

F.B. Hole

**Comments on
the Epistle to the
Colossians**

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Chapter 1

THE BELIEVERS AT Colosse were far in advance of the Galatians as to their spiritual state. As we go through the epistle we shall see that there were certain important matters as to which the Apostle Paul had to sound a warning note, yet in the main they had been marked by progress, and he could speak of their "order" and of the "steadfastness" of their faith in Christ (Col. 2:5). They were therefore in happy contrast with both the Corinthians and the Galatians, for the former were characterized by disorder and the latter by backsliding as to the faith of Christ.

Because of this, doubtless, they are addressed as faithful brethren as well as saints. All believers may rightly be called holy brethren for all are "saints," or "holy ones," that is, "ones set apart for God." Can we all be addressed as faithful brethren? Are we all going forward in faith and faithfulness? Let us take these questions to heart for the unfaithful believer is not likely to appreciate much, or understand, the truth unfolded in this epistle.

As so often in his epistles, the Apostle opens by assuring the Colossians of his prayers for them. If any word of admonition or correction is necessary, it comes with much greater power and acceptability from lips that have been habitually employed in prayer for us, than from any other. His prayers had however been mingled with thanksgivings, and both had been provoked by that which he had heard concerning them, for, as Col. 2:1 shows us, he had not yet seen and known them face to face. Tidings had reached him of their faith in Christ and of their love to all the saints.

These two things, simple and elementary as they may appear, are of extreme importance. They indicate with definiteness and certainty the possession of the divine nature — see, 1 John 3:14; 1 John 5:1. An unconverted person may be quite attached to an individual believer here or there, who happens to strike his fancy, but he does not love "all the saints." That is quite beyond any, save the one who is born of God.

The Apostle does not inform them as to the burden of his prayers for them until verse 9 is reached. He first tells them of that for which he gave thanks. "We give thanks ... for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven." That hope is alluded to in

the course of the epistle (see Col. 1:27; Col. 3:4), but it is not unfolded in any full way because they well knew it. Tidings of it had reached them when the word of the Gospel first came to their ears. We learn from this that those who preach the Gospel should take care to emphasize not only its present effect in delivering from the power of sin, but also its ultimate effect — introducing the believer into glory. It would of course be equally a mistake to preach its ultimate effect without insisting on its present effect.

The Gospel in those days had overleaped the narrow boundaries of Palestine and was going forth into all the world. It had reached to the Colossians, Gentiles though they were, and consequently they knew the grace of God in truth. Does grace make us careless or indifferent? It does not; it works in an exactly opposite direction; it brings forth fruit. "The Glad Tidings ... are bearing fruit and growing, even as also among you," is another rendering of this passage. Both growth and fruit-bearing are proofs of vitality. There is no stagnation and decay where the Gospel is really received.

It would appear from verse 7 that Epaphras had been the servant of Christ who brought the light to them. They had learned

the Glad Tidings of the grace of God and of the hope of glory from his lips. Then verse 8 indicates that he had travelled to Rome and made known to Paul what God had wrought among the Colossians, and the depth and sincerity of their Christian love. We can see how highly Paul esteemed him. He speaks of him as a faithful servant of Christ, and at the end of the epistle we learn how truly devoted he was to the spiritual welfare of the Colossians.

The report brought by Epaphras had not only moved Paul to thanksgiving, as we have seen, but also impelled him to constant prayer on their behalf. In verse 9 he begins to tell them of that which he prayed for on their behalf. His prayer may be summarized under four heads: —

1. He desired that they might have full knowledge of the will of God, so that
2. they might walk in a way worthy of the Lord and well pleasing to Him; that so they might be
3. strengthened to endure suffering with joyfulness, and
4. be filled with the spirit of thanksgiving and praise. But let us look a little more particularly at these things.

The will of God is to govern everything for us; hence the knowledge of His will necessarily comes in the first place. The word used for knowledge here is a very strong one really meaning full knowledge, and with that full knowledge they were to be filled. The apostle would not be satisfied with anything short of this. The will of God was to possess all their thoughts and fill up their horizon. This is an immensely high standard truly, but then the divine standard and objective never is anything but immensely high.

Further our knowledge is to be in spiritual understanding; that is, understanding acquired by the Spirit of God and not by a merely intellectual process. It is possible to acquire Biblical information in much the same way as one obtains historical or geographical information, and in such a case one may be able to analyse and expound the Scriptures and yet be quite a stranger to their experimental bearing and their power. Also our knowledge is to be in all wisdom. The wise man is he who is able with good judgment to apply his knowledge to the circumstances that he has to face.

So what the Apostle desired for the Colossians, and for us, is that we might gain full knowledge of God's will by the teach-

ing of the Holy Spirit, for in that way we shall ourselves be governed by what we know and also be able to apply our knowledge to practical details in the midst of the tangled circumstances that surround us.

Now this it is that will enable us to walk worthily of the Lord, so as to please Him well. Few things are more sad than to see a believer distracted by circumstances, filled with uncertainty, vacillating this way and that. How inspiring, on the other hand, when a believer is like a ship, which though buffeted by fierce winds, blowing at times from all points of the compass, yet keeps with steadiness on its course, because the skipper has good nautical understanding of the chart, and the wisdom not only to take his observations from the sun but also to apply them to his whereabouts and direction. There is a definiteness and certainty about such an one that glorifies God. That of which we speak was exemplified in surpassing measure by the Apostle Paul himself. We have only to read Philippians 3 to see it.

This walk, worthy of the Lord and pleasing to Him, is the necessary basis of fruitfulness. We may distinguish between the "fruit of the Spirit," spoken of in Galatians 5:22-23, and "being

fruitful," according to our 10th verse. There it is fruit produced in the way of Christian character. Here it is fruitfulness in good works. The former lays the foundation for the latter, but both are necessary. Good works are the necessary outcome of a character which is really formed after Christ. Good works are works which give expression to the divine life and character in the Christian, and which are according to the Word of God. We are to be marked by every good work.

