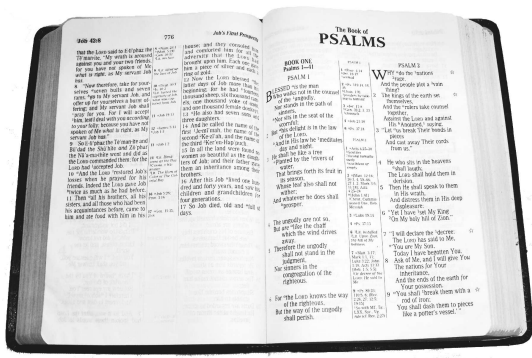


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



October 2017
Psalms 113 to 118
Colossians

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Who is like the LORD our God who dwells on high?

Psalms 113 to 118 are known as ‘The Hallel Psalms’ or ‘The Egyptian Hallel’ because of the song of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt which is celebrated in Psalm 114 (‘Hallel’ means ‘praise’). These psalms were sung at the great pilgrim festivals of the Jewish religious calendar, Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. The Passover hymn sung at the Lord’s supper would have been one of these psalms (Matthew 26:30).

Psalm 113 begins and ends with, *Praise the LORD* (‘Hallelujah’ –1,9). We are to praise God for his greatness (1–5) and for his mercy (6–9). We should sanctify every day with praise to God, *from the rising of the sun to its going down* (3). *Who is like the LORD our God who dwells on high, who humbles himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and the earth?* (5–6). Wonder of wonders, our Lord Jesus, *who being in the form of God ... humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross* (Philippians 2:6,8) to save us poor sinners. He has not only saved us from the dust and rubbish heap of the degradation and pollution of sin, but has brought us into his royal family, making us heirs with himself (7–8; cp. Romans 8:16–17; 1 Peter 1:3–4). **Does not the very reminder of all this cause your heart to leap with joy so that you praise the Lord with grateful adoration and hallelujahs?**

Spurgeon comments, ‘Having been ourselves lifted from spiritual beggary and barrenness, let us never forget our former estate or the grace which has visited us, but world without end let us praise the Lord. Hallelujah’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

*Wonders of grace to God belong
Repeat his mercies in your song.* (Isaac Watts)

Childlessness brought much heartache and reproach to women in Bible times as it is still does in the 21st century (see the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel chapter 1; some of her words are echoed in verse 7 of this psalm; cp. 1 Samuel 2:8). God is mindful of those who suffer in this way and has special blessings for them in their heartache (9).

Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord

It is a good and encouraging exercise to remind ourselves of God's mighty deeds in times past and to remember that he does not change. Matthew Henry comments that just as time 'does not wear out the guilt of sin, so it should not wear out the sense of mercy.' This psalm reminds us of God's wonderful and miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

The Israelites were brought out of Egypt to know God's presence among them and his rule over them. *Judah became his sanctuary* (dwelling-place) *and Israel his dominion* (kingdom). The house of Jacob enjoyed the presence of the God of Jacob (1,7). When God is among his people they are truly blessed. We are reminded how he protected and provided for his people. The Red Sea and the River Jordan were both turned back at his command and by his mighty power, he also miraculously provided water for his people in the desert (3,5,8).

God's presence is awesome! '*Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord*' (7). It is tragic that reverence is lacking in so much of our praise and worship and that the fear of God is generally absent among us who claim to know him. Many professing Christians want the atmosphere of the music hall in church services and have an insatiable appetite for entertainment. They forget, or do not realise, that worship is first and foremost for God, not for ourselves. Spiritual worship honours God and brings real satisfaction to the soul. Spurgeon comments, 'Let the believer feel that God is near, and he will serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Awe is not cast out by faith, but rather it becomes deeper and more profound. **The Lord is most revered where he is most loved.**' (THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

But our God is in heaven; he does whatever he pleases

Matthew Henry points out that this psalm teaches us ‘to give glory to God and not to ourselves (1), to God and not to idols (2–8). We must give glory to God by trusting in him, and in his promise and blessing (9–15); by blessing him (16–18)’. We are reminded of the answer to the first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism: ‘Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.’ We owe our progress in the Christian life, our gifts, abilities and success all to the Lord. We should pray, *‘Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to your name give glory.’* We should magnify the Lord for his mercy and his truth (1). But for God’s mercy, we would be lost and without salvation. Without God’s truth as found in the Bible, we would be groping in ignorance.

The sneers and jeers of the ungodly are not a new phenomena. They have blasphemed God and mocked his people throughout the ages but it does hurt us when we hear the name of our precious Saviour used in vain. When they challenge us and ask, ‘Where is your God?’ we must not be intimidated. Our reply should be, *‘But our God is in heaven; he does whatever he pleases’* (2–3). Our God is the almighty, exalted Sovereign over all the universe who is worthy of our worship and our trust.

How foolish it is to worship or trust in idols! These are made by men and they have mouths that are unable to speak, eyes that cannot see, ears that do not hear, noses that are unable to smell, hands that are useless, feet that are lame, and throats that contain no voice (4–8). To whom do unbelievers turn for help in their need? Many are turning to the weird occult practices of new age-religion, to psychics, astrologers and other fortune-tellers. Some are unashamed idolaters, others have their ‘lucky charms’ and superstitions. **They are not ashamed of their useless gods, why should we remain silent about our glorious Lord who loves us and cares for us?** Let us proclaim the greatness of our sovereign God, glorify his holy name, and make known the gospel to those who are lost.

The LORD has been mindful of us

This psalm reminds us in verses 3 to 8 that it is stupid to trust in man-made gods. There is now a threefold call to *trust in the LORD* who is our *help and shield* (9–11). We must not lose heart in difficult and discouraging times but remember that God is absolutely sovereign and that he sees us and hears us. *The LORD has been mindful of us*. He will never forget us and he will bless us (12–13). If you are passing through a dark valley of trial, think of God’s past dealings with you, those gracious answers to prayer and encouragements. You will then begin to rejoice that God has been mindful of you, that he is still mindful of you, and that he will always be mindful of you. If you keep this great truth before you, it will help you to trust in him when you pass through difficult circumstances.

There is all the difference in the world between our God and idols. The almighty Lord made heaven and earth (15) but idols are the work of men’s hands; they are pathetic (4–8). God has blessed us, bestowing mercy and favour upon us and we must bless God (18). What does it mean to bless God? It means to speak well of him, adoring him for his greatness, praising him for all his blessings. Spurgeon comments on verses 17 and 18, ‘Once begin praising God and we have entered upon an endless service. Even eternity cannot exhaust the reasons why God should be glorified. “*Praise the LORD,*” or Hallelujah. Though the dead cannot, and the wicked will not, and the careless do not praise God, yet we will shout “Hallelujah” for ever and ever. Amen’ (TREASURY OF DAVID).

