

Colossians

Background

Author

The Apostle Paul is the author of Colossians. There are three personal references to Paul in the first person (1:1; 1:23; 4:18). In addition, there are references to Paul's associates, such as Tychicus (4:7), Onesimus (4:9), Aristarchus (4:10), Mark (4:10), Justus (4:11), Epaphras (4:12), Luke (4:14), Demas (4:14), and Archippus (4:17).

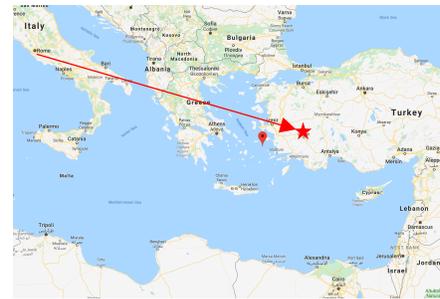
It seems that Tychicus was the carrier of both Ephesians and Colossians (Eph 6:21; Col 4:7).

One evidence that Colossians is the work of Paul is the close link to the book of Philemon:

- (1) Both books include Timothy's name with Paul's in the opening greeting (Col 1:1; Phile 1).
- (2) Greetings are sent in both books from Aristarchus, Mark, Epaphras, Luke, and Demas (Col 4:10-14; Phile 23-24).
- (3) Archippus' ministry is referred to in both books (Col 4:17; Phile 2).
- (4) Onesimus the slave is mentioned in both books (Col 4:9; Phile 10).

Date

Colossians was written from Rome during Paul's first imprisonment there, as recorded in Acts 28:30. At the same time, he wrote Ephesians and Philemon (about A.D. 60-62). These are sometimes called "Paul's Prison Epistles."



Destination

The city of Colossae was in the Lycus Valley, about 100 miles east of Ephesus [modern-day Izmir] in Asia Minor [modern-day Turkey] and 12 miles from Laodicea and Heirapolis (4:13). It seems that Paul had not visited these three cities (Col 1:7; 2:1; 4:12). They were most likely evangelized during Paul's 18-month ministry stay in Ephesus (Acts 19:10), as people visited the coastal city of Ephesus.



The town was known for its fusion of religious influences (syncretism), which included Jewish, Gnostic, and pagan influences, that in the first century A.D. were described as an angel-cult. This unorthodox cult venerated the archangel Michael who is said to have caused a curative spring [for healing] to gush from a fissure in the Earth. Excavations revealed a huge theater seating about 5,000, therefore suggesting a population of 25,000-30,000 people [Wikipedia].

Issues

Gnosticism

"Gnosis" is a Greek word meaning "to know." Gnosticism believes acquiring special, mystical knowledge is the means of salvation. It's a higher knowledge, not from the Bible. Gnostics assert that matter is inherently evil and spirit is good. Therefore, gnostics believe

anything done in the body, even the grossest sin, has no meaning because real life exists in the spirit realm only. Gnosticism as a system was a problem for the first 300 years of Christianity, but at the time of Paul, it was in its infancy [gotquestions.org].

In Colossae, the false teachers held some prominent beliefs, which the apostle condemns. Among these were:

- (1) Some taught Jesus was not 100% deity and some taught He was not 100% humanity (1:14-23; 2:9-15).
- (2) Elements of Judistic ritualism and traditionalism (2:8, 11, 16; 3:11).
- (3) The veneration of angels, whom they believed control nature (2:18-19).
- (4) An emphasis on ascetic self-denial (2:20-23).
- (5) That only those who were taught by the false teachers could understand and experience spiritual maturity (1:20, 28; 3:11).

There are many similarities between Ephesians and Colossians. Though, in Ephesians, the emphasis is on the church as the body of Christ. In Colossians, the emphasis is on Christ as the Head of the body. Also, Paul wrote Colossians primarily to respond to a particular problem, whereas he wrote Ephesians primarily to give an explanation of correct teaching.

Purpose

Three purposes emerge from this epistle:

- (1) Paul wanted to express his personal interest in the believers at Colossae, whom he had not visited. He warned them of the danger of returning to their former beliefs and practices.
- (2) Paul refuted the false teaching which was threatening these believers.
- (3) Most important, Paul taught the absolute supremacy and sole sufficiency of Jesus Christ, in one of the longest and best descriptions of Christ in the New Testament.

Chapter 1

I. Introduction, 1:1-14

A. Salutation, 1:1-2

Verse 1—Paul—After Jesus, Paul was the most influential person in Christianity. He was a *Hebrew of Hebrews* (Phil 3:5). He was a Pharisee (Phil 3:5), and educated under Gamaliel, one of the leading rabbis of that time (Acts 22:3). He was a Roman citizen by birth (Acts 22:28). He became a believer, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, while on the road to Damascus, where he was headed to persecute the believers (Acts 9).

—**an apostle of Jesus Christ**—Paul was not simply a messenger, but an official representative of Jesus Christ, the One who sent him. Therefore, what he wrote was not merely his opinion but God's authoritative Word. *All Scripture is God-breathed* (2 Tim 3:16).

—**by the will of God**—Being an apostle was not something Paul desired, nor was it something he worked for, and he was not sent by some human organization (such as the Pharisees who had previously sent him). God chose Paul, before he was a believer, to bring the Gospel, as an apostle, to the Gentiles.

—**and Timothy our brother**—Timothy was also included in the introductions to 2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon. He was a fellow-worker with Paul in his ministry. Paul testified that Timothy, *...his proven worth that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father* (Phil 2:19-22). It was to Timothy that Paul wrote his final letter before his death (2 Timothy).

- Timothy is not a co-author of the book. Only Paul wrote the book. Timothy was also not an apostle. But Paul included greetings from Timothy, who was with him, to the

believers at Colossae, who must have known Timothy (although perhaps not in a personal visit to their town). He was from Lystra, south of Colossae, and had also ministered in Ephesus.

AN APPLICATION—Timothy is *our brother*. The church is organized as a family, not an institution. We are all equally brothers and sisters in Christ. Timothy is not more of a brother in Christ than we are. You are either a brother (or sister) or you are not. There is no authority except Jesus Christ, who is the Head of our family (Eph 1:22-23), and the apostles, who wrote the Scriptures (Eph 2:19-22).

Verse 2—To the saints [set apart to holiness]—Written by Paul in prison in Rome and sent with Tychicus to all the believers in Colossae (4:7). Also, his instructions were *When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea* (4:16). [We do not have the Laodicean letter.]

—**and** [“even,” “that is”] **faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae**—Paul may be expressing confidence that when he has shown them the danger of the false teaching, they will turn away from it in faithfulness to Christ.

- “In Christ” is used over 160 times in the New Testament. *...in Him you have been made complete* (2:10).

AN APPLICATION—Notice Paul is writing to all the saints, the body of Christ, in the city of Colossae. What he wrote was not for a particular local church there. In fact, what he wrote was also for the saints in Laodicea—and for us!!

—**Grace to you**—“grace” is the favor of God. We do not deserve it and we cannot earn it—it is the gift of God (Eph 2:8). We already have seen the grace of God given to Paul. He was not what he made himself to be, but what God made him to be. “Grace” is used 155 times in the New Testament, mostly in Paul’s writings. The church age is often called “the age of grace,” in contrast to the Old Testament, which was the age of the Law.

—**peace from God our Father**—Under the Law, there was not a sense of peace with God. *Through the law comes the knowledge of sin* (Rom 3:10), and therefore, no peace. But in Christ, we have peace with God. We are redeemed and reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus Christ.

B. Gratitude for the Colossians’ Faith, 1:3-8

Verse 3—We give thanks—There are many references to thanksgiving in this letter (1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:15, 16, 17; 4:2). “We” indicates both Paul and Timothy (and possibly others with Paul there in Rome).

—**to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**—because God is the source of the grace given to us. Jesus revealed God as “Father.” In the OT, He was the “Almighty,” “Lord,” “Jehovah/Yahweh.”

—**praying always for you**—not that they were non-stop praying for them, but when they did pray for them, they were always giving thanks to God for His grace given to the Colossian believers.

Verse 4—since we heard—from Epaphras (1:8)—as already mentioned, everything about the Colossian believers Paul had to hear from others because he never went there (1:9; 2:1).

—**of your faith in Christ Jesus**—the root of Christian life, anchored in Christ. Faith is understanding Jesus is the truth (based on the evidence) and trusting Him. For example, in a restaurant, you understand it is true that there is no poison in the food, so you eat.
— **and the love which you have for all the saints**—the fruit of the Christian life—*agape* (love), giving without reciprocity (mutual benefit).

Verse 5—because of the hope laid up [“stored”] **for you in heaven**—the trilogy of virtue: faith, hope, and love (1 Cor 13:13; 1 Thess 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3, 5, 22). Hope is for the future for those who have faith in Jesus. It’s “laid up,” waiting for you in heaven. Paul is thankful for the believers. He wrote, *For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?* (1 Thess 2:19). Paul will finally meet the Colossian believers in heaven!

AN APPLICATION—Faith looks upward to God, love looks outward to others, and hope looks forward to the future. Faith rests on the past work of Christ. Love works in the present. Hope anticipates the future [BKC]. Both faith and hope should influence a believer’s conduct (love).

—**of which you previously heard in the word of truth**—The Colossians’ knowledge of hope came from hearing the word of truth (Eph 1:13; 2 Tim 2:15; James 1:18). *Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ* (Rom 10:17). This is going to contrast to the false teaching being done among the Colossian believers.
—**the gospel**—“good news” of God’s truth.

AN APPLICATION—What is the gospel? Is it turning away from sin and toward the “lordship of Christ”? Is it getting re-saved every Sunday (New Calvinism)? Is it Jesus plus traditions (Catholics). Is it being part of the “body” in a local church? Paul wrote that there are those ...*who want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed* (Gal 1:7-8; see also John 14:6; Eph 2:8-9; 1 Tim 2:5). Your eternal future depends on what is the true gospel.

AN APPLICATION—This is the attraction of all other [man-made] religions. They are based on a person earning the favor of God and thinking they deserve the favor of God because they are so “good.” But humans have a spiritual sin nature, and no outward “religious” activity can do anything about that sin nature (Col 2:23). Only Jesus, via the grace of God, can produce righteousness in a person.

Verse 6—which has come to you—The Colossians are an example of how the gospel multiplied to an area not reached personally by the apostles.

—**just as in all the world also**—the gospel is the same in the whole world. There is not a different gospel for different people or countries. The gospel transcends ethnic, geographic, cultural, and political boundaries.

—**it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing**—the word of truth bears spiritual fruit in believers (Gal 5:22-23), as well as geographically spreading, no matter where in the world it is communicated.

—**even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it**—the gospel came to Colossae, and they believed it and are maturing as believers.

—**and understood the grace of God in truth**—the truth is that grace cannot be earned by works and we do not deserve it. *For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that*

not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph 2:8-9).

AN APPLICATION—This is faith: understanding the grace of God in truth. It is not something that can be earned by works and it is not something you deserve.

Verse 7—just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant—But God uses humans to spread His gospel. *How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?* (Rom 10:14). The Colossians came to Christ through the teaching and ministry of Epaphras. He was *one of your number* (Col 4:12). Colossae was his home town.

—who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf—because Paul did not go to Colossae, yet Epaphras could go there on behalf of Paul, or in his stead.

AN APPLICATION—In the same way, Paul does not live in our time or our country, yet we bring the gospel he wrote about on his behalf. We are those same *faithful servant[s]* as Epaphras.

Verse 8—and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit—and the reverse was also true. Epaphras brought word from the fellow Colossian believers to Paul. Paul starts his letter on an encouraging note—they are truly believers in Christ. Therefore, he can teach them spiritual things.

AN APPLICATION—This is an evidence of a true believer in Christ. *A natural man [unbeliever] does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised* (1 Cor 2:14). Unbelievers talk about “works” of the flesh. Believers talk about *the things of the Spirit of God*, of which the unbeliever does not know what you are talking about. It seems foolish to them.

C. Prayer for the Colossians' Growth, 1:9-14

Verse 9—For this reason also—because Paul had heard this good report from Epaphras **—since the day we heard of it**—rejoicing at their salvation

—we have not ceased to pray for you—Prayer was a big part of Paul’s life, especially in prison. The news led Paul to go directly to God, in thanksgiving for their salvation and petition for their growth.

AN APPLICATION—It may seem unnecessary to pray for those who are doing well. Much of our prayers focus on those who are struggling, facing difficulties, or are sick. But here Paul says that the knowledge that the Colossians are progressing in the faith encourages him to pray for them to grow even more, as we’ll see in the next verses. Solomon prayed, *...that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways* (1 Kings 8:58).

—and to ask that you may be filled—what Paul asked, his petition to God, was a filling out to completeness, spiritual maturity for the Colossians

—with the knowledge of His will—that is revealed in the Word of God by the Holy Spirit. The rest of the book of Colossians will give us exactly the knowledge of the will of God for us as believers.

—in all spiritual wisdom—practical knowhow (Col 1:19, 28; 2:3, 23; 3:16; 4:5)

—**and understanding**—clear analysis and decision-making in applying this knowledge to various situations. Correct understanding is foundational to correct behavior.

AN APPLICATION—When a person becomes a believer, they understand a partial knowledge of the truth. As they grow in Christ, they learn more of the truth about Him and His will for them. But that truth comes from the Bible, not from the *teachings of men...which have...the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion...* (2:22-23).

Verse 10—so that—the purpose of the knowledge of His will, spiritual wisdom, and understanding

—**you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord**—“worthy” means “of equal weight.” The outward expression or behavior of the believer should be of equal weight as the Lord’s standard of holiness. Picture a scales with God’s holy standard on one side, and your behavior, thinking, growth on the other side. Are they of equal weight?



AN APPLICATION—Right conduct must be grounded in right thinking, but right thinking must also lead to right conduct.

—**to please Him in all respects**—in every aspect of life. This is not only the absolutely right thing to do, it is God’s eternal due. *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them* (Eph 2:10).

AN APPLICATION—Paul also wrote: *we have as our ambition...to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed [receive back] for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad* (2 Cor 5:9-10; see also 1 Cor 3:11-15). Jesus paid for our sins, that’s why we are at the Bema instead of the Great White Throne. However, we are still accountable for what we have done while living on the earth.

Pleasing God is done by the following four participles:

—**(1) bearing fruit in every good work**—this is a present tense, meaning, continual fruitfulness. Remember—good works are the fruit—not the root—of a right relationship with God.

AN APPLICATION—Good works can be done without bearing fruit. For example, I can forgive someone but still have the root of bitterness in my heart. The fruit is to be in every good work. Each passing year should see both growth in fruitfulness and in the knowledge of God. *...be transformed by the renewing of your mind...* (Rom 12:1-2).

—**(2) and increasing in the knowledge of God**—which can ONLY come through the Scriptures (not through experiences). Peter wrote, *like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the Word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation* (1 Pet 2:2). Salvation is a reproductive organism, a plant whose seed is in itself. It’s not like corn, which bears fruit and dies. It’s like a tree, which bears fruit and at the same time the tree continues to grow.