And in all this there is no finality while we are on earth, as the last clause of verse 10 shows. Though we may have the knowledge of His will yet we are to go on increasing in the knowledge of God, or, "by the full knowledge of God." We not only grow in it but by it, for the more we know God experimentally the more our spiritual stature increases, and the more too are we "strengthened with all might," as verse 11 indicates.

The language of that verse is very strong. It is, "all might," "His glorious power," (or, "the power of His glory,") and "all patience." We might well ask with astonishment, "Is it possible that weak and failing creatures like to ourselves should be strengthened to this extraordinary degree?" It is. The power of the glory is able to subdue all things to Himself, as Philippians

3:21 indicates; hence it can subdue and strengthen us now. But to what end?

The answer to this question is even more astonishing. To the end that we may be able to endure all the trials of the way, not only with long-suffering but with joyfulness also. We should naturally have supposed that extraordinary strengthening would have been in view of the performing of extraordinary exploits in the service of God, of our acting like an Elijah or a Paul. But no, it is in view of suffering, sustained with endurance and joy. A few moments reflection will assure us that there is nothing less natural to us than this.

The world knows and admires that attitude of mind which is expressed by the saying, "Grin and bear it." We commend the man who faces adversity with cheerfulness, though his cheerfulness is only based on a species of fatalism and a refusal to look ahead beyond the day. The believer, who has grown in the knowledge of God and is strengthened, may be plunged into suffering, and instead of being consumed with desire to get out of it he endures with long-suffering, instead of grumbling at the Divine ways he not only acquiesces but is joyful. Joyful, be it noted, and not merely cheerful. His joy flows on like still wa-

ters that run deep. But then the power for this is according to the might of His glory. That glory exists today, and very shortly it is coming into display, so even now it is possible for us to "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Read 1 Peter 1:6-9, for it illustrates our subject.

The saint who is joyful passes naturally to thanksgiving and praise. Hence verse 12 flows out of verse 11. We give thanks to God as the Father, for it is in this character we know Him, and that He has wrought on our behalf in the pursuance of His purposes of love. We give thanks for that which He has done. The items of the thanksgiving follow a descending scale. We work downwards from His purpose to the meeting of our need, which was necessary in order that His purpose might be reached.

Made "fit for sharing the portion of the saints in light." Not, to be made, nor, in process of being made, but, MADE. We who have believed are fit for heavenly glory, fit for that portion in the light of God's presence which is to be shared in common by all the saints of this dispensation. We may be very little able to realize what this inheritance means, but how full is the assur-

ance that we have been made fit for it by the Father. The fitness is ours already though the inheritance is future.

In order that we might be made fit deliverance had to reach us. In our unconverted state we lay under the authority of darkness. Darkness here stands for Satan and his works, even as we have just had the word, light, used to describe the presence of God. We have been delivered from Satan's kingdom by being brought into a kingdom of an infinitely higher and better character — the kingdom of "His dear Son," or, "the Son of His love." By coming under the authority of perfect good we are delivered from the power of evil.

Again and again in the New Testament are we reminded that having believed we are brought under the Divine authority. The kingdom of God is spoken of, and in Matthew's gospel we read of the kingdom of heaven, inasmuch as Jesus, God's King, is seated in the heavens, so that He is exerting heavenly rule upon earth. Other expressions also are used as to the kingdom, but none of them give us so great a sense of nearness and affection as this which we have here. The word, kingdom, in itself might have a slightly harsh sound in our ears, but there is nothing harsh about "the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love." It

speaks of authority truly, but it is authority of a perfect love, its every decree tempered by that.

Never let us kick at authority. The fact is we cannot do without it, and were never intended to do so. At the outset when man began to kick against the authority of God he instantly fell under the dark authority of the devil. It was never intended that man should be absolutely uncontrolled. If now we get deliverance from Satan's authority it is by being brought into subjection to God's dear Son. The yoke of Satan is burdensome to a degree. Those under it are like to the demoniac, who had his dwelling among the tombs, and who was always crying and cutting himself with stones. The yoke of the Lord Jesus, as He has told us, is easy and His burden is light. Our removal from the one to the other has been a translation indeed!

This translation has been effected in the strength of the redemption work of the cross. Only by redemption could we be extricated in a righteous way from bondage under the power of darkness. We have been brought back to God by blood; and by that same blood-shedding have our sins been put away, so that all are forgiven. We should not be able to rejoice in the fact of

being brought back to God apart from the forgiveness of all our sins, which once stood between us and Him.

Though the glorious truth of verses 12 to 14 is stated as from God's side on a descending scale, we on our side enter into the knowledge and enjoyment of it on the ascending scale, that is, in the reverse order. We necessarily begin with the forgiveness of our sins. Then entering into the larger thought of redemption we begin to appreciate the great translation effected, and our absolute fitness for glory, as in Christ. The more we do enter into all, the more will our hearts and lips be filled with thanksgiving to the Father, from whom all has sprung.

But if the Father is the Source of all, His dear Son is the Channel through whom all has flowed to us — the One who has put all into execution at such immeasurable cost to Himself. Redemption has reached us through His blood, and when we know WHO IT IS that shed His blood, our thoughts of it are greatly enlarged. Consequently in verses 15 to 17 we are given a sight of His splendour in connection with creation. Here is a passage hard to equal whether we consider the sublimity of the thoughts expressed, or the graphic power with which they are

expressed in the fewest possible words. Sublimity, graphic power and brevity are combined.

In verse 15 two words call for brief remarks. The word "Image" has the force of "Representative." The invisible God is exactly represented in Him, a thing impossible apart from the fact of Himself being God. Some are inclined to slightly demur to this on account of the second word in the verse, to which we have referred. In the word "Firstborn" they lay too much stress in their minds upon the second half of the word. "But He was born," they say. The word "firstborn" however besides its primary meaning has also a figurative sense (as in Ps. 89:27; Jer. 31:9), meaning, the one who takes the supreme place as holding the rights of the firstborn. That is the sense in which it is used in our passage. The Lord Jesus not only stands forth as the Representative of all that God is, He also stands forth absolutely pre-eminent over creation. All creation's glory and its rights are vested in Him, for the simple reason that He is the Creator, as verse 16 states.