The dead do not praise the LORD (17). There is no praise to God from the grave but we have so much for which we should *praise the LORD* while here on earth, and we look forward to an eternity of worship and praise in heaven. Think of the blessing of belonging to God and knowing his grace and mercy in your life. Count your blessings and praise him! ***But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the LORD!*** (18).

I love the LORD

This psalm is a song of gratitude to the Lord for all his mercies and it takes up some of the thoughts found in Psalm 18:1–6. The psalmist says, *‘I love the LORD’* and goes on to explain why he loves the Lord. The Lord had heard his prayers and had delivered him out of great distress. He was determined to call upon God for the rest of his life (1–4, 6, 8). When we are passing through difficult times we may be tempted to think that God doesn’t really care for us but that is not true! He is gracious, righteous and merciful in all his dealings with us (5) and he will always preserve us (*‘simple’* in verse 6 means to be childlike or without guile; cp. Psalm 19:7).

The suffering, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus are echoed in some of the verses before us (3–4, 8–9). This is a psalm sung at the Passover Feast and it would have been sung by Jesus at the Last Supper. He took the cup saying, *‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you.’* For us it is the cup of salvation but for him it was a cup of sorrow, appalling suffering and death (Luke 22:20,42). We love him because he first loved us (1 John 4:19).

The very thought of God’s gracious and bountiful dealings with us should calm the troubled believer. Alfred Edersheim points out that the word *‘rest’* (7) is in the plural in the Hebrew original. The word, *‘rests’* indicates complete and entire rest, at all times, and under all circumstances.

Have you been losing sight of the kindness of your great God as difficulties have beset you? Have you been brought low? Call upon the Lord like the psalmist, remember just how much he loves you and take heart. He will give you his rest and his surpassing peace.

What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits towards me?

A sense of gratitude to God leads us to serve him joyfully and sacrificially. *What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits towards me* (12)? The psalmist goes on to answer his own question:

- *‘I will take up the cup of salvation’* (13); this probably refers to the drink offering given in grateful praise to God (Leviticus 23:13; Numbers 15:5; 28:7–8).
- *‘I will call upon the name of the LORD’* (13,17); this speaks of our trust in him and allegiance to him (cp. Genesis 4:26; 1 Corinthians 1:2).
- *‘I will pay my vows to the Lord’* (14,18). He was determined to keep the promises he made to God when he was in distress. He paid these vows in the presence of God’s people. We must be sure to keep every promise that we have made to the Lord.
- *‘O LORD, truly I am your servant’* (16). If we really love the Lord Jesus we will delight to serve him and to please him.

How is the death of a believer *precious in the sight of the LORD* (15)? We have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18–19) and we are precious to God. Death cannot separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:35–39). The Lord takes us to be with himself for ever when we die. We will be removed from the presence of sin, suffering, sorrow and death. Spurgeon comments, ‘They shall not die prematurely; they shall be immortal until their work is done; and when their time shall come to die, then their deaths shall be precious. The Lord watches over their dying beds, smooths their pillows, sustains their hearts, and receives their souls.’ (TREASURY OF DAVID).

What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits towards me?

His merciful kindness is great towards us

This is the shortest of the psalms and also the shortest chapter in the Bible. It begins and ends with a call to praise the Lord. Spurgeon comments, ‘This psalm, which is very little in its letter, is exceedingly large in its spirit; for, bursting beyond all bounds of race or nationality, it calls upon all mankind to praise the name of the Lord’ (TREASURY OF DAVID). A great multitude from *all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues* are in heaven worshipping and praising God (Revelation 7:9–10). The apostle Paul quotes from this psalm to show that God purposed that the blessing of salvation includes Gentiles as well as Jews (Romans 15:11).

We praise God because *his merciful kindness is great towards us, and the truth of the LORD endures for ever*. It is a great encouragement to know that God is true and faithful to all his covenant promises. Grace and truth came by our Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:17) and we should ever praise him for his merciful kindness to us. We deserve judgment and hell but he laid down his life to save us. He not only forgives those who repent of their sin and trust in him, but he brings them in to God’s family so that they have the smile of God upon their lives. He delights to hear our prayers and he heaps blessings upon us (Ephesians 1:3). He will welcome us into his presence in heaven. Matthew Henry writes, ‘God’s mercy is the fountain of all our comforts, and his truth the foundation of all our hopes, and therefore for both we must praise the Lord.’ **How can we fail to praise him for his great merciful kindness towards us?**

*Great Father of mercies,
Thy goodness I own,
And the covenant love
Of thy crucified Son;
All praise to the Spirit,
Whose whisper divine
Seals mercy and pardon,
And righteousness mine.*

(John Stocker)

It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man

This is the last of the Hallel Psalms which were sung at the Passover and it begins and ends with the same refrain, ‘*Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for he is good! Because his mercy endures for ever*’ (cp. 1 Chronicles 16:34; 2 Chronicles 5:13; Ezra 3:11, Psalms 106:1; 107:1; 136). The psalm was also sung in processions to the temple (cp. verses 19–20; 26–27). In the dedication of his translation of this psalm, Martin Luther wrote, ‘This is my psalm, my chosen psalm. I love them all ... but this psalm is nearest my heart, and I have a peculiar right to call it mine. It has saved me from many a pressing danger, from which no emperor, nor kings, nor sages, nor saints, could have saved me. It is my friend; dearer to me than all the honours and power of the earth ... And would to God that all men would claim the psalm as especially theirs!’

Those who know God and have experienced his goodness readily acknowledge that his mercy endures for ever. When we call on him in distress, he will answer us (5). Some people may despise us or even hate us but we should not fear them. We can boldly say, ‘*The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*’ (6; Hebrews 13:6). We must never forget this wonderful reassuring truth: *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Romans 8:31). The psalmist recalls how his enemies had pushed him violently to bring him down, ‘*but the LORD helped me*’ (13). That little word *but* makes all the difference!

It is said that verse 8 is the middle verse of the Bible and what better verse could be in this position? *It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man*. Are you trusting God day by day? Israel of old proved that God could be trusted in the worst possible circumstances. The Egyptians were in hot pursuit when God miraculously parted the waters of the Red Sea for them to safely cross. The same waters destroyed the pursuing army and Moses led the people in joyful, triumphant praise with the words, ‘*The LORD is my strength and song, and he has become my salvation*’ (14; cp. Exodus 15:2). **Are you filled with fear? If you are a Christian, God is on your side. Trust in him! He is your helper and he will never fail you!**

*This is the day which the LORD has made; we will rejoice
and be glad in it*

The victory song of Moses is again echoed in verses 15 and 16 (cp. Exodus 15:6). The psalmist goes on to recall the Lord's dealings with him. He writes, '*The LORD has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death*' (18). There are times when God may severely chastise us for our sin. He does not do this to destroy us but for our good (Hebrews 12:11). Spurgeon comments, 'Blessed be the name of God, he may chastise us, but he will not condemn us; we must feel the smarting rod, but we shall not feel the killing sword. He does not give us over unto death at any time, and we may be quite sure that he has not done so while he condescends to chasten us, for if he intended our final rejection he would not take the pains to place us under his fatherly discipline' (THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

This psalm points us to the Lord Jesus Christ. He quoted verses 22 and 23 when the chief priests and Pharisees questioned his authority (Matthew 21:42). He is the chief corner-stone of God's building who was rejected by the Jews but chosen by God the Father and precious (cp. 1 Peter 2:4,7).

