



Colossians

A COMMENTARY OUTLINE

THE ALL SUFFICIENCY
OF CHRIST

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Outline

or “A Bird’s Eye View of Colossians”

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The Glories of Jesus Christ

or “*The Image of the Invisible God*”

Colossians 1:1-2:3

THE PEOPLE OF JESUS CHRIST 1:1-14

GREETINGS EXTENDED TO THEM 1:1-2

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ²to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.”

Colossae is the most insignificant city mentioned in the New Testament at which we find a church. Many cities visited by Paul were in full bloom during the birth and growth of the church. Colossae, on the other hand, was in the sunset of her history. The city was located in the Lycus River valley. Hierapolis and Laodicea, both mentioned in the New Testament, were located nearby on opposite sides of the river.

The church at Colossae was unknown by face to the apostle Paul. Paul had never been to this city, but he had heard of believers who resided there (Colossians 1:3-4, 2:1). The church apparently met in the home of Philemon. This conclusion is made by comparing Philemon 1-2, where we are told there was a church in his house, with Philemon 10-12, where we find that the name of his missing slave was Onesimus. We then learn from Colossians 4:8-9 that Onesimus was from Colossae, and the picture is complete.

Focusing on Paul 1:1

His Position

The word *apostle* refers to the divinely chosen men who were the spokesmen for God. The apostle of the New Testament was equivalent to the prophet of the Old Testament.

His Authority

Paul's apostolic authority was *by the will of God*, which indicates that Paul did not volunteer his services but was chosen by God for this unique office.

His Companion

Timothy is a *brother* of Paul because God is the Father of every believer, creating the family of God.

Focusing on the Church 1:2***Their Spiritual Position***

The expression *in Christ* is the most descriptive phrase in the New Testament telling what a Christian is. The fundamental difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is relationship to Jesus Christ.

Four things may be said about the word *saints*. First, being a saint is the result of being *in Christ*. Take out the words *in Christ*, and the word *saints* must also be removed. Second, the word *saint* means *to be set apart*. Third, saint is the most common designation of a Christian in the New Testament. Fourth, the word *saints* refers to their spiritual position, not their spiritual condition or their conduct (cf. I Corinthians 1:2 and 3:1-3).

Their Earthly Position

This is indicated by the words *in Colossae*. The city is described under the greetings section above.

PRAYER MADE FOR THEM 1:3-14**As Expressed in Thanksgiving 1:3-8*****Paul's Favorite Trilogy of Words 1:3-5***

"We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; ⁵because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel..."

First, we have reference to their faith. That faith is mentioned first is significant. It is the life that starts with faith in Christ on earth that ends up with hope in heaven. Faith points to their past. Second, we have reference to their love, which points to their present. That they have love for all saints shows it is possible to love another believer without knowing them personally. Third, we have reference to their hope, which lies in the future. In English, hope implies doubt; in the New Testament, hope indicates certainty. Heaven is our hope, not because it is in doubt, but because it is future. Hope is the part of our salvation that has been promised but has not been dispensed yet.

For additional study on the doctrine of faith, see the notes on faith in the *Commentary and Outline of James*.

The Source of the Believer's Hope 1:6-8

"...which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; ⁷just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, ⁸and he also informed us of your love in the spirit."

As found in the last of verse 5, the source of our hope lies in the *word of truth*, which is the *gospel*. The word *truth* looks at the dependability of the message, and the word *gospel* looks at the content of the message. Truth concerning the gospel is the subject through verse 8.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE GOSPEL 1:6A

The words *has come to you* are a reminder that the gospel was not the product of their own thought or ingenuity. The gospel is a revelation coming from God to man via the written word of God.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE GOSPEL 1:6B

The words *just as* show that the gospel is not the product of human thought anywhere in the world. The word *world* is a hyperbole expressing the rapid spread of the message that was taking place.

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL 1:6C

Why is the figure of *fruit* appropriate? Because, unlike a hammer or a chisel, it has reproductive power. Statements concerning this power are also found in James 1:18, I Peter 1:23, I Corinthians 4:15. Presenting the gospel is not like selling a product; it is like planting a garden. The word *increasing* shows that the gospel never exhausts itself.

THE BEARER OF THE GOSPEL 1:7-8

First, Epaphras was accurate in the communication of the truth, as is shown by the words *just as*. Second, that they had *learned* shows that Epaphras was a teacher. Third, Epaphras was personally committed to truth, shown by his close association with Paul. Verse 8 shows the positive attitude that Epaphras had toward those he taught.

As Expressed in Petition 1:9-14

The Root of the Petition: Knowledge of God's Will 1:9

"For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding."

Paul's prayer extends through verse 14, but verse 9 contains the only petition. Everything that follows verse 9 flows from this prayer. Knowing God's plan is the root of all right conduct. The word for *knowledge* is *epignosis*, which carries the two ideas of full knowledge and accurate knowledge. The word *filled* shows that Paul desires nothing less than the full limit. This is the extent of his petition for them; if there were other needs in Colossae, we do not know what they were. The knowledge that Paul desires for them is to have two qualities. First, it is to contain *wisdom*, which refers to the ability to perform what one knows; it denotes skill of application. Second, it is to involve *understanding*, which is a synonym of wisdom and also denotes ability to apply knowledge.

The Trunk of the Petition: a Worthy Walk 1:10a

"...so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects..."

Paul speaks of a worthy walk in four places. The first is in Ephesians 4:1, where the emphasis is on a walk that is consistent with our position in Christ. The second is found in Philippians 1:27, where the stress lies on a walk that is in harmony with the doctrine that we believe. Third, in I Thessalonians 2:12 our walk is related to bringing honor to God Himself. Finally, Colossians 1:10 relates our walk to the pleasure of the Lord.

The Branches of the Petition: Good Works 1:10b-14

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL IS TO REVEAL ITSELF IN OUR CHARACTER 1:10B

"...bearing fruit in every good work ..."

