

Text: Col. 1:2 "The saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colossae."

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:1-8, 4:7-18

A church is people. More than that a church is individuals. A letter like Colossians demonstrates that to Paul the church was not just a machine, an organization, an institution: it was people...real live men and women whom he knew by name and could encourage or exhort in line with their known needs. I am reminded of the chorus of a little evangelistic song we used to sing as children. It reflects Paul's attitude not only to evangelism but to all church life and fellowship:

" So you take the one next to you,
And I'll take the one next to me.
We'll all work together, in all kinds of weather
~~To see what can be done.~~
to win them by love

1. Colossae: A church does have to be in a place, and Colossae was a small town in Asia Minor. It has been remarked that this was the most insignificant place to which Paul ever addressed a letter. But what difference did that make?...there were people there, souls to be saved by faith in Christ, saints to be built up into vital Christian church life. Colossae was worth the attention of the great apostle just as are thousands of insignificant villages and towns about us here.

About 100 miles from Ephesus, which was on the west coast of Asia Minor, up the River Lycus were three cities in sight of each other...Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossae. Hierapolis and Laodicea were across the river from each other, 6 miles apart, and Colossae straddled the river 12 miles upstream. They dominated the ancient trade route from Ephesus to the Orient along which marched armies and traders and travelers. Frankly, I am glad we have Paul's letter to Colossae. As a boy I found "Colossians" hard enough to learn, but just think how much worse would be "Laodiceans" or "Hierapolisians."!

This valley was noted for severe earthquakes. The River Lycus was impregnated with chalk which built up fantastic grottoes and archways of stone, and left a white incrustation over everything. The land was fertile, ~~made~~ magnificent pasture land, and was a center of the woolen industry. The chalky water helped set dye and Colossae was so famous for dying cloth that a certain dye was called by its name. In Paul's day Laodicea was a political center of splendid financial prosperity...but if you recall that its church is the last of the 7 addressed in Rev. 5, you know that even John could say nothing good about it. Hierapolis was a great trade center and famous for hot springs with medicinal qualities. But Colossae, once as great as its 2 neighbors, had lost its glory. The ruins of the other 2 can be found today, but not a trace of Colossae...except this letter.

Ephraim probably started this church, or if not, was the minister in charge of the area under Paul's guidance. The Apostle had never visited the area but during his long sojourn at Ephesus he undoubtedly knew of it and perhaps sent the young men he had trained to evangelize these towns. Acts 19:10 tells us that the whole province of Asia was evangelized. All heard the good news of the Saviour either from Paul's lips or from the band of missionaries, one of whom was Ephraim who now had come to Rome to visit Paul in ~~xxx~~ prison, report on his work, and receive advice on the problems of the church. Paul rejoiced at the good news, and began his letter with thanks to God for the faith, hope and love of the Colossian church. "We give thanks to God always for you all, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." *Quote Col. 1:3-5a.*

We need to know 2 more things about the Colossian Church, i.e., its composition and its major problem. The church was largely Gentile, although a large and influential Jewish population inhabited the region and some Jews were in the church.

strange and hostile mind
 The phrase "aliens and enemies in your mind" (1:21) is a Pauline phrase for the Gentiles. The sins listed in 3:5-7 are characteristic Gentile sins. There were Jews too, for he speaks out against their legalism, and ceremonialism. But he says in 3:11: "here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all."

There was also a large and complicated problem at Colossae. It had to do with a heresy known as gnosticism about which we will have more to say in a later message. It infected the intellectually proud. It appealed to Jews still concerned with ceremonial legalism. It regarded the world of matter as evil and taught that God did not directly create it, but did so through a series of emanations of whom Christ was merely the last. It affected the ethical approach to life, created intellectual pride and snobbery, and worst of all made a shambles of the true doctrine of the person and ~~work~~ work of the Lord Jesus Christ, primarily by saying that Jesus and His gospel were far too simple. Much more mysterious truths needed to be known. Christ was not enough! And this prompted Paul to speak out and our letter to the Colossians is the result. Indeed it is his most important dissertation on Christ. As is true in so many human fields of human progress, a problem to be solved was the stimulant to Paul's thinking out who Christ is and what He has done. Thank God for a few dead gnostics who challenged a great thinker to write this incomparable essay on the Living Lord!

Friends of Colossae: An unusual number of people are named in this letter. All were friends of Colossae. Most were gathered with Paul in Rome. They are an interesting bunch...an elite collection of leaders of the early church. Little as we know of some of them, enough is known to get a picture. They are a "portrait gallery of Paul's friends" and friends of the Colossian church.

