

# **The Sufficiency of Christ**

## **A Study of Colossians**

by  
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## Lesson 1

# Greetings

### **The City of Colossae**

About one hundred miles east of Ephesus were three closely grouped cities, Colossae, Laodicea and Hieropolis. All three are mentioned by name in this book and at least two of the churches were to read this letter (Colossians 1:2; 4:13,16). Colossae was located in a narrow gorge, which was two miles long and ten miles wide, in the Lycus valley. It was on an important road from Ephesus to the East. Laodicea was the chief city of the district in Paul's day. Pfeiffer says, "The great road from the coast to the interior of Asia Minor passed right through the middle of the city, making it an important center of trade and communication." It was about twelve miles from Colossae. Six miles from the north gate of Laodicea was the city of Hieropolis. It was famous for its mineral springs, which made it a thronging health resort.

### **Paul's Purpose in Writing**

One of Paul's purposes of writing was to warn the Colossians about the false teachers and the dangers they presented. The false doctrine appears to have been a combination of Jewish, Christian and native beliefs. Paul's answer to the Jewish portions of it can be seen in his thoughts on circumcision, the law and observance of holy days (2:11, 14-15, 16-17). Angel worship may have been a mixing of the native worship of river spirits with true teachings on angels (2:18).

Another purpose in Paul's mind was clearly "to strengthen and to confirm the Colossian Christians in their adherence to the Gospel which they had received" (Hiebert). He thanks God for their love of, and growth in, the truth (1:3-8). He rejoiced over their steadfast faith and encouraged them to become fully rooted in Christ's teachings (2:5-7). Paul also showed them Christianity should bring an end to sinful practices. He directed them to live in a manner becoming one who is specially chosen of God (3:5-13). Specific application to Christian living are found in the remainder of chapters three and four.

### **The Place and Occasion of Writing**

Paul wrote the book from prison, or at least when he was in bonds (4:2-4). Onesimus might well have fled to such a large city far away from his master's home to avoid discovery. If it was written from Rome, the date of writing would probably be AD 61-63, as Hendriksen suggests. The occasion for writing may well have been the visit of Epaphras to the apostle Paul (4:12). In fact, the great love Epaphras displayed for the church, as well as those in Laodicea

and Hieropolis, may indicate he established the works in the three cities or at least that he worked closely with them (4:12-13). Tychicus was evidently the man who delivered the letter (4:7-8).

### **From Paul and Timothy**

In introducing himself, Paul immediately lays claim to his apostolic authority as he is going to deal with some very important issues. He was not elected by a convention of men, but was appointed by the very will of the Almighty (Acts 9:10-16; Galatians 1:1, 11-12). Reference is here made to Timothy because he was with Paul at the time of writing and in no wise suggests the words of the letter come from any other than the inspired apostle (Colossians 1:1).

### **To the Faithful brethren in Colossae**

The words "saints and faithful brethren" describe one group of people. Christ's blood was shed so that He might set apart a people for His service (Titus 2:14). This letter is especially for those who had remained true to Christ's cause. It would give them clear instructions from the Lord enabling them to answer the false teachers. All those separated from the world by Christ's blood are in Christ, or His body, the church. Paul prays that the Father will grant them unmerited favor and the inner peace only He can bestow (Colossians 1:2).

### **Thank God for the Brethren in Colossae!**

Paul did not take his praying lightly, nor his thanksgiving. The letters of 2 Corinthians and Galatians do not contain such a prayer with thanks for the brethren. Paul calls God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ because that is what Jesus called Him (John 20:17). Notice the thanks and prayer are directed to the Father and not Jesus. He gave thanks, in part, because he had heard good things about the church in Colossae. Paul often inquired concerning the churches he helped establish when he was away from them (1 Corinthians 1:11). So, this verse does not force us to believe someone else established this church. Paul did work in the region of Phrygia (Acts 16:6). A Christian's faith in Christ, as described here by Paul, would be his loyalty to Christ and obedience of His Word (Romans 1:5; 16:26). Love of the brethren is a natural outgrowth of that faith which proves such faith exists (Colossians 1:3-4; 1 John 3:14)

The reason for their faith and love was the hope reserved for them in heaven. They had learned of that hope by the preaching of the Truth which is found in the gospel. This truth was in stark contrast to the false teaching they had been hearing near the time of Paul's writing, which he confronts in this letter. By the time this letter was written, the good news of hope had spread throughout all of the world (compare Acts 19:10, 20; Philippians 1:12-13; 1 Thessalonians 1:8). Wherever the gospel had been preached, fruit had been produced, by the gospel, not the preacher (Colossians 1:5-6; 1 Corinthians 3:4-9, Romans 1:16)!