The words, '*Save now*' are rendered '*Hosanna*' in the New Testament and verses 25 and 26 were repeated by the great crowd who greeted the Lord Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem at the beginning of the week in which he was crucified (Matthew 21:9). Little did those people realise at the time that the salvation of sinners was to come through his death on the cross.

This is the day which the LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it (24). **We must remember that every day is given by him. We are able to commit our darkest and most difficult days to him when we acknowledge him as our God. How wonderful it is to belong to him! Let us praise and exalt him** (28).

COLOSSIANS

Colosse and Laodicea were cities in the Roman province of Asia, situated in the fertile valley of the river Lycus. Colosse was over 100 miles east of Ephesus and some 15 miles south-east of Laodicea. The gospel was preached throughout Asia when Paul was based at Ephesus (Acts 19:10), though it is appears that the apostle had not been to Colosse (1:3–4, 7–8). It is possible that Epaphras, himself a Colossian (4:12–13), heard the gospel in Ephesus, and after coming to faith in Christ, took the good news to Colosse.

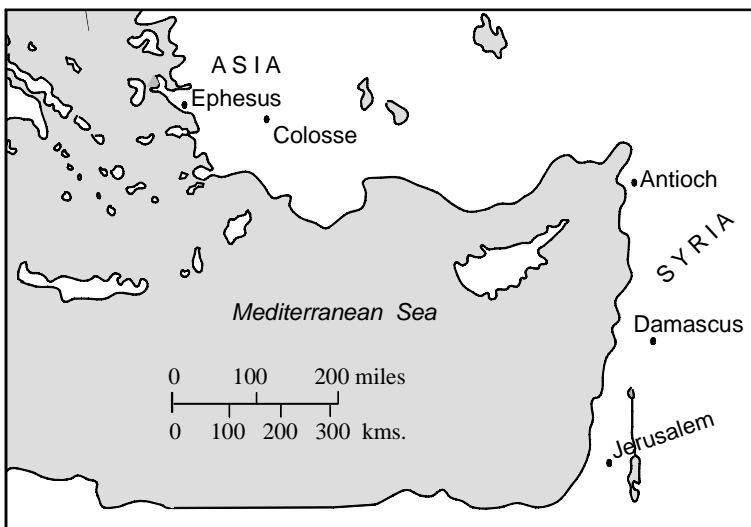
Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians between AD 61 and 63 at the same time as he wrote to Philemon and to the Ephesian church, the letters being carried by Tychicus (4:7; cp. Ephesians 6:21). The apostle, in prison in Rome, was concerned that false teachers were having an unsettling and disturbing influence upon the Colossian church. These teachers were saying that there is more to the Christian life than ordinary Christianity, and that a fuller experience and a greater freedom than that which they had thus far enjoyed was available to them (it seems much like the modern evangelical scene, does it not?). Paul insisted that all God's fullness is to be found in Christ alone, warning against *'philosophy and empty deceit'* (2:8).

As with some of the other early churches, there were Judaisers who taught that Gentile Christians must submit to the rite of circumcision, observe Jewish dietary laws and feast days (2:11–16). Moreover, some were worshipping angels (2:18) and practising a false asceticism (2:20–23). Paul combats these errors by showing that Christ is God, and that his work in saving sinners is complete and sufficient (1:13–23). He also gives instruction on practical Christian living. There are many similarities in Colossians to the Ephesian letter, eg:

- Colossians 1:14 and Ephesians 1:7
- Colossians 1:18 and Ephesians 1:22–23
- Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19
- Colossians 3:18–25 and Ephesians 5:22 to 6:9

Outline of Colossians

1. Greetings and thanksgiving – 1:1–8
2. Paul’s Prayer for the Colossians – 1:9–14
3. Christ, the Head of Creation and of his Church – 1:15–18
4. Christ, the Reconciler – 1:19–23
5. Paul’s ministry of preaching Christ – 1:24–29
6. Paul’s concern for the Colossians – 2:1–7
7. Paul’s warning against false teaching and
his answer to it – 2:8–23
8. Living the Christian life – 3:1 to 4:6
9. Commendation of messengers and
closing greetings – 4:7–18.



I recommend the commentary on Colossians by William Hendriksen (published by Banner of Truth). Hendriksen is scholarly, warm and devotional in his commentaries.

In Christ

Paul begins his letter by including greetings from Timothy who was with him when he wrote this letter. He describes himself as ‘*an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.*’ He was not self-appointed nor was he appointed by men. He was different from the false teachers who had influenced the Colossian church; his apostolic credentials were God-given (1; cp, Galatians 1:1). Christians are described as ‘*saints*’ (those set apart to God) and *faithful brethren*’ (2; cp. Ephesians 1:1).

Paul and Timothy gave thanks for the Colossians and *prayed always* for them (3). They were *in Christ ... in Colosse* (2). Wherever we are or wherever we go we are ‘*in Christ*’. Many Christians know the feeling of isolation when they live or work among those who are ungodly or who scorn the gospel of Christ. If you feel discouraged because of your isolation, remember that you are ‘*in Christ*’ and that you are privileged to shine as a light in the spiritual darkness that surrounds you.

What are the marks of those who are *in Christ* (4–5):

- They have *faith in Christ Jesus*. This is more than saying that they believe in Jesus. They trust in him for their salvation, knowing that they could not save themselves. They believe all of his promises and take seriously his teaching and they obey him.
- They have *love for all the saints*, not just those they like. Love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and if it is not obvious in our lives, we should question the reality of our faith. Do you love **all** the saints in your church, are there some whom you ignore or despise? *Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth* (1 John 3:18).
- They have a *hope* laid up for them in heaven. We rightly emphasise the importance of faith and love in the Christian life, but hope is also of vital importance. Hope is the confident expectation of glory in the life to come (12,27). An awareness of this hope makes all the difference to us when we face suffering and trial (Romans 8:18).

Do you have the kind of faith, hope and love described in these verses?

Bringing forth fruit ... since the day you heard

The gospel had come to the Colossians in *the word of the truth of the gospel* (5). They had heard the good news through the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. The gospel had come to Colosse through Epaphras, who was also a Colossian. Paul had a very high regard for this godly man whom he describes as *our dear fellow servant and a faithful minister of Christ* (7–8; cp. 4:12–13).

When the gospel is preached, we pray that men and women will be challenged by the message. We pray that the Holy Spirit will give them understanding so that they will respond positively to the gospel. The preaching of the Word of God is important (Romans 10:14–17; 2 Corinthians 4:5–6)! Pray that God will raise up many preachers of his precious Word and that he will be pleased to bless their labours.

