected his _____ body to be exchanged for a _____ body when Jesus returns.

Chapter Four

Verse 1-- This verse probably should be the last verse of chapter three rather than the first of chapter four. "Therefore" connects it to Paul's previous discussion about the importance of disciples choosing the right example to follow.

1. As with all churches and individuals, there were things in which the Philippians could improve themselves in God's service. However, it is clear from this verse that Paul felt much better about the spirituality of these brethren than about other churches with whom he had worked. Of the Galatians he said, "I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain" (Gal. 4:11). He considered many of the Corinthians to be "carnal" (1Cor. 3:3), and some of the Colossians were subjecting themselves to the doctrines and commandments of men, such as "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle" (Col. 2:21,22).
2. Paul's remembrances of the Philippian church brought up *four* of his most intimate impressions about them.
 - a. They were beloved [*agapetos*-- "to love"]. This term is used to describe the affection that the Father had toward the Son at His baptism (Matt. 3:17); that God had toward the disciples at Rome (Rom. 1:7); and that which disciples in the early churches had toward one another (Col. 4:9,14). It is also descriptive of the love that prompted the Father to send the Son into the world (John 3:16). There are obviously degrees of this love (John 15:13), and the most intense affection has been reserved for those who obey the will of God (John 14:23). It was in this degree that Paul loved the disciples at Philippi.
 - b. They were longed-for [*epipothetos*-- intensive, "greatly desired"]. "Evil company *corrupts* good habits" (1Cor. 15:33). Conversely, good companions will *strengthen* those good habits [morals]. One characteristic of those who serve as elders is to be "lovers of good [men--KJV]." Generally speaking, a man's character is known by the company he keeps. It is no surprise that Paul desired to be again in the presence of the good people in Philippi. He had been helpful to their spiritual progress in the Lord, but they had also been a great encouragement to him (1:5). How satisfying would be a renewal of their earlier relationship!
 - c. They were his joy. Paul was an optimistic individual. Many more things gave him happiness than grief. He seemed especially pleased when he learned of the faithfulness of other Christians (Eph. 1:15,16; Col. 1:3,4). The emphasis given to "JOY" throughout this epistle cannot go unnoticed. Forms of the word are found *sixteen* times in the four chapters. It is clear that this emphasis is related to the remarkable commitment that these people had made to the cause of Christ. His

personal affection for them found expression when he declared, “I thank my God upon *every* remembrance of you” (1:3).

- d. They were his crown [*stephanos*-- “a token of public honor” for distinguished service]. This was not the ultimate crown of the victor that Paul called the “crown of righteousness” that he would receive at the judgment day (2Tim. 4:8). Instead, it was a symbol of whatever success he had enjoyed in his apostolic work. He regarded this group of Christians as his “crowning” achievement in the task of planting and edifying local churches. He hoped that the *ultimate* salvation of the Thessalonians would become the “crown” of his preaching labors there (1Thes. 2:19), but that did not quite reach the level of praise as this. The Philippians *already were* his crown. What a commendation for these disciples to be thus singled out from all the brethren whom Paul had known over many years!
3. “Stand fast in the Lord” expressed confidence more than concern. He had little reason to think that the church at Philippi was in imminent danger of plunging into a state of disobedience, but his encouragement for them to continue in a good work was welcome and in order.

Verses 2,3-- One of the minor (?) flaws in the Philippian church concerned some kind of disagreement between [at least] two of the women in the group.

1. Euodia [“prosperous journey”] and Syntyche [“pleasant acquaintance”] had names suggesting positive relationships. We can only hope that their present ill-feeling was both recent and temporary. These women had been faithful and dependable workers in the cause of Christ. It would be hard to imagine that any sort of long-running feud had existed between them.
2. Paul could have ignored this knotty problem in his epistle. After all, these two had been good friends and were respected church members. Surely, their past acquaintance with gospel principles of love and forgiveness would work in them to bring about a resolution of their trouble. Surely, it would all go away if left alone to the healing powers of time. No-- Paul knew that, if not addressed, the rift might become *worse* instead of better. Serious damage to the image of the local church might occur in the eyes of the world if the problem, however small it might appear to some, was not solved in a righteous manner. So, he pressed two *immediate* actions on those who were involved or who might need to become involved.
 - a. Be of the same mind in the Lord. The same remedy was prescribed for the Corinthians when they became embroiled in divisive behavior (1Cor. 1:10). In doctrinal controversy, only one can be right on an issue, and both may be wrong. An appeal to the truth of the Scriptures provides quick and easy agreement if all parties are respectful of divine authority. In differences of opinion or judgment, both parties are in error if the differences are pressed or resisted to the point of ill-will and friction (Rom. 14:16,17,19).
 - (1) The problem between Euodia and Syntyche, like most issues that disturb local

- churches, was likely over divergent opinions about something or other. Paul sought to enlist help in the matter from other brethren, which may indicate that he thought personal rather than scriptural appeals might work better.
- (2) Neither these women nor any other of the members had a right to promote personal judgments to the disturbance of the congregation. “A Christian shows his selfishness and his disregard for God when he disturbs the body of Christ to gratify his own and gain his ends. He ought to be willing to bear and suffer wrong rather than defile the temple of God” [David Lipscomb].
- b. Help these women. When controversy arises in a church, often there are those outside the dispute who can offer valuable help in restoring peace between the parties involved in the dispute. They should be enlisted by the church leadership or on their own initiative seek to intervene in situations where they have special credentials as possible peacemakers. In this instance, a “true companion” or “true yokefellow” [KJV; ASV] in the congregation was asked by Paul to do what he/she could. We cannot know exactly who this person was or why he/she might have been a logical choice to help. Some suppose that it was one of the bishops of the local church; others that it was the husband of one of the women. Another possibility is that it was a particular individual known to Paul whose *name* was Suzugos or Syzygus [the Greek word for “yokefellow”] and who might be equipped to make a special contribution to resolving the controversy in question.
3. Clement [of whom we know nothing more], a host of fellow workers, and the “true companion” [Suzugos] all had labored in the gospel in Philippi alongside Paul, Euodia, and Syntyche. They would be anxious to see this problem solved between two women they had respected for their work’s sake. The apostle seems to vouch for all their names being written in the “Book of Life.” This is the great book in which the names of saved people are inscribed and from which entrance into heaven will be granted at the last judgment (Rev. 20:11,15).
- a. How comforting it must have been to these persons to be assured that their names were in heaven’s Book. We are usually anxious until we know for sure that our names really are on lists and in places where they are supposed to be. Anyone who has gone to a polling place to vote for the first time knows the anxiety one feels until his name is actually located on the list of registered voters. Other similar situations can elicit even greater distress, but no issue is more crucial than whether our names ultimately will appear on the most important list of all-- the Lamb’s Book of Life!

Verses 4-9-- Laying aside the bothersome situation initially addressed, Paul now spells out for the disciples a catalogue of *long-term* activities that will bring *JOY* into their service for the Lord. “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”

1. Let your gentleness be known to all men. “Gentleness” [*epiekes*-- “reasonable” (adj.)] is also translated “forbearance” [ASV, RSV] and “moderation” [KJV, Conf.]. It addresses the demeanor shown to the world by Christians in their daily activities. In a cutthroat society, it is difficult to imitate the behavior of Jesus toward others (1Pe. 2: 23). But gentleness goes a long way in making a favorable impression for the truth on our contacts. Contributing to a pleasant disposition in them will in turn have a similar effect on us as well. “JOY all around” is the Christian’s goal.
 - a. Paul attaches the reminder to his plea for gentleness that “the Lord is at hand.” This was perhaps a common phrase used by early saints in various circumstances. It could serve as either a *warning* or an *encouragement*, depending on the situation to which it was applied.
 - b. Disciples might find it difficult to restrain their own harsh feelings when under attack by inconsiderate and abusive associates. Remembering the Lord’s victory over vindictive behavior would be an incentive for them to respond with gentleness rather than with harshness. The Lord was “at hand” to judge their response.
 - c. Those same disciples might decide that aggressiveness instead of gentleness was the best approach when dealing with aggressive people in the world. They might believe that one’s own interests should always be top priority, regardless of how that thinking might affect the interests of others. However, the Lord was “at hand” to guard the well-being of His people. Showing gentleness toward froward people didn’t mean that worldly associates would have the advantage over disciples when they chose to pattern their conduct after the behavior of Jesus (1Pet. 2:23).
 - d. “The Lord is at hand” poses a constant warning to Christians that we will give account for our actions in *every* circumstance. He knows what we do, and He will someday evaluate what we do in a righteous judgment (Acts 17:31; 2Cor. 5:10).
2. Be anxious for nothing. Anxiety robs the human heart of its JOY, and Jesus has called upon us, “...do not worry about your life...for which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?” The role of Jesus is to provide whatever we *need* in this world; our role is to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:25-34). JOY will rule us in proportion to our trust in the goodness and power of God, upon whom we can cast our care because He cares for us (1Pet. 5:7).
3. Let your requests be made known to God. The Lord’s antidote for worry is prayer. Prayer is not to inform Him of what we need in any given situation. He understands far better than we do what our needs really are. We pray to enlist His help in supplying those needs. “Give us this day...” Such prayers heighten our awareness of how insignificant *we* are and how significant *He* is in our day-to-day existence. Nor does prayer remove the necessity for working in our own behalf. Instead, it focuses our attention on the fact that *our* work without *His* support is vain.
 - a. Prayer [*proseuche*-- “prayer” (to God)] and supplication [*deesis*-- “a wanting, a

need”] are the proper vehicles by which Christians “make known” their requests to God. The former perhaps denotes more general, nonspecific petitions, while the latter involves particular matters for the Lord’s attention.

- b. Every request should be accompanied by heartfelt thanksgiving. The remembrance that *every* good gift comes from above will help us to be grateful for God’s rich supply of blessings to meet our *every* need. “...in everything give thanks...” (1Thes. 5:18). It is a *JOY* to be able to depend on someone wiser and stronger than ourselves who will make sure that we have all we need in this world.
 - c. The “peace of God” is a bonus offered to the Christian who takes his concerns to the Father in prayer. Not only can he know that God’s *wisdom* will “pick and choose” what is best for his life but also that his heart need not be troubled by any doubts about those choices really being best. His mind can be at rest; his soul can bask in the warm sunlight of God’s peace.
 - (1) God’s peace is beyond all understanding because faith and trust cannot be measured by human specifications.
 - (2) Unbelievers without faith and trust in God’s provident care are totally without comprehension of how Christians can be strangely untroubled by matters that are highly disturbing to the minds of worldly people.
 - (3) Believers who can lean on heaven’s strength are themselves sometimes a little bewildered at how their hearts can be at peace amid upsetting circumstances. However, each time we put bad things into God’s hands, we cause our faith and trust to become even more effective in our struggles with worry.
 - (4) God’s peace will “mount guard” [a military term] like a sentinel and “patrol before the heart’s door, keeping worry out” (Wuest).
4. Meditate on “these” things. “Meditate” [*logizomai*] means to “think,” to “account.” Vine says it signifies here “to think upon a matter by way of taking account of its character.” Paul accordingly asks his Philippian brethren to consider carefully the kinds of things of which life consists and to determine which are likely to be helpful to disciples as they struggle to reach heaven. It is not only *mental choices* that should be made; *concrete actions* based on those choices should be taken. His own recommendations furnish a kind of blueprint for keeping *JOY* in the lives of Christians.
- a. Whatever is true [*alethes*-- "conforming to reality"]. Jesus is “the truth”(John 14:6), and everything associated with the Christian life must be based on truth. Albert Barnes comments:

Everything that was honest and just towards God and towards men was to be practiced by them, and they were in all things to be examples of the highest kind of morality. They were not to exhibit partial virtues; not to perform one set of duties to the neglect or exclusion of others; not to be faithful in their duties to God, and to neglect their duty to men; not to be punctual in their religious rites, and neglectful of the common laws of morality; but they were to do *everything* that could be regarded as the fair subject of commendation, and that was implied in the highest moral character. The word *true* refers to everything that was the reverse of falsehood.

- b. Whatever is noble [*semnos*-- “reverend, serious, grave”] appears as “honorable” in many versions. Trench focuses on “gravity and dignity combined” in his translation. Cremer considers it what inspires reverence and awe. Moule perhaps says it best, “The word points to seriousness of purpose and to self-respect in conduct.” The dignity of the Christian profession cannot be overstated.
- c. Whatever is just [*dikaios*-- “custom, rule, right”]. “Doing the right thing” should be a motto of every disciple in his dealings with other people. Conduct is “just” in the eyes of the world when it is judged to be *fair* by human standards. It is “just” in the eyes of Christians when it is *right* by Biblical standards. It may require us to be more than fair and to “go the extra mile” in some situations (Matt. 5:41).
- d. Whatever is pure [*hagnos*-- “not contaminated”]. Moral impurity in many shapes and forms has almost totally permeated our society. Images and language once consigned to the haunts of the most dissolute sinners are now prominently displayed to the general public on theater and television screens. Topics of conversation that would have shocked decent people just a few years ago are now considered to be perfectly appropriate in all kinds of company. It is hard to swim against the current, but God’s children must strive to rise above the masses and present an image of purity that is fitting for people who have been washed, sanctified, and justified from whatever contaminates (1Cor. 6:11).
- e. Whatever is lovely [*prospiles*-- “pleasing, agreeable”]. Whatever offends the conscience is sin (Rom. 14:23), but the conscience is trained by what it is taught. The Christian conscience has been exercised to “discern both good and evil” through its exposure to principles of righteousness in the word of God (Heb. 5:14), and it has a great advantage in leading the disciple into appropriate activities. Conduct guided by a Biblically-educated conscience pleases everyone-- God, other godly men, and the person who follows the dictates of his conscience. *JOY* is felt when one knows within himself that he has done what he thought was *right* to do.
- f. What is of good report [*euphemos*-- “fair-sounding”]. If we act in keeping with what other faithful Christians consider to be “fair” [good], it cannot fail to cause real *JOY* in their hearts. And bringing *JOY* to others should bring *JOY* to us also.
- g. What [ever] is virtuous [*arete*-- “intrinsic eminence; moral goodness”] and what [ever] is praiseworthy [*epainos*-- “approbation, commendation”]. These terms are intended to cover anything that might have been omitted in Paul’s list of things to impart *JOY* to the Philippians. A similar term, “and the like,” is found when the apostle closes his list of the works of the flesh in Gal. 5:21. He would recommend the practice of doing *whatever* might contribute to the strengthening of their faith and the dedicating of their lives to the cause of the Savior. We, too, would do well to evaluate our activities by this same test: “Will this help to draw me closer to the Lord, or will it push me away?”

5. Two basic things would help to fill their lives in Christ with JOY: (1) apply what I [Paul] have taught you about truth and godliness and, (2) follow my example of behaving as a Christian should. This was what he also had told the Corinthians (1Cor. 11:1) and the Thessalonians (2Thes. 3:7) in letters sent to them.

Verses 10-19-- While Paul's main concern was that the members at Philippi do the things that would bring them JOY in the Lord, there were other things that also caused Paul to REJOICE.

1. The renewal of expressing their care. He *rejoiced* now that the church was both willing *and able* to support him in his gospel work. Their *desire* to help had never faltered, but their *ability* to act upon that desire was lacking. Their fellowship with him was a well-established practice (1:5; 4:15,16), but apparently some circumstance had interrupted their performance for a while. Now, the hindrance had been removed, and the coming of Epaphroditus had greatly refreshed the feeling of brotherhood between them.
 - a. Paul's JOY came not from their gift itself, but from the knowledge that he was cared for and appreciated for the work he had done and for the sacrifices he had made in behalf of the Philippians and many others.
 - b. His JOY was increased because he knew in his heart that his own contentment did not depend on worldly things. He would not have been discouraged from his duty even if the church at Philippi had *not* sent a generous gift to him. He had learned early on in his ministry how to use any changing situation to his spiritual advantage. Albert Barnes has some interesting thoughts about this:

It requires as much grace to keep the heart right in prosperity as it does in adversity, and perhaps more. Adversity, *of itself*, does something to keep the mind in a right state; prosperity does nothing...God tries his people, not by a steady course of prosperity, or by long-continued and uniform adversity, but by *transition* from the one to the other; and it often happens that the grace that would have been sufficient for either continued prosperity or adversity, would fail in the transition from one to the other...He [Paul] could bear any trial, perform any duty, subdue any evil propensity of his nature, and meet all the temptations incident to any condition of prosperity or adversity. His own experience in the various changes of life had warranted him in arriving at this conclusion; and he now expresses the firm confidence that nothing would be required of him that he would not be able to perform.
 - c. Paul had learned a "secret" [ASV-- *mueo*-- "to initiate into mysteries"] that most never would. His unchanging contentment was *uncommon* enough among the people of the world to be a "mystery" [unknown or not understood] but *common* enough among the people of God to be a source of deep JOY and satisfaction. The peace of Christ ruled Paul's heart, and nothing could take it away.
2. Confidence in the Lord's strength. Paul's attitude toward life's varied circumstances was, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." He spoke in particular of being able to be content with his lot, whether in abundance or in want. And it was

not a vain human boast that he made. James Macknight comments on verse 13:

This is not arrogant boasting. For the apostle glories not in his own strength, but in the strength of another. The fathers, as Whitby informs us, observed three things in this passage:-- 1. That the virtue of contentment requires much exercise, learning and meditation. 2. That it is as difficult to learn how to be full, as to be hungry; abundance having destroyed more men than penury, and exposed them to more pernicious lusts. 3. That our proficiency in this or in any other virtue, is to be ascribed, not to ourselves, but to the divine assistance.