### **Epaphras, a Fellow Servant**

Epaphras may have been the one who first taught the Colossian brethren. Paul only uses the word "fellow servant" here and in 4:7. The word describes one who works with another in service to the great king. Paul calls Epaphras his "dear", or beloved, fellow servant, which indicates he had a very special love for him as a worker for the Lord. He also designates him as a faithful minister, which is a good commendation, especially directed to a church having trouble with false teachers. Just as the Colossians heard the good news of Christ from Epaphras, Paul heard the good news of their love from him. Love is a fruit of the Spirit and its presence would demonstrate the true nature of their conversion (Colossians 1:7-8).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Briefly describe the city of Colossae as it would have been during Paul's day.
2. Discuss the purposes Paul may have had for writing the letter to the church in Colossae.
3. Where was Paul when he wrote and what might have stimulated him to write when he did?
4. What significant details does Paul reveal about himself, Timothy and the church in the opening verse?
5. Why did Paul thank God for the church in Colossae?

6. Why do you think Paul described Epaphras as a “fellow servant”?

## Lesson 2

# Paul's Prayer

### Paul's Prayer for the Church at Colossae

From the time Paul heard of the love of the truth which the Colossian brethren possessed, Paul prayed without undue interval, or without ceasing, that they should be filled, or fully grown, in specific understanding of God's desire for them. He also prayed that God would give them the ability to apply it to their specific circumstances. Weed says the word "understanding means the critical judgment to distinguish between truth and falsehood."

He also prayed their knowledge would be translated into a way of life which was worthy of their high calling (compare Ephesians 4:1). A Christian life will be shown by the fruit of good works (Galatians 5:22-25). We cannot produce another Christian in and of ourselves but must plant the seed of God's word, water it with the truth of the gospel and wait for God to give the increase (Luke 8:11; 1 Corinthians 3:6). The fruit of good works shows the positive impact of the gospel and readies us for judgment (Philippians 2:12-15; Romans 2:6-11; 2 Corinthians 5:10). The more good works we perform the more we will grow in the understanding of God's will (Hebrews 5:12-14).

When one practices the good works outlined in God's word, he is strengthened by His power, as contained in the word (Romans 1:16; John 14:23). God's power is so great that one strengthened according to His power is blessed beyond man's ability of description. When we have such power on our side, we can patiently face trials and suffer long with the failings of our brethren and they with ours (Romans 5:1-5; 1 Corinthians 13:4). We can even have an attitude of joy knowing our end if we remain faithful in His good works (Colossians 1:9-11; 1 Peter 4:12-16; Acts 16:22-25).

### Reason for Thanksgiving

Paul also prayed that the Colossian brethren might be thankful. Particularly, Christians should be grateful God qualified us to inherit the promised land of heaven, which is a land of light because the Son is there (Acts 26:17-18; Revelation 21:22-23). We were qualified when God delivered us out of the bondage of sin, or the realm of moral darkness. Coffman says the word "translated" was used to describe the transplanting of a race of people from one land to another. So, we are taken by God out of Satan's kingdom and placed in the Son's kingdom. This happens when one gets into Christ where he becomes a new creature dedicated in service to a new Lord, or king (2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:3-4, 16-18).

As he so often did, Paul emphasizes the blessings Christians have in Christ. The word "redemption" tells of one gaining his freedom by the payment of a ransom. Christ's blood was shed to pay the price for man's release from sin and to justify God for pronouncing those who are in the church free from guilt (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:7). Weed says the word "forgiveness" describes release from or cancellation of sins (Colossians 1:12-14).

### **The Preeminence of Christ**

Though man has not seen God, he can clearly see the likeness of the Father in the Son (John 14:9; 2 Corinthians 4:4-6). Vine says the word "firstborn" is used in reference to Christ's "relationship to the Father, expressing His priority to, and preeminence over, creation, not in the sense of being the first to be born." He goes on to say Christ's "eternal relationship with the Father is in view, and the clause means both that He was the Firstborn before all creation and that He Himself produced creation" (John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:1-2).

Genesis 1:1 tells us God created, while this verse tells us Christ was the particular member of the Godhead who did the creating. Weed says heaven and earth would be the Jewish concept, while visible and invisible is the Greek. Both of these expressions are just means of furthering the thought that Jesus created everything in the universe. Thrones, dominions, principalities and powers may have been special designations used by the false teachers at Colossae to describe the hierarchy of the universe. Christ is above all such because He created all (Colossians 1:15-16).