Notice how Paul stresses the importance of truth. ‘*The truth of the gospel*’ and ‘*the grace of God in truth*’ (5–6). There were enemies of the truth who were seeking to *cheat* them (2:8 – the Greek in that verse means ‘to take captive’) through false teaching. We must always be on our guard against error. Many a professing Christian has been taken captive by false teaching. We will only be able to recognise error if we ground ourselves in the teaching of the Bible and the great doctrines found in its pages. Some people believe that there are many truths which all lead to God. This is not true! There is only one saving truth – the truth of the gospel which is absolute and final. We dare not compromise the doctrines of Scripture by seeking fellowship with churches which reject the authority of the Bible. If you love and value the truth taught in God’s holy Word, you will hate error.

The apostle observed that this gospel was *bringing forth fruit* (such as faith, love and hope) in the lives of his readers from the day they *heard and knew the grace of God in truth* (6). **Can the fruit of the gospel be seen in your life and experience?**

That you may have a walk worthy of the LORD, fully pleasing him

The apostle told the Colossians that he and Timothy thanked God for them and that they prayed for them (3–4). He now reveals what they asked for in their prayers (9–12).

- They prayed that they *may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding* (9). We need wisdom and spiritual understanding so that we will be *grounded and steadfast* in the faith to keep us from being shaken or moved from God's truth by false teachers (23).
- They prayed that they *may have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God* (10). Notice again 'fruitful' (compare verse 6).
- Paul also prayed that they would be *strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power*. We are much aware of our own weakness and of our need for God's power to strengthen us. Some Christians seek after strength or power from wrong motives. They want power to impress others or to lord it over others in order to feed their own pride. The power that Paul desired for the Colossians was strength to enable them to have endurance (*patience*), longsuffering and joy in trial (11; cp. James 1:2).

Let us meditate on this prayer of Paul. Do you have wisdom and spiritual understanding? **Are you leading a life worthy of the Lord, seeking to please him fully?** Are you fruitful and increasing in the knowledge of God? Do you know his mighty strength so that you may joyfully endure trials in your life? We need always to pray for one another, just as the apostle prayed for the Colossians.

*Ye souls redeemed with blood
And called by grace divine
Walk worthy of your God
And let your conduct shine;
Keep Christ, your living Head, in view
In all you say, in all you do.* (William Gadsby)

Partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light

When did you last give thanks with all your heart to God? Our hearts should overflow with much thanksgiving and praise to God. What has the Father done for us through Christ? He has qualified us ('made us fit') and he has delivered us:

- *He has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light* (12; see also verse 5). Sin disqualifies us from any inheritance in heaven and we cannot be qualified unless the Father graciously works in our lives. We cannot earn this 'qualification' by good works (Ephesians 2:8–10)! Now that we have been brought into God's family, we are qualified to share in this glorious inheritance with all other Christians (*saints*). The expression *the saints in the light* reminds us of our separation to God. A saint is someone who has been separated from sin to serve God. *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light* (Ephesians 5:8; cp. 1 Thessalonians 5:5).

- *He has delivered us from the power of darkness (Satan) and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love* (13). The word *translated* (*transferred* in some versions) means 'removed'. In ancient times, earthly kings would uproot those they had conquered from their own country and settle them in a strange and distant land (as were the Jews when taken into Babylonian exile, 2 Chronicles 36:20). They went from liberty into slavery, but in Christ, we have been removed from slavery into liberty and from the land of darkness into the light of God's glorious kingdom. This was accomplished at great cost! The price of our redemption, our deliverance and our forgiveness was the shedding of Christ's blood at Calvary (14).

If you are a Christian, these truths should fill your heart with praise and thanksgiving to God who has given us so much Let us now thank him with grateful hearts for all that he has done for us. Surely, when we owe the Lord so much, we will want to please him and lead a life worthy of him!

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation

Most false teaching is in error concerning the Person of Christ (who he is) and his work (what he came to do). Paul deals with these vital truths in verses 12 to 23. In today's reading, we have a wonderful and majestic description of Christ in all his greatness. The Lord Jesus Christ is God (15–19; cp. 2:9)! This great truth was not something developed centuries later by the church. Athanasius reaffirmed this truth and defended it in the 4th century AD when the heresy of Arius became widespread. We must remember however that the deity of Christ was taught by Jesus himself and by the apostles (cp. John 5:18)!

The Lord Jesus is described as *the express image of he invisible God* (15). When a coin is stamped out, it bears the exact image of the die by which it was stamped. Jesus has revealed God as no other prophet could. He shares the divine nature of God (John 14:9–11). He is described as being '*the brightness of his (God the Father's) glory and the express image of his person*' who sustains the universe *by the word of his power* (Hebrews 1:3).

The Lord Jesus is the great Creator of all things (16; cp. John 1:1–3). He is the eternal One (*before all things*; cp. Revelation 22:12–13) *and in him all things consist* (17; 'In him all things hold together' – ESV). He holds the whole of the universe in his hands and he lovingly holds us and will always take care of us. Jesus He will never let us go and he will never fail us. **We should be filled with awe and wonder that he humbled himself and gave himself to die for sinners. Let us worship him, praise him, and be determined to live for him.**

*Crown him the Lord of years,
The potentate of time,
Creator of the rolling spheres,
Ineffably sublime!*

*All hail, Redeemer, hail!
For thou hast died for me:
Thy praise shall never, never fail*

Throughout eternity. (Matthew Bridges and Godfrey Thring)

***He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn
over all creation***

Jehovah's Witnesses claim that Colossians 1:15 shows that Jesus is a created being and thus he cannot be God. They back up their claim quoting from Revelation 3:14 where the Lord Jesus is described as '*the beginning of the creation of God.*' They allege that these verses prove that Jesus was created by God and is therefore inferior to him. They misunderstand and misuse Scripture.

Vine (Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words) writes, 'Prōtotokos, firstborn, is used of Christ ... in His relationship to the Father, expressing his priority to, and pre-eminence over, creation, not in the sense of being the first to be born. It is used occasionally of superiority of position in the Old Testament; see Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 21:16-17.'

The book of Colossians teaches Christ's pre-eminence over all things (1:18) and that he is God (2:9).

Revelation 3:14 does not mean that Jesus had a beginning any more than Revelation 21:6 teaches that God the Father had a beginning or will have an end. The Greek 'archē' is elsewhere translated '*magistrates*' (Luke 12:11); '*rulers*' (Titus 3:1); '*the power*' (Luke 20:20). The NIV rendering of Revelation 3:14, '*the ruler of God's creation*' is perfectly valid. Jehovah has formed no god after himself – Isaiah 43:10 and he certainly did not create Jesus, 'a god', as Jehovah's Witnesses believe. Scripture plainly declares that Christ is God and that he was with God in the beginning (John 1:1–2). It is very sad that such zealous and sincere people fail to understand the wonderful message of the gospel and that they shut their ears to truth.