3. Recollections of past fellowship. More than ten years had passed since Paul had first preached the gospel in Philippi (Acts 16:11ff). After being imprisoned there and released, he and his companions left the city for Thessalonica (Acts 17:1). We have no information about the transactions, but the Philippian church sent some form of assistance to the preachers “once and again” [perhaps twice] while they were there. Preaching in the Jewish synagogue spanned three Sabbath days (Acts 17:2); time spent in other activities is undisclosed. The apostle received help from Philippi on other occasions-- where and in what form we don’t know (1:5). Their association was a matter of “giving” and “receiving,” an arrangement much like credits and debits in an accounting ledger. There was a great sense in which the Philippians *owed* Paul a substantial *debt* for his part in their salvation. Their help had been *payments* on that debt. They had done no more than they should have done (1Cor. 9:14). Nevertheless, Paul was deeply grateful for every expression of their affection and appreciation, and his heart overflowed with the *JOY* that came from the warm personal relationships that had prompted their gracious response to his needs.
4. Deposits made to the account of the Philippians. They had “done well” in sharing material goods with Paul and the rest; they had brought *JOY* to those who benefited from their generosity. However, much more than that, Paul *rejoiced* not so much that he had benefited but that they were much the better for having shared their goods with him. He firmly believed that, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). God blesses those who bless others. The “fruit” [beneficial result] of their liberality had *abounded* to their “account” with the Lord, which was now much larger than before they had given their gifts. The apostle John expressed the feeling of Paul and every first-century preacher about his converts, “I have no greater *JOY* than to hear that my children walk in truth” (2John 4).
5. His needs had been adequately filled. The Philippians’ gift had *abounded* in satisfying Paul’s physical needs, just as it had *abounded* in increasing their own favor with God. It was much like an Old Testament sacrifice of incense that Jehovah “smelled” as He observed with pleasure the devotions of His people (Exo. 30:7, etc.). Even though Paul’s spirit was not discouraged when he suffered the lack of physical necessities, his humanity must have felt some measure of *JOY* when he was able to indulge for a while in things that most other men enjoyed continually.

- 6. Their needs would be adequately filled. Their needs were of a different kind, but much more important to them than Paul's were to him. A fundamental principle of God's dealings with men has always been, "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (2Cor. 9:6). They had "done well" (verse 14), and the Lord would "do well" with them. Their blessings would come from God's inexhaustible store of "riches," and their supply would never fail.**

Verses 20-22-- The message of this epistle is concluded in Paul's prayer that God would be glorified in this beautiful relationship among Him, Paul, and the Philippians. It had already been productive of much good in the cause of Jesus Christ, and the apostle had strong expectations that in the future the spiritual stock of the church at Philippi would soar to even greater heights.

- 1. There was also a strong bond between Christians at Rome and those at Philippi. The "brethren" and "all the saints" seem to be two different groups, but all had a deep affection for the disciples to whom this letter is being sent. "All" sent their greetings. While we can't be sure about the identity of the "brethren" who were with Paul, some believe that at least some of them are named in the closing verses of Colossians and Philemon, letters also written from this Roman prison.**
- 2. Some of the Roman Christians were members of Caesar's "household." Perhaps they are singled out by Paul to emphasize to the church at Philippi just how strong the gospel is to save Greeks as well as Jews (Rom. 1:16,17). If its message could reach the hearts of such unlikely prospects as those in the emperor's own family and/or staff, its potential for success in places such as Philippi was unlimited!**
- 3. "Caesar's household" may lend support to the position that this letter was written from Rome rather than from Caesarea, as some suppose. However, this reference is not conclusive proof about the point of origin. Caesar had fortifications and staff in Palestine at the time of Paul's imprisonment, and Caesarea was his headquarters for military and civil operations of the government. This "household" could have been located there instead of at Rome.**
- 4. Paul's epistles all conclude with some form of his constant prayer, "Grace be with you." No greater blessing could ever be enjoyed by the disciples and churches to whom his letters were written:**

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."

"AMEN."

1. Paul called the Philippians his _____ and _____.
2. _____ and _____ were having some difficulty. Paul urged a _____ to help them.
3. “_____ in the Lord _____. Again I will say, _____!”
4. Requests to God should be made by _____ and _____ with _____ and God’s _____ will _____ our _____ and _____ in _____.
5. Paul lists *eight* kinds of things for Christians to “think” on. What are they?
 - a. _____ c. _____ e. _____ g. _____
 - b. _____ d. _____ f. _____ h. _____
6. The disciples were to _____ the things they had _____ and _____ and _____ and _____ in Paul.
7. The church at Philippi _____ for Paul but once they lacked _____ to _____ him in preaching the _____.
8. Paul had learned to be _____ in whatever _____ he was.
9. Paul knew how to be _____ and how to _____; how to be either _____ or _____; how to _____ or _____.
10. “I can do _____ through _____ who _____ me.”
11. When Paul left _____ and went to _____, only the church at _____ sent aid _____ and _____ to him.
12. The Philippians had _____ with Paul in _____ and _____.
13. The gift _____ brought was like a _____ - _____, an acceptable _____, pleasing to _____.
14. Paul singled out the _____ in _____ household.

THE GOSPEL

According to

PAUL

STUDIES IN PAUL'S SHORTER LETTERS TO CHURCHES

Colossians

“*Christ and the Church*”

WITH CLASS QUESTIONS FOR EACH LESSON

By: Reg Ginn

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PAUL

COLOSSIANS

“Christ *and* the Church”

“To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:27)

“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.” (Colossians 2:8)

INTRODUCTION TO COLOSSIANS

The City: Colosse [or Colossae] was a minor city of Phrygia, located near other cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis. All three had local churches or individual saints (1:2; 4:13). Colosse once was located on an important trade route, but by the time of this letter the road system had changed, and the city had lost much of its position as a leader in the commerce of the region. However, it retained both its reputation for producing fine wool and its municipal independence under the Romans. The people of Phrygia, who claimed to be the most ancient people of the world, were known for their dissolute lifestyles and for their devotion to the pagan gods Bacchus and Cybele, the “mother” of the gods. Both sexes regularly engaged in debaucheries that were attributed to inspiration from the gods they worshipped.

The Church: Scholars differ about the origins of the church at Colosse. Many, including W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, are convinced that Paul had never been to Colosse at the time the letter was written. Their position is based on statements in 1:4 that Paul had “heard” of the faith and love of the Colossians and in 2:1 that he had concern for those who “have not seen my face in the flesh.” These scholars credit Epaphras (1:7; 4:12,13) with being instrumental in establishing the church at Colosse. Others, among them James Macknight and Albert Barnes, believe that Paul and Silas *were* involved in the initial preaching of the gospel and in the origin of the Colossian church. They cite Luke’s account of the evangelization of Phrygia in Acts 16:4-6 and conclude that Colosse would have been included in the “cities” of Phrygia where the truth was proclaimed.

The Author: As in his other epistles, Paul identifies himself as the writer of this letter, and “external testimony to the Pauline authorship of Colossians is ancient and consistent.” Moreover, the personal references in the book and its significant similarities to Ephesians and Philemon add to the evidence. Along with those two letters and Philippians, Colossians is one of the “prison epistles,” sent by Paul from his first confinement in a Roman jail about A.D. 60 or 61. It was delivered by Tychicus and Onesimus (4:7-9). Paul’s authorship has been challenged on occasion on the premise that:

(1) the vocabulary and content of this letter are more consistent with the pen of John rather than Paul and, (2) the false doctrines apparently addressed in the book posed no real threat to the churches until the second century, too late to be discussed by Paul in this book. However, these objections are satisfied by (1) acknowledging the philosophical nature of the doctrines addressed and the need for a unique vocabulary to address them and, (2) recognizing that doctrines which would become full-blown in the second century were dangerous in their formative stages to churches in the first century.

The Problems: A serious threat to the faith and stability of the young Christians at Colosse had arisen in the form of false teaching about the Person and place of Jesus Christ in God's scheme of redemption. This error had developed into a religious system that combined two schools of thought that usually were divergent in most respects.

On the one hand, the error was laced with a philosophy of Greek origin that professed such ideas as self-imposed humility, worship of angels, hard treatment of the physical body, and the need for a wisdom superior to the revelation of God. In its ultimate expression, such thinking resulted in the Gnostic movement of the second century which devastated the faithfulness of many local churches and the faith of untold numbers of individual saints.

On the other hand, a strong influence of Jewish traditionalism had been infused into the teaching being done at Colosse. Perhaps it originated with Jews of the Essene persuasion. They were staunch advocates of mystic speculation and rigid asceticism [the practice of self-denial and bodily discipline]. They insisted on an unyielding conformity to Mosaic ritual, while practicing things contrary to the Mosaic law, such as abstaining from marriage and animal foods and paying homage to the sun. They rejected a bodily resurrection and blood sacrifices, and they worshipped angels and claimed to possess secret knowledge that they refused to divulge to any except initiates to their society.

This conglomeration of teachings had caused an erosion of confidence in the Person and place of Jesus in the religious thought of some of the Colossians. In jeopardy were many of the basic tenets of the gospel:

1. The *supremacy* of Christ in all things in the world and in the church (1:13-19);
2. The *adequacy* of the divine Nature of Jesus to procure reconciliation and salvation for wicked men (1:20-23; 2:9);
3. The *completeness* of the redemption provided by Him (1:20-23);
4. The *worthiness* of sufferings and sacrifices for the gospel (1:24-29);

5. The *inability* of human religion to benefit the spirit of man (2:8-10);
6. The *removal* of God's authority from Moses' Law (2:13-17);
7. The *superiority* of divine wisdom over other wisdom (2:3,7; 18,22).
8. The *importance* of observing the moral and ethical standards established through the laws of God and the practices of decent societies (3:1-4:6).

There is no way to determine the extent to which these errors had developed among the Colossians at the time of this epistle. It does appear, however, that Paul was alarmed enough by an inspired foresight to recognize the destructive potential of these false ideas and to be convinced that he must make every effort to combat them at Colosse and wherever else they might have gained a foothold.

The Themes: As one would expect, the themes of Colossians directly reflect the problems faced by the membership of the church:

1. The preeminence and sufficiency of Jesus Christ in all things;
2. The spiritual completeness of believers in Christ;
3. The superiority of divine wisdom over other wisdom;
4. The obligations of union with Christ in the church;
5. The importance of honoring relationships with others.

The Outline: A simple outline of Colossians might be:

- I. Opening remarks (1:1-8)
- II. Rooted in Christ (1:9-2:23)
 - A. Walking worthy of Christ (1:9-13)
 - B. Redeemed by Christ (1:14-18)
 - C. Reconciled in Christ (1:19-23)
 - D. Perfected in Christ (1:24-2:7)
 - E. Complete in Christ (2:8-23)
- III. Living in Christ (3:1-4:6)
 - A. Seeking things above (3:1-4)
 - B. Putting off worldly habits (3:5-11)
 - C. Putting on heavenly habits (3:12-17)
 - D. Honoring spiritual relationships (3:18-4:1)
 - E. Showing concern for others (4:2-6)
- IV. Closing remarks and instructions (4:7-18)

References and Quotations are from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

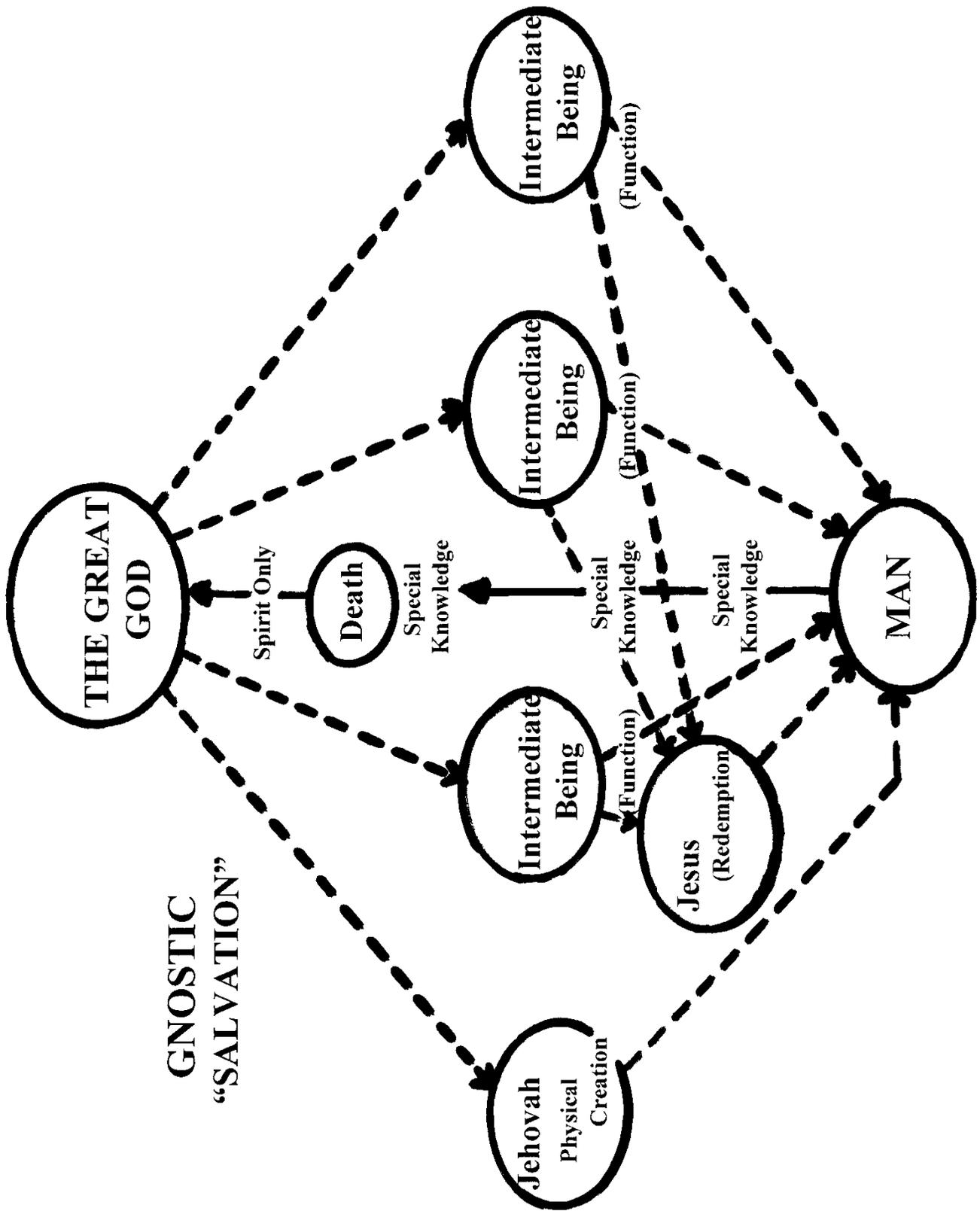
COLOSSIANS

Chapter One

Verses 1-8-- Paul's greetings to the church at Colosse follows his usual pattern. He first identifies himself and those to whom he is writing. Then, he extends his prayer for their well-being in the form of, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." After that, he either adds other personal remarks or launches into the reason for which his letter was written. In the Colossian letter, he has several things to say about the Colossians before he addresses the things he wants to say to them.

1. Paul almost always calls himself an "apostle" when he opens an epistle. This, of course, immediately calls for attention and respect for what he was to say in the letter. Sometimes he adds something like, "of Jesus Christ," or, "by the will of God." Such expressions raise the level of his divine authority even more.
2. There are exceptions to this practice. No reference to "apostle" is made to the Thessalonians [in his earliest letters, prior to beginning the practice], the Philippians [who needed no such motivation], or to Philemon [of whom Paul preferred to *ask* a favor rather than to *demand* his compliance].
3. Timothy was well-known among the Gentile churches, having accompanied Paul and others in preaching the gospel and in building up the cause of Christ in many places. He was beloved by Paul as a "brother (2Cor. 1:1)," a "true son in the faith"(1Tim. 1:2), a "servant of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:1), and as someone who possessed a "gift of God" (2Tim. 1:6). He, among all of Paul's fellow-workers, was most "like-minded" with the apostle, and his character was "proven" to be faithful in the work (Phil. 2:19-22). His endorsement of Paul's admonitions would add still more weight to their importance.
4. Paul's use of both "saints" and "faithful brethren" is subject to either of two interpretations. Perhaps both terms are simply used to emphasize his regard for the church at Colosse, with each term intended to complement the other. Or, maybe the fact that some of the members [who *were still* "saints" (separated)] were not now as "faithful" as previously because of the influence of the false teaching that will be addressed in this letter.
5. Paul was constantly concerned for the welfare of "all the churches" (2Cor. 11:28), those with whom he had a personal relationship and those he knew only by reputation. His concerns invariably prompted much prayer on their behalf.

