

The New Testament, Book 12

Colossians

Colossians is the 3rd of the four “prison epistles,” written from Rome about 60 AD, at about the same time as the other three prison epistles--Ephesians, Philippians and Philemon.

Colossians is sometimes referred to as the twin of Ephesians. Both Colossians and Ephesians are carefully wrought statements of the great doctrines of the gospel, rich in foundational Christian truth; and the two are noticeably similar in many of their passages.

Colossae the City. Colossae (or Colosse), like Ephesus a city of southwest Phrygia, was about 100 miles east of the seaport of Ephesus, and about 12 miles from Laodicea¹. Today this area is in western Turkey. Colossae was a mercantile city on the Lycus River, and was situated on the great overland trade route between the seaport of Ephesus and the Euphrates Valley. Epaphras and Philemon lived there.

Although Paul had spent three years in Ephesus, it appears probable that he had never been to Colossae at the time of his writing this epistle². The area including Colossae and Laodicea was probably evangelized by Epaphras (and, perhaps, by Timothy), while Paul was at Ephesus.

The Great Earthquake. According to the Roman historian Tacitus (ca 55-117 AD), Eusebius (ca 260-340 AD) and other ancient historians, Colossae was destroyed by a massive earthquake in the 9th year of Nero's reign, about 60 AD; this would mean that it occurred soon after this letter was written³. The same earthquake destroyed Laodicea, only 12 miles away. Both cities were rebuilt; but subsequent earthquakes and, finally, the conquering Muslims, destroyed both cities so completely that they were abandoned. Their locations have been rediscovered only in recent times; Colossae today is only a large mound (a small, rounded hill), rising above the Lycus plain, with only scattered broken pottery, squared stones and

¹ There were people from Phrygia in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, listening to Peter's inspired preaching (Acts 2:10).

² Paul's reference in 2:1, to those who have never seen him, could be a reference to new Christians who have become part of the churches since he was there in person--not necessarily proof that he has never been there. Yet 1:4, 1:7, and the over-all tone of the epistle, suggest that Paul had never been there.

³ Tacitus, *Annals*, Book 14, 27; Eusebius, *Chronicles*, 210.4; Adam Clarke: *Commentary on the Bible*, Colossians, Introduction.

remnants of arches to attest to its former importance. Nearby today is the Turkish village of Chonas.

The dates of the final destruction and abandonment of Colossae and Laodicea are unknown. We do know, however, that the church at Laodicea still existed at the time of the writing of Revelation, about 35 years after the writing of this letter, for one of the seven letters in Revelation, to the churches of Asia Minor, is to Laodicea⁴. The fact that Colossae is not mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation may mean that by that time the church at Colossae no longer existed; or, it may simply mean that the divine Author of Revelation chose not to include it.

Our knowing that this letter was written when a major disaster was soon to occur, undoubtedly killing many of the Christians at Colossae, gives its instructions an aspect of urgency. We should live so as always to be ready to meet our Maker.

A. Author. The human author is Paul; and, as in all of his epistles, with the exception of Hebrews, he tells us this in the first verse⁵. His authorship and its authenticity have been accepted since the 1st Century, and Colossians was frequently quoted by the Church Fathers.

Here he includes Timothy in the salutation, as he does in three other letters to churches (Philippians, I and II Thessalonians). This may have been done because Timothy played a role in establishing those churches; or, his reason may simply have been to enhance Timothy's authority for future ministry in those places. Paul also included Timothy in the salutation of his personal letter to Philemon, and the church which met at his house, perhaps for one or both of the same reasons.

B. Place and Date. Colossians was written from Rome, ca 60 AD.

C. Occasion. Epaphras had traveled to Rome from Colossae, apparently bringing word of dangerous heresies that were finding acceptance in the church there. Philemon 23 suggests that Epaphras, upon reaching Rome, was himself made a prisoner with Paul.

There was in the region of Phrygia a popular, humanistic, Greek philosophy in the form of self-glorifying Gnosticism (essentially, salvation by acquiring "higher" knowledge); its confused beliefs even reduced Christ to the position of a lesser god. There were also the Judaizers, those Jewish Christians who believed that to be a Christian one must first be an observant

⁴ Revelation 3:14-19.