In the very first verse of the Bible creation is attributed to God, and it is a remarkable fact that the word used there for God is a plural word, Elohim. It is the more remarkable inasmuch as the

Hebrews employed not only the singular and the plural but had also another number, the dual, signifying two, and two only. Their plural words therefore signified three or more, and when we turn to the New Testament we find that there are three Persons in the Godhead. We also discover that of the three Persons creation is always attributed to the Son.

It is so here; and in verse 16 this great fact is stated in a threefold way, three different prepositions being used, in, by and for. In our Authorized version the first preposition as well as the second is by. Literally, however, it is in. If you turn up this passage in Darby's New Translation you will find footnotes which instruct us that in signifies "characteristic power:" that "He was the One whose intrinsic power characterized the creation. It exists as His creature." They instruct us also that by signifies that He was "the active Instrument," and that for signifies that He is "the End" for which creation exists.

You will notice too the comprehensive way in which the creation is described in this passage. Heaven as well as earth is brought into view. Things invisible are contemplated as well as things visible; and the invisible and spiritual powers are spoken of under four heads. What may be the real distinction between

thrones, dominions, principalities and powers we do not know, but we do know that they all owe their very existence to our Lord Jesus. Twice over in this one verse is it stated that He is the Creator of "all things." Consequently He is before all both as to time and place; and all things hang together by Him. The stars pursue their appointed courses, but they only do so because directed by Him.

It is not difficult to see that the Creator, having entered into the midst of His own creation by becoming Man, He necessarily stands in the creation as Head and Firstborn. In verse 18 however, we find that He is both Head and Firstborn in another connection. He is the Head of the body, the church, and that church is God's new creation work. He is the Firstborn from among the dead; that is, He holds the supreme rights in the resurrection world. Consequently in all things and in every sphere He has the first place.

What glorious truth is this! How wonderful that we should know Him as Firstborn in this twofold way, both in connection with the first creation and the new creation! Only our relation with Him according to the new creation is far more intimate than ever it could have been according to the old. In all cre-

ation He is of course Head, in the sense of being Chief, and it is in that sense that He is spoken of as, "the Head of every man," in 1 Corinthians 11:3. He is Head to the church in another sense, illustrated by the human body. An organic and vital union exists between the head and the other members of the body, and just so does a vital union exist between Christ and His members in new creation.

Further, He is "the Beginning." He existed in the beginning, as we are elsewhere told, but that is another thing. Here He is the beginning, and that beginning is connected with resurrection as the next words show. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus was the new beginning for God. All that God is doing today He is doing in connection with Christ in resurrection. All our links with Him are on that footing. Let us very prayerfully consider this point, for except we lay hold of it with spiritual understanding we shall fail to appreciate the true nature of Christianity.

In the risen Christ, then, we find God's new beginning, but let us now notice the important truth that follows in verses 19 - 22. There had to be a complete settlement of every liability incurred in connection with the old creation. Unscrupulous men

may sometimes open a business and having incurred heavy liabilities, close it up without any attempt at meeting them. Then they depart elsewhere and propose to open up a new business! Such a practice is universally condemned. God ever acts in strict righteousness. By His death the Lord Jesus has wrought a settlement as regards man's sin in the old creation. Then in His resurrection God commenced anew.

Verse 19 tells us that all the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell in the Son when He came forth to do His mighty work, and by the blood of His cross the Godhead aimed at so effectually making peace that the basis might be laid for the reconciliation of all things. And we may safely add that what the Godhead aims at the Godhead always accomplishes.

The effect of sin has been that man has lapsed into a state of enmity with God, and hence the earth is filled with strife, confusion, disharmony. In the death of Christ a clearance has been effected judicially by judgment falling on that which created all the trouble. The disturbing element being removed peace can ensue. Peace being established reconciliation can come to pass.

Now peace has been made. No one has "to make their peace with God." Nor could they make peace with God if they had to do it. Christ is the Maker of peace. He made it, not by His life of singular beauty and perfection, but by His death. We of course are to enjoy the peace, and that is what is spoken of in Romans 5:1. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God." By faith we have the peace in our hearts, and what a wonderful peace it is! Here however the point is the making of the peace at the cross. The only possible basis for the peace enjoyed inside us is the peace made outside us when the blood of the cross was shed.

Peace having been made the reconciliation of all things is coming. We must not, however, imagine that this means the salvation of everybody, for a qualifying clause is immediately added. The "all things" is limited to "things in earth or things in heaven." When it is a question of bowing the knee to Jesus, there are included "things under the earth," but they are not included here. The world of the lost will have to submit. They will be broken but not reconciled.

It is perfectly evident that reconciliation has not yet been reached as to things on earth. Yet believers are already recon-

ciled as verse 21 states; and in that verse we find a word that helps us to understand what reconciliation really means — a word that describes the state which is the exact opposite of reconciliation — alienation.

Manifold evil has engulfed mankind as the result of the incoming of sin. Not only have we incurred guilt but we lie under a terrible bondage. Again not only are we in bondage but we have been utterly estranged from God, in whom all our hope lies. We needed justification in view of our guilt. We needed redemption in view of bondage. And because we were so wholly alienated from God we needed reconciliation. The alienation, be it observed, lay wholly upon our side. The enmity existed in our minds towards God, not in God's mind towards us; and the enmity and alienation expressed itself in wicked works. Hence we may say that, whilst there is a sense in which God needed reconciliation, we needed it in a twofold way.

Reconciliation was effected "through death," — the death of Christ. His death is the stable basis on which it rests, needed by God and needed by us. We however needed more than this. We needed the mighty work in our hearts by which the enmity should be swept out of them for ever. As a result of it all God

looks down upon us, as in Christ, with complacency and delight; whilst we, sensible of His favour, look up to Him with responsive affection.

