

Colossians: Power to Endure with Joy

Most of the letters that Paul wrote to the churches were written to those that he had started himself. But he did not begin the church at Rome, nor did he begin the church at Colossae. It is not certain who started the church at Colossae, but it is very likely a man mentioned in certain of Paul's other letters---Epaphroditus, or, since that was too long a name for even the Greeks to say, Epaphras. He is mentioned in this letter as being from Colossae, and is very likely the one who founded the church. Where he had heard the Gospel we do not know, but he had evidently taken it to his own home town and had begun to proclaim Christ. Out of that proclamation had come the church at Colossae.

Epaphroditus had gone to Rome to see the Apostle Paul, who was then a prisoner, carrying with him reports of the church at Colossae. Another man had also gone to Rome to see Paul during his first imprisonment, and he too brought reports of the church at Colossae. So it was to these new Christians who had never met the apostle face to face that Paul wrote the letter from Rome.

It was written at about the same time as the letter to the Philippians, and you will notice that it is very similar in its structure and content to the letter to the Ephesians. They were probably written at about the same time, during Paul's first imprisonment, and are therefore called the Prison epistles of the apostle Paul. The primary difference between the Ephesians and Colossians is that the Colossians had a problem, and it is on this problem that the apostle is primarily focusing. They were on the verge of losing their understanding of the power by which Christian life is lived. Therefore, this letter is the great proclamation and explanation of the power of the Christian's life through Christ as the resource of the individual.

Chapter 1

¹ *I, Paul, have been sent on special assignment by Christ as part of God's master plan . . .*

God's master plan . . . I love it! He had been planning since the beginning of time for man's redemption . . . he told the story in the stars, through every aspect of the temple, the furnishing with the temple, the sacrifices and offerings, it could be seen in the many feasts. He even used various fruits and vegetables to symbolize the story of redemption . . . it was in front of our eyes from the beginning of the Abrahamic covenant, yet no one saw it—they experienced it, yet never understood it.

⁴ . . . *thanking God because you believe—the leaning of your entire human personality on Him in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom, and goodness —and because you are showing true Christian love towards other Christians. We know you are showing these qualities because you have grasped the hope reserved for you in Heaven . . .*

That is always the mark that the apostles looked for. Whenever they heard of other Christians they expected to hear that something had happened to them, that they had become a different kind of people, that they weren't going on, as many Christians attempt

to do today, utterly unchanged in their attitudes or their outlooks. But to the first-century Christians, becoming a Christian meant a radical transformation. It affected their words, motivations, conduct, who they associated with.

True Christianity is more than a verbal explanation of life. It is a way of life. A twenty-four-hour a day, demanding, challenging, courageous way of life.

I like what Steve Camp has to say about the demands of our Christian lives: “There’s safety in complacency but God’s calling us out of our comfort zones into a life of complete surrender to the cross. To live dangerously is not to live recklessly but righteously and it is because of God’s radical grace for us that we can risk living a life of radical obedience for Him.” This was evident in these Colossian Christians.

Paul continues to describe these Christians in the Colossian church:

⁵ The lines of purpose in your lives never grow slack, tightly tied as they are to your future in heaven—you are looking forward to the joys of heaven—keep them taut by hope.

⁵ The Message is as true among you today as when you first heard it. It doesn’t diminish or weaken over time . . .

Because of the hope of experiencing what is laid up—or waiting for you in heaven ⁶ . . . You’ve been hungry for more . . .

I’m not surprised . . . oh, that we could have such hunger . . .

Every aspect of their lives was changed—and at times inconvenienced. They still had jobs to hold, diapers to change, bills to pay . . . but they allowed this message to alter their priorities and desires.

. . . It is changing lives everywhere . . . it is bearing fruit and still growing by its own inherent power

you can’t help it, it does it on its own!!!

—Wherever that gospel goes, it produces Christian character—and develops it . . .

Paul told the Roman church that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. So of course it will produce Christian character—and develop it wherever it goes! It has the very power of God to accomplish whatever it was sent forth to do . . .

. . . Once you came to know the grace in reality, deeply and clearly and thoroughly, becoming accurately and intimately acquainted with it. ⁷ . . . it’s as vigorous in you now as when you first learned and understood the truth about God’s great kindness to sinners . . .

Once you grasp the depth of what God accomplished through the death of Jesus on the cross, it will act as a catalyst to help transform your entire life!