6. The apostle's thanksgiving and prayers for the Colossians sprang from *two* things he had heard about them: faith in Christ Jesus and love for *all* the saints. "Faith" likely is used here to include their initial obedience to the gospel and their subsequent compliance with the commands governing Christian living. Such "faith" would be eloquent testimony of their love for Christ (John 14:15; 1John 5:3). Love for brethren was equally important to their faithfulness (1John 4:20,21).
7. His prayers and thanks also were in response to his realization that, along with all other loyal disciples, they now enjoyed a precious hope that unsaved people did not have. This was the promise of an "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven" for them (1Pet. 1:4). This promise was a vital part of the gospel to which they had become obedient (1Thes. 4:17,18), and it was such a powerful motivation that it was said that converts were "saved by hope" (Rom. 8:24--KJV).
8. Other passages provide information about the *value* and *benefits* of the Christian's hope:
 - a. Rom. 5:2-- The Christian hopes to receive glory from the Lord;
 - b. 1Cor. 9:10-- The Christian hopes to be rewarded for his service to Christ;
 - c. 1Cor. 15:19-- The Christian hopes for a bodily resurrection;
 - d. Gal. 5:5-- The Christian hopes for righteousness before God;
 - e. Eph. 1:18-- The Christian hopes for God's great power toward believers;
 - f. Titus 1:2;3:7- The Christian hopes for eternal life;
 - g. Heb. 6:19-- The Christian hopes for entrance into heaven;
 - h. 1John 3:3-- The Christian hopes to have an eternal nature like Christ's.
9. The gospel had been taken to Colosse by faithful preachers just as it had been proclaimed in all parts of the [Roman] world [Cf., Luke 2:1.] It was producing fruit in the form of redeemed individuals (1:14), active congregations of disciples (Phil.1:6), and manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God (2Thes. 1:5). Some versions add "and growing/increasing," calling attention to the continuing spread and prosperity of the truth even as Paul writes this letter to his brethren in the Lord.
10. The success of God's word in Colosse had occurred because many "heard" and "knew" [*epiginosko*-- "to know completely, accurately"] the blessings of God's grace when it was first declared to them. Like the Thessalonians, they had received the gospel "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe" (2Thes. 2:13).
11. Many scholars believe that Epaphrus, who was "one of them"(4:12), had first taken the gospel to Colosse and then had been instrumental in the establishment of the local church there. While this may be true, there possibly may here be a distinction between the "day" they had heard the truth and when they "also learned" it from Epaphrus (verses 6,7).



(6-A)

12. Epaphras was held in esteem by Paul as a “dear fellow servant” and as a “minister of Christ” on their behalf. Whether or not he had been the *first* preacher at Colosse, he had certainly been an *effective* proclaimer of the gospel in that city.
13. It is commonly thought that Epaphras had worked with the church at Colosse until the false teachers arrived, bringing their hurtful heresies among the brethren and causing much harm. Not feeling capable of handling the volatile situation, Epaphras had come to Rome to lay the problem before Paul for a solution. At the same time, he was able to encourage Paul by telling him of the love the Colossians had for him for his work’s sake. Their love was born of the Spirit’s command to “love as brothers” (1Pe. 3:8).

Gnostic Influences Addressed in Colossians

One of the movements most dangerous and devastating to the faith of early Christians came to be known as “Gnosticism,” taken from the Greek word *ginosko*, “to know.” It proposed a religious system based on a special knowledge of mysterious truths that were available only to an elite segment of humanity. While it is admitted that the movement was not fully developed until the second century or later, it must be conceded that strong elements of its principal doctrines appear in the Colossian letter. Perhaps brief attention should be given to its strange concepts before further notice is given to the text of the epistle. Some of the fundamental ideas of Gnosticism that drew attention from Paul were:

1. Salvation comes through gaining “special” *intuitive knowledge*. Not everyone is eligible or capable of gaining and utilizing such understanding of “truth”;
2. This “special” truth comes to men through varied and multiple sources [nature, angels, etc.];
3. Salvation is achieved through acquiring and employing a unique and exclusive knowledge of “truth” to divest oneself of all worldly identities. Only when one is totally separated from his “worldly” nature, and after he has successfully learned and applied the “secrets” of the universe, can he approach the “True God” for salvation;
4. The body and the spirit have nothing in common. All material things are totally evil. The spirit is totally good and is not responsible for the evil deeds of the body;
5. The “True God” did not create the material [“evil”] universe, but creation came by an inferior god [Jehovah] whose nature could deal with evil things;
6. Some thirty inferior beings called “aeons” are actively engaged in dealing with physical matter, including men. They stand between men and any direct contact with the “True God”;
7. Jesus Christ was only an inferior spiritual being. He is not the “True God” or the Son of that God. His power to enhance man’s spiritual growth was limited, and he was just one of many agents and agencies that combine to make ultimate “freedom

from ignorance” possible;

8. Some gnostics denied the very existence of Christ’s physical body, claiming it was only an “apparition.” Others believed that His spirit entered a body at His baptism and then departed when He was on the cross;
9. It was thought that the mutilation if the [evil] physical body was a sure means of enhancing the spiritual growth of men;
10. “Will worship” [service to the “True God” by whatever means are dictated by each man’s personal preferences] is the “religion of choice.”

Note-- The evolving gnostic doctrine was especially hurtful at Colosse because its advocates infused it with a strong emphasis on both traditional and nontraditional Judaism and on a measure of Oriental mysticism.

Verses 9-13-- Paul now enters into a “low-key” debate with the false teachers and their pernicious doctrines. His tactic seems to be inclined toward *confirmation* rather than *confrontation*. Encouraging the Colossians to remain firm in their convictions about Christ and His gospel would more likely strengthen their resistance to the attacks of the “*Colossian Heresy*” [as this combination of false ideas is known] rather than by making a frontal assault against its principal ideas.

1. A strong emphasis on the differences between the *knowledge* and *wisdom* of the gospel and the *intellectual progress* of gnostic philosophy is made throughout the rest of the letter. The ways in which *truth* is acquired within the two systems are also stoutly contrasted, as are the *limited access* of the gnostic-like philosophy and the Essene Judaism and the *unlimited availability* of salvation provided by the gospel of Christ. A list of verses that highlight Paul’s treatment of gnostic-like and Essene errors will be found at the end of this chapter.
2. “Knowledge” was the bench mark of Gnosticism. Salvation depended entirely on the acquisition of special knowledge by those capable of applying its precepts to their “upward” climb toward uncorrupted [by the flesh] spirituality. Paul’s position is that real knowledge and wisdom are available to all men through the will of God. It alone offers a *spiritual understanding* that attracts, satisfies, and comforts a whole world of sinners. Accepting the gospel allows everyone “not to be unwise” [foolish] but to “understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 3:17). Gnostic-like “wisdom” was withheld from most, as were the “secrets” of the Essene Jews.
3. The fruit of the gospel is changed lives and strong spirits. Such fruit had been produced wherever the gospel had gone (1:6). Continued increase in the *knowledge of God* accompanies a walk pleasing to the Lord, a life that displays “every good work” imposed on Christians in the gospel (Eph. 2:10). Contrarily, gnostic teaching minimized the importance of morality or charity in the lives of its adherents and advocated a *passive* role in alleviating the daily problems of mankind. Christians stood for something far better (Gal. 6:10).

4. Spiritual strength came only slowly and indirectly from the “True God” of these false preachers. Each man was largely “on his own” in his struggle for enlightenment and salvation. But Paul’s God was a God of great power, and He was more than anxious to share that power with His children. Knowing that our God cares and provides for us (1Pet. 5:7) adds significantly to our strength to be *patient* and *longsuffering* toward obstacles that would otherwise discourage and hinder us on our spiritual journey. Only “bootstrap” strength is available to the traveler who relies on a god disinterested in his problems.
5. Christians can be thankful that their God qualified [*ikanosanti*-- “make competent”] us to inherit His salvation. Thoughtful people understand that, “...the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jer. 10:23). But our Jehovah has done for us what we *could not* do for ourselves and what an “inferior” Jehovah *would not* do. God’s wisdom has devised a spiritual plan for our redemption that is perfect in every way. Its ability to save depends not on the frailties of men but on the absolute power of the Creator and Sustainer of all things past, present, and future (Eph. 1:19).
6. The pagan world had languished in the darkness of ignorance about God for a very long time (Acts 17:23), and the path of ignorance leads to damnation (Eph. 4:18). But eternal life and immortality had been brought to light through the gospel that had been carried to the Colossians (2Tim. 1:10). Through obedience to the truth, sinners in Satan’s kingdom (Matt. 12:26) had been translated [“changed”] in their own nature and in their relationship to God. They were changed at baptism into a *new relationship* with God [“into Christ”--Gal. 3:27], into a *new kingdom* [church of Christ--Matt. 16:18,19; Acts 2:38,47], and into a *new lifestyle* of righteousness (Rom. 6:4,11).

Verses 14-18-- The human philosophies introduced at Colosse had no place for Jesus as man’s only Savior. Man for the most part was charged with redemption on his own. But Jesus cannot be left out of the gospel plan of salvation. He delivers sinners from spiritual darkness and provides them with a kingdom full of light and truth. And more than that, He *redeems them* through the sacrifice of His blood and *forgives them* through the mercy of His love.

1. Now Paul turns to look at this Christ, “the Son of His love,” whom he insists must be regarded as *central* to any religious system depended on by a spiritually destitute world. Jesus cannot be given a minor role that could be filled by some other player in the drama of man’s quest for eternal life. His function is *unique* and *essential* in every way.
2. Paul’s goal in this discussion of the nature of Jesus Christ is to arrive at a conclusion both logical and appealing to any disciples who might be wavering from their initial commitment to Christ as He had been portrayed when they first believed.

3. The conclusion he has in mind is advocated in verse 18: “...that in *all things* He may have the *pre-eminence*.” Within verses 15 through 18, he will present several profound reasons why the Colossians should be firmly convinced about this vital principle.
4. **Reason One:** He is the *image* of the invisible God (verse 15).
An “image” [*eikon*], says W.E. Vine, suggests two concepts: representation and manifestation. An image is more than a resemblance; it is an expression of a prototype [“An original or model after which anything is copied; pattern; archetype” (Webster)]. In this instance, the prototype is “the invisible God.” Christ, as the God-man on earth, was a perfect representation/manifestation of the essence of “God” to the world. The apostle John declares that, “No man has seen God at any time” (1John 4:12), but He can be “seen” in the love that was demonstrated in Jesus’ sacrifice for humanity. Here, in Paul’s statement, we learn that there is another way in which man can see God, i.e., by looking at the God-man Jesus Christ. Jesus shows the world what “God” is like because He is God (John 1:1). Consider these thoughts:
 - a. “God” is the name given in the Scriptures to the essential nature of deity. Three Persons share that nature and that name. They are called the “God-head,” a term used only by Paul in Acts 17:29 [“Divine Nature” in NKJV and “Divinity” in RSV]; Rom. 1:20; and Col. 2:9;
 - b. There is no difference among these Three in their essential divine essence. They are all “one” in mind and purpose (John 17:21) and in action [e.g., Gen. 1:1--“Gods” created; John 10:30--One in works]. Thus, Jesus existed in the “form” of God and was equal with God [Father and Spirit] before coming into the world (Phil. 2: 5,6) because He is God;
 - c. “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit” are names that designate the functions of the divine Three. Where responsibility is divided, One acts as the “Father” in *planning* and overseeing; One acts as the “Son” in *implementing* the plans made by the Father; One acts as the “Holy Spirit” in *executing* those plans.
 - d. Prior to His incarnation, the yet-to-be Jesus was “the Word” (John 1:1,14). When He “became flesh,” He also became the “Son” of God. That was to be His function in the redemption plan made by the divine Person who was functioning as “Father” (John 3:16). Another divine Person functioned as the “Spirit,” executing the conception of the Son (Luke 1:35) and supporting the work done by the Son throughout His ministry on earth (Luke 4:18,19).
 - e. Jesus Christ was the “*image*” of the “*invisible God*” [Divinity, not just the “Father”]. He was the visible representation/manifestation of His own invisible nature, as well as the copy of the true nature of the other Two in the Godhead. In no way was He inferior to, or different from, the One God, because He was

the One God as much as any other. Would-be gnostics assigned Jesus a position of lesser importance than that of the True God. Paul declared that to be a *totally* untrue concept.

5. Reason Two. He is the *firstborn* over all creation (verse 15).

Christ [the Divine Person] was *not* a created being, as the false teachers at Colosse said He was. He was with the other Two divine Persons “in the beginning” (John 1:1). He “was” [existed] in another place before he “was” in this world (John 8:58). Being a non-created Person, He can rank appropriately *over* and be in control of all that was created, unlike the role of inferior intermediaries [aeons] in the Judaistic/gnostic-like doctrines proposed by pretenders troubling the church.

6. Paul perhaps had two things in mind when he called Jesus the “firstborn” who was over creation:

a. He is “firstborn” as others were firstborn within the patriarchal (Gen. 43:33) and Mosaic (Deut. 21:15-17) systems. The firstborn son was privileged in several ways. He exercised greater authority over family affairs than the other sons, and he inherited a double portion from his father. Jesus’ status as the Father’s firstborn [and only] Son empowered Him with authority above that of any other;

b. Jesus was also the “firstborn” from the dead (verse 18). Both gnostics and Essene Jews rejected the idea of a bodily resurrection, which was one of the great and precious promises of the gospel (2Pet. 1:4). Christ’s resurrection asserts Divinity’s power to raise the bodies of all the redeemed (1Cor. 15:20). This fact should have been a highly attractive reason for any wavering disciples to reaffirm his confidence in the pure gospel which Paul advocated.

7. Reason Three. He was the Creator of everything that was created (verse 16).

This is asserted by the first verse of the Bible, where “the heavens and the earth” is equivalent to “all things...that are in heaven...and...on earth” of this passage. Heaven and earth comprehend all of *space*. Then, Paul more specifically identifies things “visible” and things “invisible” to comprehend all of *existence*. More specifically still, all “thrones,” “dominions,” “principalities,” and “powers” [representing all important and influential forces in the world, both seen and unseen] are assigned to the creative energy of the Christ. Vincent says:

The passage is aimed at the angel-worship of the Colossians; showing that while they have been discussing the various grades of angels which fill the space between God and men, and depending on them as media of communion with God, they have degraded Christ who is above them all, and is the sole mediator.

8. Reason Four. Everything was made *for* Him (verse 16).

Not only were all things created by the Christ [in His pre-earthly existence] but also every created thing was made for His benefit, and what benefited Him also benefited the other two divine Persons.

a. The creation provided an opportunity for the Godhead to assert their authority over all created things in heaven and on earth. David said, “The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; the world and all its fullness, You have founded them” (Psa. 89:11). Through His demonstrated control over both physical and nonphysical things, the Lord proved Himself to be Lord of heaven and earth, as Paul declared in his sermon at Athens (Acts 17:24). He overpowered winds and waves (e.g., Matt. 8:27), demons and spirits of all kinds (e.g., Mark 5:9), and numerous laws of nature (e.g., Matt. 14:15). Angels were subject to Him and ministered to Him (Matt. 4:11). And since He, the Father, and the Spirit were of the same *nature*, His authority over creation also served to establish their authority as well.

b. The creation also offered an occasion for the Godhead to be praised and glorified. This was in God’s purpose from the beginning. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psa. 19:1). The psalmist also proclaimed, “Let heaven and earth praise Him, the seas and everything that moves in them” (Psa. 69:34). Had the multitudes not expressed their praise of the Redeemer, even the rocks would have cried out and paid homage to the Savior (Luke 19:40).

9. Reason Five. He existed before any created things existed (verse 17).

In this statement, the apostle declares again the eternal presence of the Lord. Obviously, if He created all things, He existed prior to anything He made. But the false philosophy Paul was combating at Colosse was adamant that the Christ was a creature inferior to the True God, who alone was eternal. Only a God who was Himself eternal could give eternal life to others. It was important for the Colossians to understand that although the Jews had killed the “prince” [*archegos*-- “author, founder”] of life, He could take up life again (John 10:18) because eternal life is not subject to death. The prospect of eternal life would surely encourage doubters to have more confidence in someone who could empower them to overcome death just as He had done.