God only has full delight in that which is perfect. But then the effect of the death of Christ is that we can be presented "holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight." Cleared are we from everything which formerly attached to us as the fallen children of Adam, for "in the body of His flesh through death" the judgment of all that we were has been executed. That same death provides the basis for the coming reconciliation of all things in heaven and on earth.

What a glorious prospect this is! There are things in heaven which have been touched and tarnished by sin, and these are to be reconciled, though the angels that sinned have been cast down to hell, and so do not come within its scope. Everything upon earth has been wrecked. Yet a day is coming when everything within these two spheres will be brought into complete harmony with the will of God, and bask for ever in the sunlight of His favour, responding in every particular to His love. Well may we cry, Lord, haste that day! Well may we pon-

der deeply upon such themes, for the more we do so the more will dawn upon us the wonder of the death of Christ.

All that we have been considering supposes of course that we are really and truly the Lord's. Hence the qualifying "If" in verse 23. Many there are who, hearing the Gospel profess to believe and yet at some later time they totally abandon their profession. They do not "continue in the faith grounded and settled," they are "moved away from the hope of the Gospel"; and thereby they make manifest that they had not the root of the matter in them. The words, "yet now has He reconciled," do not apply to such.

Again in this verse does the Apostle emphasize the vast scope of the Gospel, even "every creature which is under heaven," just as in verse 6 it is stated as "all the world." The point here is of course not that it had then been actually preached to every creature, but that the sphere of its operations was no less than every creature. Of that Gospel Paul had been made a minister. A further ministry, that of the church, was his also, as stated in verse 25.

The Apostle introduces the subject of his second ministry by a reference to his sufferings. He was in prison when he wrote and he speaks of his sufferings as, "the afflictions of Christ." That was their character. They were certainly afflictions for Christ, but the point here seems to be that they were in character Christ's afflictions, of the same kind as He endured in His wonderful path on earth, though far less as to degree. Needless to say the Lord Jesus stands absolutely alone in His atoning sufferings in His death. There is no allusion to those here.

The sufferings which rolled in upon Paul's flesh were endured for the sake of the whole church, and that church is the body of Christ. In his imprisonment the Apostle was filling up the cup of his afflictions, and that on behalf of the church in its widest sense — we mean, not only for the church as existing on earth in his day, but for the church through the ages to the finish of its earthly history, including ourselves. He suffered that the truth as to the church might be made abundantly plain and established, and out of his sufferings sprang these immortal epistles which instruct us today. In this way his ministry as to the church is made available for us today.

A "dispensation," or "administration" was given to him of God that thereby he might "fulfil" or, "complete" His Word. This does not mean that Paul was to write the last words of Scripture, for, as we know, John did that. It means that the revealing of the mystery alluded to in the succeeding verses, was committed to him, and when that was made known the last item of revelation was filled in, the circle of revealed truth was complete.

In Scripture a "mystery" does not mean something mysterious or incomprehensible, but simply something which up to that time had been secret or hidden, or at all events only known to the initiated. The mystery spoken of here had been completely hidden in earlier ages, and now is only made manifest to God's saints. It concerns Christ and the church, and more particularly the bringing in of the Gentiles in one body. This side of it is more definitely unfolded in the epistle to the Ephesians. In verse 27 of our chapter it is said to be "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Read the verse and you will see that the "you" here means "you Gentiles." Formerly God had dwelt for a brief time in the midst of Israel, and then again the Messiah had appeared for another brief season amongst Jews in the land, but that

Christ should now be found in Gentiles was an altogether new and unprecedented thing. It was a pledge of the glory to come, for Christ will be all and in all in that day.

It is not easy for us to imagine how revolutionary a doctrine this appeared to be when first announced. It completely set aside the special and exclusive position of the Jew and this was its chief offence in their eyes, arousing their furious opposition. The maintaining of this it was that had brought imprisonment and such suffering upon Paul.

On the other hand Paul knew its great importance as being the characteristic truth for this dispensation. Every dispensation of God has truth which gives character to it, and this is the truth which characterizes the present dispensation. Only as instructed in it are we likely to be "perfect" or, "complete" in Christ. Hence the Apostle laboured mightily in making this truth known according to the working of the Spirit of God in him.

Chapter 2

NOT ONLY DID Paul labour in teaching this great truth, but he laboured also in prayer, and this the more now that he was re-

strained from his former activity by prison walls. His prayers were so intense that he describes them as conflict. In this conflict he was led out specially on behalf of those he had never met face to face, such as the Colossians, the Laodiceans and others. He wanted them to come to a full knowledge of this secret and to have their hearts knit together in the process, for in this full knowledge lay the full assurance of understanding.

In Hebrews 10 we read of "the full assurance of faith," the faith that simply takes God at His word. That is something with which we are entitled to begin our career as believers. Full assurance of understanding marks maturity of spiritual intelligence. Entering into the understanding of the mystery, the last segment of the circle of truth falls into its place, the whole becomes intelligible and luminous, the vastness and wonder of the whole Divine scheme begins to dawn upon us, and a very wonderful assurance takes possession of our hearts.

We must not leave verse 2 without noticing that word, "their hearts ... knit together in love." In the mystery of God all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid, and by a full knowledge of it the full assurance of understanding is obtained, but it is when divine love reigns amongst the saints that the full

knowledge of the mystery becomes a simple thing. A believer isolated from all Christian companionship might so study his Bible in dependence on the Spirit's teaching as to gain a very good mental grasp of it, but he could not grasp it experimentally. We never understand it fully until we have some experience of what it means.

Here lies the reason, without a doubt, why the mystery is so little understood today. The true church of God is so sadly divided that there is very little knitting together in love. We cannot remedy the divided state of the church but we can walk in love towards our fellow-saints as far as we know them; and as far as we do this so far shall we have our hearts expanded to embrace this truth — so far shall we enter into our place in the body of Christ, instead of thinking, as so many do almost exclusively, of a place in some body of Christians, or some denominational organization.