This is expressed by the participle *bearing fruit* and is followed by the words *in every good work*, showing the uniqueness of this tree. Most trees bear after their kind, but this one bears all kinds of fruit.

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL IS TO REVEAL ITSELF IN OUR WITNESS 1:10C

"...and increasing in the knowledge of God..."

The word *increasing* is used for the dissemination of something; thus, the idea is that of witness. The knowledge we have of God is to be continually passed on to others everywhere.

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL IS TO REVEAL ITSELF IN OUR SHARED POWER 1:11

"...strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience."

The term *according to* is used to introduce a norm or a standard. It teaches that the power supply is not based on our need, but on God's resources. This is not to deny that God meets our needs, but it does mean that the resources are far greater than anything we could ever need.

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL IS TO REVEAL ITSELF IN OUR MENTAL ATTITUDE 1:12-14

"...joyously ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

Thanksgiving is a response attitude. Its existence depends upon appreciation of certain facts. What these facts are is explained in verses 12 through 14.

He has qualified us for an inheritance (1:12). The word *qualified* is an aorist tense, indicating a decisive event that happens at the moment we are saved. The nature of our inheritance is described in I Peter 1:4 as one that knows no termination (*imperishable*), no imperfection (*undefiled*), no alteration (*will not fade away*), and no uncertainty (*reserved in heaven for you*).

He has delivered us from darkness (1:13a). The tense of *delivered* is once again an aorist, pointing to a definite event, not a process. This delivery is from darkness to light, showing that we need never again be dominated by error and confusion.

He has transferred us into the kingdom of His Son (13b). The word translated *transferred* is used for the literal removal of large groups of people to another land. The kingdom looks forward to the time when Christ will reign on earth, of which we are already citizens. The verb *we have* is present tense and points to the ongoing blessing of forgiveness that we enjoy.

THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST 1:15-18**JESUS CHRIST IN RELATIONSHIP TO GOD THE FATHER 1:15A**

"And He is the image of the invisible God..."

The noun *image* means *a likeness derived from an original*. Two eggs might look alike, but the word used here would not apply to them because one is not derived from the other. A photographic copy of a document would better illustrate the word. Two basic ideas are

inherent in the word. First, we have the idea of representation. Jesus is a perfect representation of deity because He is deity. Second, we have the idea of manifestation. Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. Who is God? God is Christ!

JESUS CHRIST IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE CREATION 1:15B-17

The Relationship Stated 1:15b

“...the firstborn of all creation...”

The word *first* has two distinct senses, both in Greek and English. It may mean first in time; it may mean first in rank, as in, “She is the first lady of the land,” referring to the wife of the President. The word *firstborn* as applied to Christ means *first in rank*. Psalm 89:27 makes clear that the idea of sovereignty and priority is contained in the word.

The Relationship Amplified 1:16-17

“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him. ¹⁷And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”

Christ Is the Originator of All Things

His relationship to creation is expressed in these verses by the prepositions *by*, *for*, *before*, and *in*. The opening words of verse 16 use the word *by* to show that the plans for creation were born and formulated in His mind.

Christ Is the Builder of All Things

This is expressed by the words *by Him*, which picture Christ as producing that which He conceived.

Christ Is the Owner of All Things

The preposition *for* carries this idea. It is for His pleasure and honor and glory that all things exist. Though stained by sin, the ultimate aim of all will be His glory.

Christ Is the Predecessor of All Things

This is conveyed by the preposition *before*, which shows Him to be above and before all creation.

Christ Is the Sustainer of All Things

The words *hold together* show Christ to be the cohesive power of the universe. Man would explain cohesiveness in scientific terms. The truth of the matter is that every heartbeat is a gift of His grace, sustained and maintained by Him alone.

JESUS CHRIST IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE CHURCH 1:18

“He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything.”

The Statement of His Position 1:18a

The concept of head and body sets forth the basic relationship of Christ and the church. The noun *head* has a definite article with it stressing His exclusive position. He is not *a* head; He is *the* head. The metaphor conveys at least three ideas—authority, intelligence, and direction.

The Reason for His Position 1:18b

Christ Is Head Because He Is “the Beginning”

Being the eternal God, He is the beginning of all things.

Christ Is Head Because He Is “the First-born”

The reference to being *first-born from the dead* is a reference to the resurrection. The word *dead* is plural in the Greek text, showing that He is the only one who has ever broken the power of death.

The Aim of His Position 1:18c

A practical question lies behind these words. Will His new creation (the church) respond to His headship as the physical creation does? He spoke, and the angry waves subsided; do we respond as obediently? The word *come* is a word that means *to move from one condition to another*. It refers to recognizing His Lordship in daily life.

THE WORK OF CHRIST 1:19-2:3

ITS DESCRIPTION 1:19-20

“For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him,²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.”

His Work in the Origin of Salvation 1:19

It Centers in the Pleasure of the Father 1:19a

The good pleasure of the Father is expressed with three infinitives. Two are found in verses 19 and 20, and the third is found in verse 22. They are *to dwell* and *to reconcile* in verses 19 and 20 and *to present* in verse 22. The first points to a perfect Savior, the second to a perfect work, and the third to a perfect result.

Verse 19 opens with the connective *for*. It ties verse 19 to verse 18 in introducing the reason why the Son is supreme in the church. The Son is supreme because of His work of reconciliation.

It Centers in the Perfection of the Son 1:19b

This is expressed by the term *all the fulness* that occurs here and also in 2:9 with slightly different ideas connected with it. In 1:19 the emphasis is on the fullness of His saving power; in 2:9 the emphasis is on the fullness of His divine nature.

His Work in the Accomplishment of Salvation 1:20

See “Observations on Reconciliation” at the end of these notes for an explanation of the doctrine of reconciliation.