Paul used words in verse 17 which would say "he (Christ) and only he is" before all things and the One through whom all things consist. It is reminiscent of the Lord's identification of Himself to Moses (Exodus 3:6). Christ identified Himself this way in John 8:58, and the Jews clearly understood it as a claim to being God (Hebrews 13:8). Not only is Christ pre-existent, but Paul also says He is the sustaining power of the universe. The word, "consist" literally means "hold together in an orderly fashion," according to Weed.

In addition to His power over the whole universe, Jesus has authority over the church as its head. In fact, the church had its beginning in Christ's death, burial and resurrection. His blood paid the price for our sins, thereby redeeming us from all iniquity (Matthew 26:28; Acts 20:28; Titus 2:14). The redeemed, or saved, are added to the church, which is the body (Acts

2:47). Christ is the head over that body because He is its resurrected Lord (Acts 2:36). Jesus was the first raised, or born, from the dead to die no more. Thus, in the church, as well as the universe, Christ is the pre-eminent one, which means the first in rank (Colossians 1:18)!

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Explain why you believe God was concerned with the Colossian brethren being filled with knowledge of God's will, wisdom and spiritual understanding.

2. How does God qualify Christians to be "partakers of the inheritance"?

3. Discuss what Paul says Christians have through the blood of Christ.

4. Explain Jesus' role in the creation process as it is here revealed by Paul.

5. Discuss various things which could be said to be accomplished through Christ's authority.

### Lesson 3

## Achieving Perfection in Christ

### Reconciliation is in Christ

Paul wanted his readers to see the complete essence of God resides in Jesus Christ. Sin disrupted the peaceful relationship man had with God in the Garden of Eden. Jesus' blood satisfied the demands of sin (Hebrews 9:22; 1 Peter 1:18-19) and made friends again of God and man. Ordinarily, reconciliation is said to take place between the Father and man, while here Paul says it is the Son. This writer believes the evil men of earth are the ones who are reconciled there and sees two possibilities for the things reconciled in heaven. Either, sinful man used the universe for purposes not originally in God's design and reconciliation restores its proper use, or those righteous who died prior to Christ's death are reconciled by His shed blood (Colossians 1:19-20).

Paul said the Colossian Christians were separated from God and became His enemies because of the wickedness with which they had filled their minds. Minds filled with wickedness caused them to involve themselves in evil deeds. Christians are made friends with God again by the death of the Incarnate One. Also, Christ's death causes them to be placed before God as ones dedicated to His service, without blemish and not needing reproof. Such a presentation could only be made before God to the Colossian brethren on the condition that they remained within the total of that taught, or the faith. Paul urges them to be stable and steadfast in that



faith, unmoved by false teachers who would take them away from the source of their hope, which is the gospel. Paul declares that every creature under heaven had heard the good news just like those at Colossae. The apostle was a servant of the gospel because he had been saved by the Christ of the gospel (Colossians 1:21-23).

### **Preaching the Mystery of Christ**

Paul was happy he could suffer so that the body of Christ could be benefitted. Christ suffered to purchase the church, His body, but more suffering had to take place for the church to be expanded to encompass all the earth. Christ called Paul as a minister of the gospel to the lost, especially Gentiles, and to the church (Acts 9:15; 26:16-18). Paul says his ministry is a part of God's great plan to have the word fully preached, particularly to the Colossians (Colossians 1:24-25).

Paul uses the word "mystery" to describe something God had kept secret in the past and had been revealed (Romans 16:26-26; 1 Corinthians 2:7-10; Ephesians 3:1-10). Also, Paul usually referred to it as something that now was to be proclaimed. While other religions had secrets known only by its priests, or leaders, Christianity was openly proclaimed to all. The saints are especially said to know about the mystery because they have willingly heard its message and obeyed it. Weed says, "In Christ, the wealth of God's self-manifestation spills over the barriers of nationality and race into a universal demonstration of his greatness" (See Romans 9:24; 11:17, 33). The mystery of salvation is fully revealed when one has Christ in him as the only hope of eternal glory in heaven (Colossians 1:26-27).

The false teachers with whom Paul was dealing may have approached only a selective group with their secret, but Paul preached the gospel to every man. His desire in such proclamation was, in the distant future, to present every man perfect before God, which can only occur if they are in Christ. Notice, "Christ in you", from the previous verse, here becomes every man "in Christ." Paul was working and striving with all his being to bring every man to the riches available in Christ. He was able to keep working as he did because Christ worked in him (Colossians 1:28-29).