In the first century they had not to face difficulties springing from the divided state of the church, but there were difficulties nevertheless as verse 4 indicates. Already men were going about beguiling believers. Let us take especial note that they were doing so "with enticing words." Smooth, elegant, persuas-

ive speech is the chief stock-in-trade of deceivers. How often have simple and unsuspecting folk said of some propagandist, "Oh, but he must be all right: he spoke so beautifully!" When a little subsequent investigation showed that he was as far from being "all right" as could be.

The Apostle proceeds to warn them more in detail as to these deceivers whose teachings would altogether turn them aside from any understanding of the mystery. Before doing so however he joyfully acknowledges the good that marked the Colossians, and he exhorts them to further progress in the right direction.

The good that characterized them we have in verse 5. In the first place they were orderly. In this they contrasted happily with the Corinthians, who were in a very disorderly state. Evidently both in their assembly life and in their private lives they had been subject to the apostolic instructions. In the second place there was a steadfastness about their faith. They were like soldiers who had firmly withstood the shock of battle. Every assault upon their faith had failed.

Verses 6 and 7 indicate that the best preventive against evil is progress in the right direction. Having received Christ as their Lord, they were to "walk in Him," that is, to put into practice what they knew of Him and of His will. Having been rooted in Him they were to be built up in Him, and thus established so firmly in the true faith that they were like vessels filled up to the brim with it, and overflowing with praise and thanksgiving. Let us all take note that it is when our knowledge of the truth comes out in our practice on the one hand, and in our praise on the other, that we are really established in it.

But when a frontal attack fails the enemy will try an assault upon the flank. What cannot be accomplished by open and bold denials may perhaps be achieved by subtle insinuations, by sly subtractions, or even better still, by apparently harmless additions to the faith of Christ — additions which nevertheless do nullify much that is vital. Such has ever been the plan of the devil, and Paul's watchful eye saw signs of danger for the Colossians in this way. Consequently the rest of the chapter is taken up with earnest and loving warnings, together with unfoldings of truth calculated to fortify them against the dangers.

The Apostle's warnings seem to fall under three heads. This may be seen by looking at verses 8, 16 and 18, each of which opens with a word of caution as to the activities of men. The activities run in different directions but all are antagonistic to the truth. In the first case the danger comes from philosophy. In the second from Judaism. In the third from superstition. All three dangers are tremendously alive and energetic today, particularly the first and third.

The word "spoil" in verse 8 does not mean to mar, but rather, to capture as spoil, or to make a prey of you. It describes the kind of thing that will happen to you if instead of progressing in the faith of Christ you submit to the teachings of philosophers. It is a strong way of putting it, but not one whit too strong. In the ancient world the Greeks were the great philosophers. They had no knowledge of any revelation from God, and in its absence set their minds to work on the problems presented by man and the universe. In result their teachings were but empty deceit, all of them framed according to man and his little world.

Even in Paul's day some were found who wished to accommodate Christian teaching to Grecian philosophy, and this

meant the virtual destruction of faith. In our day the same kind of thing has taken place. The philosophy of today differs in many ways from that of the ancient world. Two terrible features characterize it: firstly, it pursues its investigations and theorizings not in ignorance of any revelation from God at all, but in rejection of the revelation that has been brought to their notice; secondly, it all too frequently has seized upon the terms used in God's revelation, the Bible, and then having emptied them of their Scriptural meaning has filled them with another meaning suited to their own purposes. A very deceitful process, this! When the Apostle coupled together philosophy and vain deceit he wrote as a prophet indeed!

Philosophic teachings, whether ancient or modern, are brought in professedly to supplement the simple teachings of the Gospel and lead us on to more perfect knowledge. In reality they destroy the Gospel. Christ is the test of all teaching. Is it according to Christ? — that is the test. And why is Christ the test? Because the whole fulness of the Godhead dwells in Him, and we ourselves are "complete" or "filled full" in Him. We need go outside Him for nothing.

There is a strong likeness between Col. 1:19 and verse 9 of our chapter; only there it refers to that which was true of Him in the days of His sojourn on earth, whilst here it is stated as being true of Him today. It is hardly possible to imagine a stronger statement of His deity, and yet it plainly infers that He still is Man in saying, "bodily." If then we are rooted and built up and filled full in such an One as He, it would be manifestly very foolish to turn aside to the philosophizings of poor little human brains that ere long will be eaten of worms.

Verse 11 adds another important consideration. We are circumcised in Him as well as complete in Him. Now circumcision is a thorough cutting off. The circumcision of Christ was His cutting off by death. In His death He put off all connection with the old order of things; He died to sin, and lives to God, as Romans 6:10 puts it. A spiritual circumcision, "made without hands," has reached us by means of His death, which to us has been "the putting off the body of the flesh" — the words, "of the sins," should not be included in the text. Death has come in between us and the flesh, and consequently we are cut off from the teachings of man and his world.

If verse 11 speaks of death, verse 12 brings before us burial and resurrection. Burial is the completion and ratification of death. That which goes to corruption must be put out of sight. We are buried, be it noted, in baptism. In submitting to that ordinance we go to our own funeral. But we go into burial in view of resurrection, for we are risen with Christ through the faith of that which God did, in raising Him from the dead. In these two verses we are instructed in the true force of the death and resurrection of Christ and also of our baptism — what God sees in them. And we are entitled to see in them what He does. The application of all this comes later in the epistle.

As we commence verse 13 we pass from that which has been accomplished in Christ to something accomplished in us. As to our spiritual state we were dead; dead in our sins — what we had done; dead in the uncircumcision of our flesh — what we were. But now quickened — made to live — together with Christ; our new life being of the same order as His.

Resurrection put us in a new world, and quickening endows us with a new life. Neither the one nor the other however brings us release from the guilt of our sins. We are released however.

All our offences are forgiven. But that brings us back to the cross.