ITS APPLICATION 1:21-23

“And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,²² yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—²³ if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.”

Viewing Their Past 1:21

This verse shows that a sinful past filled with hostility toward God is no barrier to the possibility of reconciliation. Sin represents the need for salvation, but it is not a barrier to salvation. Christ did not withhold His saving work because men did not deserve it.

Viewing Their Present 1:22a

The expressions *through the blood* in verse 20 and *through death* in verse 22 both show the means whereby reconciliation is accomplished; they are also synonymous in the sense that they explain one another.

Why does Paul refer to Jesus’ *fleshly body*? This is because the gnostics tried to deal with what they considered a basic problem. They believed evil is present in the world, and God cannot create evil. They held that matter was evil, God is good, and the two cannot touch. To solve the problem, they devised what they call aeons and emanations coming from God, with each possessing less and less divine quality until contact with evil becomes possible. Out of this error, other doctrinal errors emerged. First, the gnostics worshiped angels (Colossians 2:18). They did not believe that Christ was creator (Colossians 1:15-17), nor did they believe Christ came in the flesh (Colossians 1:22, 2:9). Fourth, they perverted Christianity by turning it into asceticism (Colossians 2:20-23).

Viewing Their Future 1:22b-23

The words *to present* point to glorification. Since this is God's ultimate goal for the believer, it is interesting to note that Paul makes that his goal also. Paul was not satisfied merely to see men saved. Paul taught with an aim to glorification.

Verse 23 shows the evidence that one has received Christ's reconciling work is continuance in the faith. The true test of genuine faith is continuity. Faith that is set aside is never genuine faith. I John 2:19 makes this clear. John says, "They (the deserters) went out from us, but they were not really of us (genuine believers); for if they had been of us (genuine believers), they would have remained with us; but they went out (deserted), in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us."

ITS PROPAGATION 1:24-2:3**Paul's Ministry and the Church 1:24**

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions."

This verse begins with an important principle: Learning to handle personal pressures and suffering qualifies us to help other believers (II Corinthians 1:3-7). In this sense, Paul's suffering is to the benefit of the Colossian church.

What does Paul mean when he speaks of "filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions"? First, we must reject any idea that there is some insufficiency in the work of Christ performed on the cross. Nothing is made clearer by Paul than the total adequacy of the cross. The word translated *afflictions* is never used in the New Testament for the atoning suffering of Christ. Second, we must reject the fanciful idea of a *treasury of merit* wherein the merits of Christ plus the suffering of the saints may be dispensed as indulgences. The sufferings of the believer are seen as a continuation of this world's quarrel with Jesus Christ (John 15:18-21). Persecution of the Lord's people is always viewed as persecution of Him. Paul persecuted the church; yet when faced by Christ on the Damascus road, Jesus said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

Paul's Ministry and the Word 1:25-27

"Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God,²⁶ that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints,²⁷ to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

The words *fully carry out* translate a verb that means *to fulfill*. Two ideas are involved in fulfilling the word of God. First, it refers to making a complete presentation of its content. Second, it refers to the geographical spread of the message. The word *mystery* as used in the New Testament never means *mysterious* in the sense of inability to understand. It refers to the truth about the church that was unrevealed in the Old Testament but has now been revealed, with Paul being its primary vehicle of explanation.

Paul's Ministry and the Individual 1:28-29

*“And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ.
²⁹And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”*

Paul's Methodology

The focus is now on the individual believer. The word *admonishing* is a compound of the word for *mind* and a verb meaning *to put or place*. The word *teaching* most frequently refers to public instruction. The word shows that the teaching was related to real-life situations. Paul showed believers how doctrine related to their lives.

Paul's Goal

Notice Paul's goal, as stated here in verse 28, is identical to God's goal for the believer, as stated in verse 22. The goal of the ministry is not merely men's salvation, but is a much more inclusive thing. See Colossians 2:1 for comment on Colossians 1:29.

Paul's Ministry and the Local Church 2:1-3

“For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, ²that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

The Statement of the Struggle 2: 1

The word *for* that begins the chapter ties these verses to the last words of chapter 1. It is an exposition of the noun *labor* and the word *striving* in 1:29. Paul's sense of the oneness of the body of Christ is manifested by his labor for believers he had never as much as seen face to face.

The Purpose of the Struggle 2:2-3

The word *understanding* shows where full assurance comes from. The mention of knowledge and love together in the same sentence

shows the close relationship of true doctrine and genuine love. Love is always spoken of in the context of truth and knowledge. Love is a mental attitude, not merely an emotion or burst of sentimentality.

APPLICATIONS FOR LIVING

The primary subject matter of our prayers should be for spiritual growth (1:9). This is not to eliminate other matters, but it is always the basic feature of all of Paul's prayers.

Prayer is simple communication with the Lord (1:9-14). Notice that it is difficult to tell at what point Paul moves from prayer to the teaching of doctrine. Verse 12 is clearly speaking of prayer, and verse 13 moves into teaching.

There should be no doubt in our minds about the exalted position of deity of Jesus Christ (1:15-18). There is no passage in the New Testament that gives the details of His highest exaltation as the sovereign of the universe as does this one.

NOTES

O ur Union with Jesus Christ

or “In Him We Are Complete”

Colossians 2:4-3:4

THE THREAT TO OUR RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST 2:4-8

THE METHODS OF FALSE TEACHING 2:4-5

“I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument. ⁵For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.”

False Teaching Aims to Deceive 2:4a

Paul’s teaching, at this point, rests upon a realistic assumption: A believer can be deceived by false teaching. We would do well to remind ourselves of the character of those who stood in danger and needed warning. They were full of faith and love (1:4, 8), and they were standing firm at the time Paul wrote (2:5).

The word *delude* is a compound verb that means *to reason off to the side*. It denotes clever argument. This may be accomplished by withholding some of the facts, as Genesis 29:25-26 shows, or by creation of an appearance contrary to the facts, as Joshua 9:1-9, 22 illustrates.