Now the apostle writes to them and thanks God for what he has heard about them. He comments upon their faith and then prays for them. This prayer is one of the most refreshing prayers in the New Testament (1:9-12):

⁹ . . . asking God to give you wise minds and spirits attuned to his will . . . that you may be filled with the full . . . deep and clear . . . knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom . . . in comprehensive insight into the ways and purposes of God and in understanding and discernment of spiritual things . . . a thorough understanding of the ways in which God works . . . as you learn how more and more how God works, you will learn how to do your work . . .

That's the purpose of the whole thing! That we can know what God is all about, what He wants from us, who He is . . . to know HIM—to know His will . . . —that we could be filled—filled to overflowing with knowledge and understanding . . . —to possess a deep and clear knowledge . . . —to have comprehensive insight into the ways and purposes of God—a thorough understanding of the ways in which God works . . .

This does not happen overnight. It is a growing process—the maturing process intended for us.

He's not hiding it from us!! He wants companionship; fellowship; intimacy . . . we are the ones holding Him back! We are the ones hindering Him from revealing Himself!

¹⁰ *We also pray that your outward lives, which men see, may bring credit to your masters name. That you may walk—live and conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him and desiring to please him in all things . . . steadily growing and increasing in the knowledge of God—with a fuller, deeper and clearer insight, acquaintance, and recognition—that your knowledge of God may grow yet deeper . . .*

That note begins to set forth the source of all power in the Christian life—Jesus Christ himself.

The theme of this letter can be expressed by these words that are part of the apostle's introductory prayer for the Colossian Christians:

¹¹ *May you be strengthened with all power, [that is why he wrote the letter] according to his glorious might [That is the subject of the letter to the Colossians.]*

Strengthened with all power . . . what kind of strength? ¹¹ . . . the strength to stick it out over the long haul—not the grim strength of gritting your teeth, but the glory-strength God gives—invigorated and strengthened with all power . . . that you will have all the

patience and endurance you need . . . It is strength that endures the unendurable and spills over into joy—that you may pass through any experience and endure it with joy . . .

Look at Paul’s attitude when he knew hardship was to come:

Acts 20:22 And now, you see, I am going to Jerusalem, bound by the [Holy] Spirit and obligated and compelled by the [convictions of my own] spirit, not knowing what will befall me there—²³ Except that the Holy Spirit clearly and emphatically affirms to me in city after city that imprisonment and suffering await me (He knew “clearly and emphatically” what was coming, but): ²⁴ But none of these things move me; neither do I esteem my life dear to myself, if only I may finish my course with joy!!!!—

That kind of attitude doesn’t come naturally! It requires God’s ability—God’s Grace! But that is the attitude Paul was praying for them to have—the ability to endure any hardship, disappointment, persecution, frustration, etc., to endure them with joy!

¹² . . . *always thanking the Father, who has enabled you—qualified and made us fit—to share the inheritance that belongs to God’s people . . .*

Of course we should give honor to our Father . . . it is beyond amazing what he has accomplished and provided for us! He has enabled us—He has qualified and made us fit—to inherit his kingdom!

We didn’t do anything to earn it or achieve it for ourselves—he did it all!

¹³ *The Father has delivered and drawn us to Himself out of the control and dominion of darkness*

- *he has rescued us from the power of darkness*
- *and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love—think of it! He has given us citizenship in another country—a country for which we are now ambassadors!*
- *re-established us in the kingdom of his beloved Son.*

That is utterly amazing!!!!

Then Paul gives us one of the strongest and most glorious proclamations concerning Jesus’ essential deity. It is found in this passage (1:15):

¹⁵ *We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen—he is the visible image of the invisible God . . . We look at this Son and see God’s original purpose in everything created . . .*

He is the image of the invisible God,

An image is an exact expression. He is declaring here that in the man Jesus we have the exact expression of all that God is. And furthermore, he is, the first-born of all creation.

Maybe you have been visited by a couple on your doorstep with little green books under their arms, announcing themselves as Jehovah's Witnesses and asking if they may come in and tell you the truth about life and the Bible. If you let them in, sooner or later they turn to this passage to show you that Jesus Christ was not God, but he was essentially a creature—the highest of the creatures of creation—and they use this term the first-born of all creation to bolster their argument. They state that this means that Jesus was the first one ever created. (There is, of course, a sense in which this word first-born does have that meaning. In referring to our children, we say that the oldest one is the first-born because he or she appeared first on the scene.) That is one of the slick devices by which the cults propagate their errors. It is very subtle because it seems to be logical and scriptural.