### **Paul's Desire for Them In Christ**

It is possible Paul specified Colossae and Laodicea because he had been to both of those cities. Hierapolis, the third of the tri-cities, would thus be designated by the words, "as many as have not seen my face in the flesh." He labored for the salvation of all Gentiles worldwide, whether he had seen them or not. The apostle used the word "comforted," or encouraged, several times in his epistles (4:8; Ephesians 6:22; 2 Thessalonians 2:17). After reading all of these, one can see Paul particularly had in mind the comfort that comes from a fuller knowledge of the truth. We must remember they did not have the complete revelation in written form, as yet. As broken bones are knit together in the healing process, the bonding element in the church is love (Ephesians 4:16). Paul wanted them to have the complete confidence in their salvation that can

only come through understanding the riches which come to Christians from God. To fully appreciate the mystery of God, one must realize Christ is its embodiment (Colossians 2:1-2).

Man is searching for knowledge and wisdom through a multitude of means. He will not find them until he comes to Jesus wherein those things are revealed. Paul was especially concerned that the Colossian brethren know true wisdom is found in Christ because there were false teachers who would seduce them with false reasoning that sounded good but had no substance in truth. Though Paul was not with them bodily, he could say he was with them in spirit. Through the reports of others, like Epaphras, he could see their works and rejoice that they had kept their lines straight and presented a solid front before the enemy. Surely this suggests an active faith that is held steadfast and not mere belief (Colossians 2:3-5).

The good news had been transmitted by God for man's benefit. Those who recognized Jesus Christ as Lord, by yielding to Him in obedience, received that transmission. Those who had so yielded to Christ's Lordship should continue by allowing His will to direct every action of their lives. When a Christian receives Jesus, it is as if he is planted in Him. To properly grow, one must take root. Those who remain in Christ will constantly be built up and strengthened, or established, in Him. The banks of their lives will also overflow with thankfulness (Colossians 2:6-7).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Explain what reconciliation is and describe what it means to have such.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What report did Paul make concerning the gospel?

3. What is the mystery of which Paul writes? To whom is it made known?

4. What riches did Paul want every man to have? Where did he say they can be found?

5. Describe the comfort Paul wanted his hearers to have and explain where such is found.

6. Contrast the man in Christ with the one still in the world.

#### Lesson 4

## Complete In Christ

### Beware of Empty Deceit

Paul urged them to be constantly on their guard lest anyone take them captive through human reasoning. The philosophers Paul is speaking of were puffed up with their own knowledge, which led to empty reasoning that could not save. Such reasoning bred traditions which were passed from one man to another as a type of law. The "basic principles of the world" would be the basic teachings of worldly instructors, or heathens. Paul's whole point here is that teachings which do not come from Christ are teachings that will not save but will cause one to be captured by the devil (Colossians 2:8).

One would not want to be taken away from Christ because in Him is to be found

everything essential to being divine. He was not, as some false teachers suggested, a mere emanation from God. Turner says this essence of deity both dwelt and dwelleth in Christ, which is the force of the verb here. The word bodily may well suggest Christ's incarnation, though there certainly is a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:44). The word "Godhead" is only found three times in the New Testament. Paul uses theios in Acts 17:29, which the Greeks used "to denote the divine nature, power, providence," according to Thayer. In Romans 1:20, the word is theiotas, which Thayer says means "divinity, divine nature." In Colossians 2:9, the word is theotas, meaning "deity, i.e. the state of being God," according to Thayer.

The false teachers may have suggested the road to completeness began with Christ but had to be finished with some others. Paul says completeness comes in Christ who is the head of all (Compare Matthew 28:18). The Greeks thought there were various emanations from God and each had a specific area of authority, but Paul says Christ has all authority (Colossians 2:10).

### **The Circumcision of Christ**

The Jews stressed the importance of a physical circumcision. In Christ, sinful ways, to which our fleshly desires lead, are cut off. The "circumcision of Christ" may be his death on the cross which made it possible for our sins to be put away from us. Or, it may refer to the putting away that is done when one yields to Christ. The circumcision of our body of sins, as it was described by Paul in the previous verse, is accomplished in baptism. Note, Paul says we are buried in baptism, which would eliminate sprinkling or pouring. When we are raised out of the watery grave, we are cleansed because we showed faith in God's power to take away sin. Certainly, the God who could raise Jesus from the dead can rescue us from the spiritual death.

The Gentiles were not circumcised. Paul used this outward condition to depict the inward sinful state of men separated from God. Their sins, or trespasses, were actually the problem that caused them to be spiritually dead. God quickened, or made them alive, by forgiving their trespasses. A brief comparison of Luke 24:46-57, Acts 2:38 and the preceding verse in this chapter will show that such forgiveness takes place in baptism (Colossians 2:11-13).