False Teaching Uses Plausible Arguments 2:4b

The words *persuasive argument* translate a single Greek word that refers to the skill of using words to gain a desired end, whether good or evil. Satan is the master counterfeiter, and he trains his servants well.

False Teaching Can be Successfully Resisted 2:5

The Colossian believers had responded with *good discipline*. Again, this is a single Greek word, a military term meaning *fixed ranks*. The troops in Colossae had not been scattered by the enemy; they had

maintained their ranks well. Another military term is found in the word *steadfastness*. It was used to describe the Roman phalanx.

THE PROTECTION AGAINST FALSE TEACHING 2:6-8

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. ⁸See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

Their Continued Walk 2:6-7

What does the word *as*, which begins verse 6, mean? First, it may mean *keep walking on the basis of the same principle on which you were saved, i.e., faith*. Second, it may mean *keep walking on the same basis that you received Him, i.e., as deity*. The latter idea seems to fit the context best. The false teachers were attacking the deity and authority of Christ, and the Colossians needed to stand firm in their convictions concerning Him.

In these two verses, Paul makes reference to their past experience and their present condition. First, their past experience is noted by the words *firmly rooted*, a perfect participle pointing to past completed action with abiding results. This is a reference to their initial salvation experience. Second, their present condition is stated using two present tense participles, *being built up* and *established*. Christ and doctrine are our protection from error. All of this occurred *just as you (they) had been instructed*. What might have happened to them had they not been instructed?

Their Daily Threat 2: 8

The Danger of False Teaching

The danger is introduced by the words *see to it*. As long as we are in this world, we are never out of the danger zone. Paul does not want them to become kidnaped Christians.

The Description of False Teaching

It is described as *philosophy*. This is the only place where this word is found in the Bible. In a good sense, philosophy is the search for clarity and understanding of the whole of reality. In a bad sense, as it is used here, it is human speculation about man's basic questions that deny the authority of God's written revelation. The gnostic teaching, which the false teachers were attempting to bring, was a syncretic mixture of Judaism, Hellenism, and Christian vocabulary.

The Source of False Teaching

The *traditions of men* point to a dual source. There were the traditions of Judaism, referred to in Matthew 15:7-9; and there were the secular Greek speculative systems.

The Content of False Teaching

This is expressed as the *elementary principles of the world*. Gnosticism was nothing but “ABC’s” compared to the fullness that was in Christ.

The Deficiency of False Teaching

It is deficient because it is not *according to Christ*.

THE GLORY OF OUR RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST 2:9-15

HE IS THE SOLUTION TO OUR INADEQUACY 2:9-10

“*For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form,¹⁰ and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.*”

The Fullness of the Son 2:9

The word *for* connects verses 8 and 9 together. It introduces the reason why philosophy is not only dangerous, but unnecessary. The most common pursuits of men are things (I Timothy 6:17), people (Isaiah 40:6-8), and human ideas (Colossians 2:8). The only true completeness comes from knowing Him who is fully complete.

The word *fulness* was a favorite of the gnostics. In their view, it was distributed and was not found in one single place alone. Paul counters that fullness is found in one single person, Jesus Christ. The words *deity* and *bodily* make two points about the person of Christ. First, He has sufficient power to help us, for He is God. Second, He has sufficient heart to help us, for He is man.

The Fullness of the Sons 2:10

The words *made complete* are the same as *fulness* in verse 9. Our fullness comes from His fullness; our completeness derives from His completeness. See also John 1:16 and Ephesians 3:17-19.

HE IS THE SOLUTION TO OUR SIN NATURE 2:11

“*..and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ...*”

Christ’s death was for both sin and sins. Christ’s death on the cross severed our connection to the sin nature in that we do not have to

| say yes to its urgings. This is the same concept that is taught in Romans 6.

HE IS THE SOLUTION TO OUR GUILT 2:12-14

| “...having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. ¹³And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, ¹⁴having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”

Our Former Condition 2:13a

| The pre-salvation condition of the Colossian Christians is described by the noun *dead*. The key idea in this word is that of separation. Separation of the soul and spirit from the body is called physical death. Separation of man from God is called spiritual death. Those who are spiritually dead operate in two spheres—*sins* and *sin*. *Sins* refers to the acts which they do, and *sin* speaks of the nature that dominates and determines them.

Our Present Union 2:13b

| Our life is due to union with Christ.

Our Present Forgiveness 2:13c-14

| The word translated *forgiven* is important and enlightening. It is the verb *charizomai*, which is linked to the word *charis*, which means *grace*. The most important accomplishment of God’s grace is God’s forgiveness. Notice that forgiveness is stated as a fact, not a potential. It is something to be believed, irrespective of how we may feel. It may well be that the sin of failing to believe that we are forgiven may be worse than the sins that required forgiveness in the first place.

| The words *having canceled out* translate a word that means *to wipe away*. It was used of smearing out letters on a wax tablet. It was also used of the removal of an item from an account. The term *certificate of debt* was used of an IOU statement. There were really two superscriptions over the cross: one written by man saying, “This is Jesus the King of the Jews” (Matthew 27:37), and one written by God and found here in Colossians 2:14.

HE IS THE SOLUTION TO OUR ARCH-ENEMY 2:15

| “When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.”

| The words *triumphed over* were used of the leading of a victory processional by a conquering general. This privilege was a coveted

honor for military commanders. In order to lead such a parade, there were four requirements. First, one had to be the actual field commander. Second, one had to lead a complete and totally successful campaign. Third, large portions of the enemy troops had to be vanquished. Fourth, there had to be a positive extension of occupied territory.

THE OBLIGATIONS OF OUR RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST 2:16-3:4

NEGATIVELY, WE MUST REFUSE RELIGIOUS PERFORMANCE 2:16-23

By Remaining Free of Legalism 2:16-17

“Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—¹⁷things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.”