⁵ Concerning the reasons to ascribe the authorship of Hebrews to Paul, and for the likely reason for his not identifying himself in the letter, see "Introduction to the Epistles" at the beginning of the study guide to Romans, and "Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries)..

Jew, i.e., to obey the Old Covenant Law. Some false teachers were even claiming to have received visions requiring extreme self-denial, and the worship of angels (especially Michael) whom, they believed, protected them. Doctrinal things at Colossae were definitely getting out of hand; and Epaphras had traveled to Rome for help from Paul.

“Between Scylla and Charybdis.” As the early Church was finding its form, there were factions, each contending for its particular vision for the Church, and there were two doctrinal extremes. On the one hand there was the influence of Greek philosophy, with its ever-changing, free experimentation with new ideas, adopting what seemed appealing to the mind. On the other hand, there was hard-nosed, rigid, legalism, insisting that a Christian must obey a strict set of rules. As is usually true, the truth is to be found somewhere between extremes, and the church at Colossae needed to find its way between them.

In Greek mythology (Homer’s “Odyssey”), Odysseus, the hero, had to make his way through the Strait of Messina, the narrow sea lane between Sicily and mainland Italy. On one side of the strait was a sea monster, Scylla, and on the other side there was another sea monster, Charybdis. Both monsters were waiting to destroy Odysseus, and he had to find a way to pass between them. To apply this metaphor to the Colossian Christians, those familiar with Greek mythology would say that the Colossians were “between Scylla and Charybdis.” This situation has its modern form in our expression, “between a rock and a hard place,” and, more appropriately, “between the devil and the deep blue sea.” Dr. C.I. Scofield expressed the Church’s situation this way: “Pure Christianity lives between two dangers, ever present: the danger that it will evaporate into a philosophy...and the danger that it will freeze into a form.”

The church at Colossae was in this situation theologically, and the book of Colossians might be thought of as a chart for safely finding the way through this dangerous situation to the simple, unchanging, truth of the gospel of Christ.

D. Theme. The theme of Colossians is the deity and preeminence of Jesus the Messiah and the **all-sufficiency** of his redemptive work. To express mathematically the requirements for salvation, we might say: Jesus + 0 = everything; and Jesus + anything else = 0; it seems to be this simple⁶. Adding self-redeeming requirements for salvation, things that we must do to earn it, is to denigrate the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, saying that what He did

⁶ This proposition is expressed clearly and succinctly in Gal 4:31-5:4.

for us was good, but not enough⁷. We cannot work our way into a redemptive relationship with Christ, seated with Him in heavenly places; it is a gracious gift. However, once we have received this gracious gift of redemption, we must grow into maturity as Christians, serving, ever learning, and renewing our minds. He does all the redeeming; but we must do all the growing and the renewing of our minds. And we do this with applied self-discipline and the help of the Holy Spirit, daily reading the Scriptures, praying, Christian fellowship, and functioning in the Church.

E. Highlights. Highlights in Colossians include the following:

1. A Lengthy Salutation. (1:1-8)

Paul's salutation is unusually long; and its length is a subtle suggestion that he is writing to a congregation with which he is not familiar, adding to the evidence that Paul had not founded the church at Colossae, nor visited there. Verses 4 and 7-8 strengthen this likelihood.

2. A Concise Summary of Christian Truth. (1:9-24)

After his lengthy salutation, Paul says that he is praying for the Colossians, that they might be filled with the knowledge of the will of God, in spiritual understanding, so as to live in such a way as to please Him and be fruitful. He then summarizes almost every aspect of foundational Christian truth, such as: forgiveness and redemption by the blood atonement on the cross; Christ's divine identity; his role in Creation⁸; his divine intention to present us to the Father, sinless; and the requirement that, once redeemed, we cannot return to a life of sin and yet retain the blessings of redemption (note that verse 23 begins with the word "If"). Read these 16 verses slowly and carefully, and you will see it.