There were Paul and Timothy, writers of the letter. So much is known of Paul that we will not dwell on him at length. But we note that he was in prison, bound by chains to a Roman guard so that we hear the rattle of those chains across his paper as we hear references to those bonds. "Remember my fetters." (4:18). "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church." (1:24). All his thoughts are for the welfare of his churches, and his prayers are continual. "For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you, and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not seen my face." (2:1). Even in prison Paul could pray, he could write, and to a surprising extent be a one-man General Executive Board of World Missions. Another interesting fact emerges here: Some modern critical scholars assert that the Apostle knew nothing of the historic Christ. How idiotic? Here in Rome he has the company of writers of two of the four Gospels, Mark and Luke. One was an eyewitness of much that Jesus did and said, the other a careful historian who had researched the details accurately. Don't you suppose that as Paul composed this epic of the person and work of Christ he repeatedly consulted these two biographers to refresh his knowledge and inspire his faith as he wrote: "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...for in him all * the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." (1:15-20)? With Paul was Timothy to care for his physical needs and to learn from the lips of the great teacher. Overlooking the generation and experience gap, Paul calls him "our brother." Perhaps it was Timothy who was acting as stenographer for this letter to which Paul penned the final greeting and signature.

Epaphras was with Paul too. He may have been a native of Colossae who had been converted under Paul's ministry in Ephesus and sent back to work among his own people. Paul says here that Epaphras is "one of yourselves." His reports prompted this letter while he visited in Rome. Paul uses gracious terms to describe him as "our beloved fellow servant" (1:7) "a faithful minister of Christ" (1:7), and "a servant of Christ Jesus" (4:12). Paul notes how Epaphras always remembers his churches in his prayers and has worked hard for the three churches in the Lycus

River valley. The expression "always remembering you earnestly in his prayers" actually means "agonizing" in prayer. It takes agonizing prayer and real hard work to be the kind of pastor Epaphras evidently was.

Then there was Tychicus, the bearer of the letter and probably a citizen of Ephesus. He had already gained a reputation for trustworthiness as bearer of a relief offering to the poor Christians of Jerusalem. He too is called "a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord." (4:7). Now to him Paul gave a special responsibility to act as his personal envoy in two respects. One is that with Tychicus Paul was sending Onesimus, the runaway slave mentioned here by name, who somehow had been in contact with Paul and had been converted. Now Paul was returning him to his master and Paul's friend Philemon^{who} was a pillar of the Colossian church. With great tact Paul does not refer to the slave status of Onesimus but says, "He is a faithful and beloved brother who is one of yourselves." This slave probably lived to become bishop of Ephesus. Surely it would call for some diplomacy and tact on the part of Tychicus to handle this affair so as not only not to offend Philemon but also to get a fair deal for the now repentant slave. Paul knew he could count on Tychicus to negotiate this with Christian courtesy. Happy is any church or Christian organization which has people which can handle delicate personnel matters! But Tychicus has another responsibility too. He was to tell the Christians of Colossae "everything that has taken place here." (4:9) When Paul wrote to Ephesus on another occasion, he entrusted this same man with this same responsibility. This implies tremendous trust on the part of Paul in his envoy to give an accurate picture of Paul's condition and experiences, and to convey his opinions and doctrines as he was teaching them in Rome but did not have time and space to write down. What we would give for a tape recording as Epaphras sat in Philemon's house, the restored slave Onesimus at his feet, and excited Christians gathered around to hear what news there was from the beloved Apostle in Rome!

Another friend of the Colossian Church was Aristarchus, from Thessalonica. He ~~ke~~ keeps popping up now and then in the New Testament. Here he is called a "fellow prisoner". Probably he was not actually under arrest but voluntarily attached himself to Paul so as to deserve this description. William Barclay makes the point that Aristarchus was the kind of man to have around in a tight spot. He was on hand when the people of Ephesus rioted and was right in the thick of things so as to be captured by the mob. When Paul was under arrest and set sail for Rome, Aristarchus was with him. Now in prison, Aristarchus was with Paul. His main virtue seems to be been to be a good companion, particularly in times of trouble. Some Christians are called for this good purpose...to be the man Friday when needed, or just to be there to provide solace and comfort and companionship when the going is rough. A church always needs an Aristarchus or two.