Verse 11—strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might—It’s not power proportioned simply to our need, but to God’s abundant supply. It’s *according to* His might. So how much power does God have? *All things have been created through*

Him...and in Him all things hold together (1:16-17). That's how much power He has! For example, a multimillionaire may give "of" his wealth, but that can be very little. But if he gives "according to" his riches, it will be substantial.

—(3) **for the attaining of all steadfastness [endurance] and patience**—A lack of endurance often results in despondency or losing heart. A lack of patience leads to wrath or revenge. Both things focus on circumstances. Attaining endurance and patience comes with increasing in the knowledge of God and strengthened with His power, focusing on God.

Verse 12—(4) joyously giving thanks to the Father—Giving thanks to God is key to the believer's life (see 1 Thess 5:18; Phil 4:6; Col 3:15-17; 4:2; Gal 5:22). Be a grateful person (not a complaining person). Why are we so quick to complain and so slow to be thankful? —**who has qualified us [made you competent] to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light**—In ourselves, we are unfit for the inheritance. But God has qualified us to share in the inheritance.

Verse 13—For He rescued us from the domain of darkness—We were *dead in your trespasses and sins...But God...even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ* (Eph 2:1-6). He liberated us, He saved us, He delivered us from the dominion of darkness and evil.

—**and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son**—God not only delivered us from the authority of darkness, but He transferred us, "reestablished us," to the kingdom of the Light, of His beloved Son. Paul here is not talking about a physical kingdom. It's not a territory on a map. It's the sovereign rule of God in our hearts, that happens at salvation.

Verse 14—in whom we have redemption—some manuscripts add "through His blood" as it says in Ephesians 1:7. It means "to rescue by ransom" or "emancipation." *Qualified, rescued, transferred* are all past tense. They are the finished work of Christ in our lives, so now we have (present tense) *redemption* and *forgiveness of sins*.

AN APPLICATION—Notice "in whom." Redemption does not come from keeping church traditions or doing good works. It comes only through the person of Jesus Christ—*in whom we have redemption*. This is a big point to the Colossians who are being taught the "teachings of men" (2:22-23), things that have to do with eating, severe treatment of the body, i.e., works.

—**the forgiveness of sins**—"removal"—Sins are no longer a barrier that separates us from God.

AN APPLICATION—It is only the person who is *qualified, rescued, and transferred*, thus *redeemed* and has the *forgiveness of sins* who is able to *be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God...* A person who is in the *domain of darkness* cannot know this or do this.

II. The Exalted Christ, 1:15-29

A. Christ's Character, 1:15-23

"No comparable listing of so many characteristics of Christ and His deity are found in any other Scripture passage" (Constable).

Verse 15—He is the image—Image involves 3 things:

- (1) the exact likeness of God, a mirror image,
- (2) representation, Christ represents God to us, and
- (3) manifestation, Christ makes God known to us

God made man in the image of God (Gen 1:27), Christ is the image of God. Jesus *existed in the form of God* (Phil 2:6), that is, the very substance or essential embodiment of something or someone.

—**of the invisible God**—As Jesus said, “*Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father*” (John 14:9). *For no one has ever seen God, but God the only Son...has made Him known* (John 1:18). *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1). Christ always has been, is, and always will be the image of God. His incarnation did not make Him the image of God, but it did bring Him, as being that image, within our grasp. So Christ’s supremacy is first shown in His relationship with God the Father.

—**the firstborn of all creation**—Also used in Colossians 1:18; Romans 8:29; Hebrews 1:6; and Revelation 1:15. In the Old Testament, the “firstborn” was the son who had the right of inheritance. He was not necessarily the first one born. Although Esau was the first one born, it was Jacob who was the “firstborn” and received the inheritance and the covenant promises. Jesus is the One with the right to the inheritance of all creation.

AN APPLICATION—The Jehovah’s Witnesses wrongly add the word “other” six times in this passage in their *New World Translation*. Thus they suggest that Christ created all other things after He was created! But the word “other” is not in the Greek. Also, if Paul meant “first created,” he would have said “first created,” but he did not say that. Also, in verse 16, Paul says, *For by Him all things were created*. How could He Himself be created by Himself. He cannot be self-created!!

Verse 16—For by Him [instrumental Cause] **all things** [totality] **were created**—He has the position of being the “firstborn” because He was the One who made everything. Christ is God, a spiritual Being, and He created the material and spiritual universe.

—**both in the heavens and on earth**—from the largest star to the smallest asteroid, from the largest dinosaur to the smallest bug. *The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world* (Ps. 19:1–4). Job 27:14 says, *...these are the fringes of His ways!!*

AN APPLICATION—The sheer size of the universe is staggering. The sun, for example, has a diameter of 864,000 miles (one hundred times that of earth’s) and could hold 1.3 million planets the size of earth inside it. The star Betelgeuse, however, has a diameter of 100 million miles, which is larger than the earth’s orbit around the sun. It takes sunlight, traveling at 186,000 miles per second, about 8.5 minutes to reach earth. Yet that same light would take more than four years to reach the nearest star, Alpha Centauri, some 24 trillion miles from earth. The galaxy to which our sun belongs, the Milky Way, contains hundreds of billions of stars. And astronomers estimate there are millions, or even billions of galaxies. What they can see leads them to estimate the number of stars in the universe at 10^{25} . That is roughly the number of all the grains of sand on all the world’s beaches.

The universe also bears witness to the tremendous wisdom and knowledge of its Creator. Scientists now speak of the Anthropic Principle, “which states that the universe appears to be carefully designed for the well-being of mankind” (Donald B. DeYoung, “Design in Nature: The Anthropic Principle,” *Impact*, no. 149 [November 1985]: p. ii). A change in the rate of Earth’s rotation around the sun or on its axis would be catastrophic. The Earth would become either too hot or too cold to support life. If the moon were much nearer to the Earth, huge tides would inundate the continents. A change in the composition of the gases that make up our atmosphere would also be fatal to life. A slight change in the mass of the proton would result in the dissolution of hydrogen atoms. That would result in the destruction of the universe, because hydrogen is its dominant element. ...There is evidence of an intelligent order of the universe to which both man and nature are subservient. [quoted in MacArthur]

—**visible and invisible**—the physical, material world, and the spiritual world, including angels (demons). Whatever invisible supernatural powers there may be, Christ is the One who made them, and He is their Lord. It could also mean invisible things like morality, love, truth, righteousness, right, wrong, etc. It can also mean oxygen, air, CO₂, etc.

—**whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities**—*He removes kings and establishes kings* (Dan 2:21). *For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God* (Rom 13:1). Just the idea of having dominion or authorities and submission to them is created by Jesus. This could also be referring to angels (Eph 1:21; 6:12). Jesus is not an angel but the Creator of angels, who are subjected to Him (1 Peter 3:22). Jesus made them and He is their Lord.

—**all things** [totality] **have been created through Him**— The entire life of the universe is mediated from God through Christ (John 1:3, 10). God the Father is the designer, and Jesus is the builder.

—**and for Him** [final Cause]—Christ is the end for which all things exist, the goal toward whom all things were intended to move. Their whole being, willingly or unwillingly, moves to Him, whether as His servants or as His stricken enemies. Jesus is the Judge at the Great White Throne, and all unbelievers will appear before Him for judgment (Rev 20:11-15).

Verse 17—He is before all things—He exists in eternity past, before all things were created. It could also mean that He is above all in rank. Similar to the expression “firstborn” (v. 15b).

—**and in Him all things hold together** [conserving Cause]. Jesus is the reason things continue to exist. *If He should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust* (Job 34:14-15). He is the reason we have a cosmos instead of a chaos. When He quits holding it together, then *the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up* (2 Pet 3:4).

AN APPLICATION—*But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells* (2 Pet 3:13). *And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new”* (Rev 21:5). This present earth is not going to be renovated. It is going to be destroyed. And Jesus will make a new earth, one without any sin and curse.

Verse 18—He is also head of the body, the church—See Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23. This is the invisible or universal church into which all believers are baptized by the Holy Spirit the moment they believe in Christ (1 Cor 12:13). There is neither Jew or Gentile (Gal 3:28). It is a *mystery...which was not made known to men in other generations* (Eph 3:4-5). Being

the head means He is sovereign, its Leader who guides and governs it. As the human head governs the human body. There is no other head over the church. He is the *head of the body*, not the head of an organization. This is a mystery relationship not revealed in the Old Testament.

AN APPLICATION—This suggests: (1) the church is a living organism, composed of members joined vitally to one another; (2) the church is the means by which Christ carries out His purposes and performs His work; and (3) the union that exists between Christ and His people is most intimate and real. Together they constitute one living union, each, in a sense, being incomplete without the other.

—**and He is the beginning**—if this refers to the church, He began the church. It did not exist before He created it (John 16:5-15). It originated with Christ. Or it could go with the following statement, He was the beginning of the resurrected dead. He was the first to get a resurrected, eternal body.

—**the firstborn from the dead**—Jesus was not the first one to be resurrected chronologically. But of all those ever raised (past or future), He is the preeminent One [see verse 15].

—**so that He Himself** [“alone”] **will come to have first place in everything**—over all creation, over the church, over the dead. The phrase is “that He might be alone supreme among all.”

AN APPLICATION—Christ has always been first, but by His resurrection and creation of the church, His body, He entered a wider and more significant sovereignty—over death and over the life of His body, the church, which happens when believers *walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God* (1:10).

Verse 19—For it was the Father’s good pleasure—to fulfill one’s desires, very pleased with [*this is my dear Son; I am very pleased with Him* (Matt 3:17)]. God the Father was pleased:

—(1) **for all the fullness** [“total quantity,” “completeness”] **to dwell** [“permanent residence”] **in Him**—Paul repeats this in 2:9, *For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form*. In Jesus resides the totality of the Divine powers and attributes.

Verse 20—and through Him—again, refer to 2:22-23, that man-made religions have the appearance of wisdom but are of not spiritual value. It is only through Christ that we can be reconciled to God.

—(2) **to reconcile all things to Himself**—a double compound verb, intensive force: to change completely, to change so as to remove all enmity. What has not been spelled out, however, is what has happened to all things since creation that they needed to be reconciled.

AN APPLICATION—We must be careful not to interpret this in such a way as to make it contradict the clear teaching of other Scriptures. Admittedly, the statement might appear, on its surface, to indicate that eventually everything will be brought into a saving relationship with God. Such universalism, however, is contrary to those passages that affirm that apart from personal trust in Christ there is no salvation. Our Lord, in fact, spoke of the impenitent as going away into “eternal punishment” (Matt 25:46). We should therefore understand this statement to be a reference to the cosmic significance of Christ’s work, the thought being similar to, but not identical with, that of Romans 8:19-22. There, the general

sense is that the disorder that has characterized creation will be done away and divine harmony restored. Here perhaps the main idea is that all things eventually are to be decisively subdued to God's will and made to serve His purposes. [EBC]

AN APPLICATION—There is a sense in which the whole world is reconciled. Because Jesus died as payment for all the sins of all people for all time, the whole world is changed in that every single person is able to be saved. However, they need to personally appropriate that reconciliation to themselves, that is, they need to individually be reconciled (2 Cor 5:18-19). [Chair illustration]

—**having made peace through the blood of His cross**—the “shedding of blood” in Scripture is an expression that means much more than just bleeding. It refers to violent sacrificial death. If just bleeding could buy salvation, why did not Jesus simply bleed without dying? Of course, He had to die to be the perfect sacrifice, and without His death (v. 22) our redemption could not have been purchased by His blood. It was Christ shedding His physical blood, dying on the cross, that satisfied God's justice, as a condemnation for our sin.

AN APPLICATION—Christ's physical blood has no magical or mystical saving power. It is not some supernaturally preserved form of the actual blood of Christ that literally washes believers of their sin. The blood of Christ is applied to the believer in a symbolic sense, by faith. How could the red and white corpuscles be literally applied to believers in salvation? To our physical bodies? Could it be otherwise with literal blood? Where is that literal, tangible blood kept? How much of it is applied, and why is it not used up? [For Catholics, they claim the wine actually becomes the blood when the priest blesses it—called transubstantiation. But—that's still physical liquid, physically swallowed.] To one degree or another, we must acknowledge that there is symbolism in what Scripture says about the blood. Otherwise we will wind up with an obviously unbiblical doctrine like transubstantiation [Catholics] to explain how literal blood can be applied to all believers for salvation. Other passages speak of “blood” symbolically, such as *Your blood be upon your own heads* (Acts 20:26-28). [MacArthur]

—**through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven**—The world order, including things in outer space, are cursed because of the Fall. In the tribulation, there will be terrific upheaval in space. Romans 8:19-22 says, *...creation waits eagerly...that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God...*

Verse 21—**And although you were formerly alienated** [“cut off, estranged”] **and hostile in mind** [internally], **engaged in evil deeds** [externally]—

AN APPLICATION—The NIV translation “because of your evil behavior” is not good. Sin begins in the heart (Matt 5:27-28) and shows in the evil deeds. People are not inwardly hostile toward God because of their outward acts of sins. They commit sins because they are inwardly hostile to God.

Verse 22—**yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death**—Spirits cannot die. *Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness* (Heb 9:22). So in order to redeem humans, Christ Himself must be truly human (Heb 2:17). Christ's real physical body and death were necessary for man's salvation (Rom 7:4; Heb 10:10).

—in order to present you before Him [God the Father]—*For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus* (1 Tim 2:5). *Since...we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus...let us draw near to God* (Heb 10:19-22).

—holy and blameless—“Without blemish” was a sacrificial term in the Old Testament used of animals without any flaw, worthy of being offered to God. It’s our position in Christ. **—and beyond reproach**—“free from accusation”—a word used 5 times in the New Testament and only by Paul (here; 1 Cor 1:8; 1 Tim 3:10; Titus 1:6-7). Free from all charges—positionally.

Verse 23—if indeed you continue in the [your] faith—

- Some take this as continuing with Christ is the test of whether they are truly saved (i.e., you can lose your salvation or were never saved to begin with).
- Some say these words are proof of a past (and continuing) experience, a condition of what is future—but there is no reference made to the future and no threatening danger is implied.
- The Greek indicates not an uncertain prospect but a necessary condition and an almost certain assumption.... Paul is at once insistent and confident; they must [continue], and he is sure that they will” (EBC).
- “**if**” is a first class condition in Greek, which can be translated “since.”

—firmly established and steadfast—Paul is assured of this. In 2:5, he says he is **rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ**—There was a danger that the Colossian believers would follow the false teaching they were exposed to. Paul will list some of that false teaching in the next chapters.

—and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard—a person cannot lose their salvation, but they can be **moved away from the hope** (why else would Paul mention it unless it was a possibility?), or *fall away from the faith* (1 Tim 4:1-2), what Paul said was *shipwreck in regard to their faith* (1 Tim 1:19), what Hebrews called a *drift* away from *what we have heard* (Heb 2:1), *some...have wandered away from the faith* (1 Tim 6:10). Perseverance is normal for believers (2 Cor 5:17; Phil 1:6; 1 John 2:19), however, perseverance in the faith is not inevitable.