***NOTE:** Although the Holy Spirit inspired the thoughts of Paul as he wrote his magnificent epistles, he did not become a robotic transcriber, with an unseen force moving his quill pen over the parchment. Rather, he expressed the inspired revelations in his own way. And, as we have seen before, his brilliant mind, seeming sometimes to run at blinding speed, can require slow-going for us as we read what he wrote. As we have observed before, it can be difficult at times to understand him, because he hurls so much rich, compressed, revelation at us at one time; and this is such a time. Even Peter, the great apostle, as we have observed before, had difficulty at times understanding Paul's writings, but recognized them as inspired⁹.*

⁷ See in this regard the study guide to John 19:28-30, and Gal 5:2-4.

⁸ John 1:1-3.

⁹ II Peter 3:13-16.

*Here, in this passage, the long clause, “through the blood of his cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself,” deserves closer inspection. What could he mean, in this context, by “reconcile **all things** to Himself” (emphasis mine)? It seems to be a reminder that, before the atoning sacrifice of Christ Jesus, the entire World (we might say the entire Universe) was under the curse of sin. As Paul expressed this in his letter to the Roman church, “...the **whole creation** groaneth, and travaileth together in pain until now” (emphasis mine).*

*When he added “until now,” he meant the period after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, i.e. the period in which he was writing, and in which you and I now live¹⁰. The effects of this curse of sin will not be removed until Christ returns and all things are restored, as they were before sin entered the Garden; but **the power of sin to enslave**, is broken.*

3. “Christ in You, the Hope of Glory.” (1:25-29)

The great mystery of redemption (available to the Gentiles--not just the Jews), hidden for ages, is now revealed to (and through) the Church. This mystery is this: Christ is in us, as individuals (the Holy Spirit Who lives within us); and He is in and among us collectively, enlightening and empowering us, as the Church. This gives us the blessed hope of the glory of redemption, and the glory yet to come, when all things are completed by Him. To impart this knowledge and reveal this mystery, Paul says, is the thing for which he works. And he works with the power that the Holy Spirit gives him, in order to be able to present the believers, as fully mature Christians, to the Lord.

***NOTE:** As we have observed before, there are holy mysteries in the Kingdom of God, infinite things beyond the ability of our finite minds to comprehend, such as the virgin birth, and the Triune nature and omnipresence of God; but there are **no secrets**. This is worthy of being repeated.*

4. True Knowledge and Wisdom Are Found in God. (2:1-10)

Paul writes that he is concerned for those in the churches in Colossae and Laodicea, and for all those whom he has never met. As we have already observed, the church at Colossae is being troubled by Greek philosophy; especially troublesome is the influence of Gnosticism, which exalts lofty, esoteric, secret knowledge (knowledge possessed only by an elite few), and wisdom, as the means of redemption. He desires that they be in peace, not troubled by confusing heresies, and that their hearts may be knitted together

¹⁰ Romans 8:22.

in love. He wishes for them all the riches that flow from the mystery of the Triune God; and then he makes a tremendously important point: it is that **all true wisdom and knowledge are to be found in God**--not in the confusing speculations of unredeemed philosophers. God alone, through godly teachers, will teach them all things and guide them into all truth¹¹. Some humanistic philosophers and false teachers can be very convincing; but they are wrong, and they only produce confusion and division in the Church¹². The traditions of men, as Jesus had taught, pollute and nullify the pure Word of Christ; in Him, and Him alone, there is the fullness of the triune God, with all true knowledge and wisdom. He is superior to all principalities and powers; and, in Him, and his eternal truth, believers are complete.

NOTES:

a. There is no evidence to establish that Paul was ever at Colossae, and it is generally believed that the church there was founded by Epaphras¹³. This is important to our understanding of "the epistle from Laodicea," which will be mentioned in 4:16, q v.

b. The word "Gnosticism" is derived from the Greek noun "gnosis," meaning knowledge, or the act of seeking knowledge. This school of philosophy took many forms, but basically taught that salvation came from acquiring hidden, secret, knowledge. Gnosticism also proposed that spirit is good and physical matter is evil; thus one Gnostic heresy was that, since Christ is perfect, He could not have come in the flesh--rather, went the heresy, He only appeared to come in the flesh, only appeared to suffer on the cross, etc. For a more thorough explanation of Gnosticism and its troublesome impact on the early Church, see "Gnosticism and the Early Church" in Part IV (Selected Topical summaries).