That in all things he may have the pre-eminence

The Lord Jesus is now described as ‘*the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in all things he may have the pre-eminence*’ (18). When Christ has the pre-eminence in our thinking, we are better protected against false teaching, whether it be the godless philosophy and empty deceit of men, or the worship of angels (2:8,18). When Christ is pre-eminent in our lives we will always seek to honour him and obey him. We acknowledge the Lord Jesus alone as the Head of the church because as sovereign Lord he is pre-eminent. He is God and in him all fullness dwells (19). He is glorified by the Holy Spirit (John 16:14). **Is the Lord Jesus first in your life? How much time to you spend in personal fellowship with him?**

*We worship thee, Lord Christ,
Our Saviour and our King;
To thee our youth and strength;
Adoringly we bring:
So fill our hearts that men may see
Thy life in us, and turn to thee!*

(E. Margaret Clarkson)

Paul reminds us of the reconciling work of Christ who reconciles all things to himself by making *peace through the blood of his cross* (20; 2 Corinthians. 5:18–19). Some false teachers claim that the words, ‘*by him to reconcile all things to himself*’ (20) mean that in the end, everyone will be saved, even the devil. **This cannot possibly be true!** The golden rule for understanding difficult verses is to remember that any interpretation that contradicts the plain teaching of the Bible must be wrong. Many passages of Scripture state that all will not be saved (eg. Daniel 12:2; Matthew 7:13–14,21–23; 25:46; John 5:28–29; Philippians 3:18–21; 2 Thessalonians 1:3–10; Revelation 20:10; 21:8). *The restoration of all things* (Acts 3:21) comes when there will be new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, when all things are brought under subjection to Christ, when all his enemies are put under his feet (1 Corinthians 15:24–28; 2 Peter 3:13).

You ... he has reconciled

Paul has written of God's plan of reconciliation (20) and he now applies it directly to us : *you ... has he reconciled* (21).

- The need for reconciliation. Sin alienates men from God, our evil deeds making us his enemies and leaving us without God and without hope (21; Ephesians 2:12–13). Not only do we need to be reconciled to God; he also needs to be reconciled to us.
- The way of reconciliation. Christ, the great Creator, took human flesh, humbled himself, suffered and died on the cross to reconcile us to the Father. This salvation is freely given to us, but it was purchased at tremendous cost through his death on the cross (20,22).
- The purpose of reconciliation. The Lord Jesus did all this to prepare us for the great day when he will present us *holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in his sight* (22; cp. Jude 24–25). We do not have to fear the day of judgment if we belong to Christ. On that day we will hear words of welcome as we receive our inheritance (Matthew 25:34).

We have a glorious Saviour and an amazing salvation but we live in confusing times when many professing Christians are weak and unsettled. We need to *continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast* so that false teaching will not move us away from the hope of the gospel. **This gospel is for every creature regardless of race (23); we need to make it known!**

*My God is reconciled,
His pardoning voice I hear;
He owns me for his child,
I can no longer fear;
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And Father, Abba, Father! cry.*

(Charles Wesley)

That we may present every man perfect in Christ

Following the opening greetings which came also from Timothy, Paul shows that he is the author of this letter. The pronoun ‘we’ in verses 3 and 9 becomes ‘I’ in verse 23. Paul described himself as a ‘minister’ (or ‘servant’) of the gospel (23) and of the church (24–25). The Christian ministry must always be seen in terms of service; the minister serves Christ and his church. Paul also viewed his ministry as a *stewardship* (‘dispensation,’ AV) *from God ... to fulfil the word of God*. Paul saw that he had been entrusted with a great responsibility which he did not take lightly (cp. 1 Corinthians 9:17; Ephesians 3:2).

There were a number of ‘mystery’ religions in Paul’s day which claimed to have special secrets and knowledge for those initiated into them. Paul’s use of the word ‘mystery’ is entirely different. He uses the word ‘mystery’ to denote a truth which was hidden in the past ages, but which has now been revealed. *The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations has now been revealed to his saints* (26). It is now an open secret known by all of God’s people! What is this ‘mystery’? It is *Christ in you, the hope of glory*. William Hendriksen comments, ‘It is Christ in all his glorious riches actually dwelling through his Spirit in the hearts and lives of the Gentiles’ (COMMENTARY ON COLOSSIANS). This had not been seen before, but was now evident (though many Jews in the early church had difficulty in recognising it, eg. Acts 10:45; 11:17–18).

Preaching must be Christ-centred and the goal of the true minister is not only to win souls but to care for them so that when Christ returns he is able to *present every man perfect in Christ Jesus* (28). The word ‘perfect’ here means ‘mature’. Paul knew that the work of the Christian ministry involves hard toil but he also knew the mighty power of God working through him (29). **Let us pray that God will be pleased to raise up many faithful men to pastor churches and to preach Christ to a needy world that is perishing in its sin.**

That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love

Paul had never met the Christians in Colosse or Laodicea, but he had a great concern for them (1). The noun ‘*conflict*’ is similar to the verb *striving* in the previous verse (1:29). Our word ‘agony’ is derived from the Greek. Paul continues with the theme of ‘*striving*’ which involved preaching, warning against error and teaching in order that Christians will become mature in Christ (1:28).

The purpose of Paul’s striving for these Christians was (2):

- *That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love.* Hendriksen comments, ‘The heart of all true pastoral activity is to be instruments in God’s hand to bring the hearts of those entrusted to one’s care to the heart of Christ ... Over against the attack of false teachers these hearts must be strengthened’ (COMMENTARY ON COLOSSIANS). Good teaching alone is not enough to strengthen our hearts. We must also love one another because love is *the bond of perfection* (3:14).

- That they would attain *to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God.* There was much at stake (and there still is). In God, Father and Son, *are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* (2–3). ‘*The mystery of God*’ is not some dark and mystical knowledge, but something that he reveals through the Holy Spirit. As we increase *in the knowledge of God* (1:10), we will discover more and more wonderful things from his *treasures of wisdom and knowledge* (cp. Romans 11:33–36; 1 Corinthians 2:6–16).

Paul was concerned that they might be led astray by false teachers, being deceived *with persuasive words* (4). False teaching has an attraction for the unwary and disguises error within truth, having *an appearance of wisdom* (23). **If those of us who are pastors and teachers fail to warn against wrong doctrine, we are being irresponsible.**

You are complete in him

Epaphras had brought an encouraging report to Paul concerning the Colossians (1:7–8) and the apostle rejoiced to see their *good order and the steadfastness of their faith in Christ* (5). He goes on to urge them, ‘*As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him*’ (6). To walk in Christ, is to live for him, always acknowledging him as Lord over our lives. This is what he expects of us and also that we be not only rooted in Christ, but also *built up in him and established in the faith* as we have been taught, *abounding in it with thanksgiving* (6–7).