10. Reason Six. He maintains everything that He has made (verse 17).

In Him all things “consist” [*sunistemi*-- “to stand with or fall together”]. Vine says that the literal meaning here is, “by Him all things stand together.” He cares for what He has created, unlike the pagan gods who were disinterested in the earth and its inhabitants. David declared, “You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth” (Psa. 104:30). Paul and Barnabas corroborated that truth in their sermon at Antioch, “Nevertheless He did not

leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17).

11. Reason Seven. He is head of His church (verse 18).

The church is the body of Christ, and it is not without competent leadership. It is probable that the Judaistic/gnostic teachers who were troubling the local group at Colosse had confused some into doubting that Jesus’ voice was the only one to be heard. They were promoting other sources of guidance and authority. Paul’s position was that if Christ had been *wise* enough and *powerful* enough to create and maintain the universe, He was certainly able to direct His people into proper paths of service and obedience. He adds a quick reminder about the nature of the One whom he had identified as their head in all things. Christ is their only head because He is eternal, He has overcome death, He made the world in which they live, and He was chosen by the Godhead to be the preeminent One in His world and in His church!

Verses 19-23-- The Godhead had one great purpose in mind in the formulation of the “mystery” plan which called for the Word to “become flesh and dwell among us” (John 1:14). That purpose was for the incarnated Son to become heaven’s offering for sin so that man could recapture his spiritual purity and be *reconciled* to God. Only then could man and his Maker share the spiritual intimacy that was planned by God but was disrupted by man’s fall into disobedience and disgrace.

1. The “*Colossian Heresy*” troubling the church probably promoted a *multiplicity* of intermediaries between man and the “True God.” Gnosticism later taught that numerous beings [aeons] and “emanations” from heaven had to be dealt with before man could have any relationship with the great god who conferred spiritual freedom [salvation] from the bad influences of the world. The text indicates that Paul was already concerned that some form of these ideas was gaining a foothold in the minds of the Colossian disciples.
2. These aeons [beings between man and the “True God”] had the elements of man’s salvation distributed among them and were jointly responsible for whatever progress seekers might make toward heaven.
3. The gospel offered a tremendous advantage in providing for *one* Mediator who was totally capable of securing access to God without any help from any other source. The pre-eminent Christ offered a simple and effective route to the throne of God (1Tim. 2:5) because He was God in the fullest.
4. God’s “mystery” plan specified that “fullness” [*pleroma* denotes here “the completeness of God’s Being”] should “dwell” [*katoikeo*-- “dwell down”; signifies here “to dwell *fixedly* in one place”] in the Christ whom Paul is setting forth as *pre-eminent* in all things involved in man’s reconciliation to God. Thus, the total nature of Divinity was the nature that dwelt permanently in the body of

Jesus as He worked on earth to save man from his sin. It wasn't just a more-than-human nature that entered His body at baptism and then was removed at His death on the cross. The divine nature came into the flesh from conception and apparently remains in His *glorified* body until now (Luke 24:31,39; 1John 3:2). This "fullness" [of the Godhead] will appear again in 2:9.

5. "All things" in heaven and on earth, whoever and wherever they might be, can be reconciled to God by Christ. "Reconcile" [*katallasso*] means "to change enmity to friendship." But here the word is *apokatallasso*, "to reconcile completely." Of course, this offer of reconciliation does not include those who by reason of unforgiven sin are not eligible for forgiveness (Jude 6,15).
6. Jesus can make peace between God and man because He alone was able to atone for the crimes man had committed against God. His blood was the *only* "payment" precious enough to satisfy the justice of heaven for what humanity had done. Nobody else had anything of consequence to offer.
7. "All things" is a rather generic category of persons and powers that were reconciled by Jesus. But to make the greatest impact on any shaky Colossians, Paul makes his application entirely *specific*. "And you...He has reconciled." These enemies of God had not been people far away somewhere; they were you! And-- what did reconciliation by Christ mean to you?
 - a. You were enemies in your mind. Your need for forgiveness went beyond what you did. Your mindset was against the rule of God. Paul discusses Gentile thinking in Romans, chapter one. He describes pagan hearts that were filled with lust and vile passions; that chose lies over truth; that controlled minds that were debased and dominated by all sorts of violent thinking and hateful attitudes. Generally, Gentile peoples were "futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened," and "professing to be wise they became fools" (Rom. 1:21-31).
 - b. You were also guilty of doing unspeakably wicked works, and such actions often drove the apostle to insist that Gentiles "put off the old man" and his deeds and "put on the new man in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:22-24). Lists of evil practices to be thrown aside by new Christians appear in several places in Paul's writings (e.g., Eph. 4:26-32; Gal. 5:19-21; Col.3:8,9; 2Tim. 3:1-5). Such behaviors will condemn souls (2Cor. 5:10).
 - c. You, nevertheless, have been reconciled despite your unworthiness of forgiveness for what you thought and for what you did.
 - d. You can now expect to be presented [as a sacrifice (Ro.12:2)] as holy, blameless [*amomos*-- "unreprovable"], and irreproachable [*anenkletos*-- "that which cannot be called into account, unchargeable" (Rom.14:12)]. Why? The deep love of Christ took Him to the cross, and His body

of *flesh* was freely given for your reconciliation to God. That statement must have puzzled any who had accepted the idea that all flesh was evil and was incapable of any good deed. How wrong might they also be about this Jesus, whom Paul claimed to be pre-eminent in all things about salvation!

8. Along with his *encouragement* about what the God-man Jesus Christ had done for them, Paul feels compelled, in the light of some apparent influence over them by the false teachers, to add a *warning* for them to consider. Although they had reaped rich rewards for their obedience, any disobedience in the future would result in the removal of those blessings. Salvation was *not automatic*. There were some “ifs” that stood between them and the happy ending they anticipated:
 - a. *If* they continued in the faith of the gospel;
 - b. *If* they remained grounded [*themelios*-- “to lay the foundation of”] and steadfast [*hedraios*-- “seated”] in the truths about Jesus that were vital to salvation;
 - c. *If* they didn’t move from their convictions about the *pre-eminent Christ* that had first given them the hope of heaven (1:5).
9. Surely, the Colossians knew that the gospel [“good news”] of Christ had been taught in places other than in their own city. They might not have known just how widely that message had been proclaimed, but by now, “every creature” in the Roman world enjoyed the same opportunity to learn what *they* had learned about the God-man Jesus and to embrace Him in anticipation of great spiritual rewards. Was more faith and trust in Christ required of Colossian saints than of others? Must they better understand the place occupied by Him in the “mystery” of salvation? Absolutely not! There was “*one faith*” about the Lord for all men to believe, and “*one hope*” of heaven that can be entertained only by those who hold to the truths that made Christ unique and special in God’s plan!
10. Paul had worked hard to spread the good news into as many places and to as many lost souls as possible. He was pleased to be a minister [servant] to *any* person who would be pleased to be the servant of the *pre-eminent Christ*. He considered the gospel as worthy of his most difficult labors; he thought that it was reasonable to expect others to regard it as worthy of their loyalty (Ro. 12:1).

Verses 24-29-- Paul was concerned that his imprisonment might become a hindrance to the faith of other Christians. He was fearful that some could lose confidence in a God who would allow such a faithful servant to suffer so. Others might be reluctant to be associated with someone in jail. Still others would be unwilling to risk punishment similar to Paul’s and would hide or abandon the commitment they had made. It was important to the apostle that they all understand that “the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel” (Phil. 1:12).

1. Paul maintained a very optimistic outlook on his imprisonment. Regardless

of how it terminated, his sufferings in prison or out were for the benefit of his fellow Christians. By his own behavior he would be able to influence their behavior positively.

2. Paul's sufferings "for the sake of...the church" were a continuation of the trials endured by the Lord at the hands of oppressive men. Jesus' persecutions were now over, but "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2Tim. 3:12). Paul was willing to "fill up" [bear] in his flesh whatever tribulations might be necessary to preach the truth to the world.
3. James Macknight has this worthwhile observation about Christ's afflictions:

The apostle does not mean that the sufferings of Christ for the church are incomplete, and need the addition of the sufferings of the saints to render them effectual: For the phrase, 'afflictions of Christ,' in this passage, being the genitive of the agent, signifies, not the afflictions which Christ suffered, but the afflictions which he appointed the apostle to suffer for building the church. Wherefore the Colossians were not to think the worse of his doctrine concerning their salvation, because of his imprisonment. --This text hath been appealed to by Papists, to prove that the good works of the saints are so meritorious as to procure pardon even for others. But it is to be observed, that although the apostle saith that he suffered afflictions for the church, he does not say it was for procuring pardon for the church.
4. Paul's conversion and apostleship were to be attended by "many things" to be suffered for the name of Christ (Acts 9:16), so imprisonment was not unexpected. His ministry was intended as a stewardship [responsibility] to benefit the church wherever he preached the gospel. He had gladly accepted his responsibility of "fulfilling the word of God," i.e., acting in accord with God's purpose for him as a proclaimer of the gospel.
5. Paul called the gospel a "mystery" several times in the book of Ephesians (1:9; 3:3,4,9; 5:32; 6:19). His point to the Colossians was that they were greatly favored with truths that had been withheld from humanity until then. The revelation of such things as the *pre-eminence of Christ* was vital to their eternal destiny, and they should be anxious to make the most of their opportunity.
6. The "mystery" preached to the Gentiles [including those at Colosse] was "rich" in spiritual blessings that they might enjoy if they chose. But they must understand that only by unequivocal acceptance of Christ's unique place in the "mystery" were the rewards available to them. It was "Christ in you," or nothing-- no Christ-- no glory!!
7. The *pre-eminent Christ* was real wisdom, the wisdom of God. Human wisdom, such as came from the false teachers, promised "perfection" through personal achievement, a struggle attended by uncertainty, frustration, and disappointment. Perfection [completeness] in Christ was available (Matt. 5:48) to every man, and not to just a few intellectuals. Its characteristics were identifiable by the qualities seen in the "fullness of Christ" while He was on earth (Eph. 4:13). How much more desirable was this "perfection" than the shadowy, ambiguous

- “philosophy and vain deceit” (2:8), promoted by the charlatans at Colosse.
8. Paul had worked hard for the salvation of many. His labors were amply rewarded by the hard work of other Christians in the cause of the Lord, but his success was impossible without the “mighty working” of Christ in him, which was also his own “hope of glory.”
 9. The working of Christ in Paul assumed two roles:
 - a. Christ worked in him through motivating him to satisfy his Lord’s expectations for him as a preacher and as an apostle (Acts 26:16-18);
 - b. Christ also worked in him through the support of signs and wonders given to him to assist in his effectiveness as an evangelist (e.g., Acts 14:3).

o-O-o

ADDENDUM-- True Wisdom is Found in the “Mystery” of Christ

- 1:5-- “the word of the truth of the gospel”
1:6-- “knew the grace of God in truth”
1:9-- “filled with the knowledge of His will”
1:9-- “in all wisdom and spiritual understanding”
1:10-- “increasing in the knowledge of God”
1:23-- “continue in the faith”
1:25-- “to fulfill the word of God”
1:26-- “the mystery has been revealed”
1:27-- “God willed to make known”
2:2-- “full assurance of understanding”
2:2-- “knowledge of the mystery of God”
2:3-- “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”
2:5-- “steadfastness of your faith in Christ”
2:7-- “established in the faith”
2:7-- “as you have been taught”
2:12-- “raised with Him through faith”
3:16-- “Let the word of Christ dwell in you”
3:16-- “word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom”
3:16-- “teaching and admonishing one another”
4:3-- “a door for the word”
4:3-- “to speak the mystery of Christ”
4:4-- “make it manifest as I ought to speak”
4:5-- “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside”

o-O-o

To combat the false claims of gnostic/Essene doctrines, Paul stressed that true wisdom is available to all men in the gospel. It comes through plain teaching of the gospel and consists of simple concepts which can be understood by men of all abilities and backgrounds. These are references to these pertinent facts about the gospel preached by Paul and other evangelists.

o-O-o

1. Paul had heard of the Colossians' _____ and _____ for all the _____.
2. The Colossians had heard of their _____ in the _____ of the _____ of the _____.
3. The _____ was bearing _____ in all the _____.
4. _____ had taught the gospel at Colosse. Where was his home? [See 4:12.]
5. Paul prayed for the _____, _____, and _____ of the Colossians.
6. A walk "worthy of the Lord" would be noted by what *six* characteristics? (verses 10,11)
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
 - f. _____
7. Sinners are _____ from the _____ of _____ and are _____ into the _____ of Christ.
8. In Jesus, we have _____ through His _____, the _____ of our _____.
9. What *seven* things make Christ pre-eminent in God's plan of salvation?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
 - f. _____
 - g. _____
10. Men are _____ by the _____ of Christ's body and can be presented to God _____, _____ and _____.
11. What are *two* requirements for receiving the blessings in question 10?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
12. Paul was a _____ and a _____ to fulfill the _____ of _____.
13. The _____ had been hidden but now is _____ to the _____.
14. Paul _____ and _____ to present men _____ in Jesus.

Chapter Two

The “Colossian Heresy” was of great concern to Paul as he wrote this letter to the disciples at Colosse. While we must be cautious in over-identifying the roots and the destiny of the errors that were being promoted there by false teachers, there can be no question of their fundamental likeness to concepts contained in other fraudulent doctrines. For example, James Macknight says:

Long before the light of the gospel shone in the world, the Greeks had introduced their philosophy into many of the countries of the Lesser Asia, and among the rest into Phrygia, where it would seem the doctrines of Pythagoras and of Plato were much admired. --The followers of Plato held, that the government of the world is carried on by beings inferior to the gods, but superior to men, such as the Jews believed angels to be. These they called *daimones*, a name which in the Greek language signifies divinities; and these they enjoined their sect to worship, on account of their agency in human affairs...The philosophy of Pathagoras led to a different discipline. They held, that mankind had all lived in some pre-existent state, and that for the sins committed by them in their pre-existent state, some of their souls were sent into animal bodies, and others of them into the bodies of brutes to be punished for, and to be purged from their former sins. Wherefore, believing that the whole creation to be animated by human souls, they held it unlawful to kill any thing which hath life, and abstained wholly from animal food. Withal, effectually to free themselves from the vices and pollutions contracted in their pre-existent state, they practiced repeated and long-continued fastings, and other severities, for the purpose of thoroughly subjecting the body with its appetites to the soul.

Other untruths, such as those taught by the gnostics and Jewish Essenes, either in their formative or full-blown development, perhaps had already compromised the faith of some disciples in the supremacy of Jesus Christ in spiritual things and posed a serious threat to the convictions of others. Paul challenges these hurtful ideas about Jesus and the gospel as he strives to bring confused minds back to the true wisdom and practice that had originated in the mind of the God of heaven and earth.

Verses 1-3-- Many scholars believe that Paul, at the time of this epistle, had never been in Colosse. It would be consistent with that position for him now to reaffirm two things to support the credibility of what he taught about the pre-eminence of Jesus in God’s scheme of redemption: (1) his *deep concern* for the saints’ spiritual welfare, even though he was not personally acquainted with them; (2) his *pure motivation* for injecting himself into a controversy about which he had no personal knowledge but was dependent on a report made to him by someone else. It would have been easy for some to consider him nothing better than a busybody and an intruder into their spiritual affairs.

1. Paul's "conflict" for the Colossians and the Laodiceans was mental rather than physical. Epaphras' disturbing report had thrown him into distress over their serious problems with false teachers and false teaching that would eventually destroy their faith if allowed to operate unexposed and unopposed.
2. It was not the ego of a self-appointed crusader that had prompted this letter. His motivation was focused on *them* and not on *himself*. As a fellow-Christian, he felt a deep affection for these brethren and felt a conscious identity with them in their spiritual struggles. As an apostle of Christ, he felt a great responsibility for what might happen to them as they faced the attacks of their spiritual enemies.
3. A genuine love for one another that emulated the love he had for them would greatly strengthen their mutual desire to stand together against the doctrinal perversions with which disciples were being confronted at Colosse, Laodicea, and, no doubt, in other churches in the area.
4. Not only was a sense of unity a key factor in resisting error but also the possession of a good understanding of God's "mystery" would provide a defense that deception and falsehood could not penetrate. Truth was an impregnable fortress that assured spiritual security to all who really understood and were truly committed to the gospel of Christ.
5. The "mystery" of God and Christ was not beyond their understanding and commitment. True, it was for ages *hidden* to man's comprehension, but now its message had been *revealed* to be known and obeyed by all men (Rom. 16:25,26).
6. Heaven's revelation was now *hidden* from men only in the sense of being a precious treasure for which men must "dig" diligently if they were to share in its inestimable riches. It offered wisdom and knowledge not available to men anywhere else. It could make otherwise ignorant seekers wise in a way that no other religious system could. Perhaps Paul's implication is that some of these troubled saints had not yet searched diligently enough for truth and were much more vulnerable to untruths than they should have been.

Verses 4-7-- The apostle's declaration of his interest in their well-being was not meant to increase their appreciation for him personally but to enlarge their awareness of personal responsibility for their own steadfastness of faith. He was not there personally to help them defend against the dangers of doctrinal delusion. They must face the challenges of error by themselves.