### **Things Which Resulted from Christ's Resurrection**

"The handwriting of requirements" is an apparent reference to the ten commandments, which God wrote on tables of stone, and the rest of the law of Moses, which Moses wrote at God's direction. God erased, or canceled, that law because it was against man and could only condemn him. If a man could not live a perfect life, the law condemned him and had no provision for pardon. That law was taken out of force by Christ's death on the cross. Man's inability to find pardon, which was his problem under the law, was removed by the death of Christ (Romans 8:1).

Jesus was opposed by both religious and political leaders in the hours preceding His death. They could be described as the pawns in Satan's attempt to overthrow God by the death of

His Son. Thus, Satan was against Him too. He threw off their opposition when He threw off the shackles of death. His resurrection allowed Him to lead those who had opposed Him as a conquering general leads captives from the defeated forces. Jesus' public appearances made this an open display of victory (Colossians 2:14-15).

### **Warnings About False Teaching**

Since the law of Moses had been nailed to the cross, Colossian Christians did not have to answer to anyone as to why they did not observe various parts of the law or some group's private requirements. It is particularly interesting that Paul mentions the Sabbath, since some would still require its observance today. Those things, according to Paul, were a shadow of the things which would come in Christ. A shadow can tell us someone is approaching and give us a vague idea of the shape of that person. While the shadow is but an image, the body is reality. In this case, the shadow is the Old Testament law and the body is Christ's (Colossians 2:16-17).

The apostle warns against those who would "defraud" the Colossian brethren of their reward. Weed says the word suggests athletic competition in which one is disqualified. If the Colossian brethren listened to the false teachers, they would be robbed of a prize rightfully theirs. "False humility" may refer to fasts men would require of other men. Perhaps this false humility was outwardly shown by worshiping angels, implying one was not worthy to worship the Father. It is thought that those wanting to be initiated into the false religion were required to tell of visions they saw. Great emphasis was placed on one's ability to reason and the more knowledgeable were puffed up. All of these false doctrines kept people from yielding to the true head of the church, Christ. That is spiritually fatal because it cuts one off from the one who supplies necessary nourishment and holds the growing body together (Colossians 2:18-19).

Once one had died to sin and worldly pursuits in baptism (verse 12), there was no reason for him to live as if he were still controlled by worldly thinking. Worldly traditions and the law of Moses do not control the Christian's life. The Pharisees wanted to add their own requirements to God's law and force everyone to follow them. Jesus said they thereby made their worship vain (Matthew 15:9). We need only to follow God's will to be pleasing unto him (Matthew 7:21). Man's laws have to do with the temporary things of the world. Such commands come out of the minds of men and have no bearing upon one's spiritual well being.

Man's additional, external requirements appear to be based upon wisdom. However, such appearances are merely an illusion. Will worship is based upon what the worshiper wants instead of what God wants. The false teachers worshiped angels and endured deprivation of their body in an effort to control fleshly lusts, but such did not achieve the desired end (Colossians 2:20-23).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Describe some of the false teaching which arose out of “empty deceit.”
  
2. Is physical circumcision required under Christ’s law? What is spiritual circumcision? Where is it accomplished?
  
3. Describe some of the things achieved in the death and resurrection of Christ.
  
4. Explain the Christian’s relationship to the sabbath.
  
5. What types of things did the false teachers encourage which might have defrauded Christians?
  
6. Explain how will worship leads to men adding more requirements to God’s law.

#### Lesson 5

## **Focusing on Christ**

### **Setting One’s Mind Above**

Christians have died with Christ in baptism and been risen with Him to walk in a new life (Colossians 2:12, 20; Romans 6:3-4). Because the Christian has risen with Christ, he should seek spiritual things instead of sensual (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). Christ rules in a spiritual realm, rather than a physical, and expects His followers to concentrate on spiritual living (John 18:36).

Since the one in Christ is no longer alive to sinful pursuits but is alive in Christ, he must set his sights on spiritual things and not worldly. Of course, it is impossible to go out of the world, but the true follower of Christ must strive to keep the world out of him (1 Corinthians 5:9-10). Paul placed great emphasis upon the proper frame of mind to live the Christian life (Philippians 4:8; Romans 12:1-2).

Men place the bodies of those who die physically in the earth and cover them up. Similarly, those who put to death the man of sin are just as surely buried in Christ, thus hidden. Christ gave the members of His church life by conquering sin for them (Ephesians 2:1). They are hidden in Him until He appears in His glorified form, when all His children will appear with Him (Colossians 3:1-4).