5. The Circumcision Made without Hands. (2:11-23)

In Paul's teachings, circumcision became a symbolic word--a metaphor--meaning legalistic observance of the entire religious law. An example is seen in Galatians 5:2, "...if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing." He even used "the circumcision" to refer to those Judaizers who demanded that Christians observe the Mosaic Law¹⁴. Because the Colossians have been spiritually circumcised, putting off the fleshly nature,

¹¹ John 14:26, 16:13.

¹² I Corinthians 14:33.

¹³ Colossians 1:1-4, 7; 2:1.

¹⁴ On only one occasion, in Phil 3:2, Paul uses a similar, but much more negative, word to refer to the Judaizers. The word is "concision" (in Greek, *katatome*); and, in the context of that passage, it means to mutilate. In the same sentence he calls them "dogs [a terrible insult in the Middle East, even today] and evil workers." He leaves no question as to how he feels about them and their false, legalistic, teaching.

and have entered into the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, they are new creatures. They no longer need such things as physical circumcision, dietary laws, and other legalistic observances in order to be acceptable to God. The reality is that Christ satisfied all of those requirements for us, symbolically nailing the ordinances to his cross, and blotting out our sin debt. They are to beware of such legalistic religious requirements, and the heresy of angel worship (which was even worse than the Old Covenant legalism), because complying with them not only keeps them in religious bondage, but also leads to religious pride. They may make the individual look good, but they accomplish nothing, and offend the perfect, complete, redeeming work of Christ.

NOTES:

a. The underlying Greek rendered “blotting out” in verse 14 is revealing. It is a form of “ekaleipho,” meaning to blot out, wipe off, or remove. Thus we see again that, when we are forgiven, the record of our sin is not simply lined out in the record of our lives, or marked “paid in full,” but left in the record; instead, it is completely removed from the record, as if it had never occurred. There is a play on words that can be useful in understanding this “justification”: when I am justified [redeemed], it is “just as if I’d” never sinned. The same Greek word is used in this sense in Acts 3:19 and Rev 3:5. It is also used in Rev 7:17 and 21:4, to express the wiping away of our tears (thus, the permanent abolition of sadness and pain).

b. There is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that physical circumcision is inherently wrong. It is wrong only when applied as a religious requirement for redemption. If this were required in order to be redeemed, no female could be redeemed. The New Covenant believer is spiritually circumcised, with the circumcision “made without hands”; and only God can do this.

c. The worship and invocation of angels was one feature of the multi-faceted heresy of Gnosticism. It was a popular heresy among 1st Century Jews, and it plagued the early Church. It is important to remind ourselves that “...there is one God, and [only]one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”

Much of the effort during the Council of Nicaea (begun 325 AD) was devoted to correcting Gnostic heresies.

6. Set Your Affection on Heavenly Things. (3:1-11)

Since we are raised from spiritual death by Christ, and seated with Him in heavenly places, we should value and seek heavenly things, eternal things, where He is seated at the Father’s right hand. We should set our affections

and keep our minds on things above, in the heavenly realm, and not on material or carnal things here on the Earth. We, the blessed few of the redeemed, will spend eternity with Him in Paradise; while, it appears, most of mankind will be lost and separated from Him forever¹⁵.

We should constantly remind ourselves that Christ is now the source and meaning of life for us; and we will someday appear with Him in glory. Therefore, we should strive to put to death sinful desires of the fleshly nature, including covetousness, the sinful desire to possess the things that others possess, for that becomes the deadly sin of idol worship¹⁶.

It is for choosing to live in a sinful way that the wrath, the holy anger, of God, is visited upon deliberately sinful people ("the children of disobedience")¹⁷. The Colossians (and, of course, we) once lived that way; but, as new creatures, Paul exhorts the Colossians, they should resist these sinful desires and practices, and should clean up their thoughts and resulting behavior.