Not only is the believer to stay free of legalism, but he is to refuse to allow the legalist to put him on a guilt trip. The rituals under the Law were shadow theology. They foreshadowed realities yet to come. It is not appropriate to hold on to the shadows when what they predicted has come. A photograph of a friend is pleasant when the friend is not present, but their personal presence demands that our eyes be on them, not the photograph.

By Remaining Free of False Spirituality 2:18-19

“Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, ¹⁹and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.”

The Self-Abasement Program

The self-abasement Paul is talking about is the type in which one abases oneself and then becomes proud of one's humility. It says, “I don't mind suffering silently as long as everyone knows about it.”

The False Worship Program

The worship of angels allows praise to be directed to beings other than God. While it is true that angels are instruments in the hands of the Lord, it is false worship to heap praise on the instrument.

The Experience Program

This is expressed by the words *taking his stand on visions he has seen*. Our experience is to be based squarely on the word of God; *visions* points to experiential and emotional orientation.

The Problem with These Programs

All of these programs have a fatal flaw: They do not recognize the total adequacy of Jesus Christ. They are programs, and true Christianity focuses about a person.

By Remaining Free of Asceticism 2:20-23

“If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ²¹‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!’ ²²(which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? ²³These 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.”

Behind the instruction in these verses lies a problem: How can man’s nature be controlled? God’s solution is simple and drastic—death is the solution. The word *if* introduces a first class conditional sentence, which assumes the statement to be true. God dealt with the sin nature of every believer at the cross by severing our connection with it (Romans 5, II Corinthians 5:14, and Galatians 2:19). The sin nature is present, but we are freed from the obligation to obey it. The world handles man’s problem of the sin nature by denying its existence and blaming man’s environment instead.

There are at least five errors involved in attempting spirituality by legalistic practices. First, it contradicts God’s method of dealing with the sin nature, namely, by death (2:20). Second, it is negative in character—“Don’t touch, don’t taste, don’t handle” (2:21). The Christian life is an expression, not a suppression. Third, legalism has nothing behind it but human authority (2:22). Fourth, it involves a false display (2:23). Fifth, it does not honor God, but rather honors the flesh (2:23).

POSITIVELY, WE MUST RECOGNIZE OUR POSITION IN CHRIST 3:1-4

“If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on the things above, not the things that are on earth. ³For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”

Union with Christ: Its Features

Our Position Relative to the Past

First, we *have been raised up*. Second, we *have died* (3:3). Our identification with Christ in His cross work has two aspects to it. Our identity with His death cuts us off from our old life. Our identity with His resurrection connects us to our new life. This position is to have practical effect on how we live as 3:3, 5, 9-10 will show.

Our Position Relative to the Present

This is expressed in the words *hidden with Christ*, which point to our secure relationship. The term *with Christ in God* puts a double lock on the door of security. It also indicates that which is secret. We have resources available to us that are unknown and unseen to man.

Our Position Relative to the Future

The words *will be revealed* look to our future glorification.

Union with Christ: Our Mental Obligation

The word *seeking* carries the sense of making an examination. It does not imply pursuing something that is trying to elude us. The reference to *things above* points to spiritual truths and realities. That Christ is *seated* indicates salvation is complete and finished.

APPLICATIONS FOR LIVING

We must always be alert to the possibility of falling to false teaching no matter how well established we may think we are (2:4-5).

We must learn to trust the adequacy of Christ for every area of life. Our walk is *in Him* (2:6), our rooting is *in Him* (2:7), our foundation is *in Him* (2:7), our completeness is *in Him* (2:10), our victory is *in Him* (2:11), and our life is *in Him* (2:13).

Any valid Christian experience must accord with sound doctrine (2:18).

Every experience must answer two questions: Is its source God, man, or Satan, and what does it mean? The answers to these must come from the word of God.

NOTES

The Conduct of the Believer in Christ or “Putting Off and Putting On”

Colossians 3:5-4:1

OUR INWARD LIFE 3:5-17

ITS NEGATIVE ASPECTS 3:5-11

Items to Put Off 3:5-9a

“Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. ⁶For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, ⁷and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another...”

The main verb is translated by the words *consider...as dead*. It is in the emphatic position and thus lays great stress on our duty. The verb may mean *put to death* or *treat as dead*. The latter fits the context best (see 3:3). This command is followed by a listing of some of the manifestations of the sin nature.

Manifestations of Sin in Sexual Conduct 3:5a

This is expressed by the words *immorality, impurity, passion*. The word of God shows that there are three possible uses of sex. First, there is the wrong use of sex, as in fornication (I Corinthians 6:15-19). Second, there is non-use, or abstinence (I Corinthians 7:7-8). Third, there is proper use, as in marriage (I Corinthians 7:9).

Manifestations of Sin in Mental Habits 3:5b-7

The word *greed* means *desire to have more*. It is an attitude that is an enemy to the sufficiency of Christ. How is this idolatry? It is idolatry because it raises a rival object of worship.

Manifestations of Sin in Social Habits 3:8-9

The first three words of verse 8 go together. The word *anger* points to a bad disposition; *wrath* refers to an outburst; *malice* to the ill will

that remains after the first two sins have been committed. The next three words also go together. Speech intended to damage reputation is *slander*; speech intended to inflict injury is *abusive*; and speech intended to create false impression is a *lie*.

The Argument for Putting Off 3:9b-11

“...since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him,¹¹—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.”

The Old Self Put Off 3:9b

The use of the word *self* is more of an interpretation than a translation. The Greek word is *anthropos*, which means *man*. The *old self* is literally the *old man*.

The New Self Put On 3:10-11

What is the *new self*, or new nature? The new self is not the indwelling Holy Spirit or Christ. This is true because the new self is said to be created and is something that grows progressively. The new nature is the constantly renewed personality of the believer.