Mark is named too. He had an interesting career. As a young man his mother's home was open to Jesus and his disciples and later to the young church. As a close friend of Peter, it is generally believed that his gospel account of Jesus echoes the witness of the great fisherman. He was on hand when Jesus was arrested but fled leaving his garment behind. He went along with Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey but quit when the going was hard and went home. Paul could not forgive this quickly and his refusal to take the young man on the second journey caused him and Barnabas to split up. Somehow in the meantime, Mark had redeemed himself, perhaps as tradition says by faithful service as a missionary to Egypt. Now he is with Paul again, forgiven and restored to fellowship with the Apostle who was now happy to forget the past and to forgive. Paul here suggests that Mark may be traveling to Colossae soon and gives him a word of approval... "if he comes to you receive him." (4:10). Mark demonstrates the way in which any one of us who has slipped or failed, can repent and be forgiven and restored and become useful to God and His Church.

Jesus who is called Justus. Of him we know nothing, but with Aristarchus and Mark, the three are listed as "the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me." (4:11). Strange that

of the thousands of other Jews in Rome, many of them Christian, only these three were attendants of Paul. The word "comfort" possibly had the medical meaning of tonic. Their loyalty and comfort was a tonic for the heart of the Apostle.

"Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you." (4:14) We know from the beginning of the "we" passages in Acts 16:10 that Luke joined Paul at Troas at the start of his first journey into Greece. Perhaps he was converted there and influenced the Apostle to obey the call of the vision of a man of Macedonia calling for help. He may have given up a good income as a doctor to become a fellow missionary, ... not the only physician to do such a thing. Many think that Paul's physical condition required a medical attendant. At any rate, Luke earned the title of "beloved physician" and probably extended his services to bring healing healing to many as they travelled, thus making him the first medical missionary.

Demas is mentioned but not praised, which is significant. He presents sharp contrast to Mark who went from disgrace to restoration in Paul's favor. In Philemon 24 he is included with Mark, Aristarchus and Luke as a "fellow worker" but here there is silence. He is just there. Later in II Tim. 4:10 we read, "Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica." Isn't this the faint outline of degeneration, or gradual slipping away from a faith once held, and an hoped position in the service of Christ? Somehow he lost his faith. He could have done so much, but his attention was drawn to the pleasures of the world and in the end he deserted. How tragic, and yet how often true of those who could be the friends of the church. The excitement and advantages and pleasures of the tangible world can draw away from the permanent joys of the household of the faith. How sad to just let us in reality.

Paul's final words mention local friends of the Colossian church. "Give my greetings to the brethren at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house." (4:15). He requests that the two churches swap and read their letters from him. These churches derived ~~xxx~~ stimulation and help in association with each other. It has often been my experience that a lone country church too far from other churches to easily experience any fellowship, has a rough time, but that in a group of churches it acquires stimulation and strength. One log in a fireplace will not burn well and usually goes out, but two or more burning together make a fine continuing blaze. So with churches, and Colossae was fortunate to have the help of two others. Nympha may have been a woman in Laodicea who opened her home to the church. For a couple of centuries after Christ there were no church buildings but Christians of wealth used their homes or prepared a large room for the collective worship of the group. We know nothing of Nympha either, but she was undoubtedly a gracious lady whose contribution was to keep an open home, to dust the piano and bookcases, and fix the flowers for the church meeting in her home. We recall several women mentioned in this capacity in the New Testament. Such ladies too, are friends of the church and deserve, as did Nympha, a name in Holy Scripture.

Last was Archippus. The letter to Philemon is addressed to "Philemon our fellow worker, and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier and the church in your house." Was this a Christian family, and was Archippus the son of Philemon and Apphia? Here we read: "And say to Archippus, 'See that you fulfill the ministry which you have received in the Lord.'" Maybe while Rev. Ephraim was in Rome, Archippus was acting pastor of these churches. Some think he was lagging in his duties and Paul was telling him to get on the ball. But this is not necessarily so. If Paul had trained him and commissioned him as a young evangelist, perhaps in his first ministry, what would be more natural than for the Apostle to encourage him to "fulfill the ministry which you have received in the Lord." I like to think of it that way...that here was a young man confronted with all the problems of a hostile non-Christian society, perplexed with the heresies which denied Christ His proper place of pre-eminence, but who with the inspiration of this unique discussion of the person and place of Christ and His right to rule in every human relationship is here called upon by his beloved teacher to "fulfill" the ministry which he had received from the Lord.

Conclusion: So here you have a church and its friends. There were imperfections in the church and in each of these friends. But together we get a picture of a church where various capacities and abilities had combined. The great need of this church which all recognized was to keep Christ at the center, to make Him supreme and sufficient. Isn't there a picture here of every church and of our own needs as we work with churches? Some may be an apostle like Paul, others a lady like Nympha. Some are messengers, some are peace-makers, some are the soldiers in a scrap, some minister to physical needs. But all with Christ as the head of the church form His body and bear fruit for His glory.