### **Putting to Death Earthly Thinking**

Having shown how the Christian is alive, Paul next turned to show what each member of His body must put to death, or mortify. Thomas suggest mortify means "to dig out by the roots, and utterly destroy." Notice, Jesus' followers die with Christ to become Christians and must continue to put to death wrongful desires that may come up in their lives. Fornication describes unlawful sexual relationships. Uncleaness is moral impurity which is brought on by lustful thinking. Thayer says the word translated "passion" refers in the New Testament to "depraved passion". A desire, craving or longing for that which is forbidden would be evil desire, according to Thayer. Covetousness might well be described as a lust for money. It makes the acquisition of material things the god of one's life, thus it can be called idolatry.

Paul indicates all those who live in the above described ways and refuse to obey God will face a predetermined end. Notice, God's wrath in judgment is reserved for those who will not obey him, not a group destined to be lost. Remember, Christians have quit living in worldliness and started living in Christ. When the Colossians lived in worldliness, they participated in some of the sins Paul had mentioned (Colossians 3:5-6).

### **Changing Clothes**

Since the Colossian brethren were dead to the world in Christ, Paul said they should put sin out of their lives. Anger and wrath both describe passions aroused when one is insulted or otherwise hurt by someone else's actions or statements. Apparently, one refers to short term and the other sustained anger. Malice is ill will which may result from anger and leads to the desire to injure. Blasphemy means "to speak against". Christians should not slander anyone and especially not God. Filthy language especially describes suggestive stories and cursing which

should also be eliminated from the lives of Christians. One can lie by telling something that is not true or failing to tell the truth. That latter deceives people by allowing them to draw false conclusions from what has been left unsaid. Since members of Christ's body have stripped off the old clothing of sin, all these things should be cast out of their newly cleansed lives.

In place of the old clothing of sin, Christ's followers put on the new man in baptism. Their renewing is an ongoing process through growth in knowledge of Christ. The goal is to grow more and more like the Lord and the Father (1 Peter 2:21; John 14:9). The new creature is in Christ where there is no distinction between people. The Jews divided the world into Jew and Gentile, or circumcision and uncircumcision. The Greeks divided it into Greeks and Barbarians, who Weed says, were despised by Jew and Greek. Of course, there was also a social distinction between slaves and free men. All of these distinctions are meaningless in Christ, where the redeemed are many members but one body. Christ loves all categories of people and is in all those people who come to Him for salvation (Colossians 3:7-11).

## **Discussion Questions**



1. Describe how one participates in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.
2. How are the goals of one who has been made alive in Christ changed?
3. List and briefly describe the various things a Christian must put to death in his life.
4. What awaits the individual who allows such sinful practices to remain in his life and refuses to obey God?
5. List and describe the various activities (clothes) Paul says the Christian must put off.

## Lesson 6

# The Changed Life in Christ

### The Christian's New Clothes

The only way to keep sin's clothing off is to replace it with the new clothes of the Christian life (Matthew 12:43-45). Elect, holy and beloved are all terms used in the Old Testament to describe physical Israel as God's chosen people. Now, Christians comprise God's chosen people. As such, they should develop hearts of compassion for the physical and spiritual needs of others. The Lord fed the hungry, healed the sick, raised the dead, wept with those that mourned and cried over the lost. To be like Him, one's concern must extend to those today who are in similar circumstances. Compassion can only truly be shown in a gentle demeanor, or kindness. Jesus' disciple will place selfish considerations behind the needs of others, thus exhibiting lowliness of mind and humility. Such will also cause one to put up with ill treatment and ingratitude from the very ones whose needs he has tried to meet.

The redeemed should endure wrongs they may suffer at the hands of brethren and have a forgiving spirit. Notice, the Lord's prayer as He looked down from the cross at the mob that crucified Him (Luke 23:34). Of course, such a spirit cannot lead to full forgiveness without repentance on the part of the wrongdoer (Acts 2:23; Nahum 1:3; Exodus 23:7). The Lord came to earth to extend an offer of forgiveness, to those lost in sin, by His death on the cross. To be like Him, believers must extend an offer of forgiveness even when they are wronged (Matthew 18:15-17). Love is the outer garment that holds all the other garments in place. Love will cause one to keep God's commandments and look out for the best interests of brethren and enemies (Colossians 3:12-14; 1 John 5:3; John 13:34-35; Matthew 5:43-45).

### The Result of Putting on Spiritual Garments

The result of putting on the spiritual garments Paul has spoken of will be an inner peace that allows one to remain calm when all around him is in confusion. Christians are called by the gospel to such peace in a united body of believers. All of which should make each member of the body very thankful to God.