Hendriksen comments, ‘Gratitude is that which completes the circle whereby blessings that drop down into our hearts and lives return to the Giver in the form of unending, loving, and spontaneous adoration. Moreover, such giving of thanks increases the sense of obligation (Psalm 116:12–14), so that those who overflow with this grace feel all the less ready to turn away from the abundance which they have in Christ Jesus the Lord, and to follow the advice of false teachers (COMMENTARY ON COLOSSIANS). **How sad it is that ‘unending, loving, and spontaneous adoration’ is often missing from our lives!**

Beware lest anyone should cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit which come from human tradition and worldly principles (8). This philosophy is not the thought of the Greek philosophers; it was a mixture of Christianity, Jewish ceremonialism, worship of angels and asceticism (see verses 11–23). The high-sounding talk of false teachers is nothing more than ‘*empty words*’ (Ephesians 5:6). The Lord Jesus is God and he has supreme authority over spiritual powers. *For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and you are complete in him* (9–10). The Greek word translated ‘*complete*’ means ‘filled’ (see ESV). We are ‘being filled’ in Christ in whom *dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*.

*O fill me with thy fullness, Lord,
 Until my very heart o’erflow
 In kindling thought and glowing word,
 Thy love to tell, they praise to show.* (Frances Ridley Havergal)

Having disarmed principalities and powers

Paul now explains how we are ‘*complete*’ (‘filled’) in Christ, describing our Lord’s saving work in the life of the believer and the freedom that we enjoy in him:

- Freedom from the power of sin (11–13a). The false teachers were insisting that physical circumcision was necessary for victory over *the indulgence of the flesh* (23). Paul reminded the Colossians that in him (in Christ) they had already been circumcised with *the circumcision made without hands* (11). We are not helpless in our struggle with temptation to sin! When we come to Christ, we are joined to him in a spiritual union (this explains the expression, ‘in Christ’). We receive circumcision of the heart in which our sinful nature (*the body of the sins of the flesh*) is put off. This does not mean that we will never sin again; we are to go on putting to death the remains of sin within us (3:5). We are now identified with Christ in his death (cp. 3:3), burial and resurrection, and have been made alive with him. This union with Christ is symbolised in believer’s baptism (cp. Romans 6:3–8).
- Freedom from the penalty of sin. He has *forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us* (13b–14). The condemnation of the law is removed through the death of Christ, the perfect One. The charges against us have been nailed to the cross. *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit* (Romans 8:1).
- Freedom from the power of Satan. Christ has triumphed over the forces of evil (15). He *who is the head of all principality and power* (10) has through his death on the cross, *disarmed principalities and powers* (15). Calvary was not a defeat, but a glorious victory wrought on behalf of poor, needy sinners. **Let us rejoice and thank God for the liberty that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ!**

Let no one defraud you of your reward

Paul continues to warn us about false teachers. Since we have such a glorious freedom in Christ, we must beware of falling into bondage through their influence (16–17; cp. Galatians 5:1). Legalism is more concerned with outward religious observance than joyful obedience to God from the heart. We are not bound by the Jewish food regulations, festivals or sabbaths found in the Old Testament; they are but a foreshadowing of all that we have in Christ (16–17).

It appears that a false teacher was telling the Colossians that they were not true Christians because they did not observe his religious practices. The man had a semblance of humility and may have been teaching that we are unworthy to approach God directly and must therefore contact him through angels, who were also to be worshipped. The man's humility was false. He was *vainly puffed up* and in his conceit, he had intruded into the unseen (18, 23). He claimed to have had visions (*things which he has not seen*; commentators such as William Hendriksen suggest that the inclusion of 'not' as in the AV and NKJV is not the best translation). The apostle urges us, '*Let no one defraud (disqualify) you of your reward*' (18). Many deceivers continue to claim that they have had visions in an attempt to convince us. The best advice is to ignore their claims and to test their teaching by God's holy Word.

At our conversion, we died with Christ and we are dead to any seeking of salvation by keeping man-made rules and regulations. The false teacher was urging the Colossians to abstain from certain foods and to neglect their bodies (20–23). This asceticism was *according to the commandments and doctrines of men*. False teaching attracts because it has an *appearance of wisdom*. We should beware of unscriptural, joyless rule-keeping. We should be enjoying our liberty in Christ; this is not a liberty to do as we please, but to joyfully obey him. **If you are an unhappy Christian, could it be that are just keeping man-made rules rather than biblical commandments, and that you have lost sight of Christ, neglecting to enjoy fellowship with him?**

Your life is hidden with Christ in God

We have already seen that when we are born again through the mighty work of the Holy Spirit in our lives; we are *'in Christ'*. There is no more condemnation and we shall never perish. Wonderful indeed! There is more than this involved in our union with Christ, however. We are not only united to Christ in his death, but also in his risen life (1; cp. 2:20; Romans 6:1–5). The old life is now finished, we must live to please God.

The risen Christ ascended to heaven and he sits at the right hand of God (1). *Your life is hidden with Christ in God* (3). This means that we are to set our mind *on things above, not on things on the earth* (2). What are these things which are above that we are to keep on seeking? They are spiritual qualities which are priceless treasures — *tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering*, etc. (12–14). Heavenly-mindedness is quite a rare quality today. We must never be taken in by the accusation that being heavenly-minded makes us useless on earth. The most effective Christians are those who set their minds on things above.

We must make it our priority to *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness* (Matthew 6:33). Everything that is displeasing to Christ must go from our lives. We are to reckon ourselves to *be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 6:11; cp. verse 3). We are to *put to death* those evil things that once held sway in our lives (5,7). How do we do this? We must shun everything that we know will hinder us and be determined not to feed fleshly lusts by reading sordid books and magazines. We must avoid pornography at all costs, whether on DVD's, internet or television. We are not to allow evil-doers to influence us. We have to live out our new life in Christ in every area of our lives, every day. It is a sad fact that so often, rather than being seen to be *hidden with Christ in God*, we hide the Saviour from those around us. **Are you setting your mind on things above and living to please your Lord and Saviour?**

You have put off the old man ... and have put on the new man

Christians have a different future to those who are not saved. When the Lord Jesus returns, we *will appear with him in glory* (4) whereas the unsaved (*the sons of disobedience*) will face the wrath of God because of their sin (5–6). The Christian hope is a great encouragement for us to lead holy lives (1 John 3:1–3). Remember that Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit when he wrote his letters to the churches (cp. 2 Peter 3:15–16). He now sets the standard for Christian behaviour in the local church (9–17), in the home (18–21), in the place of work (22 to 4:1) and among the unsaved (4:5–6).

When we come to faith in Christ and follow him, our lives will be transformed. The Word of God reminds us, '*You have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man*' (9–10). The unbeliever is quite content to live with the old man – he does not know better, but the Christian can never be at home with this old sinful nature. How do we *put off the old man with his deeds*? We must get rid of the sinful attitudes, words and actions described in verse 8; we have no need to be under the dominion of sin (5,7; cp. Romans 6:14). We have the help of the Holy Spirit to lead godly lives and we must not encourage this old man by feeding sinful desires (Romans 8:12–13).