Paul is encouraging us to "hold fast to the Head from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God." (2:19)

Plus. Whole church in a little boat in Galilee - but Christ was in the midst.

1. A Church and Its Friends
2. The Supremacy and Sufficiency of Christ
3. Steadfast Christian Living

The Supremacy and Sufficiency of Christ

Scripture reading: Col. 1:13-20

Text: "...that in everything he might be pre-eminent." (Col. 1:18b)

The supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. These words sum up Col. 1:13-20 for which we find the best single text in 1:18: "...that in everything he might be pre-eminent." One could wish that Paul had closed this paragraph with his words in 3:11 which in simpler language also offer a summary: "Christ is all, and in all." *Some wonder if Paul was not here quoting a hymn of the early church.*

① Paul's approach shows that as a missionary he knew the importance of understanding cultural differences. Jerusalem, Rome, Athens, and Colossae demanded varied cultural adaptation of the Gospel truth, and this paragraph is difficult for us mainly because of the strange philosophy of religion developed in Colossae. We missionaries can learn here from Paul that, although the essential Gospel content is always the same, the form of presentation in Korea may be totally different from California. To transplant American forms of evangelism, or revivals, or literature, or programs because they are familiar to us and successful at home in no way insures their effectiveness in Korea. Paul was trying to put himself in the pew beside the Colossians to hear himself expound on the person of Christ.

② We must also note again the presence of a local heresy the nature of which we are not entirely sure. It relegated ~~Christ~~ ^{Christ} to a subordinate position, denied that the true God was the creating God, regarded the body as totally evil, and required special knowledge to gain access to God. God's relation to His creation was like a man who creates a robot, charges it batteries and turns it loose. The robot in turn creates another robot, somewhat inferior, and turns it loose. This robot creates a third, and so on. There is no direct connection between the man and the final robot in the chain which is inferior, evil, and makes things for which the original man is not responsible. This denied so much of the true nature and function of Christ, that Paul here is correcting by asserting the truth. *while denying Deism*

③ The immediate context also deserves comment. *Christ denied to the rank of an angel's intermediary was in vogue in Colossae* This Christological jewel is set between statements assuring our redemption by Christ. 1:13-14: "He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his Beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin." Then vs. 20: "and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." Paul the theologian never forgot that he was Paul the evangelist. His sublime phrases about the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ are bracketed with convictions of deliverance, redemption, forgiveness, and reconciliation of sinful man with God.

I find in these 6 verses 9 statements about Christ, and elsewhere in the book about 9 more statements, some echoing those in this paragraph. Like many other students who express these ideas in different forms I find 4 statements about Christ:

1. Christ and God
2. Christ and Creation
3. Christ and the Church
4. Christ and Reconciliation

① Christ and God. Verse 15 tells us: "He is the image of the invisible God," and Verse 19: "In him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell. These words not only tell us the relationship of Christ and God, but what William Barclay calls "what Christ is to Himself."

② Christ is the image of the invisible God. The child's catechism asks: "Can you see God?" and answers: "No, I cannot see God but He always sees me." We cannot see God, but Jesus Himself taught: "He who has seen me has seen the Father." Paul had only a momentary glimpse of the risen Christ in that blinding light on the road to Damascus, but he must have talked with Peter and John (as well as Mark) and others who saw Jesus in the flesh. He had heard what HE LOOKED like,

the tone of his voice, his gestures and mannerisms. More than this he learned of the attitudes and moods and character of the Savior. He was convinced that in the person of this physical, historical person called Jesus, men saw God.

The word for image is eikon. We associate eikons with the Greek Orthodox church where pictorial images of Christ are a part of architecture and worship. An eikon was a portrait, like a modern photograph. When a legal document was drawn up it included a description of the characteristics and distinguishing marks of the contracting parties so there could be no mistake later on. An eikon was a description by which you could be recognized. In Jesus we recognize God, because
 ⇒ there are His personal characteristics and distinguishing marks. Like a mirror, Jesus was the image of God representing Him. But a representation which is perfect enough is also a manifestation, for more than a picture image He manifested what God is like in His inner being. In Genesis this same word eikon is used:
 ⇒ "God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him." Therefore it is fair to say that Jesus is a double image...an image of God, and an image of what man was supposed to be.

"For in him the complete being of God, by God's own choice, came to dwell." NEB.