The cross blotted out our sins truly, but it did more than this: it blotted out also the whole system of legal ordinances which had been against us. The law was not blotted out: far from it, for it was vindicated and magnified in the death of Christ. On the other hand we died from under the law in His death, and we are now under grace, with all the old legal ordinances — samples of which are found in verse 16 — set aside. The language of verse 14 may need a word of explanation. The word translated "blotted out" is one "used for annulling a decree of law." The idea of "handwriting" is that of "obligation to which a man is subject by his signature." Paul used a very graphic figure. We had bound ourselves by our signature to Jewish ordinances, but the document has been nullified in the death of Christ. As far as we are concerned it was nailed to the cross when He was nailed to the cross. In these words of course Paul particularly had Jews in view.

The cross is viewed in still another light in verse 15, so that we have it here presented in three connections. We may summarize them thus: —

- v. 11. The cross in relation to ourselves, and in particular the flesh.
- v. 14. The cross in relation to legal ordinances.
- v. 15. The cross in relation to the spiritual forces of evil.

Whatever these spiritual powers may be, from Satan downwards, in the cross the divine triumph has been manifested. On the surface it looked like being the triumph of the powers of evil. Really it was their undoing. This being so we can see that when verse 10 spoke of the Lord Jesus as "the Head of all principality and power," it was stating something which is true not only upon the ground of creation, but also on the ground of what He accomplished at the cross.

The truth of the cross as unfolded in verse 11 had special reference to what had preceded, that is, the warning as to the snare of philosophy. Today we should speak of it not only as philosophy but as rationalism also — the worshipping of human intellect and human reasonings. Immediately we discern in the cross our circumcision — our cutting off — a clean sweep is made of rationalism, as to any authority it possessed over us. It influences us no more.

The cross as presented in verse 14 is the basis of the warning uttered in verse 16, as indicated by the word, "therefore." There were plenty of Judaizing enthusiasts who would take them to task as to their observance or non-observance of ordinances, but they were not to be moved, nor to pay attention to them. Five classes of ordinances are specified, those relating to meat, drink, feasts, new moons, sabbaths. These things are all shadows of things to come, as we are told also in the epistle to the Hebrews, but the body — that is, the substance — is of Christ.

If any are disposed to ask in what way these things have to say to us today inasmuch as there is no active Judaizing party at work in the church at present, the answer is that they are still very much to the point. The reason why there is not much active Judaizing is that the professing church has been for many centuries so largely Judaized. But have you never met the Seventh-day Adventists? If so you may thank God. But if you have, take special note of the way in which this Scripture negatives their propaganda, the spear-head of which is their insistence on the Jewish sabbath. They will judge you as to the sabbath, if you will let them. The word here is not exactly "sabbath

days," but rather, "sabbaths," as covering sabbaths of all kinds whether of days or years.

The sabbath as a legal and Jewish ordinance is set aside, but that of course does not touch the fact of one day in seven being set apart by God from the creation as a day of rest. This is a mercy from God which we do well to esteem very highly.

We come in verse 18 to what we may call the ritualistic snare. We shall easily see that it is a snare if we revert to the truth of the cross as it was presented to us in verse 15. The only angels that desire to have our homage are evil ones. The holy angels always refuse human worship, ascribing all worship to God. See, for instance, Revelation 19:10 and Revelation 22:9. Now the unholy angels have been despoiled and vanquished at the cross. Who then would wish to worship them? Oh, what light does the cross shed! What deliverance it effects!

There is another very powerful consideration. We are entitled as members of the body each one of us to be "holding the Head." Thereby we maintain an intimate and worshipful contact with Him. The figure of the human body is evidently before the mind of the Spirit, and the head is considered as the

seat of all supply for the body. The supply and the increase may reach us through the "joints and bands," yet it all comes from the head.

It is of the utmost importance that we should take up our privilege and learn what it means to hold the Head. Once we have learned that, we shall be rendered proof against the seductions of ritualism. If I am accorded the right of access to the presence of a real potentate, and privileged to hold intercourse with him, you will not find me presenting my requests to, or expecting to receive from, one of his footmen. The footman may be a very fine fellow, and very gorgeous to look at in his golden-braided uniform, but you will not catch me doing my obeisance to him.

Someone may wish to observe that by doing homage to the footman we should at least be showing what very humble people we are. But is this the procedure laid down? It is not! Then after all we are only doing our own will; and this is self-will, the exact opposite of humility. This may serve as an illustration of what is said in verse 18.

Angels have been purposely hidden from our eyes lest we should give them the place that belongs to God. They are

amongst the things not seen. Their would-be worshippers are puffed up by the mind of their flesh. The opening of the verse has been translated, "Let no one fraudulently deprive you of your prize, doing his own will in humility and worship of angels." This makes the whole position very clear. The procedure all looks very humble. It is really self-will, a thing very hateful to God. And those who fall a prey to it may indeed be true believers but being fraudulently diverted from Christ they lose their prize.

The fact of the believer's identification with Christ in His death and resurrection has already been before us in verses 11 and 12. We have now to see that it is not a mere doctrinal notion, something existing only in the region of theory. It is a FACT, and intended to exert a very potent influence upon our lives.

In verse 20 we get the words, "dead with Christ"; in verse 1 of chapter 3, the words, "risen with Christ." So complete was the identification that His death was our death, His resurrection was our resurrection. It may be remarked however that in both cases there is an "if." Yes, but not as expressing doubt but rather as furnishing the basis of an argument. If this, then that. It really has the force of "since." Certain things are incumbent

upon us since we have died with Christ: and again certain other things should mark us since we have been raised with Christ.

Since we have died with Christ our true interests lie clean outside the world and its rudiments, or, elements. Having died out of the world system we cannot proceed as though we are alive in it. That is the argument of verse 20. The world, and particularly the religious world, has its many ordinances concerning the using or not using of perishable material things. According to these ordinances we should not handle or taste or touch this or that. But if we really understand our identification with Christ in His death we find ourselves outside the world where ordinances have their sway, and that of course settles all such questions for us in a very decisive way. There were many ordinances connected with the law of Moses, which was given to curb men in the flesh. They have no validity as regards men who are dead with Christ.