1. "Persuasive words" can be destructive to faith if they are not used to speak the truth. Paul preached the gospel with persuasive words to the Corinthians (2Cor. 5:11), but he knew that men are as easily persuaded to accept lies as the truth unless their hearts are attracted more to truth than to lies (2Thes. 2:9-12).

2. Paul was always “in [the] spirit” with disciples who were trying to do the right thing in serving God. His spirit was with the church at Corinth when they met to discipline a member whose life was disorderly (1Cor. 5:4,5), and his heart was so much in tune with the hearts of the Corinthians that his desire was for them to “die together and to live together” in their mutual struggle to please God. The Colossians could rest assured that they also had his total support in resisting the evil influences of false teaching.
3. His commitment to supporting their battle against error was strong because he knew of their previous achievements in the religion of Christ.
 - a. They had “good order.” Order [*taxis*-- “an arranging”; of the general condition of a local church] is a feature necessary to the effectiveness of a local congregation of God’s people (1Cor. 14:40). Confusion is harmful and can prevent Christians from gaining the benefits intended in the worship and work of the local church (1Cor. 14:33). Paul’s use of *taxis* likely was associated with the “orderly alignment” of soldiers, which the apostle had occasion to observe daily in and about his Roman prison. A scriptural organization of elders and deacons and an orderly and dignified approach to worship and work will go far in guarding against the inroads of worldly influences and pernicious human doctrines.
 - b. They also had displayed a “steadfastness” of faith. The Galatians were less stable in their commitment (Gal. 1:6; 3:1). The Colossian disciples had proved much more dependable to this time. We cannot know how many had already been disturbed or to what extent they may have been troubled by the gnostic-like and Essene doctrines which undermined the place of the Lord in man’s salvation. Paul could only hope that their previous level headedness and sober mindedness would now enable them to perceive in this doctrinal controversy what was right and what was wrong. With this perception, they could continue to be steadfast in their convictions.
4. Unless someone could teach them some *truth* that would change their initial understanding of the Lord’s excellency, why should they even listen to a teacher who wanted to move them away from their original faith? Of course, no new truth could ever conflict with the old truth about Christ which they had heard from their first teachers, because all truth is totally consistent and harmonious in every way (Eph. 4:5; Gal. 1:8,9). His inspired advice: Just “keep on walking” as you have always walked.
5. Their “walking” in Christ would be blessed by:
 - a. Being *rooted* with a sound foundation of “first principles” upon which to build a “perfect” knowledge of God’s “mystery” (Heb. 6:1);
 - b. Being *established* in the faith so that any future attacks by human wisdom could be more easily and efficiently dispatched (John 8:32). Repetition and

- reflection are essential to maintaining a deep commitment to convictions;
- c. Being *abundant* in the faith that had been taught by apostolic authority. Minds not filled with the knowledge of *truth* are susceptible to being filled with *error*. [See Luke 11:24-26.]

Verses 8-10-- Having called attention again to his genuine interest in their welfare, Paul returns to warning the Colossians about the dangers of the religious errors into which certain teachers were trying to lead them. He has already announced the purpose of his warnings: to help all the disciples reach “perfection” [completeness] in their service to Christ (1:28).

1. In Christ, the Colossians could enjoy innumerable spiritual advantages:
 - a. “All wisdom and spiritual understanding” that would provide strength (1:9);
 - b. Redemption and forgiveness of sins (1:14);
 - c. Spiritual peace through reconciliation to God (1:20);
 - d. *All* spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3).
2. Paul and other inspired teachers had been working hard to teach gospel truth about the rewards of “Christ in [among] you, the hope of glory” (1:28,29). Only through this truth could Christians be assured of receiving these rewards (Rom. 1:16,17).
3. False teachers were working hard to teach other “truths” they claimed were superior to the gospel. Not only could they *not* deliver on their own promises of better wisdom and better spirituality but also they could cheat [*sulagogo*-- “carry off as spoil”] the disciples of the precious promises they had come to expect when they first obeyed the Lord.
4. These pretenders had three powerful weapons in their arsenal of errors:
 - a. Philosophy and vain deceit. These terms evidently relate to the doctrines of Grecian religions from which came strange concepts about the world and the gods who governed its affairs. Gnosticism would become a full-blown religious system in the second century and would lead to numerous problems for Christians. Even now, some of its fundamental differences from gospel truth were being actively promoted in many places. This new “wisdom” was intended to appeal to intellectually “elite” persons and was based on worldly pride. [See, “Gnostic Influences Addressed in Colossians,” page 7.] Its premises were entirely wrong and its methodology deceitful, relying on human reasoning and “persuasive words” (2:4);
 - b. Traditions of men. The Jewish approach to religion was largely one of following the traditions established by leaders over the course of many years. Jesus had long before exposed the fallacy and futility of tradition (Matt. 15:6,9), but its popularity was undiminished in Jewish sects like the Essenes. The impact

of Mosaic tradition seems to have been every bit as strong as that of Grecian philosophy and Oriental mysticism;

- c. Basic principles of the world. The Jewish and pagan religions had several things in common, such as temples, priests, sacrifices, rituals, etc. These were physically-oriented features of both systems. Paul calls them “basic principals of the world.” The KJV and ASV call them “rudiments,” and the Confraternity [Catholic] assigns the term “elements” [*stoicheion*-- “a row or series”]. *Moses’* Law consisted of such elements called “shadows” (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1) intended to point to *spiritual* realities upon which Christ’s salvation would depend. *Stoicheion* also indicates simple things that were appropriate to teach children before more sophisticated things could be taught. These “elements” had been removed at the cross (2:14), but the false prophets at Colosse seemed to be making heavy use of them to try to lead disciples away from the pre-eminent Christ of the gospel.
5. Not one of these things was “according to [the truth about] Christ.” Any one of them was enough to destroy their “completeness” [verse 10] in Him. How deadly then were the concerted onslaughts of *all three*!
6. Christians could be “complete” in Christ because He possesses the “fullness of the Godhead bodily.” He could give them everything they needed to make them everything they needed to be. The false religions promoted many gods, each of whom had only piecemeal powers. None was capable of doing for men what Jesus could. Exchanging a God of fullness for one of greatly limited abilities, as the preachers of “wisdom” were characterizing Jesus, would be a very unwise move! Paul taught that there is a *filling up* or *completeness* in Jesus that leaves nothing wanting:
 - a. He imparts all the wisdom we need to guide us in our service;
 - b. He makes atonement for sin so that we can be free of guilt;
 - c. He is the merit by which sinners can be justified before God;
 - d. He provides grace to sustain us in the trials and duties of life. [Barnes]

Verses 11-14-- Special attention needed to be given to the doctrines of the Essene Jews who appear to have posed an especially dangerous threat to the faith of the Colossians. While we can’t know the racial composition of the disciples at Colosse, most must have been Gentiles (1:27). This fact, however, failed to deter the Judaizers who went from church to church trying yet to convince Gentile members, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). Physical circumcision was the point of emphasis in their teaching.

1. Paul declared that it was a circumcision “without hands” that mattered, not the physical rite practiced by Jews under the Law. The Colossian disciples

should not be bothered by the insistence of the false teachers that they had to be circumcised after the manner of the Law.

2. The “putting [cutting] off” of the gospel was a much more extensive operation than required by the Mosaic Law. The *whole body* was involved instead of just a small part. Mosaic circumcision was a *pledge* to put away [cut off] sin from the life of a Jew. Gospel circumcision was both an *act* of putting away [cutting off] sins already committed and a *promise* to put away [cut off] sin in the future. Fleshly circumcision served as a sign of the Jew’s special *physical* relationship to Jehovah. Spiritual circumcision serves as a sign of the Christian’s special *spiritual* relationship to Almighty God (Rom. 2:28,29).
3. There are *two* distinct actions necessary to spiritual circumcision, where only one occurred in the Jewish rite. First, there must be a “cutting off” of sin by the sinner who seeks such circumcision. This is done through repentance. Turning *from* the practice of sin and turning *to* the purity required of a disciple of Christ (Acts 3:19--ASV) positions the sinner for *God* to do His part in completing the circumcision.
4. Christ “circumcises” the sinner when He “cuts off” his sins in the act of water baptism. The sins of the flesh, put off by the offender in his repentance, are *buried* [completely hidden] in baptism, whereupon God finishes His “working” [“operation”--KJV] upon those sins in forgiving them.
5. The spiritually circumcised individual, now identified as belonging to God by what is *missing* in his life [sin], can rise from baptism in “newness of life” to serve the God to whom he belongs. He will carry that identity as long as he continues to keep sin “put away” in his life.
6. In the same way, Jesus, who *had no actual sins to be put away*, was buried in the earth to represent this “cutting off” of sin in the physical body. His “old body of flesh, *subject* to sin (Heb. 4:15; 2Pet. 2:22), was put away so that the “new body,” glorified and not subject to sin (Rom. 6:9,10; 1John 3:2), could emerge in the same sinlessness urged upon all men in the gospel (Rom. 6:11).
7. Rather than being concerned about the circumcision of the flesh advocated by those who were undermining the message of the gospel, the Colossians should be extremely grateful for the unmatched blessings that had come to them through their spiritual circumcision of the heart. Although uncircumcised in the flesh, Gentiles could rejoice about:
 - a. Being freed from spiritual *death* into which their sins had thrust them. They now enjoyed spiritual *life* and shared in every advantage offered by a close relationship with the pre-eminent Christ;
 - b. Being forgiven of *all* trespasses. Their pagan lifestyle was identified with gross sinfulness (Rom. 1:26-31). Only *abounding* grace could provide total forgiveness for Gentiles guilty of such evil deeds (Rom. 5:20). But

- God's grace had made salvation possible for the obedient (Eph. 2:10);
- c. Being excused from the rigors of conforming to the Law of Moses. The teachers of Jewish principles were promoting a religion of *involvement* in the Law by these Gentiles. True wisdom would recommend instead *strictly avoiding* the rituals of the Law.
8. Paul's characterization of the Law was a devastating blow to efforts to deceive Gentiles into thinking that it could provide advantages not available to them outside its ceremonies and rituals. He described the Law as:
- a. A handwriting of requirements. The Jews had a *written* Law [first on stone tablets and then on other materials] that was not given to the Gentile nations. That was an advantage in many ways (Rom. 3:1,2), but the handwriting [*cheirographon*-- "a note of hand , a bond"] of laws bound the Jews to perfect obedience to its ordinances. Violation of *any* ordinance was a violation of *all* (Jas. 2:10);
 - b. A law that was against us. The Law was "against" the Jews because it offered no real forgiveness for any transgression against the Law. Its animal sacrifices could not take away any sin (Heb. 10:4). *Once* a sinner under the Law, *always* a sinner! Gentiles were greatly mistaken if they thought that obedience to Moses' requirements would be "for" them. The truth was, the Law would be very much "against" them in their efforts to get to heaven. It would hold them to a strict standard which they could never satisfy any more than the Jews had been able to do through their long history as a nation with a written law;
 - c. A law that was contrary to them. It was a "bond of payment" that the Jews could never pay. It demanded perfection; the Jews had offered imperfection. It required consistent obedience; the Jews wavered in their dedication through the weakness of the flesh. It was offered as a means of drawing near to God (Isa. 1:16-18), but failure to keep the Law drove its imperfect subjects further from Jehovah than ever (Isa. 1:19,20). Following Moses would prove to be as contrary to the spiritual welfare of the Colossians as it had been to the whole nation of Israel.
9. In addition to the reasons already cited for which Christ should be appreciated as the pre-eminent figure in the scheme of redemption, Paul credits Him with removing the legal *bond* of the Law which had brought damnation instead of salvation to sinful Jews (Rom. 7:10).
- a. Christ took the Law "out of the way." It had proved to be an obstacle rather than a help in getting to heaven. Jesus removed its barrier and opened the way to eternal glory (John 14:6).
 - b. He "nailed it to the cross." What was done to Him, He did to the Law.

The Israelites crucified Him because they considered Him to be a threat to their *perceived* status as Jehovah's special people. Jesus crucified their Law which was the real threat to that relationship. Any claim that the requirements of the Law were no longer binding was viewed by the sects of the Jews as an effort to remove them from their lofty position of religious prominence. Ironically, removing those requirements had been the only way to establish them [and all other nations] in a place of real favor with the Lord.

Verse 15-- "Principalities and powers" had hurled their powerful weapons of deceit and destruction against the people of God for many centuries. Those vicious attacks had reached their peak in the actions against Jesus by the Jews during His life and in His death. The substantial powers of the Romans had also been brought to bear against the Savior. Unseen forces ["spiritual hosts of wickedness"] as well as those seen might have been included in Paul's declaration [See Eph. 6:12.]. Christ had removed all power that sinful entities had exerted over men prior to the cross. Never again could anyone or anything lead men into sin, rendering them helpless to escape sin's consequences (Eph. 4:8). Evil was totally disarmed, and Jesus' triumph was complete. Sin had made a "public spectacle" of the Savior by hanging Him on a cross, but soon Christ and the evil horde had changed places-- He was fully vindicated by the resurrection; Satan and his angels were put on public display as deceivers who were weak and helpless before the Lord's "sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17). His death set in motion the worldwide proclamation of a gospel message (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15,16) that could forgive sin and destroy the power of every opponent of righteousness and salvation (Eph. 6:12).

Verses 16-19-- "Therefore," these facts about Jesus' triumph over evil had definite consequences for Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, and had made a dramatic change in how the Colossians should regard the laws and regulations that other men might seek to impose on their spiritual lives. Paul's conclusions could be used in their response to teachers who were pressuring them to conform to Jewish law or pagan philosophy.

1. Paul's *first conclusion*: Let no one [Jew or Gentile] judge [condemn] you if you choose to ignore the doctrines and traditions not included in the gospel.
 - a. Food and drink. Both the Essene Jews and the would-be gnostic Gentiles insisted on restricting the eating of certain foods [animal flesh in particular]. The Nazarite law of the Jews forbade drinking anything from the vine while the vow was in force (Num. 6:2-4). Some apparently were trying to make such things as these tests of religious dedication.
 - b. Festivals ["feast days"--ASV] and "new moons" and "sabbaths" celebrations

were central to the observance of Moses' Law. Feast days and various kinds of celebrations were also important in pagan religions. But since all law had been set aside to make way for Christ's law, no regulation outside the gospel could be enforced on anyone.

2. The ceremonial regulations incorporated into the Jews' Law served two purposes: (1) They provided tests of loyalty that allowed participants to display their devotion to Jehovah's instructions; (2) They called attention to "better" [more significant] elements of a "better" covenant that lay ahead when the old covenant between Jehovah and His people had fulfilled its role in the world. Hence, these *physical* components of the Law served as "shadows" [representations] of the "substance" [the *spiritual* components] of Christ's government over men. The shadows stood in relation to the substance in the same way that a man's *shadow* relates to his *substance* [body].
3. Paul's *second conclusion*: Let no one [Jew or Gentile] defraud you of your reward. Christ has promised, "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give every one according to his work" (Rev. 22:12). Also, "Blessed are they who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (Rev. 22:14). Eternal reward is to those who obey Christ, not Moses, and not Greek philosophers. Any teaching to the contrary is a *trick* and will cheat us of precious treasures in heaven.
4. Perhaps the proponents of human philosophy were advocating some things that were attractive to some Christians who were not as *rooted, built up, and established* in the faith as others were.
 - a. False humility perhaps consisted of going beyond things specified in the gospel and trying to demonstrate a *greater* humility [*tapeinophrosune*-- "lowliness of mind"] than most by displaying a willingness to serve in *more* ways than others do. But it was the *display* and not the *service* that was really important to them. Nevertheless, many onlookers might be fooled.
 - b. Worship of angels is said to have played a part in the religions of both the Essene Jews and the Greek philosophers. Each persuasion attributed powers and honors to angels to a degree that equaled or even surpassed their respect for Jesus Christ. Of course, gospel teaching strictly forbids regarding Jesus in the same way as angels (Rev. 22:8,9; Heb. 1:4,14).
 - c. Things that men have not seen. Some versions omit "not." The verb *embateuo* means "to step in, or on," and also "to frequent, dwell in." A marginal reading may be, "taking his stand upon." These things that men *claimed* to have seen, but which they really had *not seen* at all, were probably mystical visions promoted by the Eastern religions that had intruded into the thinking of both Jews and Gentiles in various locations. A persuasive "selling job" (2:4) made

proof of these visions unnecessary for shallow minds.