① Again, in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. ^{↑ "The word was God"} Fulness is pleroma. There is nothing of God left out in Jesus. He is such a full revelation that nothing more is necessary. Some Colossians thought all kinds of special knowledge and secret passwords were necessary to get to know God. Paul brushed this aside with the sufficiency of Christ alone. In 2:3 he says: "In [Christ] are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." and in 2:9: "In [Christ] the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily." Except in faith, we cannot understand the doctrine of the trinity, but we know that all of God was in Christ who shows us all that is needed to know God. No "unknown" God, no abstract philosophical conceptions, no statues of wood and stone...Just Christ as revealed in the Scriptures shows us the pleroma, the completeness of God. ~~Pleroma: the fullness of God~~

II. Christ and Creation. "[He is] the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities...all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Here Paul deals with the nub of the problem in Colossae and provides plenty of meat for our astronomers, geologists, anthropologists and other scientists to chew on. So often Christ is left out of their calculations and theorizing. The four statements here assert Christ's Lordship, Agency, Priority, and Control of all Creation.

altho it includes that

① Lordship. He is the first-born of all creation. First-born does not mean ^{merely} in order of time, but is a title of sovereignty. It was an ancient title of honor for kings in many lands. In the O.T. it is used of the Messiah. The highest honor of creation belongs to the Son of God, Jesus Christ. With respect to all Creation, Christ holds the position of sovereign honor and lordship, which places him above all creation, and puts all creation in subjection to Him, ^{including all the}
"King of kings, Lord of lords, & He shall reign forever."

② Agency. In him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities...all things were created through him and for him. How strange to our scientifically tuned modern minds! "In him" and "through him" and "for him" are key phrases.

① In him expresses the spiritual locality of all creation...all the universe is a marvelous unfolding of the mind of God in Christ. All the law and order and majesty and beauty and harmony which we see are in him.

② Through him shows Christ as the mediator. When God made the stars, Christ was the mediator. When God makes a new creation of a sinful man, Christ is the mediator. The same preposition is found in "through him we have access to the Father."

③ For him, or unto him points to Christ as the goal of the universe. He is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. All the world was made for

Christ, to be His, to give Him glory.

Remember that Paul was adjusting his language to the thinking of the Colossians. Without saying yes or no to their whole system of "emanations" from God, intermediate beings, and various powers in the universe he is proclaiming: "All these things, whatever they are in creation were created in Christ, through Christ, and for Christ." *Christ is superior to all these, for He created them.*

C Priority. "Christ is before all things." Jesus was not a part of creation, but existed prior to creation. He was not created for He was before creation. According to the ancient credal interpretation, he was eternally begotten of the Father. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." This pre-existence in time is a part of Christ's supremacy in dignity, headship, sovereignty.

D Control of Creation. "In Him all things hold together." The marvelous unity and order of the universe are not accidental. The law of gravity and all other cohesive and regulatory ordinances of infinite space as well as micro particles of the atom are in him. He put the stars in their places and then holds them in his hand. Here we step by faith outside the limitations of human science. For all its amazing discoveries, science knows only what it can deduce from what it can see and test. Only Christ gives the fundamental explanation of what holds all the universe in balance and keeps it running smoothly according to divine plan.

III. Christ and the Church. *growth comes from the head - not human effort* "He is the head of the Church." First-born in creation, first in the church. The head of the church is the risen and exalted Christ. First-born in creation, first-born from the dead., that in everything he might be pre-eminent. In I Cor. Paul also spoke of the church as the body of Christ, but emphasized the diversity of functions of the single organism and the interdependence of its members. Here the emphasis is on the head of the whole organism, the resurrected Christ from whom all members derive their vital powers. Revel 2:19 *holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together thru its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.* With the emphasis upon Christ as head, the church as the body is subject to that head, and any abuse of it is unfitting. The Colossians separated spirit and body into good and evil, and some of them reasoned that what we do with the body makes no difference. But Paul points to Jesus as the head of the church and to the church as the collective body of saints with a duty to keep itself holy and pure in order to honor the head, Jesus Christ. This thought is just as pertinent today as 2000 years ago, though perhaps in different ways. CHURCH IS MEANS BY WHICH CHRIST ACCOMPLISHES HIS PURPOSES

Phillips: "Life from nothing began thru him, and life from the dead began thru him" Again, as Jesus was the agent at the first creation so with the new creation. He is the beginning of the church by virtue of the resurrection. The open tomb signifies his victory over death...he has conquered every enemy. His is the final triumph making possible the new creation of individually redeemed men and collectively the church. Barclay puts it this way: "He is the living Lord; He is the source and origin of the church; He is the constant director of the Church; and He is the Lord of all by virtue of His victory over death."