NOTES:

a. As we observed in the beginning, Colossians is sometimes called the twin of Ephesians because so much of the content is similar. Here we see an example of this: Chapt 3, here, reads very much like Chapt 4 of Ephesians.

*b. There is a criticism sometimes heard, that a certain person "is so heavenly minded that he is no earthly good." This is a clever play on words, but I don't believe that it is valid. Logically, I don't think it is possible to be too "heavenly minded." If we are thinking in harmony with Christ Jesus, seeking heavenly things and setting our affections on things above, we will **not** be floating ineffectively through life, with our heads in the clouds. Rather, we will be walking daily in the will of God, here on Earth, led by the Spirit, relating effectively to others, and doing what He would have us do, which must mean doing a great deal of "earthly good."*

c. Affections are natural emotions that arise within us; and, as those of us old enough to be reading this know, these emotions can be powerful and seemingly compelling. At first mental glance it would seem to be impossible to control such emotions simply by deciding how we will feel about things and people; and, in fact, it is impossible.

¹⁵ For a more thorough treatment of the dismal fact that most human beings who ever lived will be consigned to Hell and, ultimately, forever in the Lake of Fire, see "Will God take everyone to Heaven?" in Part IV (Selected Topical summaries).

¹⁶ This sobering point is also made in Ephesians 5:5.

¹⁷ Ephesians 2:2, 5:6; Col 3:6.

*Our nature--the way that we were created--is not nearly that simple. We cannot decide how we will feel about things or people simply by turning on, or off, a mental and emotional switch. We can cease **doing** things that we should not do simply by deciding; but feelings, emotions and affection are another matter altogether. How can we "set our affections" where they should be, as we are commanded to do in v 2?*

When we find ourselves becoming inordinately fond of something (or someone) to the extent that the thing or person interferes with our affection for, and obedience to, the Lord and his will for us, we really can decide to take actions (mostly avoidance) that will help us to get the inordinate affection under control (or eliminated from our lives). The ultimate solution, however, is not to be found simply in deciding. The solution, I have come to believe, is to be found in prayer.

When we love and desire something (or someone) to the extent that it is unhealthy, sinful, or even that it begins to crowd Jesus out of the central place in our lives, I believe that it is perfectly valid to pray something like this: "Lord, I really don't want to give up this thing, this idea, or this person [we might as well tell Him--He knows it anyway]; however, I am willing for you to change the way I feel about it (or about him, or about her)."

This gives the Spirit of God freedom to begin to change our hearts, because I am convinced that He will never force us to do anything, even something for our own good. If He would force us to anything He would certainly force us all to be redeemed and go to Heaven. Ezekiel 18, II Peter 3:9, et al, tell us that God is not willing that any of us should perish--that He wants us all to go to Heaven, and that it breaks his heart when we die lost; yet the New Testament (e.g. Matthew 7:14) tells us that most will be lost¹⁸.

At any rate, it is healthy to have an honest conversation with Him about the problem concerning our affections, and state our willingness to be changed.

***The "Willing to Be Willing Prayer."** I have come to call such a prayer the "willing to be willing prayer"; and it goes something like this: "Lord, I don't want to give up this affection (behavior, person or thing); I really desire this, I like the way I feel about this, and you know it. However, if you want to change the way I feel about it, I am willing for you to change my desires and give me the will to change."*

¹⁸ For a more thorough treatment on the dismal probability that most human beings who ever lived will be consigned to Hell and, ultimately, to eternity in the Lake of Fire, see "Will God Take Everyone to Heaven?" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

When the inordinate affection or desire is so strong that the changing of it is unmanageable simply by an act of the will, this prayer is a good place to start in correcting the problem; in fact, I don't know of any other.

d. We must wonder why it should be necessary for Paul to devote so much of his letters to these churches in Phrygia to admonish them to stop their sinful ways--to stop lying, stealing, coveting the possessions of others, using filthy language and indulging in sexual sin.