ITS POSITIVE ASPECTS 3:12-17

Our Duty in Respect to Others 3:12-14

“And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.¹⁴ And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.”

In Terms of Attitude 3:12

Galatians 5:22 lists the qualities of verse 12 as the fruit of the Spirit.

In Terms of Action 3:13

The word *bearing* is a participle showing how the foregoing attitudes are to be expressed. Literally it means *to put up with*. One might note that Paul does not speak of changing one another. Our *own* weaknesses are the only ones we are responsible for changing. The command presupposes that we all border on being intolerable at times—many times—perhaps most of the time? The word *forgiving* is the verb form of the noun *grace*. It refers to unconditional forgiveness.

In Terms of Priority 3:14

The word *beyond* is a Greek preposition whose basic meaning is *upon*. Love is to be the crowning quality that is put upon all the foregoing things.

Our Duty in Respect to Ourselves 3:15-17

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

The Peace of Christ Ruling 3:15

Two types of peace must be recognized. First, there is objective peace. This is the peace that has been established by the cross of Christ (Colossians 1:20, Romans 5:1). Our response to this peace is to be faith. Second, there is subjective peace. This is the inner, experiential peace and tranquillity that comes from resting in God's objective peace. Its protective nature is described in Philippians 4:6-7.

Peace is to have the final word on all matters. The word *rule* is an athletic term for the word of an umpire. The word *hearts* is the most comprehensive term in the Bible for the totality of one's inner life. It may refer to the mind, as in Psalm 14:1; the emotions, as in Romans 10:1; or the will, as in Romans 10:10.

The Word of Christ Dwelling 3:16

First, the word of God is to be memorized (*dwell within you*). Second, the word of God is to be plentiful (*richly*). Third, the word of God is to be applied (*with all wisdom*). Fourth, the word of God is to be expressed (*teaching and admonishing one another*).

The Name of Christ Motivating 3:17

The word *all* is emphatic. This verse calls upon us to do two things. First, it demands that we eliminate certain things, such as lying (3:9). One can hardly lie in the name of Christ. Second, it demands that we evaluate all things, asking ourselves if they are truly being done for the honor of Christ. What we do is probably not as important as for whom we do it.

OUR FAMILY LIFE 3:18-4:1

Paul makes an orderly and complete presentation of family life as it existed in the first century. Each entity within the family unit is distinctly admonished. Each is particularized by means of a definite article in the Greek text. The concept of mutual duty is germane in each relationship, coupled with the concept of authority and submission.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF WIFE AND HUSBAND 3:18-19

“Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them.”

The Relationship of the Wife to Her Husband 3:18

Her Duty

Her duty has two facets to it. First, her submission is to be unbroken and continuous, as indicated by the present tense verb. Second, her submission is to be an act of volition, as indicated by the middle voice—submit yourself. The word translated *be subject* carries the idea of responding to the office of another. It denotes response and obedience.

Her Motivation

Her motivation for submission is not derived from the good or worthy character of her husband. Her obligation is to him, but her motivation is from the Lord. This harmonizes perfectly with the concept of grace. God does not bless us because of our merits nor withhold blessing because of our demerits. So the wife does not submit because of the husband’s merits, or lack of them, but rather submits as a matter of obedience to the Lord.

The Relationship of the Husband to His Wife 3:19

His Duty

The command to love his wife is imperative, and the present tense indicates it is to be continuous and unbroken. As is true of all genuine love, it is to be expressed in action. No woman should have trouble with submission to a man who loves her.

His Danger

The word *embittered* is not merely an attitude; it refers rather to harsh treatment.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHILDREN AND PARENTS 3:20-21

“Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. ²¹Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lost heart.”

The Relationship of Children to Parents 3:20

Their Duty

The verb translated *be obedient* is *hupakouo*, which is a compound word made up of a preposition meaning *under* and a verb meaning *to dispel*. Submissive listening is obedience. The ears of a child should be tuned to his or her parents, not his or her peers. The importance of this command is seen by viewing conditions where it is absent. When Paul is describing human depravity at its worst, disobedience to parents is listed along with haters of God, inventors of evil (Romans 1:30). In II Timothy 3:2 Paul describes society in its final corruption, and disobedience to parents is one of its characteristics.

The words *in all things* describe the extent of the obedience. It is not to be occasional, and it shows that the child need not be concerned with evaluating the parental request before obedience is rendered.

Their Motivation

Mom and Dad cannot be and are not always right. This, however, is not the point; pleasing God is the issue. This relationship of obedience allows the child to benefit from the age and experience of his or her parents. If one is young, one only knows what it is like to be young. If one is older, he knows what it is like to be young because *he has been there*; and he also knows what it is like to be older because *he is there*.

The Relationship of Fathers to Children 3:21

While the mother is included in verse 21, the focus is now on the father. First, he is obligated not to *exasperate* his children. The word connotes the exasperation caused by being overexacting. Second, this is dangerous because a child who never pleases gives up (don't we all?).

THE RELATIONSHIP OF SLAVES AND MASTERS 3:22-4:1

“Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. ²⁵For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. ¹Master, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.”

Understanding these verses requires that we know something about the Roman world of the first century. Wars had heavily depleted the economy, and most of the population were slaves. The Roman soldier would not think of doing the labor of a slave. Work showed low social status; idleness was the badge of the

aristocracy. That is why work is stressed in 3:22-25, and compensation is stressed in 4:1. In the empire, one was either a proprietor or a slave. The word of God does not state its approval of slavery. At the same time, it does not suggest the revolt of slaves. On the positive side, it teaches slaves to be good workers and continue in submission to their masters.

Why does the Bible take this stance? It does this because a master can be served as unto the Lord (3:23). God's word did not free the slaves who were believers; it rather gave them new motives for being good slaves. The New Testament epistles do not concern themselves with the social structure of the Roman world. The emphasis is not on the change of society, but rather on the transformation of men into the likeness of Christ. One could be a Christlike master or, just as easily, a Christlike slave—and being Christlike is all that matters for the believer who is, after all, a stranger and a pilgrim in this world.