However, what they are doing is giving the term a modern meaning, which is quite different from the usage in the New Testament. Here, the word "first-born" means the heir, or the chief—the principal one, the owner. This phrase, "the first-born of all creation," means that the Lord Jesus stands in relationship to creation just as an heir stands in relationship to his father's property. He is not part of it, but rather, he is the owner of it, the heir.

This term is used in various ways in the Old Testament. There are two specific instances where the one who is born second is the first-born of the family. In the case of Isaac and Ishmael, Ishmael was born first, but Jacob was the first-born. So you see, Jesus was not the first one of a line of creation, but the heir of all creation—the owner of it. And this fits with what Paul goes on to say:

¹⁶ For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him.

If you look carefully at the Jehovah's Witnesses' little green translation of the scriptures, you will notice that in order to substantiate their lie about Jesus Christ, they have inserted the word *other* in these phrases. "All *other* things were created by him. In him all *other* things were created." However, there is no warrant whatsoever in the Greek text for the insertion of the word *other*. This is a clear instance of deceitfulness used in order to propagate their lies.

Here is Paul's great declaration. Here is the Lord Jesus. He is declaring him to be the creator. The One who flung all the worlds into being, who was present with God (and who was God) when the great words went out, "Let there be light; let the earth bring forth." It was the Lord who did this, and furthermore, as Paul goes on to say:

¹⁷ He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment . . .

Now it is one of the puzzles of science why things hold together. We know that everything we can touch is made up of tiny atoms that consist of electrons buzzing

around a nucleus. And anything that rotates or revolves has a force that projects outward—centrifugal force. Therefore, things ought to be blowing up. Because of this centrifugal force, every atom ought to be flying apart. Well, what holds it together? Science cannot answer. Scientists say it is an unnamed force. That always interests me, because it reminds me of Paul's experience in Athens when he found the people worshipping an unknown god. It is the unknown God that science is struggling with today: his name is Jesus of Nazareth. By him are all things held together, and all power in the natural world comes from him.

But further, the apostle says:

¹⁸ . . . He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From the beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone. ¹⁹So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. ²⁰Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies—God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth—all because of Christ's death, his blood that poured down from the Cross—through the intervention of the Son, all things should be completely reconciled back to himself . . . The Father made peace by means of the blood of His cross.

Twice he uses this term, the first-born. He is the first-born of the old creation; he is the first-born of the new creation—the resurrection—the first-born from the dead. Now that does not mean that he was the first one ever to be raised from the dead, because scripture records others who preceded him—think of Lazarus. However, he is the One who is the heir, the Lord of all the new creation. He is the head of the new creation, as the apostle tells us, and we are part of a new body, the new race of men that God is forming through the centuries, and of that body, Jesus Christ is the head. From him, then, flows all power—resurrection power.

I am convinced that the problem with most Christians is that they do not understand what the Bible teaches about resurrection power. If they had any idea what this power is like and how it operates, and the areas and situations in which it is intended to operate, they would never again live as they live now. They would be entirely different. I do not mean that they would be dazzling people, making great displays of power and moving mountains. It does not take resurrection power to do that—that only requires faith (See Mark 11:23)

Resurrection power is quiet. It is the kind of power that was evident in the Lord Jesus. It was not the fact that he came from the tomb that dazzled the eyes of the soldiers there, nor that produced the earthquake. He came from the tomb absolutely without a sound. The stone was rolled away, not to let him out, but to let people in, so they could see that the tomb was empty. There was no sound, no demonstration. There was the quiet, inexorable power of a risen life which no mechanical or natural power can possibly resist. This is what God has released to us. A quiet power that changes hearts and lives and

attitudes, making everything new from within. That is resurrection power. It flows to us from the head of the new creation, the risen Christ, the source of all power.