A possible explanation may be found in the influence of Gnosticism (in pronouncing this word, in all of its forms, the "G" is silent) in these churches. Since many Gnostic philosophers taught that spirit is pure and physical matter is evil, one twisted interpretation held that, since we are material, physical beings, inescapably evil in the flesh, we should give ourselves over to all sinful behavior here on Earth, and look forward to the day when we will be freed from our physical existence and become pure spirits. This, of course, is a recipe for doing a great deal of harm to ourselves and others here on Earth and--in the end--eternal damnation.

Gnosticism, which we encounter from time to time throughout the New Testament, gets its name from the Greek word "gnosikos," which means "having knowledge" or "knowing," for Gnosticism was (and still is in some groups) a philosophical proposition that redemption requires attainment of certain knowledge (usually secret knowledge). This is the foundation of secret societies in which advancement depends upon gaining progressive knowledge, continuously gaining more "light."

*Among the many things wrong with this philosophical or religious system is that it is a form of self-redemption, **not requiring a Redeemer.***

The most commonly encountered form of Gnosticism today is Freemasonry in its various forms, although its members--the vast majority of them--are unaware of this, and sincerely believe that it will "make good men better" and that it is based upon the Bible¹⁹. It is actually based upon the Kaballa (variously spelled), an occult, medieval interpretation of the Old Testament; and Masonic doctrine holds that Jesus was just one of the great teachers ("exemplars") of the past. For the evidence of this, see the author's book, "33 Degrees of Deception," Bridge-Logos Foundation, Alatchua, FL.

7. The Peace of God as Our Guide. (3:12-15)

Instead of our former, sinful, ways, since we are the elect children of God, we should manifest the fruit of the Spirit of God in our daily lives, forgiving

¹⁹ Most Freemasons never stop to wonder why the Masonic system supposedly makes "good men better," yet has no provision for making bad men good. But, then, like all gnostic systems, it "is not for everyone," but only for the enlightened few. The Gospel of Christ, on the other hand, is for "whosoever."

one another, even as Christ has forgiven us. Above all other things, we should be ruled by the agape love of God, which will bind us together in perfect, ideal, harmony. And, giving ourselves completely to the Lord, his peace can then be our guide. We are to let the peace of God rule in our hearts, showing us when we are walking in his will, and when we are wandering off the path of righteousness.

I believe that it is valid to say that, when we are in the will of God, we will have the peace of God; and, conversely, when we are outside of his will, we will not have his peace.

And, at all times and in all things, we should be thanking God, throughout every day. It is an extremely healthy thing to do, and it keeps us in constant contact with Him.

NOTE: *In this passage, one Greek word becomes extremely instructive and important; it is “brabeuo,” rendered “rule” in v 15. It means to act as an umpire, telling us when we are breaking the rules, and keeping us within the limits and boundaries of the game of life. **It is found nowhere else in the New Testament;** and this fact alone suggests that it is unusually significant.*

A similar revelation concerning the peace of God in our lives is found in Phil 4:5-7.

8. Do All Things in the Name of Jesus. (3:16-17)

As Paul nears the end of his letter to the Colossians he summarizes his guidance and desire for their lives with two rules for living the Christian life; and they are rules that it would be wise for all of us to keep. We would be wise to stick them on the refrigerator, or post them on the bulletin board, where we will be constantly be reminded of them. They are simple in meaning, but transcendent and life-changing in their outworking. They are:

a. Let the Word of Christ Dwell in Us Richly. Let the Word (*logos*) of Christ, i.e. the words and teachings of Christ, dwell within us richly, at the center of our thoughts and affections, guiding and inspiring all that we say and do. In this way we are to teach and admonish one another--not living as individuals, in isolation, but as one body, made up of interdependent believers. We are to express this Word in singing--in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (singing "in the Spirit,"), singing praises to the Lord²⁰.

b. Do All in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Whatever we do, in thought, word, or deed, we are to do it “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” i.e. as his representatives, in his spirit, and with his authority as believers. And, in all

²⁰ Verse 16 is remarkably similar to Ephesians 5:19; and, as in Ephesians 5:19, the underlying Greek word rendered “spiritual” is *pneumatikos*, meaning songs supernaturally inspired by the Holy Spirit. See in this regard the study guide to I Corinthians 12:1-7 and explanatory *Note a.* following.

things, we should be offering thanks to the Father, through the Lord Jesus. This, because most of us (Dare I say “all” of us?) are not yet perfect, is a tall order, and we will not always succeed; but it should be our goal. And, the more we follow rule a. above, the more successful we will be in obeying rule b. here²¹.