If Christians fill themselves up with the study of God's word, they will find that true inner peace through the wisdom it gives them to face all circumstances. A means of acquiring the wisdom found in God's word is congregational singing. In this manner, each member of the body teaches the other and encourages to greater service.

Just as Christians yielded to the authority of Jesus in baptism (Acts 2:38), they should yield to His authority in all that they do. This would include worship, family life, recreation, work and school (Matthew 4:10; 15:9). As in all things, Jesus is the perfect example of the life that submits to the authority of another (John 4:34; 6:38; 7:16; 8:29; 12:44, 49; 14:10, 24; 17:4,

8). As one does all under Jesus' direction, he will be thanking God by the way he lives and thanking Him in his prayers (Colossians 3:15-17; Philippians 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:18).

### **The Christian's Home**

It appears to this writer that Paul's words on the family are a special application of doing all in the Lord's name. In even the smallest of tasks, when two people work together someone must be in charge or direct the work. God ordained that the wife should yield to the authority of her husband (Genesis 3:16). Subjection is fitting under God's law, but not if the husband directs his wife to do something unfit in God's sight (Acts 5:29). While the wife is to be in subjection, the husband cannot be a thoughtless dictator. A man's wife is to be his special love and she should receive the tender attention one would give to his own fragile, sensitive body parts (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:28-29; 1 Peter 3:7).

Children should submit themselves to their parents in obedience. Such teaches them appropriate submission to authority and will help them be prepared to yield to God. Again, submission is limited to doing those things which are right in God's sight, for the Christian's ultimate goal is to please Him. A father's goal should be to encourage his children to do good. He should carefully direct and discipline so as to keep them on the path of righteousness (Colossians 3:18-21).

### **Instructions for Servants and Masters**

Paul has been criticized by some for not openly condemning slavery. However, the instructions he gave to slave and master must have hastened that terrible system's end. If a servant wanted to please the Lord, he would obey his master and do his work so as to be acceptable in God's sight. Pleasing God can only be accomplished by doing things right through and through and not merely on the surface. Such service would quickly attract the master's attention and might cause him to ask what was different about the slave.

Because Christians wear the name of Christ, they should give their very best in service. Everything believers do should first be done to please the Lord. Men might fail to give a proper reward for things one does but God will always reward appropriately. In Paul's day, slaves could not receive an inheritance. In Christ, one is not a slave but a son and is thus eligible for an inheritance in heaven (Galatians 4:7). God's children serve Christ Jesus and He will not have them go unrewarded.

Whether slave or master, the one who violates Christ's law will be rewarded with punishment. God is impartial and will reward each according to his deeds (Galatians 6:7-8). Masters of slaves needed to remember that they had a Master in heaven. That Master will judge them in the same manner they have judged their slaves (Colossians 3:22-4:1; Matthew 7:1-2; Ephesians 6:8-9).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Explain why a Christian should show compassion. How is such shown?
2. Discuss the roll of forgiveness and love in the life of a Christian.
3. Explain a few of the ways a Christian comes to enjoy inner peace.
4. Describe the proper relationship between husband and wife.
5. Describe the proper behavior for children and fathers, as revealed by Paul.

6. What was Paul's instruction to masters and slaves? How might this have led to the end of slavery?

#### Lesson 7

## Closing Thoughts

### Prayer Matters

Christians cannot afford to cut the lines of communication with their Master, thus they should never stop praying (Luke 18:1-8; 11:5-8; 1 Thessalonians 5:17). Watchfulness in prayer is readiness and alertness. It may particularly refer to Christians being ready for the Lord to come again (Matthew 25:13). If Christians are always thankful in their continuous prayer life, it will help them yield to the One who gave His life for the church.

Paul kept the Colossian brethren constantly in his prayers (1:9), and he desired a place in their prayers. Though he was a prisoner, Paul did not ask them to pray for his own freedom but for opportunities to preach the word. Whenever opportunities presented themselves, he was going to preach of the mystery of salvation as it is revealed in Christ. It was just such preaching which led to his imprisonment because of the Jews and gave him further opportunities to preach. He specifically wanted them to pray that he would clearly preach the truth so others might understand. This may refer especially to his defense at Rome.