AN APPLICATION—Some do not believe in apostasy (falling away from the faith). They claim either a person is saved (shown by their works) or not saved (a false previous claim). What we know is that if a person is saved, they have security in their salvation. Their names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, and there is no way to get a name erased from that book (Eph 1:4). But assurance of salvation is the fruit we look at to ascertain if someone is a believer. If they have no fruit and have wandered away from the gospel, we may not have assurance they are saved (but if they are saved, they are still saved). Conversely, we may see someone’s life and have assurance they are believers, only to find out they are not believers (such as Rob Bell, for example).

—which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven—obviously a figure of speech. It does not mean the gospel had been preached to every single individual, but rather that it had been preached throughout the known world of the Roman Empire, as it had been to the Colossians. And it was the same gospel, no matter where it was preached. There is only one gospel.

—and of which I, Paul, was made a minister—Paul wanted to impress on the Colossians that the gospel they heard from Epaphras and what was proclaimed in the world was the same gospel Paul preached.

B. Christ's Commission to Paul, 1:24-29

Verse 24—Now—Closely related to the previous paragraph of Christ's supremacy, almost equivalent to "therefore..."

—***I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake***—Paul is in jail because of bringing the gospel to the Gentiles, of which the Colossians were a part.

—***and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church***—if Paul had not been in jail, this letter to the Colossian believers might not have been written, and we, the body of Christ some 2,000 years later, would have been deprived of its message.

—***in filling up what is lacking in Christ's affliction***—the word "affliction" is never used in the NT of Christ's death. It means distress, pressure, or trouble. Usually it refers to trials in life, not the pains of death. Christians are the body of Christ, so when they suffer, He suffers. For example, as a mom, if your small child is suffering a grave illness or injury, you also suffer.

AN APPLICATION—Many Roman Catholics interpret *what is lacking in Christ's affliction* as grounds for saying Christ's payment was defective and that the suffering of the saints are needed to supplement His work on our behalf. "Suffering" when a person has to say 10 "Hail Marys" with a rosary does not pay for sin. But whatever it means, we can be sure it does not mean that!!!

AN APPLICATION—There is a big difference in what Paul says here and what he says in 2:21-23. Here Paul suffers as a necessary part of his ministry. The world hates God and the people of God. So the people of God will suffer from the world. However, in 2:21-23, there was a false teaching that decrees such as "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" were part of a self-made religion that taught severe treatment of the body was the spiritually wise thing to do. This was practiced by the monks in monasteries. Even Martin Luther did it. But Paul said they are of no spiritual value. Causing yourself to suffer has no spiritual value. The suffering Paul experienced from others was because he was a believer. For example, we are commanded to be kind and love one another. We are never commanded to be shipwrecked or thrashed with a whip.

Verse 25—Of this church—the body of Christ, i.e., all believers

—***I was made a minister***—one who serves ["deacon"], both Paul and Epaphras (1:7) [not a "Rev."]

—***according to the stewardship from God***—"stewardship" *oikonomia*, lit. "dispensation," administration, management, of the age of grace, of the mystery of the body of Christ, a new creation made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Three dispensations mentioned in the Bible: the Law, Grace, and kingdom.

—***bestowed on me***—"bestowed" is to cause to happen. Paul didn't seek this out or create it, it was caused by God to happen to Paul.

—***for your [benefit]***—purpose, lit. "to be into," "to change, to become," "from...to"

—***so that [purpose] I might fully carry out the [preaching of] the word of God***—God has begun a new age called the body of Christ. Paul's assignment (stewardship, dispensation) from God was to fully bring that Word of God to people, especially the Gentiles. Paul was up to the task. He knew his responsibility well, and he would *fully carry out* what God commissioned him to do.

AN APPLICATION—In the Old Testament, the prophets fulfilled this purpose, of bringing the Word of God to the nation of Israel. Now Paul fulfills that purpose with the church age: to fully carry out the Word of God ("preaching" is not in the text) to people. The nation of

Israel began with the seed of one man, Abraham, and the knowledge of the church age began with the revelation given to one man, Paul.

Verse 26—that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations—Paul defines “mystery” as that “which has been hidden from past ages.” It does not mean that it cannot be known, but the very idea of it was not in the minds of anyone. For example, the kingdom, Christ as King, the tribulation, the suffering of Christ, even Gentiles believing are all mentioned in the Old Testament. But believers being the body of Christ was not known before Paul.

—**but has now been manifested to His saints**—This is a clear statement of a change of dispensation. **Now** is different than **past ages**. ...*by revelation there was made known to me the mystery...* (Eph 3:3). It was given by direct revelation from God to Paul, who gave it to us, God’s saints.

AN APPLICATION—God’s revelation from Adam to John in Revelation is a linear progression. There is a beginning and an end. Pantheism says history is cyclical, such as in reincarnation.

Verse 27—to whom God willed to make known—God’s will was to make the mystery known to the saints through Paul.

—**what is the riches of the glory of this mystery**—immense greatness of the mystery
—**among the Gentiles**—Previously, God’s special revelation was to the Jews (Rom 2:17; 3:1-2; 9:4). But now, those *who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ* (Eph 2:13). The dividing wall is removed. But the Gentiles do not become Jews—both Jews and Gentiles become something else—a new body of Christ.

AN APPLICATION—There are at least four “mysteries” about the church, that distinguish it from Israel:

- (1) The body concept of Jewish and Gentile believers united into one body (Eph 3:1-12).
- (2) The doctrine of Christ indwelling every believer, the *Christ in you* concept (Col 1:24-27).
- (3) The church as the bride of Christ (Eph 5:22-32).
- (4) The Rapture of the church (1 Cor 15:50-58).

—**which is Christ in you**—Finally, the mystery is revealed. Christ is at the center of God’s mystery. He is the content of the mystery. The saints, Jew and Gentile, have Christ’s life in them. Obedience to the Mosaic Law was a physical thing, not within the person. The idea that Christ is in us is new.

—**the hope of glory**—The Gentiles, who were *without hope and without God* (Eph 2:12) have now been given a glorious expectation or anticipation. ...**the hope laid up** [“stored”] **for you in heaven** (1:5).

Verse 28—We proclaim Him—Christ is the message, not a philosophy.

—**admonishing every man** [each human, person]—Only individual people can be saved. There is no “group” salvation. To provide instruction as to correct belief, counseling, to awaken a person’s need for Christ.

AN APPLICATION—In the Old Testament, the covenants were made with the nation of Israel, made up of believers and unbelievers. The church, by definition, is only individual believers, which make up the body of Christ. It’s Christ in the individual believer. There are no

institutional or organizational promises or commands. Only individual believers will stand before the Bema Seat of Christ.

—**and teaching every man** [each human, person]—once they are saved, to cause to know or learn

—**with all wisdom**—specialized knowledge or skill

—**so that we may present every man** [each human, person] **complete** [mature] **in Christ**—Paul’s goal was not to just get people saved but to lead every believer to maturity in Christ (Eph 4:13). Maturity is not just for a select few. And we should look no further than Christ for that completion.

AN APPLICATION—Growth and maturity is something unique to this age of grace. You could not mature under the Law. You either kept it or you didn’t. We are not to remain babes in Christ (1 Cor 3:1-2), but *let us press on to maturity* (Heb 5:11-14). For example, a mother is not satisfied to just give birth to a baby. They want to bring that child to maturity, to become a responsible adult.

Verse 29—**For this purpose also I labor**—struggle, like an athlete in an arena (1 Cor 9:25).

—**striving according to His power, which mightily works within me**—Paul may have given up many times with all he suffered, but he learned the sufficiency of God’s grace in his life (2 Cor 12:9)

Chapter 2

III. The Exalted Christianity, 2:1-23

A. Exalted over Philosophy, 2:1-10

Verse 1—**For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea** [about 11 miles west of Colossae], **and for all those who have not personally seen my face**—it’s clear here that they were not personally acquainted with Paul. However, Paul’s struggling (probably in prayer, as he was in prison—Acts 28:30) was not limited to those he personally knew.

AN APPLICATION—Pray even for those you do not personally know.

Verse 2—**that their hearts may be encouraged**—the Greek word *parakleto* means, to call to one’s side for comfort and/or instruction. The Holy Spirit is called a *parakleto* (Helper, Encourager—John 14:26; 16:7).

—**having been knit together in love**—“to bring together,” to unite, sometimes expressed negatively, such as, “so that no one could ever doubt”

—**and attaining to all the wealth**—riches, abundance exceeding the norm

—**that comes from the full assurance**—to be absolutely sure, complete certainty

—**of understanding**—to comprehend, to perceive the significance of, or intended meaning of

—**[resulting in] a true knowledge** [to come to know the truth—emphasis on the process involved] **of God’s mystery**—not known before, but now known

—**that is, Christ Himself**—the person of Jesus Christ.

AN APPLICATION—Paul’s prayer for them (and us) is that no believer would ever doubt the abundance of comfort or encouragement that comes from being absolutely sure and

comprehending the significance of the truth that all that is deepest in God is summed up in Jesus Christ (not in addition to other religions or philosophies). It's never Jesus+ anything!

Verse 3—*in whom*—in the person of Christ, not in any other supposed supernatural beings or other religious practices. To search for other sources of knowledge apart from Him is a useless enterprise.

—*are hidden*—stored like a treasure, accessible to every believer (not accessible to the unbeliever—1 Corinthians 2:12-14)

—*all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*—He is the source of all true spiritual knowledge, not traditions or papal authorities or extra biblical writings.

AN APPLICATION—Therefore, the believer should study Christ in the Scriptures to learn the treasures that are stored up in Christ for you. *For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form* (v. 9). The treasure stored up in Christ is something we will continually come to understand for eternity (1 Cor 2:6-16).

Verse 4— *I say this so that no one will delude* [deceive] *you with [persuasive argument* (one word)]—Here is the first warning Paul gives the Colossians. He warns them not to give in to the persuasive but deceptive speech of the false teachers. Truth and persuasion do not always correlate. Error can persuade. The purpose of the argument is to persuade you of something that is false, to make it sound like the truth. In verse 23, he says, ... ***These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom***. That's why they deceive.

AN APPLICATION—One has to have the full truth and a complete commitment to that truth to not be deceived. Jesus said, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me"* (John 14:6). No one!! No matter when they lived, no matter where they lived!! Whether the 700s, the 1300s, Hinduism in India, Buddhism in Japan, Judaism in Israel...

Verse 5—*For even though I am absent in body*—he was not physically with them
—*nevertheless I am with you in spirit*—Paul and the Colossian believers are fellow members of the body of Christ. He felt a spiritual oneness with them. And as an apostle, Paul had the spiritual authority from God to write instructions and commands to them. [From the context we know he does not mean his body is one place and his spirit another, such as the Apostle John when he received the visions of Revelation 1.]

—*rejoicing to see your [good discipline* (one word)]—orderly manner, like disciplined soldiers

—*and the stability* [being firm in] *of your faith in Christ*—They are firmly grounded in their salvation. But they need encouragement to grow and to withstand the false teaching.

Verse 6—*Therefore*—that is, all we've studied so far in Colossians

—*as you have received*—*having been firmly rooted* (v. 7). Remember what you believed about Christ when you received Him as your Savior.

—*Christ Jesus the Lord*—His deity ("Christ"), His humanity ("Jesus"), and His sovereignty ("Lord").

—*so walk in Him*—their present conduct should conform to the doctrine taught to them at the beginning, the doctrine they had committed themselves to at conversion. For Paul, there is no gap between believing and behaving. They are conjoined (like Siamese twins).

Verse 7—Four participles describe the walk with Christ:

—(1) **having been [firmly rooted]** (one word)—Gk. perfect tense means “once-for-all experience,” that is, being permanently rooted in Christ at salvation.

—(2) **and now being built up in Him**—Gk. present tense, a continual process, maturing in Christ

—(3) **and [being] established in your faith, just as you were instructed**—Gk. present tense, a continual process. *Established* means “to prove, to confirm, to be true and certain”

—(4) **and overflowing with gratitude**—“gratitude” is a phrase Paul uses 26 times. Gk. present tense, a continual process. Not simply grateful, but *overflowing gratitude*, like a river overflows its banks. *Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name* (Heb 13:15).

AN APPLICATION—“Gratitude is one of the keys to the spiritual life. It may imply that those who lack a deep sense of thankfulness to God are especially vulnerable to doubt and spiritual delusion” (EBC).

AN APPLICATION—Christ Jesus is Lord of all, in both creation and redemption (1:15-20), and He is the center of God’s mystery (1:27; 2:2). So the readers are admonished to conduct their lives as those who have been incorporated into Christ, having been securely rooted in Him. They are to so live their lives, overflowing with thanksgiving, grateful to God for all He has done. Our way of life and thoughts should conform continually to His teaching.

Verse 8—**See to it**—Gk. “to take responsibility for causing something to happen,” be on your guard.

—**that no one takes you captive**—to take control of. It depicts the false teachers as “men-stealers” wishing to entrap the Colossians and drag them away into spiritual enslavement (EBC).

—**through philosophy**—the word means “love of wisdom.” It is not a condemnation of all philosophy, but of the philosophy described in the next words...

—**and empty deception**—“foolish, stupid,” to cause someone to have misleading or erroneous views concerning the truth, to mislead with foolish words

—**according to the tradition of men**—customs or beliefs taught as sacred, but are created by men

—**according to the elementary principles of the world**—simple elements of the world that are passing away when the world is destroyed. Things that glorify created things rather than the Creator (Romans 1:17f).

AN APPLICATION—For example, some false teachers today promote so-called “scientific facts” that contradict Scripture, such as BioLogos. Their mission statement says, “BioLogos presents evolution as God’s means of creation, so that the Church may celebrate and the world may see the harmony between science and biblical faith” (biologos.org). That compromises the clear teaching of the Bible on creation. For example, if evolution is what God used for creation, then:

- The animals do not always reproduce **after their kind** (Genesis 1:21).
- God’s creating work was not **completed** (Genesis 2:1).
- It’s not true that **the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground** (Genesis 2:7).
- Moses was wrong when he said, **in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them** (Exodus 20:11).

- Jesus was wrong when He said, ***Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE*** (Matthew 19:4).

The theistic evolution conclusions of BioLogos contradict direct statements given in the Bible. The Bible says, *through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin* (Romans 5:12; 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:21). The Bible says death followed sin, as a curse on creation. But according to theistic evolution, death existed for millions of years before Adam and Eve evolved and is not a result of sin.

—rather than according to Christ—Who is the Creator of it all. *For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible... All things have been created through Him and for Him* (Colossians 1:16). Christ did not need, want, or use evolution to create anything!!

Verse 9—For in Him—This is the most definitive statement of Christ’s deity in the epistles. **In Him—**Jesus Christ, the One Paul has been talking about so far. The fullness of God does not dwell anywhere else, except in Christ alone.

—all the fullness of Deity—Jesus has **all** the fullness of God, not just part of it, but it also means “entire, whole, total.” “Fullness” is emphasis on completeness, full measure, all that is God. Jesus is 100% God (John 1:1). There is no other part of God that He does not have.

—dwells [present tense, continuously lives, resides] **in bodily form** [physical]—He will forever be the God-Man. Jesus is 100% human (John 1:14). He now has a resurrected eternal human body.

AN APPLICATION—The Gnostics taught a form of philosophic dualism, believing that spirit was good and matter was evil. So it was unthinkable to them that God would take on a human, physical body.