- d. Things that puffed up fleshly minds. This category of errors might have included many and various practices that tended to inflate the ego of someone who considered himself to be superior in some way to other people. The elitist concepts of a gnostic-like doctrine would certainly make that appeal to those who were without genuine humility of heart.
5. Paul's *third conclusion*: Take advantage of what Christ has made available for your ultimate salvation.
 - a. Hold fast to the Head. Hope in Christ is the sure and steadfast anchor of our souls (Heb. 6:19) that keeps us afloat in a sea of sin that threatens to pull us down to destruction. Deceived people at Colosse and elsewhere would surely sink if they chose to hold to the untrue religious systems that were being thrust upon them.
 - b. Allow the "body" [church] to feed on the spiritual nourishment provided in the true gospel (1Pet. 2:1,2). Disdain the "junk food" of those who profess to have something better than the gospel. A sound spiritual diet will cause the body [church] to grow and increase in every desirable way. The menu offered by the pretenders will only stunt growth and shrivel the members of the body into helplessness and vulnerability to false doctrine.
 - c. Depend on the "joints and ligaments" of the body [church] to keep it "knit together." These were those in the congregation at Colosse who led and encouraged others in the Lord's work. They sought to keep every member "on the same page" in devotion and service. They played a vital role in the unity of the church and thus made it easier for the members to throw off temptations to come under the influence of religious error.

Verses 20-23-- Another "therefore" leads to consequences of the truths established in the previous paragraph. Those truths were: (1) The Colossians had "killed" the influence of the flesh in their lives in order to "live" with Christ; (2) Christ had "killed" the Law with its regulations, along with the human traditions that had developed around the Law so that men were no longer subject to such demands; (3) God had provided an effective means by which Christians could succeed without bowing to anything not included in the gospel of Christ.

1. Paul's question was a logical one. It made no sense that people who had renounced the importance of worldly things should begin living again as if those things were important to their salvation.
2. These Christians had enjoyed for a time their freedom from the rigorous regulations imposed by human religions. The Gentiles in the church at Colosse had been burdened with the demands of pagan rituals and ordinances, and we can't

be sure about the extent of that burden. The Jews, on the other hand, had been subjected to restraints that we *can* identify. Both parties had for a time thrown off their previous controls, only to surrender themselves to other and perhaps even more repressive demands of this “new” gnostic-like religion of the Essenes and Grecian philosophers.

3. Gospel teaching had convinced these church members that the “basic principles of the world,” such things as most people choose to build their lives on, were unworthy of individuals who are trying to get to heaven. They [especially the Gentile Christians] had thrown off all allegiance to their worldly practices of immorality, idolatry, intellectualism, and irreligion when they learned that such things were contrary to the will of God.
4. Now, however, they had exchanged one set of human regulations for another. They had been influenced to accept laws about things that could not be touched, tasted, or handled, simply because the promoters of false doctrine said so. We know about Jehovah’s prohibitions in the Law of Moses about eating certain foods (e.g., Deut. 14:3f.) and about those that regulated touching certain things (e.g., Lev. 5:2f.) and handling certain things (e.g., Num. 19:1ff.). We don’t know how many of the restrictions in question were taken from the Law and how many may have been of a different kind. Since the “death” of the Law, all such ordinances would have been under human, not divine, authority, and Paul will say in chapter three, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name [authority] of the Lord Jesus...” (Col. 3:17). Albert Barnes quotes Schoetgen about the practices of the Essenes:

They allowed themselves no food that was pleasant to the taste, but ate dry, course bread, and drank only water. Many of them ate nothing until sunset, and, if anyone touched them who did not belong to their sect, they washed themselves as if they had been most deeply defiled. Perhaps there was at Colosse a society of this kind, as there were in many other places out of Judea; and, if there was, it is not improbable that many Christians imitated them in the peculiarity of their rules and observances.

5. These “new” regulations not only were human in their origin but also they were human in their focus. Physical bodies were restricted from physical things. None had anything to do with man’s spirit, and it is the spirit rather than the body that is really important, because the soul is immortal and the body will perish, along with everything that sustains it in this world.
6. It *appears* to the untaught that submitting to these prohibitions indicates an admirable degree of humble self-sacrifice and the possession of considerable stores of spiritual wisdom. However, those who are rooted in the gospel know that such restrictions that neglect [deny the needs of] the human body come from *human wisdom* and *self-imposed religion* [“will-worship”] rather than from the *true wisdom* and the *true religion* of God. They touch the body but not the heart,

and since human behavior is controlled by man's heart, conduct will remain the same until the heart is changed (Matt. 15:18-20).

7. Barnes has another pertinent comment about the dangers of requiring *more* of men than is required within the express teaching of the gospel, even though the motivation for those requirements may be pure:

There is much plausibility in this [will-worship]; and this has been the foundation of the appointment of the fasts and festivals of the church; of penances and self-inflicted tortures; of painful vigils and pilgrimages; of works of supererogation, and of the merits of the "saints." A large part of the corruptions of the church have arisen from this plausible but deceitful argument. God knew best what things it was most conducive to piety for his people to observe; and we are most safe when we adhere most closely to what he has appointed, and observe no more days and ordinances than he has directed. There is much apparent piety about these things; but there is much wickedness of heart at the bottom, and there is nothing that more tends to corrupt pure religion.

1. Paul expressed an interest in the churches in _____ and in _____.
2. He wished for them full _____ of _____ and the _____ of the _____ of God.
3. The Colossians could be _____ by _____ words.
4. Two good qualities of the Colossians were _____ and _____ of their _____.
5. What three words or phrases in verse seven indicate strength and stability in a church?
a. _____ b. _____ c. _____
6. Christians can be _____ by _____ and _____ by things that originate in the _____ of _____ and the basic _____ of the _____.
7. In _____ dwells all the _____ of the _____.
8. We are _____ with Christ in _____ and _____ with Him through _____ in the _____ of _____.
9. What two actions did Christ take against the Law of Moses?
a. _____ b. _____
10. What two effects did the Law have on those who “kept” it?
a. _____ b. _____
11. By what things can no man now be judged [condemned]?
12. Christ is the _____ who _____ and _____ the body [church], causing it to _____ with the _____ of _____.
13. What regulations are shown by Paul to be ineffective for the Christian life?
a. _____ b. _____ c. _____
14. These regulations come from the _____ and _____ of _____, and moreover they _____ with _____.

Chapter Three

Verses 1-4-- The false teachers who had troubled the minds of some of the Colossians promoted a doctrine focused on changing outward behavior without accomplishing any real change of the heart. They advocated not touching, tasting, or handling certain things (2:21) that the “doctrines and commandments of men” had judged to be incompatible with spirituality. Such restrictions, unaccompanied by a fundamental dedication of the heart, are ineffective, especially in the long term, in fortifying the life against the “indulgence of the flesh.”

1. “If” does not suggest any *uncertainty* about the regeneration of the Colossians but rather the *consequences* of their salvation from past sins. *Since* they had been forgiven of a life contrary to God’s will and had been given the opportunity for a life acceptable to the Lord, they must be totally aware of the responsibilities attending such a change.
2. The great change in their spiritual status had been made when they were baptized into Christ (Col. 2:12; Rom. 6:3,4). Their repentance and immersion for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) had imitated the death, burial, and resurrection of the Savior (Rom. 6:4,5). God’s “mystery plan” also called for the lives of Christians to imitate the renewed and glorified life of Jesus as He sits in heaven at the Father’s right hand.
3. Believers had embraced the Christ as pre-eminent in the heavenly plan and as their model to follow in everything (1Pet. 2:21). His life is now separated from the earthly things in which He was once involved and is concerned only with *heavenly* things. Similarly, His disciples should separate themselves from the things of this world, insofar as possible, and concentrate on matters associated with heaven and eternity.
4. Such a change in lifestyle is not easy to accomplish. “Setting” the mind on different *things* is essential to bringing about a different *life*. Since we are easily distracted from our goals, we must make a studied and deliberate decision to pay whatever price may be attached to the change being considered. We must not only *seek* heaven, we must *think* heaven [Lightfoot].
5. Their change of focus from earth to heaven had already made these disciples to appear strange to people who advocated doctrines centered in this world. Had Christians “quit living” for nothing? What reward had they received for the sacrifices they had made to follow Christ?
6. Indeed, they *had died* to things considered important to most people. Consider

J. W. Shepherd's remarks about this death to sin:

This represents a distinct element in Christian experience; it means that the soul passes through a death to earthly things-- sin and its allurements of the flesh, just as the Lord died upon the cross. The crucifixion must have its counterpart within us. We die to the attraction of the world. The dead know not nor care for anything of this world. Their love and hatred and envy are wholly wiped out. A dead man is as cold and motionless as a stone to all things about which the living make ado. How perfectly then, how entirely, ought we to be free from sin, in order to be dead to it! It is not enough from outward acts of sin, but if the heart cherishes any liking for it...our hearts must be completely closed against the temptation as if we were nailed down in our coffin; our ears must be deaf to his voice; our eyes must be blind to his charms. We must not only give up every evil practice; we must also stifle every evil desire. Nothing less can deserve the name of being dead to sin.

But that *death* had brought them real [spiritual] *life*. And even though the proof of that new life was invisible to the eyes of their critics, it was as real as the living Christ in whom they placed their faith. His new life was also hidden from worldly-minded individuals, but God would vindicate the true worth both of their new life and His.

7. This vindication will occur when Jesus "appears" and makes his resurrection unquestionable even in the minds of His most vigorous adversaries (Rom. 14: 11). He will return in glory (2Thes. 1:7-10), and His disciples will share in that glory (Heb. 2:10) when they are caught up to be with Him forever (1Thes. 4:16, 17). And that will be conclusive proof to all that the disciples had made the right choice between a life of worldliness and one of godliness.

Verses 5-11-- If the Colossian saints could comprehend the ultimate value that lay in choosing things that were important to Christ rather than things practiced by men whose minds were set on the earth, then there were definite changes that must be made in the way they lived day by day.

1. "Therefore" appeals to the logic of taking the steps necessary to arrive at a desired destination. If disciples wished to live with Christ in heaven, they must first live with Him on earth by behaving themselves in a manner appropriate to the holiness of their Savior. "Be holy, for I am holy" (1Pet. 1:16,17).
2. The "body of the sins of the flesh" must be killed [put off] if disciples are to live with Christ in His holiness. That is possible only if every "member" of that "body" involved in the practice of sin is brought under the control of a heaven-set mind. It is not enough to kill one passion and allow another to go unchecked. All "the members which are on the earth" must die (1Thes. 5:23).
3. Leaving nothing to chance, the apostle deals in specifics instead of generalities about the required behavior of those who truly have made Christ pre-eminent

in their hearts. He offers a list of prohibited sinful practices before commanding conduct that must be “put on” by those who are seeking the things above.

4. Wuest [Word Studies in the Greek New Testament] defines the terms used:
 - a. Fornication [*porneia*]- “illicit sexual intercourse in general”;
 - b. Uncleanness [*akatharsia*]- “uncleanness in a moral sense, the impurity of lustful, luxurious, profligate living”;
 - c. Passion (“inordinate affection”) [*pathos*]- “depraved passion”;
 - d. Evil desire (“evil concupiscence”) [*epithumia*]- “evil, wicked cravings”;
 - e. Covetousness [*pleonexia*]- “greedy desire to have more, avarice.” Paul puts the label of “idolatry” [*eidolatreia*- “the worship of false gods”] on this sin.
5. Idolatry does not always require worship to a graven image of some kind. Whatever gets between us and our complete devotion to God becomes in fact a god that takes *first place* away from the true God. “You shall have *no other gods before Me*” (Exo. 20:3). “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21).
6. Evil practices will bring evil outcomes. Christians can expect “glory” (vs. 2) as a reward for seeking the right things in this world. However, “wrath” is the prospect for those “sons of disobedience” who show little interest in the life-style pursued by the obedient (2Thes. 1:7-9).
7. Considering the *outcome* of their manner of life before they encountered the gospel, the Colossian saints should have been very grateful that they had been given the opportunity to turn themselves around and walk another path. They were like the Corinthians who had been guilty of much the same conduct, but who had been washed, sanctified, and justified by the Lord (1Cor. 6:9-11).
8. Additionally, there were other offenses as unacceptable as those just listed and that would just as surely disqualify people from a heavenly reward, even though some of them might not be considered as deadly as the first group. From these they must also flee.
 - a. Anger [*orge*- “natural impulse, desire, or disposition”]; wrath [*thumos*- “hot anger”]; malice [*kakia*- “the vicious character generally”] are all reactions to someone not liked. They seem to be progressive in nature and are thus especially dangerous to a man’s conduct. Anger may rise from some ordinary situation and may pass quickly away without any visible consequences. Dwelling on anger often spawns a wrath that is more intense and often more consequential than the initial anger. Malice can be the ultimate result of anger. This emotion corrupts the heart to harbor hatred and seek opportunities for revenge. The advice of Scripture is, “Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath” (Eph 4:26). If your anger erupts, keep it to yourself, and get over it!

- b. Blasphemy [*blasphemia*-- “to injure (by) speech”] and filthy language [*aischrologia*-- “base utterance”] are two routes by which anger, wrath, and malice often express themselves toward the object of those emotions. Although nothing overt may be *done* against another, much may be *said* that can be even more hurtful in its outcomes.
 - c. Lying is characteristic of the “old man” of sin rather than the “new man” of righteousness. The gospel is a message of *truth*. It transforms people out of “dark” behavior associated with error and deceit (2:8) and generates in them a determination to live in complete harmony with truth and openness (1:13). Lying and misrepresentation have no place in the deportment of Christians in their dealings with “one another” or anyone else (Rev. 21:8).
 - d. The “new man” has become a “new” man because he strives to remake himself into the image of Christ. His knowledge of that image comes from the gospel which depicts our Lord as a totally truthful Person. No situation ever arose which the Lord chose to handle with any duplicity, although many situations would have been more pleasant for Him if the truth had been suppressed just a bit. “I am the way, and the *truth*, and the life...”
9. Considerate treatment of other Christians was necessary not only because it was *right* but also because every member of Christ’s church is the spiritual equal of every other member. Harsh anger, cursing, and lying are actions of people who dare to show such behavior toward others because they consider them to be inferior to themselves in some way. Such an attitude, of course, is totally foreign to the character of humble Christians (Phil. 2:3) and will not be tolerated by the Christ whose humility allowed Him to suffer pain and disgrace on a Roman cross (Phil. 2:8).
10. Several examples of classes of men who normally held other classes in disdain are listed by Paul:
- a. Greeks and Jews. The animosity between Jew and Greek is well known. Each acknowledged the unworthiness of the other and held unkind feelings toward the other. Only the work of Christ on the cross had removed the great barrier between them and had promoted mutual peace in the church (Eph. 2:14-18);
 - b. Circumcised and uncircumcised. These were the same groups as Jews and Gentiles, but these two characteristics identify a different *kind* of animosity between them. Whereas the Gentiles disparaged the Jews because of their “inferior” culture, the Jews discounted the worth of the Gentiles because of their inferior religion. Circumcision, or its absence, represented the feelings held by the Jews toward the Gentiles;
 - c. Barbarians and Scythians. Gentile members of the church might have diffi-

culty being respectful of converts from nations lacking all of the sophistication they saw in themselves. These were “barbarians” [*barbaros*-- “one whose speech is rude, or harsh”] and not much could be expected of them. The Scythians ranked at the bottom of barbaric nations. Inhabitants of a region in south Russia, they were thought by socially gifted people to be the most intellectually and culturally inadequate population of all. Even many “barbarians” would find it hard to accept the equality of Scythians.

- d. Slaves and freemen. Slaves were commonly ill-treated by their masters. The world of the slave owner was far removed from that of his slaves. Perhaps these two classes were among those who were most uncomfortable with the new relationships of equality within the Lord’s church.
11. In contrast to the intellectual and religious elitism of the Grecian and Jewish teachers at Colosse, Paul calls attention to the equalities of character and opportunity of all of Christ’s disciples. Whatever their backgrounds and worldly accomplishments, the homogenizing influence of Christ was *in* them all, and *from* Him would come all that was needed to succeed in the Christian life.

Verses 12-17-- Having insisted that conduct inappropriate to the new life in Christ be “put away,” Paul next enjoins Colossian Christians to “put on” several qualities that will help them to display the image of Christ in their lives.