IV. Christ and Reconciliation. "And through him to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." The backdrop is the cosmic Christ, supreme, sovereign, sufficient... in the Godhead, in the created universe, in the Church. The final word is the grand purpose of Christ's coming: Reconciliation. God was the wronged party in this estrangement caused by human sin and resulting universal discord. Yet He took the initiative in the whole process of salvation and reconciliation. This was grace, this was love, this was true fatherhood. Incidentally we should note that in human affairs we who would be like God must take similar initiative even though we are the wronged party in order to achieve reconciliation. Certainly God did.

In the beginning God first created a harmonious universe and then made man. In Christ the order is reversed: God first man is redeemed man as a new creation and this is followed by the restoration of the disordered universe to harmonious union

with God. This peace was made by the blood of the cross, supreme proof that there is no length to which God's love will refuse to go in order to win men's hearts. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32) All things in Rom. 8:32 and all things here...in fact the expression all things 5 times in 6 verses! He is before all things, all things are created in him, all things hold together in him and through him God reconciles to himself all things?...man, nature, the universe! Whatever our explanation of the cross, the fact remains that at the heart is the cross as God's way of bringing reconciliation to men, and ~~xxx~~ to the universe. Thielman: "Creation reveals the act of God; Christ reveals the heart of God."

Conclusion: We would miss the final point or purpose in God's ~~xxxxxxx~~ plan if we skipped verses 21-22. "And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him." God could not rest until he restored man to the place He had intended. No Colossian of yesterday or Christian of today could reason that once saved by the blood of the cross we are free to continue doing evil deeds. God who in Christ has acted in such drastic fashion to bring reconciliation looks for a product holy and blameless and irreproachable. The rest of the letter is directed towards keeping his readers "stable and steadfast" in their understanding of the Gospel and to build them up so as to be holy and blameless and irreproachable before Christ. Yet sprinkled through all these teachings are constant reminders of the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ of whom He has spoken in this great paragraph.

2:3 "In [HIM] are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. - all that we need to know
2:10 "In Him you have come to fulfulness of life." - all that we need for an abundant life
3:3 "Your life is hid with Christ in God." - all that we need for ^{life} protecting (hope)
3:11 "Christ is all, and in all."

Thielman: "Creation reveals the act of God, ~~and~~ Christ reveals the heart of God"

Berkhof: ~~The~~ Re generation of the Son: "It is that eternal and necessary act of the first person in the Trinity, whereby He, within the divine Being, is the ground of a second personal subsistence like His own, and puts this second person in possession of the whole divine essence, without any division, alienation, or change." p. 94

Text: "...every man mature in Christ." (Col. 1:28b)

Scripture reading: Col. 1:28-29; 3:1-17

Paul the evangelist, the theologian, and the pastor are all evident in Col. 1:28. "Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ." "Every man" occurs three times and leaves none of us out. Our concern today is with the last of these...the pastoral purpose of every true shepherd of the flock in Paul's day and ours..."every man mature in Christ!" "Mature" means perfect, finished, wanting nothing necessary to completeness. Our word comes from the Latin for "ripe" and hence full grown, or adult. Anticipating Christ's return, Paul does not want infantile, half-baked, dwarfed products, but full-grown, complete, mature men and women in Christ to place in the Master's hands. He echoes the words of Jesus: "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt. 5:48) He wants us to attain "to perfect manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Eph. 4:13). The goal is: EVERY MAN MATURE IN CHRIST.

In ^{the control body of} Col. 2-3 are ^{presented} three overlapping areas of spiritual maturity corresponding to what we regard as maturity in other respects. A normally mature person (1) has "his feet on the ground" so far as ^{his} life philosophy and purpose, (2) he has self-control over himself and his daily routine, and (3) he is adjusted socially with others about him. Similarly Paul pictures a mature Christian as (1) Stable in Doctrine, with (2) Healthy Christian Practices, and (3) Wholesome Interpersonal Relationships. Surely more could be said about Christian maturity, but let us look at how Paul here would present every man mature in Christ.

I. STABLE IN DOCTRINE. If Paul was disturbed about fickle doctrinal stance among the new Christians at Colossae, how "up in arms" would he be about the wishy-washy, sloppy, "anything goes" situation in much of the Christian thinking today? After his sublime Christological statement in Chap. 1^{and} in view of the false teachings in Colossae, he challenges his readers to "continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard." (1:23) When I think of something stable, I think of a great building with its foundation on solid rock, anchored with steel and concrete, immune to earthquake or falling bombs. I think of "steadfast" whenever I see a Korean woman with a bundle on her head determinedly striding across a busy street, eyes neither to right nor left, disdaining such inconsequential hazards as erratic bicycles or speeding taxis. When I think of the term "not shifting" I think of the keel of a great ship...invisible beneath the waves, yet nevertheless preventing the ship from capsizing mid wind and wave, and insuring that she responds to the rudder to guide to the distant port. This is what Paul urges with reference to the Christian and his doctrine: "continue in the faith, stable & steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard."