Now Paul goes on to show who are the intended recipients of this power:

²¹ *You yourselves are a case study of what he does. At one time you all had your backs turned to God, thinking rebellious thoughts of him, giving him trouble every chance you got.* ²² ***But now.*** (But Now! I love that phrase . . . things were bad—But Now!—you were rotten—But Now!—you were lost—But Now!—Whoa, we could stop and shout about that all day!)—*But now, by giving himself completely at the Cross, actually dying for you, Christ brought you over to God’s side and put your lives together—reconciled you to God—made you* (That includes us all, doesn’t it? We all belong in this category. And we are the ones through whom this power is now to operate.) . . . *made you whole and holy in his presence—brought you into the very presence of God, and you are holy and blameless* (He didn’t say, “You will be holy and blameless . . . No, he said, you are now holy and blameless!) *as you stand before him without a single fault.*

²³ *You must continue to believe this truth and stand in it firmly—you don’t walk away from a gift like that! You stay grounded and steady in that bond of trust, constantly tuned in to the Message, careful not to be distracted or diverted—don’t drift away from the assurance you received when you hear the Good News . . . There is no other Message—just this one . . .*

Then Paul gives us the demonstration in his own life of this power. He says that God called him and set him up in the ministry to proclaim a mystery, and to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations . . .

You will not find it explained in the Old Testament. It was experienced there, but it was never explained. In another letter, Paul said that IF the evil powers had known—they would never have crucified the Lord! Of course not! They signed their own death-warrant when they crucified Jesus.

²⁶ *This mystery has been kept in the dark—kept secret—for generations and centuries, **but now*** (See! There it is again!) *But now it’s out in the open—revealed to his own holy people.* ²⁷ *God wanted everyone . . . to know* (He has been telling his story since the beginning of time—but no one could see the message—you doubt that? Didn’t God instruct Jonah to preach salvation to the heathens in Nineveh? If God wasn’t interested in their safety, why would he send Jonah?) ²⁷ *God wanted everyone . . . to know this rich and glorious secret inside and out . . . this mystery in a nutshell is just this: Christ is in you!—He lives in you!!! There you can look forward to sharing in God’s glory. It’s that simple!!! That is the substance of our Message.*

What is this great mystery? “Christ in you—He lives in you!!!!.”

Christ living in you. There must be more to this fact! We must be missing something because Paul was jumping up and down and shouting his message—"Christ lives in you!"

This is the supreme declaration of the Christian church. You have never preached the Gospel until you have told men that not only will their sins be forgiven when they come to Christ, but that he, himself, will live within them—to do through them everything they are expected to do. He died for us, so that he might live in us. This is the full glory of the Christian Gospel.

Look at Paul's prayer for the church in Ephesus:

*1:17-21 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the all-glorious Father, will give you spiritual wisdom and the insight to know more of him:
— that you may receive that inner illumination of the spirit which will make you realize how great is the hope to which his is calling you
—the magnificence and splendour of the inheritance promised to Christians
—and how tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God.*

. . . That power is the same divine energy which was demonstrated in Christ when he raised him from the dead and gave him the place of highest honour in Heaven—a place that is infinitely superior to any command, authority, power or control, and which carries with it a name far beyond any name that could ever be used in this world or the world to come . . .

So what does Paul do about it?

28 We preach Christ, warning people not to add to the Message—we tell everyone about Christ . . . We teach in a spirit of profound common sense (so even the simplest among us could understand)—with all the wisdom God has given us . . . so that we can bring each person to maturity—presenting them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ . . . To be mature is to be basic. Christ!!! No more, no less.

Where does the energy come from? This amazing apostle, with his indefatigable journeying night and day, through shipwreck and hardship of every kind, working with his hands, laboring, traveling up and down the length and breadth of the entire Roman empire, is ceaseless in his endeavors. Where does he get the energy? Would you like to know? He says:

28-29 . . . Striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires with me . . . with all the energy God so generously gives me . . . I labor unto weariness, striving with the superhuman energy which He so mightily enkindles and works within me . . .

That same superhuman energy, will be generously given to us, as well!!!!

Christ in you! The hope of glory. That is why I say if Christians would begin to understand what it is that God has made available to them, they would never be the same again. We could end the struggles with addictions, the struggles with lust, the struggles depression . . . We would never have to plead with people in the church to take on needed enterprises, ministries, or teaching Sunday School. We would not be met with the excuse, “Oh, I just don’t have the strength to do it. I don’t have the energy.” You see, here is a source of energy, Paul says, that is constant and consistent and which flows through him, created by the Spirit of God indwelling him. As he saw the task, he moved to meet it with energy which God gave. That is resurrection power.