AN APPLICATION—This should remind us of Philippians 2:6-9.

- Jesus, in His preincarnate state: *who, although He existed in the form of God* [very nature, the essence, of God, internal and external spiritual form], *did not regard equality with God* [describes the manner of existence—One’s essential nature can remain unchanged (*form*) though the manner in which that nature is expressed can vary greatly through changing times and circumstances], *a thing to be grasped* [to be held onto—He did not lose any of His deity, it was impossible for Him to not be God]—
- Jesus in His incarnation: *but [He] emptied Himself* [to eliminate the privileges or prerogatives associated with such status or rank, to divest oneself of position, to lay aside], *taking the form of a bond-servant* [does not imply an exchange but rather an addition, emphasizing a humbling of Himself], *and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man* [implies that even though Christ became a genuine man, there were certain respects in which He was not absolutely like the other men—the absence of the sin nature, for example], *He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* God could not die. Jesus had to become human so He could die to satisfy God’s justice as payment for our sins.

AN APPLICATION—Christ did not surrender His deity at His incarnation, and He did not give up His humanity at His resurrection. Can we understand how this is possible? No. It’s like time/eternity, sovereignty/free will. We can understand both parts independently but cannot put them together. They seem like opposites to us because we do not have enough information to understand how both things are true.

Verse 10—and in Him you have been made complete—are made full, that is, share in His fulness (John 1:16). Calvin wrote, it “does not mean that the perfection of Christ is transfused into us, but that there are in Him resources from which we may be filled, that nothing be wanting in us.” In our union with Christ, our every spiritual need is fully met.

AN APPLICATION—*His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us...* (2 Peter 1:3). There is nothing to add to what we have in Christ—no traditions, works, beliefs, authorities, papal bulls, private “words” from God, etc. Again we see: Jesus+ nothing.

—**and He is the head over all rule and authority**—all the powers of authority in the physical world and the spiritual world are under the lordship of Christ. NOTICE: although Christ is here described as Head, the powers and authorities are NOT called His body—that distinction is reserved for God’s people.

B. Exalted over Legalism, 2:11-17

Verse 11—and in Him you were also circumcised—In Christ, believers have true circumcision, that is, the reality of which was symbolized by Mosaic physical circumcision. [The Colossian believers were primarily Gentiles, but there must have been some Jewish influence.]

AN APPLICATION—Under the Law, every Jewish boy on the eighth day after his birth (Lev 12:2-3) was circumcised, the sign that he belonged to the covenant nation (Gen 17:10-14). Membership in the covenant community, however, did not guarantee individual salvation (Rom 2:25, 28).

AN APPLICATION—Even the Old Testament described a circumcision of the heart (Deut 30:6; Jer 4:4). Paul said, *...circumcision is that which is of the heart* (Rom 2:29). God was always concerned with the heart, not with the physical rite. This brings us back to the idea that physical acts have no spiritual value. It’s the relationship with Christ that is of spiritual value.

—**a circumcision made without hands**—the Mosaic circumcision was done with physical hands, but in Christ, the circumcision is spiritual, without physical hands. It is a wholly divide creation.

—**in the removal** [“putting off”] **of the body** [unlike a piece of the body in the Mosaic circumcision] **of the flesh**—i.e., the sin nature, it’s a spiritual removal. Paul wrote, *We are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh* (Phil 3:3). We still have the sin nature, until we die, but its power over us has been removed, put off.

—**by the circumcision of Christ**—Having the true spiritual circumcision in Christ, there is no need for the physical circumcision of Judaism, which was a shadow of the true circumcision in Christ (v. 17).

AN APPLICATION—Just as in physical circumcision, that part of the body cannot be re-attached, so in spiritual circumcision, the sin nature cannot replace or eliminate your new nature in Christ. It is a circumcision that cannot be reversed. In Christ, a believer is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). A believer is eternally secure in their salvation.

Verse 12—having been—Gk. aorist, “accomplished fact”

—**buried** [Gk. “to bury together with” used figuratively, sometimes with a simile, ‘we were, so to speak, buried with Him’] **with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him**—This co-burial and co-resurrection is pictured in baptism. In water baptism, immersion portrays burial with Christ, and coming out of the water depicts the resurrection.

— **through faith**—salvation is by faith, Paul is not saying here that we must be physically baptized. He is using it figuratively to describe our salvation experience.

—**in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead**—Buried and raised with Christ conveys the thought not just of burying the old way of life but rising to a new kind of life, as Christ rose to a new kind of life, the glory of being the Son of God.

Verse 13—When you were dead [“separation” not annihilation] **in your transgressions**—the actual sins a person commits. *You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest* (Eph 2:1-3). A spiritually dead person is unable to respond to spiritual stimuli, unable to respond to God. The Bible and spiritual truth make no sense to them.

—**and the uncircumcision of your flesh**—the sin nature each person has

—**He made you alive together with Him**—the same power that raised Christ from the dead is the power that resurrects believing sinners to spiritual life.

—**having forgiven us all our transgressions**—the Greek form of *charisamenos*—“grace,” divine grace is the root principle in forgiveness. Ephesians 1:7 says, *in Him we have...the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace*. It’s not according to how much grace we need—it’s according to the riches of His grace. No matter how many sins we have, the riches of God’s grace is more than enough.

AN APPLICATION—What are the characteristics of God’s forgiveness?

1. It is gracious. It is not earned, but is a free gift (Rom 3:24; Titus 3:4-7).
2. It is complete (Eph 1:7; Rom 5:20; 1 John 2:12).
3. It is eager to forgive (Ezek 18:23; 33:11; Ps 86:5).
4. It is certain (Acts 26:18).
5. It is unequalled. *Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity...* (Mic 7:18).
6. It is motivating. *forgiving each other, just as God in Christ has also forgiven you* (Eph 4:32).

Verse 14—having canceled out—Gk. “to wipe off, to cause something to cease by obliterating the evidence, to do away with.”

—**the certificate of debt consisting of decrees** [“legal demands”] **against us** [God’s law had a valid claim on us], **which was hostile to us** [it stood as an obstacle in our way]—Romans 3:20 reads, *through the Law comes the knowledge of sin*. Since people cannot keep the Law, it is like a certificate of indebtedness to God. It makes us aware of our sin. For example, in Romans 7:7, Paul said he was not aware that coveting was a sin until the Law told him it was a sin.

—**and He has taken it out of the way**—Gk. perfect indicative, emphasizing abiding results, i.e., removed permanently, removed so that its claims against us can never again alienate us from God.

—**having nailed it to the cross**—When Jesus died, He had the words “King of the Jews.” Paul is saying here that it’s like when Jesus died, the words nailed above Him read, “The Debt Is Paid.”

Verse 15—When He had disarmed [Gk. “stripped off” the weapons] **the rulers and authorities**—these would be the hostile supernatural powers, the hierarchy of evil, the spiritual forces of this world that are in rebellion against God (Rom 8:37-39; Eph 6:12; Heb 2:14).

—**He made a public display of them**—a picture of the conqueror riding at the front, and the defeated people following behind him.

—**having triumphed over them through Him**—To unbelievers, the cross appears as an instrument of death, but Paul presents it as Christ’s chariot of victory. Christ, the crucified, risen Lord of all, reigns supreme in the universe. To be united with Him is to be free from Satan’s dominion. That adds up to complete salvation with complete forgiveness and triumph.

Verse 16—Therefore—based on your position in Christ, and your walk with Him and that He triumphed and disarmed rulers and authorities who make laws about food and days.....

—**no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day** [possibly a Jewish influence]—Christians are free from the Law’s legalistic requirements. God does not condemn those who eat everything. God will not condemn you for eating bacon!! Similarly, there is no spiritual value to what you do NOT eat, as in fasting (Rom 14:1-12; 1 Tim 4:3). In our age, every day is a feast, every day is holy, an unbroken Sabbath—set apart for worship of Christ.

AN APPLICATION—Rules about food and religious days could originate with Judaism or pagan religions. But the results are the same. They seek to undermine the believer’s freedom in Christ. Paul goes on to say that these things have **the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence** (v. 23). For example, going to church on Sunday as a law, eating fish on Friday as a law, fasting for lent as a law—all have no spiritual value against fleshly indulgence. They do nothing to make you not lust. For example, a believer asked me to pray and fast over their situation. I prayed—but what would fasting mean? Did it mean that I was unwilling to sacrifice in my prayer by fasting? That those prayers were more likely to be heard and answered than my simple prayer? James wrote that the *prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much* (James 5:16). He said nothing about fasting or other physical treatments of the body accomplishing anything.

Verse 17—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come—what the Old Testament foreshadowed, Christ fulfilled (Matt 5:17; Rom 8:3-4). It was an anticipation of what Christ is and would do.

—**but the substance belongs to Christ**—Once a person finds Christ, they no longer need to follow the old shadow. For example, the Law said to not commit adultery (Ex 20:14). Jesus said to not lust (Matt 5:27-28). Adultery in the Law was a foreshadow of lust. If you commit adultery, you lust. As a believer, if you do not lust, you do not have to worry about not committing adultery.

AN APPLICATION—We might think the opposite. Because the Law is physical, it is the substance, and the things of Christ are the shadow. But it’s exactly the opposite because sin originates in the heart. Jesus said, *“But the things that proceed out of the mouth come*

from the heart, and those defile the man” (Matt 15:18). So the substance is what is in the heart. The physical is a shadow of what is in the heart. If the heart is right with Christ, then the physical won’t be a problem.

C. Exalted over Mystical Teaching, 2:18-19

Verse 18—Let no one keep defrauding [deprive of a reward; to disqualify,” lit. “condemn”] **you of your prize**—of your rewards in heaven (1 Cor 3:10-15) but also of your reward of the spiritual life while still on earth, such as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). These heretics seek to turn believers away from faithful service to Christ. To set one on the wrong path, away from Christ rather than toward Him.

—Lit. “Let no one deny your claim to be a Christian.” This is exactly what legalism and mysticism do. They usually have a false humility, claiming their experience is true spirituality, while downplaying anyone who bases their spirituality on what the Bible says.

—**by delighting** [“to enjoy”] **in self-abasement** [“humility”]—a false humility, i.e., being proud of being humble!! Just appearing to be humble but really being proud. Like the Pharisees, *they do all their deeds to be noticed by men, but they are like whitewashed tombs...outwardly appear righteous to men, but inward you are full of hypocrisy* (Matt 23:5, 27-28).

—**and the worship of the angels**—which Scripture forbids (Rev 19:10; 22:8-9; see also Matt 4:10). Legalism itself is a teaching inspired by fallen angels (1 Tim 4:1), i.e., Satan and his demons. This denies the truth that *there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus* (1 Tim 2:5).

—**taking his stand** [“harps,” i.e., “to talk or write persistently and tediously”] **on visions he has seen**—allegedly or imaginatively or even actually seeing visions, but not from God.

—**inflated** [“to puff up,” “to be haughty, and despise another person”]

—**without cause by his fleshly mind**—[“by his sinful thoughts”]. Mysticism is the pursuit of a deeper or highly subjective religious experience. It looks for truth internally, weighing feelings, intuition, and other internal sensations more heavily than objective external data, such as the Bible.

—Jeremiah wrote of these during his days: *...the prophets have said who prophesy falsely in My name, saying, “I had a dream!”...the deception of their own heart, who intend to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they relate to one another...The prophet who has a dream may relate his dream, but let him who has My Word speak My Word in truth...I am against those who have prophesied false dreams,” declares the Lord, “...and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting; yet I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit,” declares the Lord (Jeremiah 23:25-32).*

AN APPLICATION—Today, this brand of mysticism is most commonly seen in the charismatic movement, where Scripture is often a distant second in importance to visions and revelations. In the 1500s, some believing in mysticism were given the privilege of an interview with Martin Luther. They cried out, “The Spirit, the Spirit!” Luther thundered, “I slap your spirit on the snout. I will not follow where your spirit leads.” Do not be intimidated by those who would make something (like an experience) other than knowing Christ through His Word a requirement for Spiritual maturity.

Verse 19—and not holding fast to the head—“holding fast” is one word, meaning to hold on to, to seize. There is always a tendency in human nature to shift the focus from Christ to experience!!! This will be our tendency, even if we don’t want it to be.

—**from whom the entire body** [the church], **being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God**—Each believer has a

vital connection with Christ the Head (1:18). Without this contact with Christ, the heretics cut themselves off from the source of life for God's people and cannot possibly contribute to their growth.

AN APPLICATION—The *growth which is from God* is only available as the body is *holding fast to the head* (Jesus Christ). The false teacher who does not depend on the Head has no contact with the source of life and nourishment, and does not belong to the body. Imagine a decapitated body. What is it going to do? What is its value? NOTHING!! Rather than contact with the Head, they rely on their visions, their dreams, their “special knowledge,” their experiences, etc.

D. Exalted over Asceticism, 2:20-23

Verse 20—*If* [“since”] ***you have died*** [Gk aorist=one time action, the believer's conversion] ***with Christ to the elementary principles of the world***—a believer is severed from ordering our life by ascetic rules. We are no longer obligated (by fleshly inclinations) to obey those originating from our sin nature, i.e., getting spiritual value out of physical actions. Saying a rosary, for example. Having perfect attendance at Sunday school (a cause for “spiritual” pride in past years).

—***why, as if you were living in the world*** (living like an unbeliever—giving value to worldly things), ***do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,***

Verse 21—***“Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!”***—to gain righteousness through self-denial. They are all negative and there are no exceptions. The prohibitions increase from not handling to not even touching. When challenged by Satan, Eve exaggerated God's command into “...*neither shall you touch it, lest you die*” (Gen 3:3).

AN APPLICATION—Jesus said, “*Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?*” (Thus He declared all foods clean.) *And He was saying, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts...”* (Mark 7:18-23).

AN APPLICATION—Believers must beware of mixing their Christian faith with such alluring things as yoga, transcendental meditation, Oriental mysticism (acupuncture, for example), horoscopes, and the like. We must also beware of ‘deeper life’ teachers who offer a system for victory and fullness, “hearing” words of God, experiencing tongues, etc. that bypass devotion to Jesus Christ. Genuine Christians can be deceived by false teaching, even teaching concerning Christ. Remember, Satan mis-used God's words to Eve, and he mis-used God's words in his temptation of Jesus.

Verse 22—(***which all refer to things destined to perish with use***)—As Jesus said, “*whatever goes into the man from outside...[goes] into his stomach, and is eliminated*” (Mark 7:18-23). One interpretation's conclusion is that if you do not handle, taste, or touch, logically, you eventually avoid everything, and there is nothing left. Everything perishes. Jesus said that *treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal...* (Matt 6:19). They are not eternal. They have been ***destined*** by God ***to perish***. Only things of God are eternal.

—***in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?***—man-made rules, often taken out of context from God's Law.

Verse 23—*These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence*—Paul is saying here that these physical rules may seem to be expressions of devotion to God, or humility, however, they actually fail to help one grow spiritually.

AN APPLICATION—Of course, this does not mean that once we are in Christ everything is permissible. That would be contrary to the very nature of the new life in Christ. It does mean, however, that the controls of the Christian life spring from within. Indwelt by the Spirit, we walk by the Spirit (not keep physical laws), and thus do not carry out the desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16). It's a heart issue.