But the point here is not so much as regards Jewish ordinances but rather those that are "after the commandments and doctrines of men"; ordinances which never did have any divine sanction at all. Such are the ordinances which ritualism enforces upon its votaries today.

In our Bibles verse 21 and the first part of verse 22 are printed in brackets. In the New Translation all verse 23 save the last six words is printed in brackets also. This makes the sense of that verse clearer. The words in the first bracket give us samples of the ordinances which the Apostle had in mind. The words in the second bracket tell us certain things which characterize these ordinances. They have an appearance of wisdom, being marked by "will worship," (i.e., voluntary worship) and humility and the neglecting of the body instead of giving it the honour which is due. And then the words not enclosed in brackets read, "subject to ordinances ... after the commandments and doctrines of men ... to the satisfying of the flesh."

What a searching condemnation of ritualism it is! All these elaborate ordinances may look like the voluntary rendering of homage in great humility. The asceticism connected with it looks very lowly. The dress, the girdle of rope, the poor food and the fastings and neglect of the body may appear to be very holy and very wonderful, but in point of fact it is all according to purely human teachings and all ministers to the satisfaction of the flesh. In true Christianity the flesh is disowned and re-

fused. In ritualism it is fostered and gratified. That is the condemnation of ritualism.

Chapter 3

THE COUNTERPART TO our identification with Christ in His death is our identification with Him in His resurrection. The effect of the one is to disconnect us from man's world, man's wisdom, man's religion. The effect of the other is to put us into touch with God's world and with all that is there. The first four verses of chapter 3 unfold the blessedness into which we are introduced.

There are things which find their centre in Christ seated in heavenly glory. They are "things above," that is, things which are heavenly in character. On these things our minds and affections are to be set, and not on earthly things. At the present moment Christ is not in manifestation here, He is hid in God. Now He is our life, and all the hidden springs of our life are consequently hidden with Him in God. The day approaches when He will be manifested, and then we shall be manifested with Him in glory. It will be quite clear in that day where our real life is found.

It is, alas! not nearly so clear today. Yet our life today lies just exactly where it will then. This is what makes this truth so very practical. The unbeliever necessarily lives and moves and has all his thoughts in "things on the earth." As a fallen creature estranged from God he knows nothing else. Still there is a very great danger of our getting absorbed with earthly things. Hence the need for these exhortations.

The fact is we have an altogether new sphere of life. Our interests centre in the right hand of God, and not in our homes or businesses, however important these may be in their place as furnishing us with occasions for serving the will of God. We set our minds upon things above, not by reposing in arm-chairs indulging in dreamy and mystical imaginings as to things that may be in heaven, but rather by setting our minds supremely upon Christ, and seeking in all things the furtherance of Heaven's interests. The British ambassador in Paris sets his mind upon British things by seeking British interests in French circumstances, and not by continually sitting down to try and recall to his memory what British scenery is like.

As risen with Christ, then, we are lifted into His heavenly interests and permitted to seek them while still on earth. A posi-

tion of extraordinary elevation, this! How little do we go about as those who are risen with Christ into another region of things, and that a heavenly one! How much do we get our minds clogged with earthly things!

The Apostle recognized how great and how many the hindrances are and hence he exhorted us to mortify certain things. The "members which are upon the earth," of which he speaks in verse 5, are not of course the actual members of our bodies. The term is used metaphorically as indicating certain moral, or rather immoral, features of an earthly nature which characterized us more or less in our unconverted days. We now have heavenly interests and therefore these purely earthly features are to be mortified; that is, put to death.

Put to death is a strong and forcible expression. Our tendency is to parley with these things, and sometimes even to play with them and make provision for them. Our safety however, lies in action of a ruthless kind. Sword in hand, so to speak, we are to meet them without any idea of giving quarter. We should rather meet them after the fashion of Samuel who hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord.

But there are other things besides those specified in verse 5, which we must have done with, and these are mentioned in verses 8 and 9. It is not now, "Mortify," but, "put off." Once we lived wrapped up in these things as in a garment. When men looked at us that is what they saw. But they are to be seen no more. The ugly garment that once characterized us is to be visible no more. Another garment is to be put on as we shall see when we arrive at verse 12.

Notice how much the things mentioned in verses 8 and 9 have to do with our tongues, and consequently with our hearts which express themselves thereby. Sins of the tongue are terribly common even among Christians. We all know the kind of words that are provoked by anger, wrath and malice. Would any true believer blaspheme? Hardly, yet how very easily it is to fall into speaking of God and of divine things in a light and irreverent way. How easy too it is to utter unsavoury things with our lips, even if we do not go so far as "filthy communications." And what about lying? An Ananias or a Sapphira may still be found. And we may go further and assert that every one of us who possesses a sensitive conscience knows right well

that it is no easy thing to stick to absolute and rigid truth in all our utterances.

Truth, however, is incumbent upon us because we have put off the old man and have put on the new. This is what we have done in our conversion, and the exhortations to put off and put on in verses 8 and 12 are based upon it. Conversion means that we have learnt to judge and condemn and refuse the old order of man and his character, and to put on the new man which is God's creation and partakes of His character. We do not for one moment say that we understood this or realized it at the moment of our conversion. But we do say, in the light of this Scripture, that this is what was really involved in our conversion, and that it is high time that we do understand and realize it.

In this new man the distinctions of this world — whether national, religious, cultural or social — simply do not exist. Christ is everything, and in all who have put on the man, for the new man is a reproduction of Himself.

Just what the old man is and what the new man is, is not easy to grasp and still less easy to explain. In both expressions we

have a certain character of man personified. In the one you have the Adam character, in the other Christ. Only it is not just idealism but a real transaction. The Adam order is judged and we have done with it and put on Christ and consequently the character of His life. We put it on however not just as a man may don a new coat, but rather as a bird dons a new dress of feathers after moulting. The new character grows naturally out of the new life we have in Christ.