1. A vacuum not only is contrary to the laws of nature but also is contrary to the spiritual laws of God. A person is committed either to a lifestyle that pleases the Lord or to one that pleases himself. One kind cannot be abandoned without adopting the other. Jesus warned in a lesson about unclean spirits that bad behavior must be replaced with good or there is danger that conduct will become worse than ever (Matt. 12:43-45).
2. It is not enough, therefore, for the convert to lay aside old sinful practices. Former habits must be superseded by better ones. The Lord’s disciple is commanded not only to do *no harm* but also to do *significant good* to those around him (2Tim. 2:24,25). If one aspires to be “one of God’s elect,” he must grasp the real impact of Paul’s “*Therefore...*” A better lifestyle is not optional but mandatory!
3. The apostle’s catalog of desirable qualities, much like his list of undesirable conduct, is focused on how Christians treat other people. The approach always taken by God to changing human behavior is to deal first with changing the *heart* of the offender, because changed hearts *will* change lives (Matt. 12:33-35).
 - a. Tender mercies. The ASV has, “a heart of compassion.” That is a good place to begin in developing proper relationships. When we *feel right* toward our fellows, we will *act right* toward them. Compassion [*oiktirmos*-- “the inward parts,” akin to *oikterio*-- “to have pity”] identifies with the feelings of others, especially feelings of distress, and responds with action to alleviate those

- feelings. Our compassion toward other people reflects what God always feels toward us (1John 4:17; 1Pet. 5:7).
- b. Humility and meekness are attitudes about oneself that prompt acts of compassion toward others. As long as we “count others better than ourselves” (Phil. 2:3), treating them appropriately will not be difficult. “*There, but for the grace of God, go I*” should ring loudly in our hearts as we make choices about responding to the problems faced by other people.
 - c. Kindness, longsuffering, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another are all natural responses by disciples who are humble and meek. These virtues are encouraged throughout the Scriptures.
 - d. Forgiveness of those who mistreat us is one of the most difficult traits for a Christian to exhibit in his struggle to “put on” good behavior. Paul seems to acknowledge that difficulty when he reminds us, “...as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.” Forgiveness is not a matter of choice; it is an essential quality in every disciple (Matt. 6:12).
 - e. Underlying *every* acceptable treatment of others is *love* (1Cor. 13:13). Without love, anything we do that appears to be benevolent is only “sounding brass or a clanging cymbal” (1Cor. 13:1). Love is the “bond of perfectness.” It promotes the nurturing of all virtues in Christians and allows them to develop in themselves the “perfection” [completeness] required by Jesus (Matt. 5:48).
4. When we are at peace with ourselves, we can be at peace with others. But personal peace is available to us only when we are at peace with God, and that only happens through faithful obedience to His will (Rom. 5:1). God makes peace *available*; we make peace *operable*. His peace will rule our hearts if we permit it, and that occurs when we come to really understand that if things are all right between us and our God, nothing can be really wrong with anything else. “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).
5. Paul’s use of “rule” is interesting. It is the Greek *brabeuo*, “to act as an umpire.” Barnes makes these remarks about *brabeuo*:

The word rendered *rule*-- *brabeuo*-- is commonly used in reference to the Olympic and other games. It means, to be a director, or arbiter of the public games; to preside over them and preserve order, and to distribute the prizes to the victors. The meaning here is, that the peace which God gives to the soul is to be to us what the *brabeutes*, or governor at the games, was to those who contended there. It is to preside over and govern the mind; to preserve everything in its place; and to save it from tumult, disorder, and irregularity. The thought is a very beautiful one. The soul is liable to the agitations of passion and excitement-- like an assembled multitude of men. It needs something to preside over it, and keep its various faculties in place and order; and nothing is so well fitted to do this as the calm peace which religion gives,

a deep sense of the presence of God, the desire and evidence of his friendship, the hope of his favor, and the belief that he has forgiven all our sins. The “peace of God” will thus calm down very agitated elements of the soul; subdue the tumult of passion, and preserve the mind in healthful action and order-- as a ruler sways and controls the passions of assembled multitudes of men.

5. The peace of God had a special application at Colosse and other places where there was a diversity of membership in the churches. Many long-standing antagonisms could easily disrupt relationships among brethren, but personal prejudices must be abandoned. Christians from all backgrounds and walks of life were *called* to practice peaceful pursuits as a top priority (Eph. 4:3).
6. God never makes demands without furnishing the tools with which to meet those demands. Accordingly, He has provided the means for maintaining our peace with self, God, and other men.
 - a. The rich indwelling of the word of Christ. Serious study of Scripture will instill *wisdom* [the ability to see things as God sees them] in us that we may make appropriate decisions about our daily lives.
 - b. Mutual participation in spiritual worship with brethren. Nothing “levels the playing field” and promotes good behavior among disciples more than worshipping together before the same God, whose pleasure with their conduct is of greatest concern to all of them. When Christians teach one another, admonish one another, and encourage one another by the word of God, both spoken and sung, there springs forth a spirit of comradeship and brotherhood that is scarcely seen elsewhere. Worshipping together perhaps overcomes natural diversities quicker and more completely than anything else.
7. The gnostic-like doctrines of the Greeks and the defunct practices of the Jews were divisive and counter productive of the harmony among disciples that was intended by the “mystery” plan of heaven. To clear-thinking converts who even by *natural* instinct preferred peace to turmoil, the message of unity in the gospel was far more appealing than the strife that they observed when the “new” doctrine was introduced at Colosse.
8. Paul’s recommendation in closing this part of his discussion was, “If you really want peace and harmony among yourselves, there is only one way to have it-- Everything you do and say must originate in the authority [name] of Jesus and not in the the strange and worldly based laws promoted by teachers who have been trying to lure you from the perfection you have in the *pre-eminent Christ*.”
9. The privilege of sharing in the advantages offered to them by the gospel should evoke hearty thanksgiving in the Colossians. Every blessing came out of the merciful grace of a God who cared for them and out of the love of His Son who had been willing to sacrifice Himself for their salvation.

Verses 18-25-- We cannot know whether there were members of the Colossian church who were experiencing relationship problems. Paul's remarks in this section of the chapter might be *preventative* rather than *corrective*. At any rate, fractured relationships can prove destructive to the health of a congregation if attention is not given to them in a timely manner. These same instructions are found in more detail in Ephesians 5:22-33 and 6:1-9.

1. **Wives.** Submission to husbands by their wives has the same emphasis given to that relationship in Ephesians 5:22-24. Here, Paul comments that submission is "fitting" in the Lord. "Fitting" is *aneko*, "to have arrived at, reached to;" it came to mean, "what is due to a person, one's duty, what is befitting." Hence, submission in marriage is the husband's due from his wife and the wife's duty to her spouse.
2. **Husbands.** Love for his wife is the duty as well as the privilege of the husband. Ephesians 5:25-33 explores the many-sided responsibilities that the Lord has placed upon men who would enjoy peace in the home as well as peace in the local church. Wuest says:

The husbands are exhorted to love their wives. The word here is not *phileo*, a non-ethical fondness or affection. They all did that. That was the type of love which was exercised when they fell in love with them. It is *agape*, the love that was shown at Calvary, the love produced in the heart of the yielded saint by the Holy Spirit [by the word--RG], the love that will cause the husband to sacrifice himself and his own wishes in the interest of the well-being of the wife.

3. **Children.** The role that children play in the harmony of the family unit is sometimes vastly underestimated. Their respectful obedience to their parents' wishes contributes significantly to the ability of the home to serve as a haven of safety and godliness for every family member. Similarly, older children can misbehave in ways that can drastically disturb the peace of the family. And sometimes a parent will "take sides" with the children against the other parent in a disagreement. This, of course, sends mixed signals to the children and erodes the line of authority that must govern family matters.
4. **Fathers.** In addition to the husbandly duties that Christian men have toward their wives, Paul reminds them of their responsibilities toward their children. They are warned not to "provoke" [*erethizo*-- "to excite, stir up, provoke"] their children. There are some positive things about which we should "provoke" others [e.g., love and good works--Heb. 10:24], but *this* kind of provocation is forbidden. Parents may be tempted to make arbitrary decisions about things that obviously mean a great deal to a child and refuse to offer any reason for denying the child's request except to proclaim in a harsh tone, "Because I said so!" We forget sometimes that children are people and should be treated as such. When children are "discouraged" from *willful* obedience into *forced* compliance, perhaps we should

not be surprised when they choose to rebel against parental authority at their earliest opportunity.

5. Servants. Much the same things were written to servants [slaves] in Ephesians 6: 5-8 in much the same language. Converts to the gospel who were in bondage to others now found themselves with *two* masters. They had a new master, the *pre-eminent Christ*, whom they must strive to please in all things. But they were still obligated to serve the old master, in some instances even better than they had before. Paul's instructions assured them that there was no conflict between these duties. Indeed, good service to a *physical* lord was a large part of good service to their *spiritual* Lord. Therefore, "hearty" [sincere] obedience was not [only] to men but also served to glorify the Lord and His choice to come to this earth as a servant and not as a master. (Mark 10:45; Phil. 2:7).
 - a. Masters of Christian slaves might not always appreciate the faithful service given to them. Their governance might still be harsh and overbearing, and that could be discouraging to servants trying to do their best. Disciples in this situation should remember that their *new* Master is always aware and always appreciative of faithfulness in *His* servants. Without exception, they will be rewarded for what they do (Mark 9:41), and Christ's reward is far more valuable [an eternal "inheritance"] than man's.
 - b. Faithfulness by disciples in bondage to their masters was not just an opportunity to make a favorable impression on behalf of Christ. It was a *duty* about which they had no choice. Those who might think they could "ease up" instead of "bearing down" in their service were thinking wrong and were doing wrong when they failed to give their best. Unfaithfulness would as surely be *punished* by Christ [if not by their earthly masters] as faithfulness would be *rewarded*.
 - c. God requires no less of His people than He demands from the people of the world. Total dedication is the standard by which the worthiness of *all people* is measured (Luke 17:10). "There is no partiality."

Verse 4:1-- This verse, obviously, belongs with the text of chapter three rather than chapter four. It is a continuation of Paul's discussion of specific personal responsibilities of converts to the gospel, whereas verse two of chapter four begins a new focus on some general duties of the Colossian Christians.

1. This instruction to Christian masters also appears in Ephesians (6:9). There, the apostle enjoins the "good will" treatment of servants; here, it must be "just" [*dikais*- "custom, rule, right"] and "fair" [*isotes*-- "equality"], i.e., without prejudice or partiality among servants.
2. Masters must remember that their power to control other men is itself under the control of an all-knowing Master of all men. Conduct toward their servants

should be patterned after how they wanted to be treated by their own Master in heaven.

3. Joseph Lightfoot makes these remarks about the treatment of slaves by their Christian masters:

The recent fault of Onesimus would make the apostle doubly anxious to emphasize duties of the slave towards the master, lest in his love for the offender, he should seem to condone the offense. But on the other hand, it is the apostle's business to show that justice has a double edge. There must be a *reciprocity* between the master and the slave. The philosophers of Greece taught, and the laws of Rome assumed, that the slave was a chattel. But a chattel could have no rights. It would be absurd to talk of treating a chattel with justice. St. Paul places the relations of the master and the slave in a wholly different light. Justice and equity are the expression of the divine Mind, and with God there is no respect of persons. With Him the claims of the slave are as real as the claims of the master.

1. People raised with _____ should seek things _____ where _____ is _____ at the _____ of God.
2. Christians have _____ and their _____ is _____ with Christ in _____.
3. What are the things that will bring the wrath of God against evildoers?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____, “which is _____.”
4. *Six* additional sinful deeds must also be “put off” by converts to Christ:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
 - f. _____
5. *Eight* things to “put on” in the pursuit of “perfection” in Christ are:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
 - f. _____
 - g. _____
 - h. _____
6. Which of the qualities is the “bond of perfection”? _____
7. *Two* things must be allowed [“let”] to “rule” and “dwell” in us:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
8. Our singing in worship serves what *two* purposes for “one another”?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
9. Whatever Christians do in _____ or _____ must be done in the _____ of the _____.
10. How many relationships are specified in verses 3:18- 4:1? _____ What are they?
11. Where else are these same relationships discussed by the apostle Paul? _____
12. Masters and servants should remember that both have a _____ in _____ who is concerned about the quality of their relationship.

Chapter Four

Verses 1-6-- In chapter three, Paul encouraged the Colossian Christians to “set their minds on things above” (3:2). Accordingly, there were several inappropriate practices that the guilty must “put to death” (3:5) while simultaneously “putting on” behaviors (3:12) more in keeping with the image of Christ (3:10). Attention was also given to several classes of people whose membership in those groups imposed particular responsibilities on them. It was important to the perception that worldly people had of the gospel that church members strive to adorn the message that faithful teachers were proclaiming about the *pre-eminent Christ*. Having completed the special instructions for some specific classes, the apostle turns now to six important duties to be confronted by every disciple at Colosse.

1. Continue earnestly in prayer. The efficacy of prayer was one of the pillars of Paul’s faith. Scarcely anything is mentioned in his letters to Christians as often as his own prayers and those he enjoined on the saints. To the Thessalonians he said, “Pray without ceasing” (1Thes. 5:17). He never hesitated to write about praying for other people or asking other people to pray for him. Like our Lord, he gives all of us a great example to follow in our own prayer life.
 - a. Praying was to be done with “vigilance.” The ASV has “watching.” Both words come from *gregoreo*-- “spiritual alertness.” Prayers of disciples should be sensitive to specific needs of real people as well as to generic needs of people in general. Every thought of every prayer should be especially meaningful to the Christian praying the prayer. Nothing should be “thrown in” just because some things are “usually” prayed for.
 - b. Praying was to be done with “thanksgiving.” The blessings of God are far too many to be counted, but “counting our blessings one by one” would prove to be a profitable exercise for all of us from time to time. Even Jesus felt the importance of giving thanks to His Father (e.g., Matt. 11:25; John 11:31; Mark 8:6; etc.). A significant portion of prayer time should be devoted to expressing our gratitude for inestimable favors from a God who cares for us (1Pet. 5:7).
2. Pray also for us [Paul and his companions in the gospel]. Paul was a prisoner of Rome as he wrote these words. His future was uncertain and depended in large measure on the actions of others. But his practice always was, when uncertainty was great and dangers were imminent, that prayers must be more intense than ever. His trust was placed completely in the hands of the Great Protector (Rom. 8:37-39).

- a. Pray that a door for the gospel might be opened. A “door” [metaphorically] is an opportunity to preach the truth to lost individuals. Paul was very aware that no one can be saved without hearing the gospel (Rom. 1:16,17). He furthermore recognized his *personal role* in making such a hearing possible (1Cor. 9:16). And perhaps most of all, he knew that efforts to do his duty could not succeed unless the Lord’s providence arranged circumstances for success that he could not control himself (Acts 18:10;14:27). Doors needed *to be* opened. God opens doors for disciples eager to do His will, and those doors cannot be shut by any other than themselves (Rev. 3:8).
- b. Pray that the “mystery” of Christ might be spoken [effectively]. The gospel message was a “mystery” that required *supernatural* powers in its preaching (1Cor. 2:12,13) but only *natural* powers in its comprehension (Eph. 3:4). No special intervention from heaven was necessary for people either in and out of the church to grasp the words of salvation and obey them (Acts 2:22, 36-41). The gospel was a “mystery” only in the sense that it had once been *concealed* from the ordinary man’s understanding but had been later *revealed* openly for the apprehension of the masses of all nations (Rom. 16:25,26). Paul’s success as a preacher depended simply, (1) on speaking so his hearers would understand what he was preaching (1Cor. 14:19), and, (2) on presenting himself in a way that would gain the confidence of his listeners (1Cor. 9:22).
3. Pray that the gospel would be “manifest” [*phaneros*-- “open to sight, visible”] to the lost. The root word means “shining.” Hence, the story of Jesus needs to be seen by both saints and sinners as a “light that *shines* in a dark place” (2Pet.1:19) and viewed as an awesome treasure that must be grasped at all costs. Enduring the chains of his imprisonment was the price Paul was paying for the privilege of taking salvation to the lost. The gospel was far more important to him than anything else on earth, and he was willing to make any sacrifice to give it the opportunity to transform men out of darkness into the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13). If only darkened minds would see the urgency of embracing his message!
4. Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside. “Walk” is a common Biblical expression for “live,” appearing frequently in both Testaments [e.g., Lev. 26:3; Psa. 1:1; John 18:12, etc.]. It is often used in Ephesians [4:1; 5:2; 5:8; 5:15] and in Colossians [1:10; 2:6; 3:7; 4:5]. Paul here connects walking and teaching. Every disciple must “speak” the word and make it manifest to the lost (Matt. 28:20). But *first*, he must “walk” before the lost in a manner that attracts them to the “talk.” *Wisdom* is “seeing things as God sees them,” so “walking in wisdom” is practicing in daily life those things the Lord has shown us are appropriate for followers of the *pre-eminent Christ*.
5. Redeem the time. Time is precious because the “night is coming when no man

can work” (John 9:4). The Ephesians were told to “redeem the time” because “the days are evil” (Eph. 5:16). Opportunities are often fleeting, and distractions are in rich supply. Many opportunities for doing the Lord’s work, once neglected, are never again available. “Evil days” are days in which we let our opportunities slip away for reasons that might be avoided. God has promised to “redeem” our souls (Eph. 1:7) and our bodies (Rom. 8:23) from the control of Satan, but *our own* redemption depends on our efforts to redeem both *time* and the *souls* of sinners.