AN APPLICATION—These laws are inadequate for three reasons: (1) the things prohibited were destined to perish through normal usage, (2) the laws were of human origin, and (3) they do not solve the real problem: the desires of the flesh. Asceticism treats the body as an evil thing and despises the natural order which God has ordained. The right course is to dedicate the body to God for fruitful service (Romans 12:1).

IV. The Exalted Calling, 3:1-4:6

A. The Certainties of Our Calling, 3:1-4

Verse 1—*Therefore*—because we *have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world* (2:20)

—*if* [Gk. first class condition, “since”] ***you have been raised up*** [aorist tense, past act with ongoing results] ***with Christ***—now he says we have been raised up with Christ to a new life in Him (as He was raised to a new life at His resurrection, 2:13).

—***keep seeking the things above***—Gk. present imperative, continuing action—“keep on seeking.” This is a direct command from Paul. The Bible is the only reliable source of knowledge about the character of God and the values of heaven.

AN APPLICATION—Continuous ongoing effort is required. This is not something that will occur naturally. Our affection to one (the earth) will proportionably weaken our affection to the other (heaven), and vice versa. We must not only *seek* heaven, we must also *think* heaven. The believer will no longer live as if this world was all that mattered. We will see this world against the background of the larger world of eternity.

—***where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God***—the place of supreme privilege and divine authority (Heb 2:14-15).

Verse 2—*Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth*—it's a choice you make—fix your eyes on what is unseen, not on what is seen. What is seen is temporary. What is unseen is eternal (2 Cor 4:18). To be preoccupied with Christ's purposes, plans, provisions, and power. It's like to view everything through the eyeglasses that are Christ.

Verse 3—*For you have died*—The wages of sin is death, but by union with Jesus, we die the required death in Him, thus the penalty is paid, and sin can never claim us again. So we have died to sin in the sense of paying its penalty. Its presence and power still affect us, but it cannot condemn us.

—***and your life is hidden with Christ in God***—concealment but also safety. We belong in a very real and profound sense to the invisible spiritual [but rational, truth, real] realm [but

not a mystical (symbolic, esoteric, or allegorical) realm]. Unbelievers cannot grasp a spiritual concept. It is foolishness to them (1 Cor 2:14). Today, it is in your heart, but one day it will be fully shown, *revealed with Him in glory* (v. 4).

Verse 4—*When* [lit. “whenever”] ***Christ, who is our life***—what today is hidden with Christ in God (v. 3)

—***is revealed*** [lit. “open display”]—probably referring to the Rapture

—***then you also will be revealed*** [lit. “open display”] ***with Him in glory***—we will be changed, in a twinkling moment, into our eternal, glorified bodies (1 Thess 4:15f). Or this could refer to the Second Coming, when we, in our glorified bodies, will return with Jesus (Rev 19).

AN APPLICATION—Believers should look **upward** to Christ’s reign over them in heaven and also look **forward** to His return for them in the clouds. In Colossians there is an “already—not yet” tension. We are already saved, but not yet glorified.

B. The Characteristics of Our Calling, 3:5–4:6

1. In Everyday Life, 3:5–17

Verse 5—*Therefore*—because our minds are seeking things above, in practice, put away the things of the old life which springs from our earthly sin nature, for example, as the new believers in Ephesus did. “...*the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified...and many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of all...*” (Acts 19:17-19).

AN APPLICATION—Your sin nature cannot do anything righteous in God’s eyes (Romans 3:10, *There is none righteous*), and your new nature in Christ cannot sin. Hence the struggle between the two natures is the normal Christian life (Romans 7). Your sin nature is never reformed and is always at 100%. You lose it when you die.

AN APPLICATION—To use man-made rules or religions do not accomplish this because (1) laws attack the problem from the outside, and Jesus said morality begins in the heart (Matt 15:18) and (2) man-made rules and religions exist to produce morality, but Paul says here that if your heart is right with God, the change in morality will be the fruit of that new life.

—***consider*** [“to cease completely from activity,” “to stop completely”] ***the members of your earthly body***—what members of your body? Your eyes. Your ears. Your stomach. Your thinking. Your emotions. Your intellect.....

—***as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed*** [lit. “greed” includes entire disregard of the rights of others, the assumption that all other persons and things exist for one’s own benefit]

—***which amounts to idolatry***—to slay the evil passions, desires, and practices that live in our sin nature, that make use of our bodies, and then attack us through them. Obeying them is like bowing down to an idol.

AN APPLICATION—Most likely, a Christian will think they do not practice idolatry—yet, here Paul says that if you continue to practice evil immorality, evil passions, evil desires and greed, that *amounts to idolatry!!*

There are two reasons to put off this immorality:

(1) Verse 6—*For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come* [lit. “comes”] ***upon the sons of disobedience***—*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness* (Rom 1:18). The wrath of God, His condemnation because of sin, today is abiding on unbelievers (John 3:36). They are alive but condemned, like a prisoner on death row. Also, some of them, *God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity...God gave them over to degrading passions...God gave them over to a depraved mind* (Rom 1:23-31). Also, the wrath of God will come upon the evil in the Tribulation (Rom 2:5; 2 Thess 1:7-9; Rev 5–19).

AN APPLICATION—*But there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* (Rom 8:1). *For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Thess 5:9). Don’t live like the condemned. Live like the saved!

(2) Verses 7-8—*and in them you also once walked* [what they did], ***when you were living*** [their attitudes and feelings] ***in them***—these are past tense. This isn’t you any more. Read Ephesians 2:1-5.

—***But now you also, put them all aside***—now a command to not practice them. Some sins are practiced because of bad habits. A person needs to be diligent to not do them.

AN APPLICATION—Did sin give you real pleasure? Did you find solid satisfaction in it? Sin never gives what it promises to give, yet it is addictive. It is “passing pleasures” (Heb 11:25). Now, as a believer, don’t believe sin’s lie and be sucked back into living that way. You became a believer because sin did not live up to its promise of life. And it still doesn’t!!

These are sins of speech committed directly against other people:

—***anger*** (attitude of hostility), ***wrath*** (verbal outburst of evil), ***malice*** (desire to hurt one’s neighbor)—three generations of evil: anger begets wrath which begets malice.

—***slander*** (insulting, injurious, malicious speech), ***and abusive*** (filthy, disgraceful) ***speech from your mouth***.

Verse 9a—*Do not lie to one another* (deceptive, distorting, untruthful speech). It’s a command. Do not lie!! If it is not the truth, it is a lie. A lie is an intent to deceive. You may withhold the truth, as long as the intent is to reveal the truth (a surprise party, for example).

AN APPLICATION—Jesus said of Satan, *“He...does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies”* (John 8:44). Any lie you tell, you are speaking from Satan. Saying Santa Claus is real is a lie. Saying the clothing on a woman looks good when it doesn’t is a lie. Making evil things at Halloween look like fun is lying about evil. There are no “white lies.” Exaggerations (to represent something as being larger, greater, better, or worse than it really is) are lies. Lying in our society, whether in word or videos, is at an all-time high. Lying is not only accepted, it’s not considered wrong any more. “Fake news” is accepted by many.

Verses 9b–10—*since you laid aside* [lit. “to put off” like old clothes] ***the old self with its evil practices***—who you were before you accepted Christ. Talking and living like an unbeliever. The old self (sin nature) is with us until we die. But we don’t have to obey its desires.

—**and have put on the new self**—another clothing example. As you learn the Bible, you are “*transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Rom 12:1-2). A new believer cannot be expected to know and live the same as a mature believer. You learn, you grow. You don’t learn, you don’t grow.

—**who is being renewed**—present tense, continuous process, i.e., sanctification, “becoming new, becoming different.”

—**to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him**—

AN APPLICATION—If a person does not have the true knowledge of Christ...according to the One who created him, but instead believes in theistic evolution, for example, then growth is cut off. True knowledge ➡ image of the One/Christ ➡ who created us. If you do not think Christ is the Creator (Col 1), then you do not have the true knowledge of Him.

AN APPLICATION—True knowledge of Christ comes from the observation, interpretation, and application of what the Bible says. But beware because Satan misused God’s Word both with Eve and Jesus. It’s a constant tension to not bring our preconceived ideas to the Word of God. For example, if you believe the church replaced Israel, then you will read all the promises God made to Israel as promises made to the church. Many Christians are disillusioned, claiming promises God never made to them. For example, “I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope” (Jer 29:11). This was a promise God made to Israel not to Christians in America!! But Christians claim this promise and feel God let them down because they have calamity.

AN APPLICATION—Paul also wrote, *Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day* (2 Cor 4:16-17). Our physical bodies are deteriorating, but our spiritual bodies are being made new every day, maturing in Christ. [Too sad is an aging person who has quit growing spiritually!!] Paul continues, *For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison. As you age, you will find new opportunities to live for Christ. A teenager has different ones than an elementary-age child. A young adult has different ones than a teenager. A grandmother has different ones than a mother. A widow has different ones than someone who is married. We mature as a believer as we are obedient to God in these opportunities in life. Godly grandparents can have a huge spiritual impact in their grandchildren’s lives. Verne Fuder (from Holland) had cancer and was soon going to die. He told us that he knew people he had witnessed to over the years were watching him, how he died, and perhaps his greatest testimony would be in those last few moments of life, as Jesus ministered to the thief on the cross, dying right next to Him.*

Verse 11—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew—national distinctions. The Mosaic Law, given by God, was full of distinctions. God gave them and God removed them (Eph 2:11-22).

AN APPLICATION—Israel was a nation with distinctions to separate them from the other nations in the world. Today, our distinction is individual and spiritual and moral. As individual believers, we are not to be like the world morally. Israel had a national (as well as individual) accountability. In our age, there is no group accountability. It is all individual. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that **each one** may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10).

—**circumcised and uncircumcised**—religious distinctions (e.g., Baptist vs. Bible church)
—**barbarian, Scythian**—cultural distinctions (e.g., teenage vs. adult)
—**slave and freeman**—economic distinctions. Paul told Philemon to view Onesimus, his runaway slave, “no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother” (Phile 16).
—**but Christ is all, and in all**—all believers in Christ are truly equal. Paul is not more of a Christian than you or I am. There are distinctions between people, but there are no distinctions in Christ. A Jew comes by faith, just as a Gentile does. A Romanian comes to Christ by faith, just as an American does. A rich person comes to Christ by faith, just as a poor person does.

Verses 12-17—So—Therefore, as a consequence, **as those who have been**—past tense,

(1) **chosen of God**—(Rom 8:33; Titus 1:1)—...*He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...* (Eph 1:4). Who you are affects how you behave. If you are chosen to be a queen, you don’t go home and live life as you used to do.

(2) **holy and**—“separated to God” (Col 1:2)

(3) **beloved**—Rom 5:8; 1 John 4:9-11, 19

—**put on**—like putting on clothes. A believer has laid aside the old self, but also needs to put on the characteristics of the new self.

—**a heart of compassion**—“tender sympathy,” sensitivity to those suffering and in need

—**kindness**—benevolence in action, thoughtful interpersonal dealings

—**humility**—dependence on God, not independence (pride) from God.

—**gentleness**—not behaving harshly or arrogantly but with consideration for others

—**patience**—self-restraint in the face of provocation—the next two qualities expand on the thought of patience

—**bearing with one another**—lit. “put up with each other,” enduring discomfort

—**forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you**—complaint implies blame. Forgiving doesn’t negate the complaint. It acknowledges the complaint—but does not hold it against the person. Forgiveness is a characteristic among believers, as it is characteristic of the Father toward us. An unbeliever does not even think about God forgiving them.

—**Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond** [holds together, like glue] **of unity**—It’s like these virtues are the book, and love is the cover. *Agape* love is larger than any one of the other virtues, in fact, it is larger than all of them combined. “But now faith, hope, love...but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13).

AN APPLICATION—*agape* love is giving without reciprocity. *For God so loved the world that He gave...* (John 3:16). The world defines love as receiving. People are disappointed in love because they want to be loved, to receive it. God defines love as giving. There is no disappointment in giving, expecting nothing in return.

AN APPLICATION—These virtues are the fruit of love. Attempting to practice these virtues apart from love is legalism. A parent makes man-made rules about kindness, for example, to try to legalistically keep their child from doing an unkind action, but it will not make the child a “kind child.”

—**Let the peace of Christ rule** [used of an umpire’s decision] **in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body**—This is peace within, not peace with the world. It’s what is going on in your heart, where Christ lives. *“peace of God...shall guard your hearts*

and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:7). When making a decision, does it preserve that oneness with the Lord? It's one of the greatest deterrents to sin in a believer's life. Sin offends Christ, with whom we are at peace, and thereby shatters our rest in our heart.

—**be thankful**—not complaining. Being thankful is a key to the other virtues and a constant theme in Colossians (1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:15, 16, 17; 4:2). The Greek denotes gratitude that finds outward expression in thanksgiving. By mentioning what God has done, other Christians are encouraged to praise Him also (2 Cor 1:11; 4:15).

AN APPLICATION—Ingratitude marks unbelievers...*though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened* (Rom 1:20-21).

—**Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you**—study, meditate, apply the Word, so Christ's words become part of your nature, so the virtues will spring forth naturally. Let the Word be at home in your life. If the tree is healthy, the fruit will be lush and abundant. "Richly" can be translated "extravagantly rich." The "word of Christ" is **a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him** (3:10). The truths of Scripture should permeate every aspect of the believer's life and govern every thought, word, and deed. To be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:19–6:9) is to be controlled by His Word.

—**with all wisdom teaching**—imparting positive truth of Scripture

—**and admonishing one another**—warning of the consequences of their behavior

—**with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God**—giving glory to God in various kinds of songs. King David was constantly expressing his praise to God through the Psalms that he wrote, many of which were to be sung by the people.

AN APPLICATION—I cannot go by this without mentioning that what we sing should be the truth from Scripture. Many sing songs based on the Psalms, which make promises God made to Israel, not to us. But Christians think they are "biblical" because they quote the Bible. For example, "More Precious than Silver" is sung about Jesus, however, it is from Proverbs 3:13-15, which is talking about wisdom being more precious than silver, "and nothing you desire compares with her." Of course, replacement theology teaches the church replaced Israel, so they teach it is legitimate to claim all Israel's promises. Or it might be something that sounds good, but is not only not in the Bible but contrary to the Bible—such as "What a Friend we Have in Jesus." Nowhere in Scripture is Jesus called our friend. Jesus calls some His friends, like Abraham (James 2:23), but Jesus is not "our" friend—He is our God!!!

—**Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus**—for His glory. "The name of Christ hallows and ennobles all work. Nothing can be so small but this will make it great, nor so monotonous and tame but this will make it beautiful and fresh" (EBC).

—**giving thanks through Him to God the Father**—Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16). How do you do something in the name of the Lord Jesus? By doing it with thanksgiving rather than complaining.

AN APPLICATION—We don't need to be thankful for everything, but we can be thankful in everything. Ask yourself what you can be thankful for in the midst of whatever you are doing. I don't like to clean, but I am thankful for my house. I am thankful for my cleaning

products. I'm thankful when my vacuum works. I'm thankful for the family who makes the mess: *"where no oxen are, the manager is clean, but much increase comes by the strength of the ox"* (Prov 14:4).