Chap. 2 abounds in calls to stability in theological thinking. 2:2 speaks of "the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery." 2:4 "That no one may delude you with beguiling speech." 2:6 "Live in [Christ], rooted and built up in him and established in your faith." Here is language from the plant world...I..rooted deeply in rich soil; from architecture...constructed like a well designed building; from the military...firm and well ranked like a Roman phalanx of well disciplined soldiers. Paul is saying, "Don't let anybody rob you of the rich treasures you have in Christ Jesus, or kidnap you as a slave trader abducts some naked savage, or lure you into trouble like a country simpleton tricked by the city slicker." 2:8 "See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit."

Paul's admonition reflects problems at Colossae. To those who taught that more was needed than the simple Gospel, he says (2:6): "As you received Christ Jesus, the Lord, so live in him." Let go of all that went before, and enjoy your new life!

To those who insisted that special knowledge, secret philosophy, or ecstatic experience was necessary, he says in 2:10: "In [Christ] you have come to fullness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority." With Christ you have attained to a knowledge of the mysteries of God's salvation; He is sufficient to lead into all truth. To those who emphasized circumcision and other rites, Paul says (2:12) "You were buried with him in baptism and raised with him in faith... you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, but God made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross." Let's admit that our Baptist friends win a point here...your sins are immersed beneath the water, ^{or buried} like a corpse in the grave...but you rise with new life. So far as your sins are concerned three great verbs tell us what has happened to them: forgiven, canceled, nailed to the cross. With this tremendous fact as the bedrock foundation of our doctrine, why yield to all sorts of wild theories and the seductions of false teachers?

Our day needs these words. I submit that Christians today have their stability of doctrine threatened in three ways outside of outright heretical movements. One is to over-emphasize one fact of our faith to the neglect of others, such as some aspect of our Lord's return, or the severe judgement of God at the expense of his sacrificial love, or the humanity of Christ to the exclusion of His deity. Another is to so broaden our doctrinal inclusivism as to allow almost anything one desire to be believed...a notable factor in the confession before our church today where such statements as those on the birth of Christ allow for either acceptance or denial of the virgin birth. The third way in which stability is threatened is "fadism"...the substitution of some current fad for true doctrine today, with some other tomorrow...such as civil rights, women's lib, church union, peace movements, and all others which may have some part in Christian thought to be sure, but can never be substituted for the solid core of the faith itself. "Continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard."

"Every man mature in Christ" - Stable in doctrine

II. HEALTHY CHRISTIAN PRACTICES. A mature person has achieved a balance in his personal habits so as to lead a healthy, normal life with proper proportions and ingredients of work, rest, exercise, recreation, diet, personal hygiene. Too much of one, or the neglect of any, can upset the harmony and well-being of the person. The last part of Col. 2 brings up matters affecting the ^{religious} spiritual practices of the Colossians. These had to do with circumcision, observance of certain fast days, feast days or sabbaths, ~~xxx~~ regulations about what was fit to eat and so forth. In a sense these were doctrinal matters, but Paul insists that the problem was essentially that some Colossians made them more important than Jesus Christ. No! he says, "the substance belongs to Christ." With Christ you died to all this, "why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit ~~xxx~~ to regulations?" (2:20)

Paul was combatting the substitution of any human practice for faith in Christ for salvation whether it be Jewish ceremonial legalism or pagan asceticism elaborated upon by gnostic heretical teachers. He was not preaching "libertarianism" whereby anyone can do as he pleases on the assumption that daily practices and habits make no difference! He hastens on in the first part of chap. 3 to set us straight on this score. Without going into detailed consideration which would be helpful for our private study, note three principles of healthy Christian practice which Paul gives in these three paragraphs.

1. Seek the things that are above. Here is "Paul's power of positive thinking" which Norman Vincent Peale can never improve upon. Christ is above, so set your mind on Him, and not on things that are on earth. A good doctor would always rate an optimistic, bright, smiling outlook as an important ingredient for good health. Well, spiritual health, and the antidote for much of the poisonous thinking in Colossae is looking upward to Christ, our hope, the source of goodness, the fountain of power. "Your life is hid with Christ in God." Like a compass pointing ever to the north, our orientation is to Him. Paul's prescription for spiritual health at the beginning of every day is: "Seek the things that are above!"