The first truth some people see is that which shines in the lives of Christians (Matthew 5:14-16; 2 Corinthians 3:2-3). So, in addition to the earlier reference Paul made to the change that should take place for those risen with Christ, the Lord's followers need to carefully consider their example and its influence upon unbelievers. Every opportunity to influence them for good should be seized immediately. This means disciples of Christ must pay particular attention to their speech to make sure it is acceptable. The things one says often leave the longest lasting first impression. Coffman tells us the classical Greek writers used the word salt to describe wit used to flavor conversation. It would certainly be far better to use appropriate humor in the place of suggestive stories (Colossians 4:2-6).

### Closing Greetings

Tychicus was one of those who accompanied the gift bound for the needy saints in Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). Paul apparently sent this letter by him to Colossae. He also sent him to Ephesus (2 Timothy 4:12) and proposed sending him to Titus (Titus 3:12). The apostle may have sent him to Ephesus twice as it appears he carried the Ephesian letter (Ephesians 6:21-22).

Paul often used the word beloved as an endearing term for his brethren (Romans 1:7; 12:19; 16:8-9, 12; 1 Corinthians 4:14, 17; 10:14; 15:58; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 12:19). He urged the Colossians to consider Tychicus as they would him. They had surely heard of Paul's imprisonment and would want to know of his condition. Paul told them he had sent Tychicus to learn of their spiritual welfare and to encourage them in their fight with the false teachers. The apostle always tried to help young churches in their growth by such visits (Colossians 4:7-8; Acts 15:36).

Onesimus, a runaway slave, would be accompanying Tychicus on this journey to Colossae. They also may have carried the letter to Philemon at this time. Like Tychicus, Onesimus is described by the apostle as trustworthy and beloved. They would know him since Colossae was his home town. The brethren were urged to accept these two messengers as spokesmen for Paul and his condition at the time of writing. He may have expected to be released soon (Philemon 22).

Aristarchus was from Macedonia and had traveled with Paul as he went to take the collection to Jerusalem for the needy saints (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2). He was also with the apostle as he journeyed toward his Roman imprisonment. It is impossible to know if he voluntarily joined Paul in that imprisonment or was also bound involuntarily. Certainly, Paul counted him as a friend. Paul's directions for a hospitable reception for John Mark appear to show that he has now realized his value in service (Acts 15:36-41; 2 Timothy 4:11; 1 Peter 5:13)

This Jesus, or Joshua, called Justus, is only mentioned here. He, Aristarchus and Mark are Jewish converts who are faithful in the kingdom. This may be especially significant to Paul because conflict with the Jews had led to his imprisonment. Also, it appears Paul's great desire for the Jews had been thwarted in Rome (Romans 9:1-5; 10:1). Both these men had given the apostle some comfort, which means soothing relief and comes from the word out of which we got the word paregoric. Coffman suggests Paul may have picked the word up from Luke, the physician (Colossians 4:9-11).

It should be remembered that Epaphras was likely the one who converted many of these brethren (1:6-8). He was from that area and was a slave of the Lord. He sent greetings to them and agonized regularly in prayers in their behalf. He wanted them to grow up in Christ and be complete in their understanding of and practicing God's truth. He had worked hard (R. S. V) for all the brethren in the Lycus valley. That labor had continued, despite his absence, in the form of his prayer life (Colossians 4:12-13).

Luke was often Paul's traveling companion and wrote thorough accounts of his works in the book of Acts. Demas later turned from Paul and the Lord's work (2 Timothy 4:10). His love of the world was greater than his love of the truth. Paul also greeted the church at Laodicea. Special greetings went to Nymphas and the church that met in his/her house. We do not know any more about this good soul (Colossians 4:14-15).

## **Closing Exhortations and Blessings**

Paul urged the circulation of this letter and another which was written to the Laodiceans. Not only might some of the problems be the same, but the truth is always able to build up any who will listen (Acts 20:32). He also instructed the brethren to encourage Archippus in the faithful fulfillment of the work he was performing in the Lord's service. Archippus may have been the son of Philemon. (Philemon 2) He apparently had worked with Paul before and certainly was a proclaimer of God's word.

This letter was probable written by a secretary (amanuensis) as dictated by Paul. In the last verse, the apostle added a closing in his own writing. He asked them to pray for him in his imprisonment and expressed his prayer for God's grace to be upon them (Colossians 4:16-18).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How often should a Christian pray?
2. List some of the things for which you are thankful.
3. Describe Paul's request to be included in the prayers of the Colossian brethren.
4. What types of things might you ask your brethren to ask God for in your behalf?
5. Discuss the impact of one's influence in the lives of others.
6. What things should a Christian particularly pay attention to because of their influence?

7. List some of the people Paul mentions in the close of this letter and tell some things which could be learned from them.

8. Describe some ways in which Christians can encourage their brethren in faithful fulfillment of their ministry.

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