2. In the Home, 3:18-21

Verse 18—Wives, be subject to your husbands—A wife is to defer to, i.e., be willing to take second place to, her husband. Paul gives two reasons: (1) the order of creation, with Adam created as the head and Eve as the helper (1 Tim 2:13). [Belief in evolution negates the role distinctions God made in creation.] And (2) the order within the Godhead, Christ submits to the Father (1 Cor 11:3).

—**as is fitting in the Lord**—she is not obligated to follow her husband's leadership if it conflicts with specific scriptural commands. For example, if the phone rings, and he tells her to say he's not there, when he is there, she is not obligated to lie.

AN APPLICATION—A wife's submission is never to be forced on her by a demanding husband. It is to be voluntary by the wife, conscious that her home (like any other institution) must have a head. Being subject to your husband out of obedience to God comes with reward in the next life!! You do it not because he is worthy, but because God is worthy, and it's Him we worship when we obey.

Verse 19—Husbands, love your wives—*agape* (non-reciprocal love, that gives, does not demand to receive). This love protects her, as Christ loves the church (Eph 5:22-28).

—**and do not be embittered against them**—which happens when a husband demands absolute authority over her. Lit. to have bitter resentment or hatred toward someone else, do not be bitterly hateful toward your wife. Avoidance of bitterness is an expression of obedience to the commandment to love.

Verse 20—Children, be obedient to your parents—first, notice children obey parents, wives do not obey husbands. Parents have an authority husbands do not have. "be obedient" is the present tense, indicating it is to be habitual, to continue to be.

— **in all things**—of course, Paul is here talking about Christian homes.

—**for this is well-pleasing to the Lord**—it does not depend on the parents' character. It's pleasing to God, and He will one day reward it in heaven. God made families with this hierarchy [again, evolution negates the order God created].

AN APPLICATION—*tekna* ("children") is not limited to any specific age group, but refers to any child still living in the home and under parental guidance. "Obeying" is different than "Honor your father and your mother" in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:12). "Honor" means to not speak evil of them and seems to have a financial obligation for the care of parents by older children (Matt 15:3-6; 1 Tim 5:3, 17; 6:1).

Verse 21—Fathers, do not exasperate your children—lit. "to make resentful, to make someone bitter," always nagging and fault-finding—the opposite of encouragement.

—**so that they will not lose heart**—discouraged. Feeling it is impossible for them to please the parent. Ephesians 6:4 says, children should be brought up "in the training and instruction of the Lord."

AN APPLICATION—Some ways parents exasperate children:

- Overprotection—never allowing their children liberty, not trusting them. Provide guidelines, but not a noose that strangles them.

- Showing favoritism—comparing a child unfavorably to siblings or classmates.
- Depreciating their worth—communicating that the child is not significant by not listening, for example.
- Setting unrealistic goals—never rewarding them or never letting them feel they have succeeded. Nothing is enough.
- Failing to show affection—communicate love both verbally and physically hug them.
- Lack of standards—the flip side of overprotection, children are left on their own, and not handling that kind of freedom, they feel insecure and unloved.
- Criticism—the child learns to condemn him or herself and find fault with others. They learn to live with a continual expectation of impending doom.
- Neglect—a parent should be involved in the children’s lives. [MacArthur, “Colossians”]

Inserted: “Parenting Adult Children Who Rebel Against Biblical Christianity” by Dave DeWitt.

Parenting Adult Children Who Rebel Against Biblical Christianity

By Dave DeWitt

In this paper,

- I am defining “adult children” as those living outside of the parents’ home.
- I am defining “children who rebel” as either (1) those who have left a biblical Christian faith (as, for example, following atheism, Islam, Mormonism, or the Emergent Church) or (2) those who claim to be Christians but are living in unrepentant sin (as, for example, unrepentantly practicing cohabitation, homosexuality, lying, or blasphemy).

Statistics About Adult Children Who Leave the Faith

To my knowledge, there is no research directly dealing with the question, “Why do adult children leave the faith of their **parents**?” But there is a lot of research dealing with the question, “Why do young people leave the **church**?” Maybe we are more interested in the church, or we think they are the same. They are, of course, not the same, but there is significant overlap. There are two questions the research considers: (1) How many are leaving? and (2) Why?

(1) How many (what percent of) professing Christian young people are leaving the church? **The answer is: over 70% of church-going Christian young adults will leave the church about the time they leave their parents’ home.** There is a saying, “They leave church between the two licenses—the driver’s license and the marriage license.” But current statistics show that today, most of them are not coming back. And this is not just a change in social activity, because almost the same number no longer hold basic Christian beliefs. And those who do return are coming back to a very different (a more religiously inclusive, sin tolerating, Scripture marginalizing) church than the one they left. So, although some will return, we can realistically conclude that over half of the children of Christian parents will become what I have called “adult children who rebel.” And I am guessing that has never been true before in all of history, since the time of Noah’s Flood.

(2) Why are young people leaving?

The answer is basically twofold:

A. Some of the departing adult children were never believers in the first place.

Frank Turek makes a great point about this.

“While there are notable exceptions, most American churches over-emphasize emotion and ignore the biblical commands to develop the mind (1 Peter 3:15; 2 Corinthians 10:5). In other words, we’re doing a great job performing for our youth with skits, bands and videos, but a terrible job informing them with logic, truth, and a Christian worldview. We’ve failed to recognize that what we win them with, we win them to. If we win them *with* emotion, we win them *to* emotion” [crossexamined.org].

If we win kids **with** emotional religion, instead of a credible biblical Christianity, then we have also won them **to** emotional religion, instead of the God of the Bible. Also, when we push for unbelieving seekers to regularly attend our churches, then our churches must be something they will come to regularly. The actual gospel message (where a just God judges sin and Jesus is the only way) must be compromised because it is hated by the world. So, many never become believers, and they leave when they get older because the emotionalism they came for is no longer a sufficient belief.

B. Churches are not presenting Christianity as a rationally verifiable belief.

The dominating issue that stands out in all of the (up to 2012) data is that young adults are leaving because churches don’t deal with Christianity intellectually. Young adults who are leaving the church said things like, “It didn’t make any sense anymore,” “Some stuff is too far-fetched for me to believe,” “I think scientifically and there is no real proof,” “Too many questions that can’t be answered” [<http://coldcasechristianity.com/2012/are-young-people-really-leaving-christianity>].

In the winter 2012 issue of “Christianity Today,” Barna President, David Kinnaman, reported that young people said they are leaving the church for six reasons:

- **Isolationism.** The church “demonizes everything outside church, including the music, movies, culture, and technology.”
- **Shallowness.** “Faith is irrelevant and Bible teaching is unclear.”
- **Anti-science.** “The church is out of step on scientific developments.”
- **Sex.** The “‘just say no’ philosophy is insufficient in a techno-porno world. Young Christian singles are as sexually active as their non-churched friends.”
- **Exclusivity.** “The church is too exclusive in this pluralistic and multi-cultural age.”
- **Doubters.** “The church is not a safe place to express doubts.” [christianitytoday.com/le/2012/winter/youngleavechurch.html]

A Comment

One thing interesting here is that, although I would agree that most churches are **shallow**, **anti-science**, and don’t discuss people’s **doubts**, I would not have guessed the other complaints. It seems to me, churches are bending over backwards to be tolerant of things like **technology**, **sex/morals**, and other **religions**. Apparently, the church cannot satisfy the global trends of the world, even though it’s trying. It seems like there is no way to be tolerant enough.

But, we need to come back to the relevant question for us: “Are young adults leaving their parents religion for the same reasons they are leaving the church?” Probably. But let’s take a look at the Bible.

Parenting Adult Children, In the Bible

Most of the children of the early patriarchs had the faith of their parents. We don't know how many children Adam and Eve had, but they had three sons that we know something about. Of the three, Cain was bad, and Abel and Seth were good. We are told Seth had a son named *Enosh*, and *then men began to call upon the name of the Lord* (Genesis 4:26). The Bible follows the line of Seth to Enoch, who *walked with God*, and on to Noah, one of the most godly men in the Bible (Ezekiel 14:14). Noah's extended family seems to have followed his faith, at least his sons and daughters-in-law all got on the ark. Although Noah's sons were not sinless, they did not seem to rebel against God (although their descendants did at the Tower of Babel—and Noah was still alive at that time).

Abraham was involved with his adult children. He found a good wife for his son Isaac (Genesis 24:1-8). He also gave gifts to all his later sons, but gave the inheritance to Isaac. Genesis 25:5-6 says,

Now Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac; but to the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts while he was still living, and sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the east.

Isaac did not rebel against a belief in Yahweh. And, although Isaac's sons Jacob and Esau had some character issues, they did not seem to depart from the faith of Isaac and Rebecca. Jacob became Israel and the father of the 12 tribes.

Children with parents who loved each other seemed to do better. Jacob loved his wife Rachael who had Joseph, and she died having Benjamin. Joseph became the patriarch and spiritual leader of the whole clan. The other 10 were children of the unloved wife Leah and the two concubines. These 10 tried to kill Joseph, ended up selling him into slavery, then lied about him to their father. Although they did repent of it in the end and did not depart from Jacob's faith, there is definitely a difference between the children of the wife Jacob loved and the ones he didn't.

About this time, Job was living in the land of Uz (apparently Edom—Lamentation 4:21). Job had 10, more-or-less adult children, who had parties (maybe birthday parties) where they all invited each other. Job 1:5 reads,

When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

Apparently, his children were not committing any overt sins that Job was aware of because his concern was that they might have *cursed God in their hearts*. But we can note that Job was knowledgeable about their activities, concerned about their relationship with God, and he interceded with God on their behalf. And he did it *continually*.

We know nothing about the children of Moses, but the sons of his brother Aaron were a mixture of good and bad. We know nothing of the children of Joshua or most of the Judges. Gideon had one really bad son who killed all but one of his brothers. And Gideon had 70 sons, with who knows how many wives.

Elkanah loved his wife Hannah, and their son Samuel was one of the most godly men in the Bible. We know nothing about Samuel's wife but the people said, *your sons do not walk in your ways* (1 Samuel 5:8). The same was true of Eli the high priest. Eli did try to correct his sons verbally, but he did nothing to stop their sin.

There is very little correlation between the faith of the kings and their children. We don't know much about Saul's children, but his son Jonathan was better than Saul. David seemed to follow the faith of his father Jesse, but David's children were a mixed bag. Amnon and Absalom were a mess, and we know nothing about their mothers.

But David had two wives he seemed to have loved, at least he treated them well. One was Abigail. They had a son named Chileab about whom nothing bad is said. The other was Bathsheba, who David always seemed to treat well. Their son Solomon started well and ended poorly. But Solomon said that he was taught by both his mother and his father, and he wrote the Book of Proverbs as a means of instructing his adult son. Solomon did well until he began marrying foreign wives, then he ended up worshiping their gods. [I'm not sure it's relevant, but Solomon is the forefather of Joseph, and David and Bathsheba's other son Nathan was the forefather of the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus.]

As for the rest of the kings, there seems to be no correlation of godliness between parents and children. Although it is interesting that the morality of the kings is usually compared or contrasted with a father or forefather. When there is a good king, it says something like,
*He did right in the sight of the Lord, and **walked in the ways of his father David** and did not turn aside to the right or to the left (2 Chronicles 34:2).*

The same comparison is made for bad kings. Elijah wrote a letter to King Jehoram and said,

*Thus says the Lord God of your father David, ...you **have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father** (2 Chronicles 21:13).*

When children of good parents did not follow the faith of their parents, the children were criticized for not doing so. But, it should be noted that children also followed the faith of their bad parents who treated each other well. Ahab and Jezebel treated each other well and were Baal worshippers. Their children followed their faith. And remember their daughter Athaliah became queen in Judah and tried to kill all the descendants of David who were heirs to the throne of the Southern Kingdom.

There are passages about parents teaching and disciplining their children (Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:7; 11:19; 21:18ff; and most of Proverbs 22:6) but very little about responding to disobedient adult children, who are no longer living at home. Although, God did tell Ezekiel that parents are not punished for the sins of their children. Ezekiel 18:20 reads,

*The person who sins will die. **The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity;** the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.*

We know almost nothing about the children of the prophets and, although the apostles had wives (1 Corinthians 9:5), we know absolutely nothing about their children. There are a few New Testament examples. Philip had *four virgin daughters who were prophetesses* (Acts 21:9). Paul talks about a father approving the marriage of a *virgin daughter* (1 Corinthians 7:36-38). But Christianity, unlike other religions, including Judaism, was not to expand by the reproduction of physical offspring. The two main characters of the New Testament, Jesus and the Apostle Paul, were unmarried and had no children. Jesus did not seem to emphasize family faith. Luke tells us,

And it was reported to Him, “Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wishing to see You.” But He answered and said to them, “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8:20-21).

Also, Jesus said, concerning faith in Himself,

They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law (Luke 12:51-53).

The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) is the story of a disobedient young adult child who returns when he repents. His father is waiting, but he does not go out and beg him to come home.

The New Testament also seems to prioritize the love of parents for each other, over their love for their children. Paul wrote,

- *Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them (Colossians 3:19).*
- *Older women [are to] encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored (Titus 2:4-5).*

Leaders were to be people who managed their children.

- *He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity, but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God? (1 Timothy 3:4-5).*
- *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).*

Notice, there is no claim that the children of good parents will not become angry. But when parents are nit-picking, unrealistically strict, demanding, or perfectionists, that can *provoke children to anger*. The Bible does not say parents are responsible for the character of their children, or how they “turn out.” It only says the children are to be **managed** well, and the parents are not to *provoke* them to anger. Many parents tend to do the opposite. They feel guilty about their children’s character and how they turn out, but don’t manage them well.

Things We Can Learn from the Biblical Examples

1. It was clearly taught that parents should bring up their children in biblical faith.
2. It was normal for biological children to follow their parents’ faith (1 Corinthians 7:14). When they didn’t, something abnormal was going on. The problem might have been with the parents or with the children, or the world’s influences on either one, but something was not as it should be.
3. There was some correlation between the faith of adult children and how their parents treated each other. Parents who treated each other well were more apt to have children who followed their faith.
4. Good parents (like Abraham and Job) helped their children get started in their adult life, financially and socially. They were involved in the lives of their adult children, not by trying to govern their activities but by helping them establish a home and interceding for them before God.
5. Parents were responsible for instruction, discipline, management, and teaching their children the Word of God and the fear of God, while not provoking them to anger. The purpose of this was to prepare the children to become mature adult believers.
6. Although parents were held accountable for managing how a child acted while living under their roof, parents were not accountable for the faith and behavior of adult children

who were no longer living with their parents. Parents were not responsible for the character of their children or how they “turned out.” Parents were responsible for what they taught their children, not what the children did with what they were taught.

7. In Christianity, Jesus was a priority over family, and the love of one’s spouse was to be a priority over the love of their children.