9. Additional Guidance in Relationships. (3:18-4:1)

In the remaining verses of Chapter 3, and the first verse of Chapter 4, Paul repeats the guidance for Christians that we found in Ephesians, concerning family and other relationships²². Here, however, we find some interesting additional insights.

Wives are to submit to their husbands “as it is fit in the Lord.” This seems to say that if a husband requires something of his wife that is not “fit in the Lord,” she is correct in refusing to obey. Of course, it could also be interpreted to mean that it is the wife’s (total) submission that is “fit in the Lord”; this will be discussed in the explanatory *NOTE* below.

Also, we see that husbands are not to be “bitter” against their wives, and this is interesting. If a wife is in such total submission to her husband as to do exactly as he directs, what could be the basis for his bitterness? This, it seems to me, implies that she is not in the position of a slave; rather she is a partner in life and there will be matters of disagreement between husband and wife. Peter has something to say about this in his first epistle to the Church²³.

And, further, a father is not to be so harsh with his children that they become discouraged, thinking that, no matter how hard they try to do right, they cannot please him. And, again, notice that it is to fathers that Paul assigns primary responsibility for the discipline, and the nurturing of the children²⁴.

Servants should serve their masters honestly, not deceitfully, performing their duties as unto the Lord, knowing that it is from the Lord that they receive their ultimate reward. However, servants who do wrong shall be punished accordingly, for God is not a respecter of persons²⁵.

²¹ Concerning the matter of doing all things “in the name of the Lord Jesus” see also **A Final Note on the Names of God** in “Notes on the Names of God” in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

²² Ephesians 5:21-6:9. Also, here is another place where, it seems to me, the chapter break is in the wrong place. The first v in Chapt 4 would seem to be better placed as the last v of Chapt 3; but it is far too late in the game to make such changes

²³ I Peter 3:7.

²⁴ Ephesians 6:4.

²⁵ Romans 2:11; Eph 6:9; I Pet 1:17, et al.

NOTE: *In recent decades there has been a teaching concerning submission of wives to their husbands that has, in my opinion, done a great deal of harm. According to this interpretation of Eph 5:22-24 and Col 3:18, a wife must obey her husband in all things--no exceptions--even if her obedience requires her to sin. As this reasoning goes, if she submits to her husband's sinful demands, God will honor her obedience and deal with her husband in such a way as to correct him. If there is a single verse of Scripture to support this utterly destructive idea, I have yet to find it!*

In terms of logic, this is irrational because it means that, in order to avoid committing sin (by disobedience), she must commit sin. And, because of this destructive teaching, in its practical outworking, women have stayed in abusive, ungodly relationships with husbands, living with guilt, becoming completely discouraged and, seeing no way out of an unbearable, impossible situation, have resorted to suicide. Jesus has told us to judge things by their fruit.

This teaching about marriage, energetically promoted by an extremely influential, intensely legalistic teacher, whom I will not name, and who is himself unmarried, has borne extremely bitter fruit²⁶. In more recent times, this teacher has been disgraced by his own multiple sexual sins, and has faded from the scene; but much damage was done by this teaching for many years.

10. Relating to "Them Who Are Without." (4:2-6)

As he did at the end of his letter to Ephesus (the "twin" of this epistle to the Colossian Christians), Paul asks the Colossians to pray for him, that he might have opportunities to speak and share the gospel with the non-Christians, continuing to do that for which he has become a prisoner. And then, as he has done in his instructions for family and other relationships, he adds something significant to his prayer request in Ephesians²⁷. He directs the Colossian Christians to behave themselves wisely in dealing with non-Christians, taking every opportunity to share with them the good news of redemption. He urges them to be gracious in witnessing to the unredeemed, not being critical or condemning them. Speak the truth to them, he says, so that what you say is not only interesting and true, but also appealing, like food that is pleasantly seasoned with salt. In this way, he says, they will know the right way to answer any questions that the non-Christian may ask about the gospel, not condemning the sinner, but offering him freedom.