The Relationship of Slaves to Masters 3:22-25

Their Duty

EXECUTION OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE MASTER 3:22A

This is wrapped up in the verb *obey*, which is the same word used in verse 20 to express the duty of a child to his parents. The word translated *master* is *kurios*, which means *Lord*, and is the same noun as is applied to Christ.

CARRYING OUT ONE'S JOB BY DOING AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE AS WELL AS POSSIBLE 3:23

The word *heartily* is *ek psucha*, which literally translated says *out of the soul*. This points to both quantity and quality of work.

FINAL COMPENSATION COMES FROM THE LORD, NOT MEN 3:24-25

The Lord takes notice of how we perform on the job and responds to the quality of our work. How we perform our work is identical with serving the Lord poorly or well, for in God's eyes we are all in full-time service to Him.

Their Motivation

Slaves are to be motivated by God in their work (3:22b). Negatively, the slave is not to perform *external service*. The word is a compound made up of the noun *ophthalmos*, which means *eye*, and the noun *doulia*, which means *service*. There are two ideas here. First, it refers to work which is done only when the master is looking. Second, it refers to work which is done to attract the eye of the master. Either of the above shows that we are working only to please men or ourselves. Positively, work is to be done *with sincerity of heart*. The word *sincerity* carries the idea of simplicity of moti-

vation. The worker must be able to say, “I am here on earth to live for the Lord, and I am a servant to pay the expenses.” Doing our job well shows we have respect for the Lord.

The Relationship of Masters to Slaves 4:1

Their Duty

The employer is to be meticulous in the areas of justice and fairness.

Their Motivation

As in all family relationships, the motivation is the same: The Lord observes and responds and regards all obedience within the family as unto Himself. Husband and wife, child and parent, slave and master are all answerable to the same God.

APPLICATIONS FOR LIVING

Trying to change others is an impossible task—we help others by passing on the word of God to them (3:13).

It is never God’s will for a believer to be in a frenzy (3:15).

Thankfulness is a commanded quality, and there is basis for it in every situation if we make an effort to see it (3:15). On an occasion Matthew Henry was robbed, and he gave thanks for four reasons. First, the robber took all I had, but that was not much. Second, the robber took my possessions, but not my life. Third, I had never been robbed before. Fourth, I was the one robbed, not the robber.

NOTES

Paul's Concluding Remarks

or "His Friends and Personal Matters"

Colossians 4:2-18

PAUL'S PARTING COMMANDS 4:2-6

ABOUT WATCHING IN PRAYER 4:2-4

"Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; ³praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ for which I have also been imprisoned; ⁴in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak."

The verb *devote* is a very strong word. It is used to describe the preoccupation of the early church with three things: prayer (Acts 1:14), the word of God, and fellowship (Acts 2:42). The word is used of devotion to a task to the exclusion of other things (Acts 6:4). It was used of an unbroken, uninterrupted activity (Acts 10:7). Finally, it is used of the activity of a tax collector in Romans 13:6.

The command for alertness is appropriate because any repeated activity can lead to listlessness. Verses 3 and 4 show the relationship of prayer and evangelism. Prayer is directly linked to the open door for a witness. We are not told to make opportunities or wait for opportunities, but to pray for opportunities. Several things can be said about an open door. First, an open door does not mean absence of opposition (I Corinthians 16:9). Second, an open door is not the same as the existence of a need (Acts 16:6). An open door is a set of circumstances brought about by God for the presentation of His word through a human instrument. Paul is in prison as he writes, and it is significant that he is more interested in getting the word out than getting himself out.

The concept of witnessing is a thread that runs through verses 2-6. Verses 2-4 deal with the obtaining of opportunity, verse 5 with seizing the opportunity, and verse 6 with preparing for the opportunity.

ABOUT WALKING IN WISDOM 4:5

“Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.”

First, the walk involves discretion toward unbelievers. This would refer to having the skill to know the “what, when, and how” of witnessing. Second, the walk involves purpose in the use of time. The words *making the most* translate the single verb *exagorazo*, which means *to buy out*. The word *opportunity* refers to a particular point in time.

ABOUT WITNESSING IN WORD 4:6

“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.”

Three concepts about the believer’s speech are found here. First, our words should contain charm. This is conveyed by the words *with grace*. Second, our words should be seasoned. This conveys the idea of a well put phrase. We should think and plan before we speak. Third, our words should be adapted and appropriate to the one to whom we witness.

PAUL’S PERSONAL FRIENDS 4:7-18

HIS MESSENGERS 4:7-9

“As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bondservant in the Lord, will bring you information. ⁸For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; ⁹and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here.”

His Friend Tychicus 4:7-8

Tychicus was a messenger for Paul on several occasions. He had been dispatched to Ephesus once (II Timothy 4:12); to see Titus once (Titus 3:12); and here he is the bearer of the letter to the church at Colossae.

Tychicus is described in three ways. First, in relationship to the church, he is the *beloved brother*. Second, in the relationship to his function, he is a *faithful servant*. Third, in relationship to Paul, he is a *fellow bond-servant*.

His Friend Onesimus 4:9

Onesimus is going to Colossae under a different set of circumstances than Tychicus. The book of Philemon provides the details. There is no mention of his offense; there is no call to confess it to

the church. Sin's guilt has been forgiven by God; the rest was a personal matter between him and Philemon.

HIS GREETINGS 4:10-18

From His Companions 4:10-14

“Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas' cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him); ¹¹and 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 to me. ¹²Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. ¹³For I bear him witness that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. ¹⁴Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas.”