My Personal, Subjective, Unscientific Data, Observed for 40 Years

1. My experience for the last 40 years of working with parents of adult children is that those parents, who have faithful children, are kind to one another. No scenario is always true, but the general trend is that parents who treat each other well are more likely to have faithful children. Parents who do not treat each other well (or where one does not treat the other one well), parents who do not get along, who argue repeatedly and disagree, or get divorced, will more often have unfaithful children. It would seem that one of the best things a parent can do for his or her children is to love their biological mother or father, more than they love their children.
2. I have seen that when a father/husband sees the solution as everyone submitting to him, in other words, the problem being they do not submit to him, then the battle is already lost. That is only a testimony to the fact that he has not been the head of his family. Commands about submission are never given to the father so that he can pass them on as a basis for keeping his children faithful.
3. Children leave the faith for a variety of reasons. There may be nothing the parents did, or could have done, to keep them faithful. In which case, there is nothing they can do now to persuade them to return. Also, I have observed that when parents become believers as adults, the children who grew up before the parents were saved are more likely to be unbelievers or disobedient.

Nonetheless, parents should ask if they have done things or presented Christianity (or themselves as believers) in such a way that has caused their children to leave the faith. Because, if they did some things that drove the children away from the faith and they keep doing those things, they will keep convincing their children to stay away from the faith. If you keep doing what you are doing, you will get more of what you’ve got.

4. Biblical parents always welcome repentant children with open arms (Luke 15:11-32). Of course, almost all parents do this. But biblical parents will also distinguish between forgiveness and ongoing temptation. Repentant children should always be forgiven and restored to fellowship, no matter how many times they have sinned. That does not mean they should be given the same temptations to sin again (an alcoholic should not be given a drink, a financially irresponsible person should not be given a loan, etc.). Sin reveals weakness that needs to be treated, not enabled.
5. It has been my observation that mature Christian parents focus on the spiritually healthy children, the ones who have not left the faith or Christian morality. Many less mature parents make the mistake of putting their focus, and their efforts, on the wayward children while neglecting the faithful children.

With the quarantined lepers in Israel (Leviticus 13) and the excluded unrepentant brother in 1 Corinthians 5, the focus was on the healthy, not the sick. The emphasis should be on the believing children, not the adult unbelieving children. *Do you not know*

that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump (1 Corinthians 5:6-7). The sick, and the spiritually sick, should be quarantined, not prioritized. Of course, you don't withhold compassion from the sick, but neither do you allow them to infect the healthy. And, by the way, this is especially difficult in a mother-led family. Mothers are nurturers.

6. Good parents keep the discussion open. They never "agree to disagree" because that ends the discussion, and trivializes the relationship. They take the time to be informed about whatever issues the rebellious adult child is dealing with (like maybe it's evolution, abortion, lying, or the liberal moral agenda) and engage in discussions about those issues. Good parents ask questions. If a child is an atheist or has a new religion, parents are more apt to reveal its errors by asking about it, than they are by condemning it. The basic rule is: Never attack, never accuse, always ask questions.

You will notice that the objective in most of Jesus' conversations was not just to make a point but to allow His opponent to come to the bankruptcy of his own position. People will not tend to leave what they believe just because you have good reasons for what you believe. They will just say, "that's okay for you but not for me." People will only consider your faith after they reject their own. Most people believe, "If it's not broke, don't fix it." [And, by the way, don't turn it into a political argument, keep it about the Bible.]

7. Mature parents do not see problems as something that can be solved. Immature parents look for solutions and (hopefully quick and painless ones) to their child's unfaithfulness. My observation is that mature parents look at their situation as a lifestyle they must develop, not a problem to be solved. So rather than go to counselors or secular programs, they establish a biblical home and live with the situation in a godly manner. The reality is, most problems cannot be solved. But they can be treated.
8. Mature parents will involve their children in ministry. Good parents are involved with people, where the lives of those people are being conformed to the image of Christ. A good question for parents is, "Have your children witnessed the changed life of someone outside the family, because of your ministry?"
9. Mature parents have a good knowledge of the Bible. They read and study their Bible and know its content. Bible knowledge is not sufficient, but it is necessary. Parents cannot communicate a knowledge they don't know.

But there is one more area of parenting rebellious adult children that requires special attention.

The Distinction Between Taking a Stand and Removing Fellowship

Adult Children Who Have Become Unbelievers

It is my observation that if adult children have become unbelievers, that is, they once considered themselves to be Christians but no longer do, then good parents treat them as any other unbeliever. They share the Gospel with them, they pray for their salvation, they are open to have discussions with them, and participate with them in social events. Paul said,

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world (1 Corinthians 5:9-10).

The rule of thumb is, treat unbelieving adult children as you would any other unbelieving adult. Suppose you have an adult customer, or neighbor, or high school friend, who is an atheist. How should you treat them? Hopefully, you would witness to them and speak to them about their atheism as the occasion allows. You would not refuse to go fishing or play golf with them, but you would not let them teach their atheism to your children. Mature parents might socialize with unbelieving adult children, but they do not allow unbelieving children to bring their sin into their house (sleeping with their girlfriend or boyfriend, bringing a homosexual partner, practicing underage drinking, speaking blasphemy, promoting unbiblical theology, mocking God or the Bible, etc.).

Unrepentant Sinful Adult Children Who Claim To Be Believers

At issue is the distinction between (1) taking a stand that protects the family versus (2) removal of social interaction. I shall call it,

1. **Quarantining the sin** to protect the healthy (as was done with leprosy under the Mosaic Law – Leviticus 13) versus
2. **Removing fellowship** by withdrawing social interaction (*not to associate with... not even to eat with such a one* – 1 Corinthians 5:11)

[I am purposefully not using the term “excommunication” because it means to “officially exclude (someone) from participation in the sacraments and services of the Christian church” (“New Oxford American Dictionary”). That assumes the “Christian church” is an institution and the exclusion is only about “sacraments and services.” The removal of fellowship in Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5 is social, not institutional.]

If a sinning adult Christian child refuses to repent, and, as a parent, you believe this has gone to the point of requiring removal of fellowship, hopefully you would follow Matthew 18:15-17. Go to them individually, and then take some others along from outside the family, eventually take it to the church, and the church would decide to remove fellowship. An individual family does not have a biblical mandate to remove fellowship. If the parents are part of a church which has removed fellowship from their adult child, then the family members should not associate with that child either.

We’ll take an extreme example, just to make the point. Let’s say some Christian parents have a son who is a mass murderer, claims to be a Christian, is unrepentant for his sin, and he is in prison.

- Suppose no one other than the family has been involved, and the son is not influencing other family members because everyone understands that he is wrong and should repent. Is it all right for the parents to go and visit the son in prison? **Yes.**
- Suppose the parents ask some of the son’s other Christian friends to go talk to him, and after several visits by several friends, the son still refuses to admit he was sinning. So a group of families get together, including the parents, and all decide he must be removed from Christian fellowship. Is it all right for the parents to go and visit their son in prison? **No.**

Taking action against sin, without removing fellowship, is a difficult but important distinction to make. Parents should never tolerate sin in their adult Christian children under the guise of being “loving” or “keeping communication open.” Whatever is tolerated is approved and becomes the new normal (and the new low) for the family. But one single family is not a platform for removal of fellowship. Paul presents removal of fellowship in the context of a

group gathering, which might assemble for the Lord's Supper Communion (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

Historically, Most Churches Could Remove Fellowship Quite Effectively

The apostles defined the local church as all the believers in a location, usually a city or other geographic region. In that city, believers had gatherings, centered on the Lord's Supper Communion, in various homes. But all the believers, in all those house gatherings, were one church (the church of Corinth, the church of Rome, the church of Jerusalem, etc.). The idea of Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5 was that an unrepentant sinning believer was to be (eventually) removed from the fellowship of all his believer friends in the city or village where he lived. It was not that one group would exclude him from their group, thus allowing him to simply join another group.

Through much of history this worked fairly well in small towns, maybe even in large ones. Even though the church had become institutionalized and met in buildings, it is likely that all the believers in the town were part of that fellowship. For example, if you were in a Lutheran Church in Eisleben, Germany in the 1600s, or in a Methodist Church planted by one of the circuit riders in Dodge City, Kansas in the 1800s, all your Christian friends were most likely in that church. It was probably the only church in town. In that case, removal of fellowship (even if it was defined as "excommunication") was pretty devastating because you would have nowhere to go for Christian fellowship, or to worship, or to take Communion. It could have even affected your ability to do business, since much of your business would be closely tied to those Christian friends.

Today, Removal of Fellowship Is Somewhere between Difficult and Impossible

In today's post-modern world, there are institutional churches all over the city that have no connection with one another. Most of our Christian friends are scattered among those churches, and we don't know all (or most) of the people in the institutional church we attend. Our real church, as defined by the apostles, is our network of close Christian friends all over town. But they never all gather together, except possibly when a "para-church" organization has a conference or special speaker.

Today, this is complicated by the fact that most of our institutional churches pursue "seekers." That means many people in the congregation are unbelievers, whose sin must be tolerated or they would leave. Then there is the problem that many professing Christians attend mega-churches (off and on), but most of their friends are unbelievers. Small groups within the mega-churches don't help, because one's closest friends are somewhere else, and removal from one of these groups simply allows the sinner to join another group or another institutional church across town. Removal of Christian fellowship becomes meaningless and ineffective, if not impossible.

The Temptation Is for the Family to See Itself As a Church

Although there are exceptions, most of today's institutional churches are not likely to remove fellowship. The temptation of the sincere Christian family is to take that role upon themselves. They understand that something must be done about adult children who claim Christianity but live in sin. They see that most so-called Christian families do nothing, under the flag of "love" and "keeping communication open." Good parents realize it is not "loving" to tolerate sin, since it only enables the sinner. And it is of no value to keep communication open, if you don't have something worthwhile to communicate. Therefore, some good intentioned families make the mistake of removing fellowship from their rebellious adult children.

But a family is not a church, a network of believers across the city. When families see themselves as a church, strange things can happen. Families (and other institutions) may exclude people for social or political or cultural issues that are not legitimate reasons to remove fellowship. They might remove someone who smokes, supports liberal political views, or has blue hair. On the other hand, they may not take a stand at all because they believe the only stand to take is to remove fellowship (*not to associate with...not even to eat with such a one*—1 Corinthians 5:11). When parents see the devastating effect that would have on the family, they often (or usually) opt for doing nothing at all.

It is my observation that mature Christian parents of adult rebellious children make an outward statement, which takes a physical (not just a verbal) stand against sin. This varies with the family and the situation. There is no “one-size-fits-all” solution. But good parents do not practice removal of fellowship. For example, they may refuse to attend an unbiblical wedding, but do not shun the married couple after the wedding. That way they have taken a definite strong position for the truth of the Word of God, which is more than just verbally saying, “they know where I stand.” But it also does not assume the family is a church practicing the removal of fellowship. Or a family may decide not to finance the college expenses of a child cohabitating with a girlfriend or boyfriend. But they do not exclude them from family activities.

Prevent Influence—Don’t Remove Fellowship

In some cases, the ongoing situation is also sinful. For example, if an adult child marries an unbeliever, the wedding is wrong but the marriage is not. That is, if you knew a believer married to an unbeliever, you would not say their marriage was unbiblical (1 Corinthians 7:13). But if the marriage was between two homosexuals, then the marriage itself would be sinful (Matthew 19:4-6). Therefore, it would be more than the wedding that could not be tolerated.

In some cases, rebellious adult children are like *leaven*, spreading their sin to all the family. Good parents will not allow that. So the sinful adult child must be quarantined because the principle *a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough* (1 Corinthians 5:6) is true everywhere, including families. And in some cases, it is impossible to have family fellowship with the sinner, without that influence. But the purpose of the social limitation is to protect the family, not to *deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh* (verse 5). In other words, good parents will focus on the rest of the family, not the sinful adult child. Quarantine is for the protection of the healthy (Leviticus 13).

In the case where adult children are, say, homosexuals or atheists who want to flaunt their sin, good parents will place limitations on attending family activities. But the purpose here is not removal of fellowship, but protection of the family from the leaven-effect of their sin. For example, a homosexual adult child might be invited to a holiday meal but not be allowed to bring their gay or lesbian partner. But if the homosexual, coming alone, was promoting the tolerance of his or her sin to their siblings, or degrading the parents for not tolerating it, then he or she might also be banned from family activities. At another time, the parents would still be open to have lunch with the homosexual son or daughter because they are preventing their influence, not removing fellowship. And, although they don’t need to bring it up every time, the parents will make it somehow clear that they have not begun to tolerate the child’s sin. Usually, the indication of the fact that the parents have actually limited the

influence of the sinning child is that the sinning child will react by putting limits on your involvement in their life.

Of course, all believers should have the primary motivation to please God and be true to His Word. But the removal of fellowship (*not to associate with...not even to eat with such a one*—1 Corinthians 5:11) has two specific goals:

1. To *deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh* if they don't repent so *that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus* (1 Corinthians 5:5).
2. Keeping the sin from influencing other believers because *a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough* (verse 6).

Good Christian parents, it seems to me, only have the second of these goals for their families.

Our Global Situation

Problem:

1. The world is getting worse. The proof is that the (1) percent, (2) availability, and (3) tolerance of biblically defined sin have all increased.
2. Churches are not helping. They are not preparing young people for the onslaught of global worldliness. It used to be a "good sermon" was one that made you feel bad (convicted). Today, a "good sermon" is one that makes you feel good (accepted).
3. Social institutions (the media, movies, books, TV, public schools) are all extremely liberal, religiously universal, evolutionary, and nonjudgmental, except they are intolerant of the Bible. [College is a cult.]
4. The friends of your kids will come from divorced parents and unmarried parents, leaving kids without dads, and therefore, without moral enforcement.
5. Government handouts enable irresponsibility and boredom, which is "the devil's workshop."

Treatment (there is no solution):

1. Parents, who treat each other well, will create the best environment for children to return to their faith.
2. Parents who are not legalistic or hypocritical will demonstrate a more realistic faith.
3. Parents who refuse to "leave the Bible out of it" will create a home that will be inviting for those who wish to follow the Bible.
4. Parents who judge the world's values, being intolerant of evil and godless teaching, will provide solutions that the world does not provide.
5. Parents who point to the God of the Bible, not themselves or their church or other social "communities," will take the focus off of the world's mentality, creating a haven for those who want it.

A Conclusion, In the Form of Questions and Answers

What can parents do to get disobedient adult children to return to biblical Christianity?

Probably nothing. At any rate, do not insist on solving the problem. Focus on how to live with it in a godly manner.

Why do children become unbelievers?

If they are actually unbelievers, they never were believers. If they were believers, they are still believers. If they are violating biblical commandments, and they claim to be believers, parents should take action to restrict their influence on the family.

What should parents do about children who become atheists?

Treat them like all the other unbelievers you know—associate with them, witness to them, and pray for them. But don't let them promote their atheism in your home.

What should parents do about unrepentant sinful children who claim to be Christians?

1. Do not allow their sinful activities or philosophies to be brought into or taught in your home.
2. Some outward public action should be taken to make the statement that they are acting contrary to the Bible. What we tolerate, we embrace. Any tolerated sin becomes the new normal (or the new low).
3. Ongoing fellowship should be encouraged. Removal of fellowship is inappropriate, unless a network of believers in several families across the city (or locality) decides it, after following the procedure of Matthew 18:15-17.

What can parents do to create the best climate for rebellious adult children to return?