6. Know how to answer those who teach spurious doctrines. It was important that the Colossian disciples participate in the defense of the truth against the false teachers who had come into their midst. Paul and a few others could not by themselves win the war against the *Colossian* Heresy. But helping in that struggle would require *two* things of the “ordinary” members of the church: (1) Knowing what to say and (2) knowing how to say it. Neither was more important than the other to their success in opposing error.
 - a. Being “ready to give an answer” (1Pet. 3:15) demands a working knowledge of Scripture and a reasonable familiarity with how Scripture is often misused in promoting untrue religious positions.
 - b. Knowing how to answer also requires a good attitude on the part of defenders of the faith. Paul instructed Timothy that a teacher must not “quarrel” but be gentle in correcting those “who oppose” (2Tim. 2:24,25).
 - c. The Colossians were to season their teaching with “salt.” Salt historically has served two vital purposes in man’s consumption of food. It imparts flavor, which makes food more desirable to eat. It also preserves, which makes it important to the availability of food. Jesus declared that His disciples are the “salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13). Godly examples enhance the attractiveness of the salvation message (Titus 2:10; 1Pet. 3:1). Christians are also “salt” in evangelizing the world as they “preserve” *sound* doctrine (2Tim. 4:3) in the midst of many false doctrines and as they deliver to lost people the *only* doctrine that can save them from eternal damnation (1Tim. 4:16; Jas. 1:21).

Verses 7-17-- Paul was consistently grateful for the faithfulness of other saints, and he displayed his gratitude by commending them generally or particularly. The closing verses of the Colossian letter are devoted to such personal references.

1. Tychicus. On his third preaching trip, Paul went to Macedonia and Greece. Returning through Macedonia, he was accompanied by several named companions, among whom were Aristarchus, Timothy, and Tychicus (Acts 20:1-4). Tychicus was later found with Paul in his imprisonment at Rome. He was the messenger chosen to take this letter to the Colossians and also the Ephesian letter to its

intended destination (Eph. 6:21:22). Paul held this brother in high esteem, calling him a “*beloved* brother,” a “*faithful* minister,” and a “*fellow* servant in the Lord.” Tychicus was charged to do several things in making this journey for Paul from Rome to Colosse:

- a. He would give the Colossians the latest information about Paul’s circumstances as a prisoner; about his activities in spreading the gospel despite his captivity; and perhaps relaying to them any needs Paul might have to lighten the rigors of his stay in Rome;
 - b. He would attempt to learn the “circumstances” of the Colossians and to “comfort their hearts.” Paul had learned of the infiltration of error that was designed to capture the hearts of the disciples, to confuse them about the *pre-eminent Christ*, and to involve them in some strange concepts about religion. Tychicus’ task suggests that he might have been especially capable of giving some badly-needed help in resisting the destructive doctrines. Another able soldier would surely be a great “comfort” to a church under siege from its enemies;
 - c. He would conduct Onesimus back to his master Philemon at Colosse. This once runaway slave had encountered Paul at Rome and had been converted to Christ. Paul had taken advantage of his personal services for a time but decided to send Onesimus home. He speaks of the slave [for such he remained] as a “faithful and beloved brother,” just as he had spoken of Tychicus. This was a clear demonstration of what it meant for there to be no “slave nor free” in Christ” (3:11). Onesimus would also be able to add encouraging things to the report about Paul’s well-being. Further information about Onesimus, Philemon, and Paul’s relationship to both of them can be found in the letter Paul wrote to Philemon, also carried with the other two by Tychicus.
2. Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus [Justus]. These three disciples are described as the only fellow-workers at Rome who were “of the circumcision.”
- a. Aristarchus was a “fellow-prisoner.” Some scholars suppose that he was literally a fellow captive with Paul. They further think that his involvement with Paul led to animosity in Paul’s captors until he was thrown into chains alongside the apostle. Others conclude that his “imprisonment” was self-imposed and consisted of the voluntary service to Paul he wished to render.
 - b. Mark is well-known to Bible students. He was a cousin of Barnabas and had accompanied him and Paul on their first preaching trip. For some unrevealed reason, he had left the company of the preachers in Pamphylia and had returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Paul and Barnabas later disputed about taking Mark on a second journey, and their disagreement resulted in a severance of their preaching partnership (Acts 15:36-41). Paul entertained no ill feelings for Mark and later acknowledged his usefulness in the Lord’s work during the

apostle's second imprisonment (2Tim. 4:11). Even now, he wishes that Mark be welcomed if he should come to Colosse. Of course, Mark's greatest contribution to the cause of Jesus was in writing the Gospel According to Mark not long before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

- c. **Jesus [Justus]**. "Jesus" was a name in common usage among the Jews. Joshua of Conquest fame had also borne the name. Nothing more is known about this faithful saint whose support obviously meant a great deal to Paul at this time.
 - d. These three Jewish helpers in the gospel were a "comfort" to Paul. Interestingly, Wuest calls attention to the fact that the Greek word is *paregoria*- "comfort, solace, relief, allegiance, consolation, encouragement," and from it came the name of an old-time remedy, "paregoric," used widely to calm stomach upsets and other physical disturbances. These men were a "medicine" for Paul.
3. **Epaphras**. He, like Onesimus, was "one of them" [the Colossians], but in a sense different from Onesimus. The slave had formerly been identified with the church at Colosse only by his residence in that city, whereas Epaphras had been an integral part of its membership and activity. It is Epaphras who is thought to have been instrumental in first preaching the gospel at Colosse and in establishing a congregation there. Many believe that he had gone to Rome to consult with Paul about the insidious error that threatened the purity of the disciples' faith.
- a. Paul attests that Epaphras always labored fervently in prayer for the perfection and assurance of his Colossian brethren.
 - b. Epaphras had a great zeal [concern] for the churches at Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. These cities were located within short distances of one another, and Christians likely faced similar problems with false teachers in whichever place they lived. There were congregations in Colosse and Laodicea, and there were some Christians in Hierapolis, if not an organized group. Epaphras probably had taught and worked with the saints in Laodicea and Hierapolis as well as with those in Colosse and would have had a keen interest in the spiritual well-being of Christians in all three cities.
4. **Luke**. Luke is familiar to us as the writer of Acts and as one of the companions of Paul on his preaching trips. He also was one of four men chosen by God to record the events of Jesus' life on earth among men. He apparently was a Gentile, bearing a Greek name and being excluded from the list of workers of the circumcision in verse eleven. Paul discloses here that Luke was a physician, a fact reflected in some of his thoughts and language in his Gospel and in Acts. The medical arts were rather highly developed among the Greeks, and Grecian doctors were known in the royal courts of Rome. Some consider Luke to have traveled as Paul's personal physician, which he possibly did, but it is probable that he also worked alongside the apostle in teaching the word and spreading the kingdom of God. Paul's estimate of Luke's character and faithfulness to Christ

is expressed when he called his friend “beloved.”

5. **Demas.** This disciple was with Paul at Rome in some capacity and sent greetings to the members at Colosse. He also joined in greetings to Philemon in the letter Paul wrote at the same time of this book (Philem. 24). Later, Paul sadly reported that Demas had “forsaken” him in their labors for Christ because he “loved this present world” (2Tim. 4:10). Of that incident we know nothing more. Some scholars have observed that no commendation of any sort is attached to Demas in this reference, although rather profuse praise accompanies each of the others in Paul’s closing remarks. They perceive this as indicating that Demas’ commitment to gospel work was already suspected by Paul to be rather tenuous.
6. **Brethren in Laodicea.** As suggested earlier, Christians in nearby Laodicea were facing the same challenges to their faith as were those in Colosse. Paul’s concern for their welfare possibly was magnified by the concern that Epaphras had for them (verse 13). There was not much he could do personally at this time about their problems of faith, except to instruct the Colossians to make sure that their letter was put into the hands of the brethren in Laodicea. That would give them both the same benefit of his inspired discussion of mutually important matters. We have no clue, of course, about the effect of Paul’s letter on either church. It is possibly significant, however, that when John wrote to the church at Laodicea some years later, no mention is made of problems with false teaching such as this epistle exposes and opposes. Their main trouble later was with pride and spiritual lethargy, not untrue doctrines (Rev. 3:14-22). Perhaps Paul’s admonitions had accomplished their intended purpose.
7. **Nymphas.** Some manuscripts use the feminine form of this name, Nympha. Also, the church is said to be in her, not his, house. We cannot be sure about this variation, except to note that it would have been somewhat out of the ordinary for a woman to be listed as the property owner, although that could have been possible under certain circumstances. We are not sure from this reference, moreover, whether the church in his/her house was situated in Colosse, Laodicea, or perhaps even in Heiropolis. It was common for small churches in the first century to meet in the private houses of brethren rather than in public buildings (Rom. 16:5; 1Cor. 16:19; Philemon 2).
8. **Archippus.** This “fellow soldier” was greeted in Paul’s letter to Philemon (vs. 2). He possibly was a member of the congregation that met in Philemon’s house. Some suppose that he was a part of Philemon’s own family. We are uninformed about what “ministry” Archippus had been given to do, but it must be “fulfilled” [carried on, completed]. This might or might not indicate some degree of inaction on his part.

Verse 18-- Paul often used an amanuensis, or secretary, to write the inspired words as he dictated them (e.g., Rom. 16:22). Sometimes, he only signed his name at the end or beginning of his letter (e.g., 2Thes. 3:17). When the message was especially sensitive or controversial, he wrote the entire text with his own hand (e.g., Gal. 6:11). His communications to churches and individuals needed something to validate the authority of their instructions and commands.

1. His final request of these brethren at Colosse was to “remember his chains.” He probably had either or both of two things in mind:
 - a. Remember that he was a prisoner for Christ’s sake and had suffered many discomforts and tribulations through the years for the cause of Jesus. The saints at Colosse and elsewhere should be encouraged to follow his example of willingness to sacrifice himself as he had done so often;
 - b. Remember that the apostle was only human, and imprisonment was not enjoyable. He would continue to need prayers to endure the deprivations that lay ahead for him, and perhaps there would be times when churches other than Philippi would be expected to participate with him in giving and receiving (Phil. 4:15). Be ready to respond when called upon!
2. His final words to brethren who were striving to remain faithful under stressful circumstances were, “The *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.” He could pray for no greater blessing for them, because nothing else would be able to see them through their trials and carry them into heaven!

Note-- Scholars are undecided about Paul’s instruction in verse sixteen, “you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.” Since no such letter destined for Laodicea is known to exist, we are led to wonder just what he had in mind. Three possibilities appear:

- a. A letter from Paul to Laodicea had been written and sent to Laodicea, and it has been lost to the canon of Scripture;
- b. A copy of the letter being taken to Ephesus was to be made for the church at Laodicea and then sent to Colosse to be read by the brethren there;
- c. The “letter to Laodicea” was in fact what came to be known as the Ephesian letter. It was a “circular letter” which Paul intended to be read by more than one church and would be carried from Laodicea to Colosse. Some critics point out that only a blank space is found in some manuscripts in the greeting where “Ephesus” appears in other documents.

David Lipscomb offers these thoughts about this “mystery” letter:

It is generally believed among Biblical scholars that Ephesians was designed also

for the other churches in the same province. The conclusion is based on the belief that, although it is addressed "to the saints that are at Ephesus," the metropolis of the Roman province of Asia which included Laodicea and Colossae, it was probably designed for other churches in the same province-- "the faithful in Christ Jesus." If so, it is quite conceivable that Paul gave orders to Tychicus to leave at Laodicea for the church there a copy of the epistle to the Ephesians. And this copy would be "the epistle *from Laodicea*" which Paul desired the Colossians *to read*. This desire grew out of the fact that the two epistles, though closely related in thought and phraseology, are quite distinct. Each supports the other. The one to the Ephesians deals chiefly with the church; that to the Colossians expounds the dignity and work of Christ, and rebuts certain special errors. This suggestion is so free from objection, and meets so well all the facts of the case, that with our scanty information we may accept it as probable.

1. "Continue _____ in _____, being _____ in it with _____."
2. Paul wanted to preach the _____, which was also called the _____ of _____. What price had he already paid to do that?
3. We must _____ in _____, _____ the _____.
4. Our speech should be with _____, seasoned with _____.
5. What *three* complimentary things did Paul say about Tychicus?
a. _____ b. _____ c. _____
6. _____ was a _____ and _____ brother. He is a central figure in the book of _____.
7. Three Jewish helpers were _____, _____, and _____, also called _____. They were of "_____."
8. _____ prayed that the Colossians would be _____ and _____ in _____ the _____ of _____.
9. What three churches was Epaphras "zealous for"?
a. _____ b. _____ c. _____
10. Luke was a beloved _____. What *other* things do we know about him?
a. _____ b. _____ c. _____
11. Paul greeted _____, who had a _____ in his _____.
12. This letter was to be read at _____; a letter from "_____" should be read at Colosse.
13. What might this "mystery" letter [above] have been? _____
14. _____ was to _____ the _____ he had received in the _____.
15. How did Paul try to prove to the Colossians that this letter was really from him?
16. What did the apostle want the Colossians to remember? Why?

CHRIST IN COLOSSIANS

THE PERSONALITY OF CHRIST

1. The image of the invisible God (1:15)
2. The firstborn over all creation (1:15)
3. The Creator of all things (1:16)
4. Before all things (1:17)
5. The Sustainer of all things (1:17)
6. Preeminent in all things (1:18)
7. Fullness of the Godhead bodily (2:9)
8. All wisdom & knowledge (2:3)
9. Head of all principality & power (2:10)

THE WORK OF CHRIST

1. Delivered us from power of darkness (1:13)
2. Redeemed the lost by His blood (1:14)
3. Provided forgiveness of sins (1:14)
4. Created all things (1:16)
5. Became head of the church (1:18)
6. Reconciled all things to Himself (1:20)
7. Made alive the spiritually dead (2:13)
8. Removed the Law of Moses (2:14)
9. Triumphed over worldly power (2:15)
10. Provides spiritual growth (2:19)
11. Gives reward to the faithful (3:24)
12. Gives punishment to unfaithful (3:25)

THE REVELATION OF CHRIST

1. The truth of the gospel (1:5)
2. Brings forth fruit for God (1:6)
3. Offers God's grace to the lost (1:6)
4. Contains all wisdom & spiritual understanding (4:12)
5. Available to all persons on earth (1:23)
6. Explains Gentiles' hope of glory (1:23,26,27)
7. Makes us perfect and complete (4:12)

“WORKS OF THE FLESH” --[GALATIANS 5]-- **“FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT”**
“PUT OFFS” ----- [COLOSSIANS 3]-----**“PUT ONS”**

“Works of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19-21,24)

1. Fornication
2. Uncleaness
3. Idolatry
4. Hatred
5. Wrath
6. Passions
7. Desires

Things to “put off” (Col. 3:5-15)

1. Fornication
2. Uncleaness/filthy language
3. Idolatry (covetousness)/blasphemy
4. Malice
5. Anger, wrath
6. Passion
7. Evil desires

Added: Lying

“Fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22-24)

1. Love
2. Peace
3. Longsuffering
4. Kindness
5. Gentleness

Things to “put on” (Col. 3:12-15)

1. Love
2. Peace
3. Longsuffering
4. Kindness
5. Tender mercies

Added: 1. Humility
2. Meekness
3. Forgiveness
4. Thankfulness

**EPHESIANS AND COLOSSIANS
--SIMILARITIES--**

Paul wrote four letters from prison which are preserved in the New Testament canon. Two of these contain remarkable similarities to each other. Ephesians and Colossians apparently were written at about the same time and sent at the same time to the churches by the same faithful brother, Tychicus. A survey of the letters reveals a striking correspondence of many elements in the books, which suggests that both congregations were experiencing many of the same problems and had need of the same solutions offered by Paul. Albert Barnes presents in his commentary on Colossians a list of passages he considers to be very much alike in wording and/or thought:

<u>Ephesians</u>		<u>Colossians</u>	<u>Ephesians</u>		<u>Colossians</u>
1:15-19	with	1:9-11	4:15,16	with	2:19
1:20-23	“	1:15-19	4:25	“	3:9
1:10	“	1:20	4:22-24	“	3:9,10
2:1-10	“	1:21-23	4:32	“	3:12
3:7	“	1:25	5:19,20	“	3:16,17
3:9,10	“	1:26,27	5:21; 6:6-9	“	3:18-22; 4:1
3:17	“	2:7	6:19	“	4:3
2:11-22	“	2:11-15	5:16	“	4:5
4:14	“	2:8	6:21	“	4:7

A close examination of the books will also disclose other passages and words that bear a striking resemblance to each other:

<u>Ephesians</u>		<u>Colossians</u>	
1:15	<u>corresponds to</u>	1:3,4	
2:5,6	“	2:12,13	
4:16	“	2:19	
5:19	“	3:16	[It is notable that in both lists of instructions about personal relationships, Paul uses the same <u>order</u> and places wives <u>before</u> husbands and slaves <u>before</u> masters.]
5:22	“	3:18	
5:25	“	3:19	
6:1	“	3:20	
6:4	“	3:21	
6:5-8	“	3:22	
6:9	“	4:1	
6:19,20	“	4:3	
6:21,22	“	4:7,8	

Language common to both books: “principalities and powers,” “fullness,” “holy and without blame,” “rooted,” “mystery,” etc.