2. Put to death what is earthly in you. If our orientation is towards what is above kill what is below...earthly. Earthly things incur the punishing wrath of God, but this is buried now. Yet our freedoms in Christ are not to be interpreted as license to continue to wallow in the world's filth. "Put to death; immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Put away "anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk..." "Do not lie to one another." You are a new creature, you have a new nature "which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." No condoning of evil, no compromise with the world, no indulgence in human lust simply because it is "natural," no situational ethics, no glorification of doing what we please under the fiction that this is all right because it is "normal human instinct!" All this is what we are supposed to have gotten rid of, and now Christ is all and in all.

3. Put on the garments of God's chosen ones. Every verse here is a rich text. These are the virtues which should be the natural clothing of the healthy Christian. Instead of the vices listed above, are "compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness." "Above all put on love." Instead of struggling with mysterious knowledge, keeping legal points on special days, food laws, circumcision, etc., "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" "be thankful" "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach...as you sing." "Do everything in the name of Christ." Here is the diet, the exercise, the recreation, the harmony of mind, the peace with Creator and His creatures, which bring healthy Christian daily living...true maturity. This does not solve all the problems or remove the pains, but it is God's prescription for serenity and peace, fruitfulness and victory.

III. WHOLESOME INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS. The most easily observable marks of maturity lie here. With religious convictions firmly rooted in the goodness and greatness of God, with assurance of salvation through faith in His Son our Saviour, Jesus Christ, issuing in healthy Christian practices and inner virtues...the Christian naturally exhibits wholesome interpersonal relationships. If such symptoms are not visible, the whole fabric of maturity in doctrine and of inner Christian virtue is called into question. The Apostle applies his teaching to wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves, masters, and outsiders. In other words: family relations, labor relations, and social relations.

1. Paul's formula for a happy family is simple. Despite all the talk of the "generation gap" or of "women's lib" it is still basic and usually works, especially if Christ is "all and in all" as assumed here. The formula: (1) Wives, subject to their husbands, (2) Husbands, love for wives, (3) Children, obedient to parents, (4) Fathers, no nagging of the children. Interestingly, he has no admonition for mothers...maybe Paul assumed that the mothers already knew far better than he how to love their children! But the principle of mutual subjection in love, and of conscious effort to make the system work abides. A happy home where harmony and peace prevail, where food is on the table, clothing and warmth and other comforts provided, does not just "happen"...it takes some effort, some cooperation, some mutual yielding. Remember the verse just preceding: "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

2. Paul discusses labor relations in terms of the institution of slavery without opposing or condemning it. He merely points both Christian slaves and Christian masters to Christ...the slave rendering service as to the Lord, the master treating his slave fairly, remembering that he too has a Master in heaven. Far different from master-slave relations in the 1st century! Our society knows no slavery, but we will always have employer and employee. What better rule of labor practice for Christians than right here...employer treating his workmen justly and fairly, and employee rendering happy, industrious, honest service. Often we are in the former capacity, and we can well heed the admonition to justness and fairness, the absence of which cause the most resentment, ill-will, and resulting poor service. When we remember that we have a Master in heaven of whom we expect justice and

fairness with love (even when our conduct is far from deserving such) maybe it will help to improve our own "labor relations."

3. In 4:5 we read: "Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders." Probably what Paul is thinking of is the attitude of Christians towards those outside the church. He hits us all in the face and we stand condemned. We are the advertisement for or against Christ to all outsiders. Wise conduct means tact, courtesy, friendliness, dignity, and many other things. But here Paul zeroes in on two areas: (1) Making the most of the time... I think he means that the Christian should be conscious of trends and feelings about him, and use wisely the opportunities the Lord gives to win friends and influence people for Him. And (2) Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer every one....that is an approach in words that are winsome, witty, and wise. The tone of voice, the humor without sting, the meeting of the situation in terms acceptable to our hearers...all play an important part in establishing the rapport so necessary, in some cases for the very survival of the Christian and in others for the successful evangelization of the community.

Conclusion: Here then are Paul's answers to the question of how to present every man mature in Christ. Stable in doctrine, healthy in Christian practices, wholesome in interpersonal relationships. "For this I toil," says the Apostle as pastor and missionary. We must set the same resolution for ourselves: "striving (that is, agonizing) with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me."

Every Man Mature in Christ

1. Stable in Doctrine

2. Healthy Christian Practices

- Seek the things which are above
- Put to death what is earthly in you
- Put on the garments of God's chosen ones.

3. Wholesome Interpersonal Relationships

- Happy family
- Labor relations
- Social relations