1. Parents should treat each other well. Show that God is transforming the lives of their parents.
2. Do not be legalistic or hypocritical. God's rules are not negotiable, but yours should be. Make it all about God, not about you, or them, or mankind. And don't use the Bible to make political points.
3. Discuss Christianity in a rational, informed manner, applying it to real world situations. Make it all about the Bible, taken at face value (author's intended meaning), not your ideas.
4. Keep the conversation ongoing. **Never** "agree to disagree." That closes the door on thinking, and puts your relationship on a surface, shallow, irrelevant basis.
5. Always tell the truth, no matter how hard the question. Lying is an epidemic. Don't spread the epidemic.

Back to Colossians Chapter 3

3. In Slave-Master Relationships, 3:22-4:1

Verse 22—Slaves—While slavery was certainly undesirable, Paul's goals did not include restructuring social institutions. More than half of the people on the streets of the cities of the Roman world were slaves, and this included the majority of "professional" people, such as teachers and doctors and craftsmen. Slaves were people with no rights. They were property existing only for the comfort, convenience, and pleasure of their owners. Slaves were considered a part of the household. These principles today could be applied to Christian employees.

—**in all things** [whether enjoyable or distasteful] **obey**—this, of course, did not have in mind orders contrary to Godly principles (such as lying or stealing). No matter what their position in life, the Christian's highest duty is to God.

—**those who are your masters on earth**—Paul also wrote, “Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? ...if you are able also to become free, rather do that. ...do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each man remain with God in that condition in which he was called” (1 Cor 7:20-24). Paul gave an example of the slave Onesimus’ and his master Philemon. Onesimus became a believer and returned to his master Philemon, from whom he had run away. Paul wrote of Onesimus, “no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother...” Christianity added to the relationship, it did not negate it.

—**not with external service, as those who merely please men**—negatively—satisfied with a superficial service, what appears good to other people, which can be deceptive, covering something that would not be pleasing to men.

—**but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord**—“but”—positively—with pure motives, knowing that God knows what is in your heart.

AN APPLICATION—The New Testament accepts slavery as a social reality in the Roman (and Jewish) world. So it instructs those in that system to behave in a godly manner. No matter what your job or where you live or with whom you live, godliness is always the guideline for behavior. Changing your situation does not change the guideline for godly behavior. Godliness does not change if you have a good boss or a bad boss, a good teacher or a bad teacher, a good neighbor or a bad neighbor.

Verse 23—**Whatever you do** [even if it is cleaning the house or doing the wash or dishes], **do your work heartily** [lit. “out of the soul,” “genuine” “from within”], **as for the Lord rather than for men**—for two reasons:

(1) **Verse 24**—**knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve**—you can actually be investing in eternal rewards. We are all servants of the Lord. Jesus said, “*Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Matt 20:28).

(2) **Verse 25**—**For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality**—for example, Paul acknowledged that the Christian slave Onesimus was responsible to repay Philemon (Philemon 18). The Christian is not to presume on his or her Christianity to justify disobedience. You will reap what you sow (Gal 6:7-10).

AN APPLICATION—Don’t think little things, like your attitude when cleaning the house, have no effect. It’s not the big decisions that determine the character. It’s the little decisions in the right direction that will determine character.

Chapter 4

Verse 1—**Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness**—masters have a spiritual obligation also. They are not told to free their slaves, but to treat them with justice and fairness.

—**knowing that you too have a Master in heaven**—it is to God that Christian masters [or employers] are accountable. There is one Master, who shows no favoritism between slave and master on earth. Both are accountable to God and must treat Christians as brothers and sisters in Christ. Both are to demonstrate godly character (no lying, stealing, etc.).

4. In Prayers, 4:2-4

Verse 2—Devote yourselves to prayer—to continue to do something with intense effort, with the possible implication of despite difficulty, to keep on, to persist in. “Devote” is built on the root meaning ‘to be strong.’

SOME APPLICATIONS—Prayer is not a spiritual luxury. It is essential for growth and your relationship with God. The purpose of prayer is not to get God to do what we want, but to get us to do what God wants. Jesus prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will” (Matt 26:39). Later in life, Walt Henrichsen once said, “Thank God He did not give me everything I asked for.” He then had a different perspective.

... we are to be involved in all kinds of prayer, every form of prayer that is appropriate. Scriptural precept and allowance suggest we may pray publicly or privately; in loud cries, in soft whispers, or silently; deliberately and planned or spontaneously; while sitting, standing, kneeling, or even lying down; at home or in church; while working or while traveling; with hands folded or raised; with eyes open or closed; with head bowed or erect. The New Testament, like the Old, mentions many forms, circumstances, and postures for prayer but prescribes none. Jesus prayed while standing, while sitting, while kneeling, and quite probably in other positions as well [such as from the cross—His “death bed”]. We can pray wherever we are and in whatever situation we are in. For the faithful, Spirit-filled Christian, every place becomes a place of prayer. [MacArthur, *Ephesians*] Even prison cannot stop us from praying (Acts 16:25).

Prayer is a huge subject, but here are some prayer instructions given by Jesus in Matthew 6:5-15—

- *When you pray*—He assumes a right relationship with God includes praying. It’s not “if you pray...”
- *Do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men*—the danger of public prayer is that it is not to God but is to show off before other people.
- *When you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret*—prayer is primarily a secret thing between you and God.
- *...do not use meaningless repetition*—Don’t teach children meaningless repetition prayers. Sad to say that the Lord’s Prayer itself has become meaningless repetition to many people.
- *...they suppose that they will be heard for their many words*—a prayer of many words is not heard by God any more than prayers with few words.
- *Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him*—Prayer is giving your will to God, it is honoring and worshipping Him, it is showing your love for Him. Today, He is too often viewed as a sort of cosmic automatic teller machine. If we punch in the right code, He’s obligated to deliver what we want.

As we saw in Colossians 2:18-23, mysticism and asceticism are not valuable to prayer. For example, fasting or self-abasement will not cause God to give a positive answer to prayer any more than simply asking Him. What does matter is being a righteous person. James 5:16 says, “the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”

—**keeping alert in it**—prayer is not casual.

- Be watchful against spiritual drowsiness caused by attention to the world. One of the first things to go because of friendship with the world is our prayer life. At the same time it is the simplest thing and the hardest thing to do.
- It would also seem to mean to stay awake and not fall asleep during prayer. When Jesus was praying in Gethsemane, He found the disciples sleeping. He said, “...*the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*” (Matt 26:40-41). Knowing this should be a warning for us.
- Another possible application is to stay alert for specific needs to pray for.

—**with an attitude of thanksgiving**—this is the fifth time that Paul has mentioned gratitude in this epistle. Thanksgiving places a believer in the proper attitude before God (Rom 1:21; Phil 4:6; Col 1:12; 3:16-17; 1 Thess 5:18). You can’t be thankful and complain at the same time.

Verse 3—praying at the same time for us as well—Paul’s “us” is probably his friends and co-workers he lists beginning in 4:7. It’s good to ask other believers to pray for us, especially when we are going to be in a particular situation or with a particular person.

—**that God will open up to us a door for the word**—A “door” usually refers to an opportunity (1 Cor 16:8-9; 2 Cor 2:12). Revelation 3:7 says Jesus is the One *who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens*. God is the One who provides us with an opportunity (open door) to speak His Word to others. This is not a request for an “open door” in general to make other choices. If we lack wisdom for a decision, James says we can pray for wisdom (James 1:5).

—**so that we may speak forth the mystery** [something hidden in the Old Testament but revealed in the New—see 1:26-27] **of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned**—Paul had greater concern about getting the gospel out than he had with getting himself out of prison. Specifically, the “mystery” is *Christ in you, the hope of glory* (1:27).

Verse 4—that I may make it clear—to make something visible, to make known, to make plain, to bring to the light

—**in the way**—“when,” a point in time

—**I ought to speak**—something done as a result of compulsion, matter of duty, have to do.

SOME APPLICATIONS—Paul previous wrote, *Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another...*(Col 1:28). Teaching the truth of Scripture to believers and correcting believers when they are not consistent with the Word is done among believers. Toward unbelievers, we pray for opportunities, boldness, and clarity to tell them about Jesus for salvation. The more *richly* the Word of God dwells in you, the more possible both these things will be.

5. In Witness and Speech, 4:5-6

Verse 5—Conduct yourselves—not to be harsh, unloving, tactless, how you behave

—**with wisdom**—as he says in verse 6, know how to respond to each person. For example, if a person does not even believe in God, it is not wise to explain that Jesus is God.

—**toward outsiders**—lit. those in darkness, unbelievers

—**making the most of the opportunity**—the open door God provides to share the Gospel. Be on the lookout for those opportunities. They can be news events, disasters, sickness, good news, pray for the opportunity, especially if you are aware of the beliefs of the person you will be with.

Verse 6—Let your speech always be with grace—Paul also wrote, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Ephesians 4:29).

—as though seasoned with salt—he doesn’t say to use salt to rub into a wound, causing pain. Rather “seasoned” with salt. It adds flavor. It makes a person thirsty for more.

—so that you will know how you should respond to each person—It would be easy to learn one thing that you can say to everyone, but people are not the same. What they believe is different. Their personalities are different. Their situations are different. The Gospel is the same for everyone, but how you respond with the Gospel has to be unique to each person. For example, someone may be dying, so there is an urgency to share the Gospel. Someone else may be part of a cult, so there is a lot of reasoning and discussion.

V. Concluding Personal Remarks, 4:7-18

Verses 7-8—As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, (1) that you may know about our circumstances and (2) that he may encourage your hearts—Tychicus is mentioned five times in association with Paul (Acts 20:4; Eph 6:21; Col 4:7; Titus 3:12; 2 Tim 4:12). In relation to all Christians, Tychicus is a “beloved brother.” In relation to Christ, he is a “faithful servant.” In relation to Paul, he is a “fellow bond-servant in the Lord.” His purpose was to bring the Colossian believers more information in addition to what was in this letter, and for him to personally encourage the Colossian believers.

Verse 9—and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother—he was a slave of Philemon. He had run away to Rome, where Paul had led him to Christ. He returned to Philemon, with the letter to Philemon, from Paul.

—who is one of your number—Onesimus is part of the Colossian believers.

—They will inform you about the whole situation here—In Rome, where Paul was imprisoned. Probably on this trip, these two men also brought letters from Paul to Ephesus (Eph 6:21-22), Laodicea (Col 4:16), and the one to Philemon (Phile 23-24).

According to Roman law, accusers were to testify against a prisoner within 18 months of his arrest. If not, the prisoner would go free. But as far as we know, Paul did not receive a trial. “Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him...he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters” (Acts 28:16, 30). This was to the Jews’ advantage. If he would have been declared innocent at a trial, people would be more apt to believe what he said. But because there was no trial, suspicion hung over Paul’s head.

Verse 10—Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings—he was from Thessalonica in Macedonia (Acts 20:4). He had been with Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:29) and had accompanied him to Rome (Acts 27:2). Possibly he resided in the same rental house in Rome with Paul, which was Paul’s prison (Acts 28:30).

—and also Barnabas’s cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him)—Mark, along with Barnabas, had separated from Paul after their first missionary journey (Acts 12:12, 25; 13:13; 15:37-39; 1 Pet 5:13). Mark failed at first, but he returned to the ministry and proved faithful to the Lord and to the Apostle Paul (2 Tim 4:11), and he wrote the gospel of Mark.

AN APPLICATION—We might call Mark the man with a second chance. His life was a testimony to God’s ability to use failures. He later received a privilege shared by only three other men in history: writing one of the gospels.

Verse 11—*and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement* [“comfort,” used only here in the NT, Gk. *paregoria*, from which “paregoric” comes and denotes relief of pain] **to me**—Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus were Jewish believers. They took a stand for Christ alongside Paul, in the midst of much Jewish opposition.

Verses 12-13—*Epaphras, who is one of your number*—from the Colossian believers. Paul had mentioned him earlier in Colossians as the one from whom they had learned the truth of the gospel (1:7). This was his hometown. He really cared for these people.

—*a bondsman of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect* [*teleios*, “complete,” “mature” or “fully developed”] **and fully assured** [*plerophoreo*, “persuaded,” “satisfied fully”] **in all the will of God. For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis**—Each city was about 10 miles from each other. Epaphras was an example of being devoted to prayer (v. 2), and he had a single-minded passion for the believers’ maturity. Of the three, only Laodicea is mentioned in the seven churches of Revelation 2–3, and their condemnation was that they were “lukewarm” (Rev 3:14-22).

Verse 14—*Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings*—Only here is Luke called “*the beloved physician*.” Luke is also the author of the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. If Paul did not write Hebrews, Luke wrote more of the New Testament than any other author. Because Paul does not mention him as one of the Jewish circumcision, he was probably a Gentile believer.

—**and also Demas**—...*having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica* (2 Tim 4:9). Second Timothy was Paul’s last letter, written near the end of his life, so the desertion of Demas happened after Paul wrote Colossians from prison in Rome. Judas betrayed Christ. Even the two greatest leaders the world has ever known had those who failed them.

Verse 15—*Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea*—it’s unclear why he should send special greetings to the brethren in Laodicea when, according to verse 16, he is sending a separate letter to that church.

—**and also Nympha**—depending on the position of the accent mark, this name could be either masculine or feminine. The KJV and ASV interpret it as “Nymphas” masculine, and the NIV and NEB and NASB have “Nympha,” a woman’s name.

—**and the church that is in her house**—There were no church buildings in the apostolic times, and in the New Testament, the believers most commonly assembled in homes (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Phile 2). It was not until the middle of the third century that church buildings began to appear.

Verse 16—*When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea*—First, Paul expected the contents of this letter to be read out loud among the group of believers. Perhaps copies of the total or part of this letter were made. Writing and reading are ways to pass on information and teaching to places away from you and also to future

generations. For example, I treasure the books that Charles Ryrie wrote. His teaching lives on long after his death.

There are two views about the Laodicean letter. One, this letter is lost, much like the “sorrowful” letter between First and Second Corinthians is lost (2 Cor 2:4). OR, some think it is the book of Ephesians, as the words “in Ephesus” do not appear in the text, indicating it was a circular letter intended for several city groups of believers in Asia Minor. The Ephesian and Colossian letters from Paul were to be circulated among the believers.

Verse 17—Say to Archippus, “Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it”—Because he is also mentioned in Philemon 2, some think he was ministering in Colossae in Epaphras’ absence. Also, some assume that this charge implies a degree of failure on the part of Archippus, and interpret Paul’s words as a rebuke. But we cannot be sure that is what Paul meant. OR it may simply mean that Archippus has Paul’s support, and that his ministry to them was “*received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.*”

Verse 18—I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand—Paul customarily used an amanuensis (recording secretary) when writing his letters, but frequently added a greeting with his own hand (Rom 16:22; 1 Cor 16:21; 2 Cor 10:1; Gal 6:11; 2 Thess 3:17; Phile 19).
—**Remember my imprisonment**—i.e., pray for him (see Col 4:3)
—**Grace be with you**—grace through faith in the all-sufficient Christ, not through human works advocated by false teachers. As Paul introduced the book, that the Colossian believers may understand more fully the grace of God in which they stand (1:1-12).