The new man, our new nature in Christ *is renewed in knowledge according to the image of him who created him* (10–11). That Christ-like image must be seen in our lives and he can change the vilest sinner. Jew and Gentile, Barbarian, Scythian, slave and free may all know this transforming grace (the Scythians were a cruel and vile nation from the area of the Black Sea, despised by all other nations in New Testament times, but they were not too hard for Christ to save).

If we have no desire to lead a godly life, we should question whether our conversion to Christ is genuine. **Have you put off 'the old man' and his ways? How is 'the new man' doing in your life?**

But above all things put on love

Christians are chosen by God, they are *the elect of God, holy and beloved*. Our lifestyle must reflect our election! When we *put on the new man* (10), we *put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness and long-suffering* (the Greek verb translated ‘put on’ in verse 12 means ‘to clothe’ as in Mark 1:6). Look at our spiritual clothing! Are we clothed with *tender mercies* (compassion)? If the clothes on our bodies reflected our spiritual clothing, would we be poorly dressed? Are we kind? Are we humble and meek? Are we longsuffering so that we bear with other Christians, even those who we find to be difficult? We are to forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us (13). If we are harbouring bitterness and an unforgiving spirit, our Christian life will be blighted and we will be miserable.

What is the motivation behind clothing ourselves with compassion, kindness, etc? It is love for our blessed Saviour and for his people. *But above all these things put on love which is the bond of perfection* (14). Love is the great cement which binds Christians to one another. It is easy to opt out of church life because ‘we do not get on with people’ but we just have to get on with others and show the beauty of Christ in our lives. If every Christian sought with all his heart to put into practice the virtues described in verses 12 to 14 there would be far fewer divisions in our churches. Our gatherings together would be a wonderful foretaste of heaven on earth. **Think about these lovely graces and examine your own heart. Can they be seen in your life? Have you the desire and the determination to put them on?**

*How sweet, how heavenly is the sight,
When those who love the Lord
In one another's peace delight,
And so fulfil his word!*

*When love, in one delightful stream,
Through every bosom flows,
When union sweet and kind esteem
In every action glows.*

(Joseph Swain)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom

The rule of Christ is the rule of peace; this peace is the possession of a calm and contented heart. *Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body* (15). When we walk with God we enjoy the surpassing peace of Christ in our lives. This peace of God is also linked with a thankful heart (15,17; cp. Philippians 4:6–7). Notice that the church, which is the body of Christ, is called to peace. This peace can only be maintained when we clothe ourselves with the virtues described in verses 12 to 14 (cp. Ephesians 4:1–3). We must never tolerate error, however, in our pursuit of peace. We are to *contend earnestly for the faith* (Jude 3).

God's Word must be central in our lives and in our worship if we are to increase in spiritual wisdom: *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom* (16). We are to teach and encourage one another but we will only be able to do this if we know the Bible and its teaching (cp. 1:28). Every Christian should make Bible reading and meditation on its teaching a priority! We lose much if we neglect to feed ourselves on Scripture and we will be spiritually weak.

How should we sing our psalms, hymns and spiritual songs? *With grace in your hearts to the Lord*. Some Christians would have church services taken up with little more than hymns and choruses, but they have little desire to have the Bible preached among them. This reflects spiritual immaturity and a lack of hunger for the Word of God. Worship without Scripture is not spiritual worship! Singing is important but we must not neglect the reading and preaching of God's Word.

Let us seek to glorify God in our lives, doing *all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him* (17). Hendriksen points out that '*in the name of the Lord Jesus*' means to be 'in harmony with his revealed will, in subjection to his authority, in dependence on his power.' (COMMENTARY ON COLOSSIANS). **Are you a complaining Christian or are you thankful to God for his wonderful grace and mercy to you?**

Wives, submit to your own husbands ... husbands love your wives

The remainder of this chapter deals with Christian living in the home and at work. If our Christianity is not carried into every sphere of life, it cannot be genuine. Our relationship to the Lord should govern all of our relationships with others (18, 20, 23).

In Christ, men and women are equal (Galatians 3:28), but functionally we are different. Wives are urged, '*Submit to your own husbands, as it is fitting in the Lord*' (18; cp. Ephesians 5:22–24; 1 Peter 3:1–2). God's Word is against modern feminist teaching. Some professing Christian men have really taken this verse to heart while ignoring verse 19. They are all sweetness and light in the church, but at home they are unloving and self-centred. '*Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them*' (19) When a man loves his wife as Christ loved the church, being self-sacrificing and kind (Ephesians 5:25,28), obedience to such a man is much easier. The godly man shows the tenderness and graciousness of Christ in his behaviour towards his wife and children (21).

Children are commanded, '*Obey your parents in all things*' (20). We live in evil days when some very young children are allowed by their parents to indulge in an orgy of disobedience and selfishness (cp. 2 Timothy 3:1–4). Honour is very important in the Christian life. The fifth commandment instructs us, '*Honour your father and your mother*' (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1–3). Children must obey their parents if they are to know God's blessing upon them

Many Christian families are breaking up as the spirit of this world enters the church. **We must make every effort to put these verses into practice in our homes. How are you doing?**

Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men

Paul now deals with the relationship between *servants* (Greek = ‘slaves’) and their *masters*. Slaves are told, ‘*Obey in all things your masters.*’ They were not to be *men-pleasers* but God-fearers (22). The Bible does not condemn slavery, neither does it condone it. Slavery was abolished in the British colonies mainly through the work of godly men like John Newton, William Wilberforce and Zachary MacAulay. Some slave owners were wicked, but Paul did not encourage Christian slaves to rebel against them but to be obedient. A slave had no rights and no inheritance, but the Christian slave could look forward to an inheritance in heaven because he served the Lord Jesus (24).

Though slavery is outlawed in western society today, there are vital principles here for the relationship between workers and their bosses. Paul writes, ‘*Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men*’ (23). Our work, however boring, irksome or tiring, must be done *heartily as to the Lord and not to men*. When we see this as the will of God, we will be diligent at all times and not only work when we are being watched (22). We may feel that our work is not appreciated and that we are taken for granted but let us remember that the Lord knows and cares. We may receive little or no earthly reward, but the Lord will give us an eternal reward (8; cp. Colossians 3:23–24).