The Three Jewish Believers 4:10-11

We know nothing of Aristarchus or Jesus Justus except that they were Jewish. We do know about Mark. Acts 15:37-40 tells of his desertion of Paul; Colossians 4:10 shows him back in the fellowship of Paul, for Paul bore no grudges; and in II Timothy 4:11 Paul says of him, “He is useful to me for service.”

The Three Gentile Believers 4:12-14

Epaphras is described as *always laboring earnestly*, using the verb *agonizomai*, an athletic metaphor for intense and agonizing personal struggle. Luke was with Paul in this Roman confinement; thus, with Paul, we have the authors of 155 of the 260 chapters of the New Testament.

To His Friends 4:15-18

“Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. ¹⁶And 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. ¹⁷And say to Archippus, ‘Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.’ ¹⁸I Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you. ”

The mention of a church meeting in the house of Nympha is instructive, especially in light of the massive and opulent structures we call churches today. As is always the case in Paul's letters, he concludes with reference to God's grace

APPLICATIONS FOR LIVING

Paul expected that the children in Colossae would read the word of God. Notice that they are addressed directly, not indirectly through their parents (3:20).

The church in the house of Nympha reminds us that the building in which we meet matters little (4:15). Since believers are brothers and sisters, a home setting is appropriate for the body of Christ.

NOTES

Observations on Reconciliation

The basic idea in the word *reconciliation* is very simple. It means *to adjust something to a specific standard*. As used in the Bible, man is viewed as out of harmony with God, who, through the cross work of Jesus Christ, accomplishes what is necessary to bring man back into fellowship with Himself.

The Need for Reconciliation: Man Is a Sinner

In the early chapters of the Roman epistle, Paul argues the existence of man's sinful condition saying "...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)." This verse points to the universality of sinfulness, for it includes all. It also points to the nature of sin—*all...fall short*. The word means *to lack what one must have*. It is a picture of a legitimate bill that far exceeds what one can possibly pay. This verse finally points to the standard which man fails to meet—*the glory of God*. What, then, is *the glory of God*? Our answer comes from the Old Testament in passages such as Exodus 24:16-17 which reads, "And the glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the mountain top." The *glory* spoken of here refers to the person and presence of God Himself.

The need for reconciliation is further established by Romans 5:6-10 where four words are used to describe man's condition. Men are said to be *helpless, ungodly, sinners, and enemies*. What, then, is the solution to this disharmony? How can the problem be solved?

First, can man bring himself back to God?

Obviously, this is not the solution. Man's condition of sinfulness teaches that man will not and cannot pull himself up to the standards demanded by a perfectly righteous God. Even if he could, there still remains the problem of his past sins, which demand just punishment.

Second, can God adjust Himself to man ?

Here again is an unthinkable solution. The righteous God of the universe cannot and would not adjust Himself to the sinfulness of man. God is eternally and unchangeably holy.

Third, what then has God done?

The last option expresses the doctrine of reconciliation—God must undertake to adjust man to Himself.

The Standard for Reconciliation: God Himself

Since reconciliation involves an adjustment, we must determine the standard to which adjustment is made. II Corinthians 5:18 tells us that God has “reconciled us to Himself through Christ.” Here we have the standard of reconciliation, *to Himself*, and the means of doing so, *through Christ*. God Himself is the standard to which adjustment must be made—His character may not be compromised in any way.

Reconciliation is always to God. He is the constant and unchangeable one. The question that remains, then, is this, “How can God bring man into harmony with Himself without changing in any way and without compromise of His character?”

The Means of Reconciliation: The Cross of Jesus Christ

Ephesians 2:16 explains the means of reconciliation, saying that God might “reconcile them both (Jew and Gentile) in one body to God through the cross.” This means of reconciliation is also taught in Colossians 1:20 and Romans 5:10-11. The cross work of Jesus Christ is the heart of salvation. The total solution to the problem of man’s sinfulness is realized exclusively in the cross death of Jesus Christ. The only contribution man can make is his sinfulness; all else is solved by God in the death and resurrection of His Son.

The Basis of Reconciliation: Jesus Christ Became Identified with Sinners so as to Take Their Place

II Corinthians 5:21 tells us, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Here we have the very heart of salvation: Jesus Christ died in the place of the guilty sinner. This is the biblical doctrine of substitution.

The Change of Reconciliation: A New Position Before God

Reconciliation produces a positional change. Man is now made savable. There is now a basis upon which God can extend His salvation; He is now free to grant forgiveness—a provision is made. The work of Jesus Christ does not save men, but it makes salvation possible—it makes man savable.

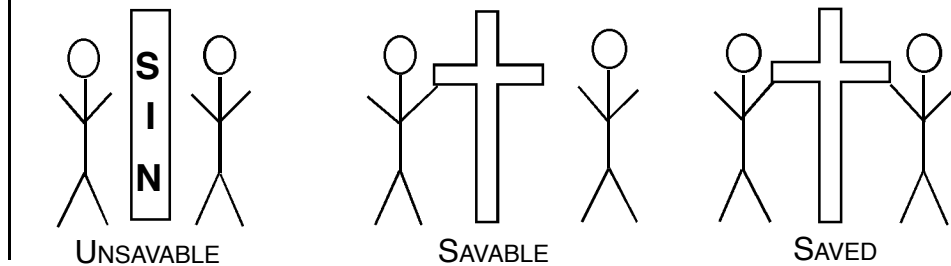
The Condition of Reconciliation: Our Faith

Reconciliation is objectively provided by the cross of Christ and is subjectively appropriated by faith.

The Responsibility of Reconciliation: Our Witness

II Corinthians 5:18, 20 contains two truths about reconciliation. First, reconciliation is a finished work—*who reconciled us to Himself through Christ*. Second, this finished work is ours to proclaim—*He gave us the ministry of reconciliation...therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God*.

The following diagrams express the concept of reconciliation by showing man as unsavable (apart from the cross), savable (due to the cross), and finally, as saved (due to faith in the cross).



NOTES