Now in chapter two we have the warning against certain false powers which would woo us away from the true power Christ has given us. These warnings are as valid and relevant today as they were when Paul wrote them. Certain things among men are always regarded as sources of power—“For just ten dollars you’ll get a course that will transform you within fifteen days into a dynamic leader. You’ll never be the same again—but wait, that’s not all . . .” If you can obtain these, you can be a powerful individual; your personality will be strong and radiant. You will be a dynamic leader of men.

Chapter 2

² *I want you woven into a tapestry of love—knit together by strong ties of love (welded together)* (—It is interesting to see the language used—when you weld to pieces of metal together, they actually melt into each other and the bond between them is becomes stronger than the original pieces on their own—When you are tied to other brothers and sisters, there is safety, enrichment, security . . .) ² *I want you woven into a tapestry of love—knit together by strong ties of love (welded together). . . in touch with everything there is to know of God. (As we hang-out with other believers, our knowledge and understanding of God increases) Then you will have minds confident and at rest, focused on Christ, God’s great mystery . . . complete understanding of God’s secret plan, which is Christ himself.*

³ *All the richest treasures of wisdom and knowledge are embedded in that mystery and nowhere else—in him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge . . .*

Oh yes, God’s ways are higher than our ways . . . ⁸ *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD.* ⁹ *“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”* (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Oh, everyone loves to quote that scripture . . . but read the rest of the context . . . ¹⁰ *“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”* (Isaiah 55:10-11)

Look at what Paul is saying here: ³ *All the richest treasures of wisdom and knowledge are embedded in that mystery and nowhere else—in him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge . . .*” Yes Paul, we know that . . .

And we have been shown the mystery!!!! (What? We have been shown that mystery? But I thought His thoughts and His ways were higher and beyond our grasp. . . . They were beyond our grasp—but not any more! *“But we have the mind of Christ and hold the thoughts, feelings and purposes of His heart.”* (I Corinthians 2:16) So quite looking everywhere else—you won’t find it in a bottle, you won’t find it in you job, you won’t find it anywhere else—but in Christ!!!

Alright Paul, so why are you telling us all this?

⁴ *I’m telling you this because I don’t want anyone leading you off some wild-goose chase, after other so-called mysteries, or “the Secret.” —so no one will be able to deceive you with persuasive arguments . . .*

Beware of anyone telling about a “new” revelation or insight; a “new” doctrine; “new” understanding given to them. Everything we need to live life, is in him.

Then he says,

⁶ *My counsel for you is simple and straightforward: Just go ahead with what you’ve been given. You received Christ Jesus, the Master; now live him—Just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, go on living in him: in simple faith (it’s not complex or confusing)—regulate your lives and conduct yourselves in union with and conformity to him . . .*

You have what it takes, now live it out, let it show.

. . . ⁷ *You’re deeply rooted . . . the roots of your being firmly and deeply planted in him . . . You’re well constructed upon Him . . . you are fixed and founded in him, being continually built up in him—becoming increasingly more confirmed and established in the faith—You know your way around the faith . . . Now do what you’ve been taught. School’s out; quit studying the subject and start living it!!!! And let your living spill over into thanksgiving . . .*

Let your living spill over into thanksgiving—draw up nourishment from him, so you will grow in faith, strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with thanksgiving for all he has done . . .

Look at that verse again. Paul said we should be overflowing in thanksgiving. What robs us of that? Well first, the idea that power comes from human knowledge:

⁸ *Don’t let anyone lead you astray—carry you off as spoil or make you captive—makes a prey of you [literally, kidnaps you] by his so-called empty philosophy and intellectualism with high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking . . .*

I have seen many instances of this kind of kidnapping. Young people go off to college to study—raised in Christian homes, but exposed to the wily, subtle teachings of human wisdom, and end up losing their faith and turning away from the things of Christ, going off into wild and riotous living. Why?

Because no one warned them, or else they ignored the warning, to avoid being made a prey of human knowledge. Now this sounds at first as though the Gospel is anti-intellectual. But the Bible is not against knowledge. It is against knowledge that does not come under the judgment of the Word of God.

The apostle analyzes what is wrong with human knowledge. There are many things that are right. There is truth in what man has discovered through the centuries. This we must readily admit. But Paul points out first that the source is suspect, because it comes from tradition. Tradition is the gradually accumulated body of knowledge built up bit by bit through the centuries and passed along from one generation to another. Consequently, human knowledge is made up of great quantities of truth, mingled with error, with no way of distinguishing between the two. Those who accept it uncritically are bound to accept as much error as they do truth. It will lead them, therefore, into mistaken concepts and erroneous and injurious ideas.