Christian slave-owners (‘*masters*’) also had solemn responsibilities. They were to have the same attitude as slaves; they too had a Master in heaven (4:1); they too were ‘*servants of Christ*’. The Christian employer must respect the dignity of those who work for him. We are all servants of Christ. **How is your testimony in your place of work? Does your conduct glorify God?**

*Ye souls redeemed with blood
And called by grace divine
Walk worthy of your God
And let your conduct shine;
Keep Christ, your living Head, in view
In all you say, in all you do.*

(William Gadsby)

Let your speech always be with grace

Paul had written about the importance of the Word of God in our lives (3:16) and he now challenges us with the importance of prayer. ‘Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving’ (2). The Greek verb ‘grēgoreō’ translated ‘vigilant’ means ‘to watch’ (as translated in the AV) or ‘to be alert’. The devil wants us to be lethargic in our praying but we must be alert to the needs of family, friends, the church throughout the world and our nation. Prayer and thanksgiving go together (cp. Philippians 4:6). Do you praise God as much as you pray to him?

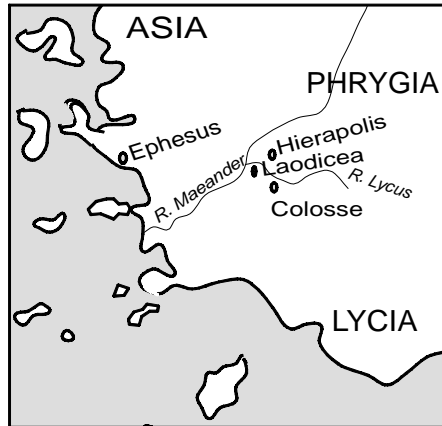
Paul asked the Colossians to pray for him. He was in chains under house arrest, but he did not ask for prayer for his release, but that God would open a door for his preaching so that God would enable him and his companions to declare *the mystery of Christ*, that is the gospel which had previously been hidden (3–4).

We are to be wise in our behaviour to those outside of Christ and we are to redeem the time (5; Cp. Ephesians 5:15–16). Time is too precious to waste and we must make good use of it. How much time do you fritter away in worthless activities when you could be learning so much from the Word of God or could be using that time to work for him?

Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one (6). Salt prevents corruption and the Word of God commands, ‘Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth’ (Ephesians 4:29). Filthy, abusive, blasphemous, malicious language and lies must have no place in our conversation (3:8–9). How do we season our conversation with salt as we seek to answer the questions or the mocking of unbelievers? *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom* (3:16). This will have a dramatic effect upon our speech as it is seen in our lives. The people *marvelled at the gracious words* spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 4:22). **Do we seek to be like our great Saviour in the way in which we speak to those around us? Let your speech always be with grace.**

They have proved to be a comfort to me

Paul wanted the Colossians to know the latest news about himself and this would be conveyed by those bearing his letter to them. Tychicus was Paul's messenger bearing his letters to the churches in Asia. (7; cp. Ephesians 6:21–2). He describes Tychicus as *a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord* (7). Tychicus was a faithful friend to Paul right to the end of the apostle's life. He was always ready to go wherever Paul wished to send him (2 Timothy 4:12; Titus 3:12).



Onesimus returned with Tychicus to Colosse. He was the slave who had run away to Rome after defrauding his Christian master. He was converted through Paul's ministry in Rome (see the letter to Philemon). Onesimus was now *a faithful and beloved brother* (9). How wonderful the sovereign, saving grace of God!

Paul's love and esteem for his fellow-workers is quite apparent in these closing greetings. Their friendship, fellowship and support were a great encouragement to him in his missionary work. He mentions Aristarchus of Thessalonica who had travelled with him to Rome and who was now his *fellow prisoner* (10; cp. Acts 27:2). John Mark who wrote the second Gospel and who had been such a disappointment in earlier years was with them (cp. Acts 15:37–38) as well as Justus (10–11). John Mark and Justus were his only Jewish fellow workers. Paul wrote concerning these faithful men, *'They have proved a comfort to me'* (11).

Can it be said that you have *'proved to be a comfort'* to your pastor or to any of your fellow-believers?

He has a great zeal for you

Epaphras, a Colossian who was with Paul at Rome (12–13; cp. 1:7–8) faithfully laboured in prayer for the church at Colosse. Paul was able to say, *‘I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you and for those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.’* This godly man had a great love for his people which drove him to toil in earnest prayer for them. Paul highly valued the willingness of Epaphras to suffer with him. He is described as Paul’s fellow prisoner in Rome (Philemon 23). Epaphras wrestled in prayer for the Colossians praying that they would *stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God* (12 – ESV; cp. 1:9.). Herbert Carson comments, ‘The meaning would then be that their spiritual experience will be filled out to completeness through their knowledge and performance of the complete will of God’ (TYNDALE COMMENTARY ON COLOSSIANS AND PHILEMON).

Paul often reveals to those who receive his letters what he is praying for when he comes to prayer on their behalf. He prayed specifically for certain things rather than ‘Lord bless so and so.’ **It is encourages others if we tell them how we are praying for them.**

Paul also had another gospel-writer other than John Mark with him in Rome – *Luke the beloved physician* (14). The Lord also used Luke to write the Acts of the Apostles. He had travelled with Paul on many of his journeys (indicated by the ‘we’ sections in Acts 16:10–17; 20:6–16; chapters 21,27 and 28). Luke remained a loyal and precious friend to Paul right to the end of his life. In his second imprisonment, the apostle wrote, *‘Only Luke is with me.’* By this time Demas had forsaken Paul, *having loved this present world* (2 Timothy 4:10–11).

Hendriksen believes that *‘Nymphas and the church that is in his house’* (15) would be better translated as *‘Nympha and the church in her house.’* The English Standard Version has this rendering. Homes were greatly used for meetings of the church in apostolic times and continue to be so in many countries today. **Your house may not be large enough for meetings of the church but do you use it for the Lord?**

Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord

Paul asked that the Colossians should pass on his letter for the Laodicean church to read and that they should read the letter from Laodicea (16). There is much speculation concerning this other letter. Some believe that it was the Ephesian letter and that it had been circulated to Laodicea; this is possible but there isn't any conclusive proof.

Paul had a special message for Archippus (described in Philemon 2 as *'our fellow soldier'*). He was a member of Philemon's family at Colosse (probably his son). Paul's message to him was, *'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfil it'* (17). We are not told what this ministry was, but it could be that in the absence of Epaphras, he had been given additional responsibilities in the church at Colosse. The Lord had given him a work to do and he had a responsibility to fulfil that work. *'Take heed'* is from a Greek verb meaning 'to watch'. False teachers were seeking to infiltrate the church at Colosse (2:11–23) and Archippus had a solemn responsibility to be on his guard. The pastor who fails to warn and guard his flock against false teaching is failing in his duty to God.

Has the Lord given you a work to do? Are you faithful and zealous in that work, or have you grown impatient, discouraged and weary? Satan wants you to give up, but God has given you this work. Persevere and fulfil your ministry that you may please and honour your Lord and Master who went all the way to Calvary to save you!

Paul closes his letter by asking for prayer: *'Remember my chains'* (18). Our prayers for God's servants are important, especially for those who today are suffering fierce persecution in certain countries of the world.

*Go labour on; spend and be spent,
Thy joy to do the Father's will;
It is the way the Master went;
Should not the servant tread it still?*

(Horatius Bonar)