²⁶ Matthew 7:15-20.

²⁷ Ephesians 6:19-20.

As we shall see, Peter also has something to say about this interacting with non-believers, just as he does about husband-wife relationships, and his guidance is interestingly similar to that of Paul here²⁸.

NOTES:

a. Has Peter been reading Paul's letters, including this one? Of course he has; and he has endorsed them. Then, does this mean that in Peter's 1st letter he was just copying Paul's idea? Of course not! It simply means that both men, inspired by the same Holy Spirit, expressed a bit of guidance that all of us need to hear, with one confirming and strengthening the other.

b. Concerning the guidance in verses 5 and 6 about sharing the good news with others, I believe that it is important to remember the emphasis in verse 6 about speaking graciously to the lost. It is not necessary to shout in order to emphasize a point; truth carries its own impact, no matter how softly spoken.

11. Closing Instructions and Personal Matters. (4:7-16)

Paul closes his letter with his customary personal matters, saying that Tychicus and Onesimus, who are delivering his letter, can answer any questions about Paul and his situation in Rome. He then sends greetings from those who are with him in Rome, including Aristarchus (apparently imprisoned with Paul), John Mark ("sister's son to Barnabas"), and Jesus Justus who, he says, are the only other Jewish Christians with him. He sends greetings from Epaphras, a member of the Colossian church who, he says, labors diligently in prayer for the Colossians, and for the nearby churches at Laodicea and Hierapolis. He sends greetings from Luke "the beloved physician," and from Demas²⁹. Paul sends greetings to Laodicea, and to one Nymphas, who has a church meeting in his house. He directs the sharing of his letters from church to church, and mentions "the epistle from Laodicea."

NOTES:

a. The Greek word rendered "sister's son" (nephew) in verse 10 is "anepsios." In early ancient Greek writings it was rendered "cousin." In later ancient Greek writings it was rendered "nephew." Modern versions of the Bible typically use "cousin" here. Mrs. Siewert, although following the Wescott/Hort tradition in the Greek manuscripts underlying her Amplified Bible, was characteristically unwilling to slavishly follow it; she renders the word "relative." Since it is clearly implied that Mark was

²⁸ I Peter 3:7, 15.

²⁹ Paul mentions Luke in only two of his epistles: here, and in II Tim 4:11. Only here does he call Luke "the beloved physician."

considerably younger than Barnabas the apostle (Mk 14:51; Acts 12::12, 25; 15:37-39), it seems to me that “nephew” is the logical choice concerning John Mark’s relationship to Barnabas; however, only God knows the precise relationship.

b. Hierapolis, mentioned in v 13, was a sister city, near Colossae and Laodicea, in the Lycus River Valley. Like the other two cities, Hierapolis was prosperous; it was also famous for its hot springs. Ruins of three churches have been found there, but it seems that Paul was never there.

c. There has been much speculation concerning the letter from Laodicea, mentioned in v 16. Was it a letter that Paul had written previously from Laodicea? This is unlikely, since it seems that he was never there (2:1); likewise, it appears that neither had he been to Colossae, only 12 miles from Laodicea³⁰. Was it a letter written to Paul by a local leader in the church at Laodicea? Perhaps; but the only intellectually honest conclusion concerning this, it seems to me, is that we simply don’t know.

There is an ancient Latin document which represents itself as an epistle from Paul to Laodicea, and which appeared in some German Bibles which were written earlier than Luther’s Bible. Luther, however, did not recognize and include it; and it is almost universally considered to be spurious. No Greek manuscript of it is known to exist, and it appears to be wise for us to give it no further consideration.

And Farewell. And, with an admonition concerning what seems to have been a lack of zeal and attention to duty on the part of a leader named Archippus, Paul bids farewell to the Church at Colossae, writing the closing salutation, and signing the letter, with his own hand.

³⁰ In this regard see explanatory **NOTE a** to Highlight 4 (2:1-10).