. . . and from the evil powers of this world—and not from Christ . . . Watch out for people who try to dazzle you with big words and intellectual double-talk. They want to drag you off into endless arguments that never amount to anything . . .

⁹ . . . *Everything of God gets expressed in him, so you can see and hear him clearly. You don't need a telescope, a microscope, or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ, and the emptiness of the universe without Him.*

¹⁰ *You are in Him! You are made full and have come to fullness of life in Christ, and you too are filled with the Godhead—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and reach full spiritual stature.*

Filled with the Godhead? Of course we can reach full spiritual stature!

¹¹ *Entering into this fullness is not something you figure out or achieve . . . You're already in!!!! . . . not through secretive initiation rite but rather through what Christ has already gone through for you, destroying the power of sin!!!—through a spiritual circumcision performed by Christ, he stripped off the body of the flesh—the whole corrupt, carnal nature with its passions and lusts!!! . . .*

Circumcised in your heart. In Ezekiel 36:26 it says: “I'll give you a new heart, put a new spirit in you. I'll remove the stone heart from your body and replace it with a heart that's God-willed, not self-willed. ²⁷I'll put my Spirit in you and make it possible for you to do what I tell you and live by my commands.”

. . . You were raised to a new life because you trusted the mighty power of God—through your faith in the working of God as displayed when He raised Jesus from the dead.¹³ God brought you alive—right along with Christ! Think of it!!! All sins forgiven,¹⁴ the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ's cross . . .

¹⁵ . . . He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets . . .

Paul goes on to indicate another false source of power, which also leads many people astray:

¹⁶ So don't put up with anyone pressuring you in details of diet, worship services, or holy days.¹⁷ All those things are mere shadows cast before what was to come; the substance is Christ!!! Christ is the real thing!!!

¹⁸ Don't tolerate people who try to run your life, ordering you to bow and scrape . . . yada, yada, yada . . . they're a lot of hot air, that's all they are. They're completely out of touch with the source of life, Christ, who puts us together in one piece, whose very breath and blood flow through us—we grow only as we get our nourishment and strength from God . . .

²⁰ why do you let yourselves be bullied by it?—You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the evil powers of this world . . .

What false source is this? It is the power that supposedly comes from a dedicated zeal for God. It manifests itself in the keeping of days and special feasts and regulations and ascetical practices—flogging the body, wearing a hair shirt, laboring long hours out of zeal for the cause, avoiding birthday celebrations and weddings—because they are not “holy”. All these things look like sources of power. Sometimes we cannot help but admire the zealousness of individuals who get themselves all wrapped up in a cause. But, Paul says, they are tricking themselves. They do not discover real power:

²³ These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, humility, and severe bodily discipline.

Sure, these have an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigors of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body . . .

In fact, there is a kind of false humility that is produced by this kind of behavior. It extracts a grudging admiration from us, but look what the apostle says:

²³ But they have no effect when it comes to conquering a person's evil thoughts and desires . . .

You see, you can wear a hair shirt and be filled with lust. You can beat your body black and blue and still be guilty all the time of thinking lascivious thoughts. These things

provide no check to the indulgence of the flesh. Therefore, there is no power here to lead the kind of life that we must live.

Now, in chapter three, the apostle turns to the true manifestation of power and how to lay hold of the power of Christ

Colossians 3

¹ So, if you're serious . . . if you have been raised with Christ to a new life—sharing His resurrection from the dead . . . act like it . . . set your sights on the realities of heaven—the rich, eternal treasures, where Christ sits at God's right hand in the place of honor and power ²Pursue the things over which Christ presides . . . See things from his perspective . . . Let heaven fill your thoughts . . .

That does not mean that we should go around constantly thinking about heaven. There is nothing super-pious about this. He is simply saying, “Don't let your desires and your attitudes be governed or directed by desires for earthly fame or power. Instead, let your desires be shaped by the word of God.” We are to have a desire to exhibit love, truth, faith, and patience—the qualities that mark the life of the risen Lord. That is what he's talking about. We are not to go around thinking about heaven all the time. We are to go around manifesting heaven in the situations in which we find ourselves.

Paul gives us the recipe for doing this:

³ For as far as this world is concerned, you died when Christ died, and your new, real life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ And when Christ, who is your real life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory . . .

⁵ So kill—deprive of power—the evil desire lurking in your members [those animal impulses and all that is earthly in you that is employed in sin]: sexual vice, impurity, sensual appetites, unholy desires, etc., etc., . . . kill off everything connected with that way of death: sexual promiscuity, impurity, lust, doing whatever you feel like—whenever you feel like it, and grabbing whatever attracts your fancy. That's a life shaped by things and feelings rather than of by God. ⁶It's because of this kind of thing that God is about to explode in anger. ⁷It wasn't long ago that you were doing all that stuff and not knowing any better.

God has already sentenced our “earthly” life to death on the cross. When it manifests itself in you, treat it like that—as under the sentence of death from God. He goes on to list these earthly things:

⁸ . . . you know better now, put away and rid yourselves completely—gone for good—of all these things: bad temper, irritability, meanness, profanity, dirty talk . . . ⁹ don't lie . . . all those things are like a filthy set of ill-fitting clothes you've stripped off and put in the fire.

Put these away—they are nothing but filthy rags and no longer fit to be worn by a child of God.

That is step number one. Step two is:

¹⁰ *Now you're dressed in a new wardrobe . . . custom made by the Creator . . . clothed . . . with a brand new nature . . .*

¹² *Clothe yourselves as God's own chosen ones—who are purified and holy and well-beloved by God Himself. . . dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion-tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility—a lowly opinion of yourself, quiet strength, discipline, gentle ways, and patient—tireless and long suffering, and has the power to endure whatever comes, with good temper.*

See what he is telling us? First throw off the rags—then clothe yourself with the robes of a king . . .

We have been told that Christ dwells in us. Since He is there, let these things be manifest in you. Deliberately set yourself to manifest these characteristics of his life. Count on his life in you to make them real and not phony—allow them to be genuine, authentic manifestations of his life.

Paul lists certain areas in which these are to manifest:

¹⁸ *Wives: understand and support your husbands—subordinate and adapt yourselves to them, as is right and fitting and your proper duty in the Lord.*

¹⁹ *Husbands: go all out in love for your wives—love them and never treat them harshly. Be affectionate and sympathetic with them—do not be harsh or bitter or resentful toward them.*

It is easy to read those instructions and think, “Sure, if my spouse followed those rules, then I could easily follow my rules . . .

Get that idea out of your head. Imagine Paul taking the husbands in one room—the wives in another and he tells the wives, “This is what is expected of you . . .” then to the husbands, “This is what is expected of you . . .”

The husbands have no idea what is expected of the wives—and the wives have no idea what is expected of their husbands. Paul simply tells them, “husbands . . . regardless of how your wife treats you—go all out in love for your wives . . .” To the wives, he says, “Regardless how your husbands treats you . . . understand and support them . . .”

²⁰ *Children: do what your parents tell you—obey them in everything—for this pleases the Lord.*

²¹ *Fathers: don't come down too hard on your children—don't aggravate and harass them. If you do, they will become discouraged—feel inferior and frustrated—and quit trying—do not break their spirit.*

²² *Servants: do what you're told by your earthly masters. And don't just do the minimum that will get you by. Do your best . . . not only when their eyes are on you.²⁵ . . . Being Christian doesn't cover up bad work. With God, there is no partiality—no matter what a person's position may be, whether he is the slave or the master.*

Go back to verse 3:

³ *For as far as this world is concerned, you died when Christ died, and your new, real life is hidden with Christ in God.*

Yahoo! You don't live any more. Jesus lives inside of you!

⁴ *And when Christ, who is your real life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory . . .*

What did he just say?

Look at what John told us:

¹What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it--we're called children of God! That's who we really are!!! But that's also why the world doesn't recognize us or take us seriously, because it has no idea who he is or what he's up to—they do not know (recognize, acknowledge) Him.

²But friends, that's exactly who we are: children of God. And that's only the beginning. Who knows how we'll end up!—it is not yet disclosed (made clear) what we shall be, but we do know this: that when He comes and is manifested—is openly revealed, we will see him and as God's children, become just like Him, for we shall see Him just as He really is. ³All of us who look forward to his Coming stay ready, with the glistening purity of Jesus' life as a model for our own.)

That's why Paul can say:

¹¹ . . . everyone is defined by Christ, everyone is included in Christ . . . Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us . . .

¹⁵ *Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other . . . let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts . . . let it act as an umpire deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds.*

When you have a decision to make, don't get all flustered and flummoxed . . . let that peace of God rule and "act as an umpire—deciding and settling with finality ALL questions that arise in your minds."

I could give you dozens and dozens of examples of how this has worked in my own life. For instance, just before my wife and I were married, we looked for an apartment. We sat down together and wrote down on a piece of paper exactly what we wanted—natural wood floors, fireplace, quiet neighborhood—we were very specific and even wrote the rent we needed, we then prayed and presented this list before the Lord

. . . well, we looked for that apartment and finally found it. The apartment we found fit the description perfectly—except, the landlord wanted more for rent. He wanted far more than we could afford—but more importantly, more than we had presented to the Lord.

It took several weeks of waiting, calling the landlord, waiting . . . my fiancé becoming restless . . . more waiting . . . finally, a week before the wedding, I called one more time and discovered that the Landlord had been trying to find my phone number. He explained that every time he had a new tenant, they either never showed up to present a deposit, or canceled at the last minute. He agreed to rent the apartment to us at out price.

I tell this example only to point out that during the waiting period—I NEVER once doubted, I KNEW beyond a moment of hesitation that we would be in that apartment. Deep in my heart, I had the most restful peace. I KNEW—somehow, someway—it would come to pass. Once I was confident what the Lord would do, I allowed the peace of God to rule and act as an umpire!

¹⁶ *Let the Words spoken by Christ (Rhema—the life giving words that he speaks to your heart) have the run of the house . . .*

—let let them live in your hearts and make you wise . . .

—as you teach and admonish and train one another in all insight and intelligence and wisdom in spiritual things,

— and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody to God with his grace in your hearts

¹⁷ *. . . let every detail of your life—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus . . .*

This is something you have to do!!! You can't just sit back and hope everything will work out right. You must fill your heart with God's Word and all the Words spoken by Christ to be the boss—the ultimate authority is every area of your life.

Paul concludes with these practical admonitions:

Chapter 4

² *Pray diligently—earnest and unwearied . . . being both alert and intent in your praying . . . in gratitude—with thanksgiving . . .*

⁴ *. . . pray that every time I open my mouth I'll be able to make Christ plain as day to them . . . that I may proclaim it boldly and unfold that mystery, as is my duty.*

⁶ *be gracious in your speech—pleasant and winsome, seasoned as it were with salt, so that you may never be at a loss to know how you ought to answer anyone who puts a question to you. The goal is to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, not cut them out . . .*

I love that!! What an attitude to have:

- Steadfast in prayer
- Being watchful in it with thanksgiving
- Conducting ourselves wisely toward outsiders
- Letting our speech to always be gracious—never putting them down or cutting them out . . .

In the last section of the letter there are simply some personal greetings from men who are with Paul. These men, too, are demonstrations of the power of an indwelling Christ at work.

He concludes the letter, as was his custom, by taking the pen in his own hand and writing:

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Don't forget I'm in prison. Grace be with you.

Now I want to return once more to that verse in the first chapter which is the key to this letter:

^{1:11} *That you may be strengthened with all power, according to the might of His glory . . .*

That is tremendous, isn't it? You want that, don't you? Christ's power, Christ's life, manifested in you. What do you want it for? So you can dazzle everybody? So you can go around performing miracles, doing startling things that will get your name in the paper? Is that why? Read what Paul wants you to have it for:

^{1:11} *. . . For all endurance and patience with joy.*

Underline those words. That is where resurrection power is made manifest. The world cannot produce that kind of living. It does not know how to take trials with a smile, to endure hardships with faith and patience and joy. As far as the world is concerned, this takes an unknown kind of power—the power that is resident only in Jesus Christ. This

power will transform our hardships and our difficulties into joyful experiences, not just phony manifestations of joy. They are genuine. We learn things from these trials. If our heart is right with Christ, if we are putting off the old and putting on the new we discover that these experiences, instead of producing grumbling, griping, and complaining provide a basis for joy, as we are “strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might.”

Thank you, Father, for this first-century book that speaks to our twentieth century lives, and shows us that not one thing has changed. Not one thing in our world is different from the world these early Christians faced. Not one thing is different about our relationship to Jesus Christ. We, too, can live as they lived, in joy, gladness and thanksgiving in the midst of this life. We pray that we may discover this truth by acting upon these admonitions which Paul has given us. We pray in Jesus' name Amen.