In verses 12 to 15 we find portrayed the character that we are to put on. It is just the opposite to those things that we are to put off according to verses 8 and 9. We are to put off the characteristics of the old man because we have put off the old man. We are to put on the characteristics of the new man because we have put on the new man. What we are to be hinges entirely upon what we are. We are the elect of God — if indeed we are believers — holy and beloved of God. From this flows what we are to be. Grace always works thus — first what we are, then what we should be.

In these verses CHRIST is in evidence. It is His character that we are to wear. If a standard is set as to the forgiveness we are to accord to others it is, "as Christ forgave you." The peace that

is to rule in our hearts is "the peace of Christ," for so it should read, and not "the peace of God," as in our Authorized Version.

Also the word, "quarrel," in verse 13 is really "complaint," as the margin of a reference Bible shows. Have we ever heard of any Christian having a complaint against another? Ever heard of a complaint! we should reply. Why the air is frequently thick with complaints! The difficulty would be to discover any Christian company without them! Well, see what is enjoined upon us in connection with such — forbearance and forgiveness; and that after the pattern of Christ Himself. For this we need the humbleness of mind, the meekness and long-suffering mentioned in verse 12, as well as the charity, or love, which verse 14 enjoins. Love is the bond of perfectness for it is the very nature of God.

The peace of Christ is that of which He spoke in the upper chamber the night before He suffered. "My peace I give to you," He said. It is that rest of heart and mind which results from perfect confidence in the Father's love and perfect submission to the Father's will. In our chapter we are reminded that we are called to this peace in one body. Consequently, the peace ruling in all our hearts, an atmosphere of peace pervades the

whole body. The closing words of the verse, "and be ye thankful," are significant.

The men of this age are peculiarly marked by unthankfulness — see, 2 Timothy 3:2. They see the hand of God in nothing, and if perchance things go well with them they only say "My luck was in." It is our privilege to see the hand of God in all things, and, walking in His fear, to trace His ways with us in a thankful spirit.

The peace of Christ is followed by, "the word of Christ," in verse 16. His word gives us all the direction we need and it is to dwell in us, to have its home in our hearts. Further it is to dwell in us richly. Our hearts and minds are to be filled with it in all wisdom. We are not only to know it but also to know how to apply it to all the problems that life presents to us. And we are to be so filled with it that it overflows from us, and we communicate it the one to the other. In our every-day dealings the one with the other we are to be able to instruct each other in that which is His will, and also to warn each other against all that would divert us from His will.

Further we should be marked by praise and song. Only our hymns and songs are to be spiritual in their character, and the Lord is to be the Object before us in them — they are to be "to the Lord." Moreover we must be careful as to our own spiritual state even in our singing. Our songs are to be with grace in our hearts. Singing which springs from a mere spirit of jollification is nothing worth. When the heart is filled with a sense of grace then we can sing to the pleasure of God.

Finally every act and detail of our lives is to be under the control of the Lord, and hence done in His Name and in the spirit of thanksgiving. This comprehensive word closes these more general instructions. The next verse begins to take up things in a more particular way.

It is worthy of note that the instructions of this epistle are not confined to the laying down of general principles, but come down to very practical and personal details. We might have supposed that when spiritually minded believers were in question, such as the Ephesians and Colossians, nothing would be needed beyond principles, and that they might be safely left to make all needful applications themselves. It is however, just in these two epistles that we get full details as to the conduct that

befits the varied relationships of life. We are told exactly how we should behave, in the full light of Christianity.

We cannot go through the world without having many and varied relations with our fellow-creatures. Most of our testings and trials reach us in connection with those relations, and hence it is God's way to leave us after conversion in the same old relationships, only teaching us how to fulfil them in the light and power which the knowledge of Christ brings. We are not set to the task of putting the world right. That will be done effectually and speedily by the Lord when He takes up the work of judgment. We are left to bear effectual witness to what is right by acting rightly ourselves.

Though the relationships of life are so many, and varied in detail, they may, we believe, be all condensed under the three heads that we find in the verses before us — (Col. 3:18 — Col. 4:1). There is, first, the marriage relation. Second, the family relation, which springs out of the marriage relation. Third, what we may term the industrial relation, which springs out of the fact that hard work is decreed to be man's lot as the result of his fall.

The organization of life in this world, according to God, is based upon marriage. If we read Matthew 19 we shall find the Lord opening out the truth, first upon marriage, then upon children, then upon possessions. Our passage deals with marriage, children, work, in that order. We make bold to say that NEVER was it more important for Christians to fulfil these relationships in a Christian way, for never have these divine institutions been more fiercely assailed than just now. Being bulwarks of that which is good the devil aims at their destruction, and every weapon is used from a "modernism" which has all the appearance of being scholarly and refined to the "communism" which practices "free love," turns the children on the streets to prowl about in droves, and alternately encourages the workman to destroy private property on the one hand, or shoots him for complaining of his miserable pay and food, on the other. We may incidentally remark just here that without a doubt "modernism" and "communism" are but varying phases of the same great devil-inspired movement. The same basic principles are common to both.

In all our relations two parties are involved. It is so here. The marriage relation is taken up as between wives and husbands;

the family as between children and parents; the industrial as between servants and masters. Each of the three relationships, as instituted by God, involves this, that one party shall assume the lead and the other shall be subject. Moreover, this is not a point which is left for negotiation and arrangement as between various individuals entering upon the relationship. It is a matter which is settled by the Word of God.

In each of the three cases those who have the place of subjection are addressed first. Subjection becomes the wife; obedience, the child. In the case of the servant there is to be not only obedience but heartiness and integrity. The most striking thing about the exhortations in each case is the way everything is to be done as in the sight of the Lord. This lifts the whole matter on to the loftiest plane. The wife is subject, but it is, "in the Lord." This implies that the prime reason for her subjection is that it is the Lord's appointment. She is subject to her husband as expressing her subjection to her Lord. It is to be hoped of course that her husband bears such a character that subjection to him is no hardship but a pleasure. But even were it otherwise she would still be subject, seeing it is to the Lord.

The same principle applies to the children and to the servants. They are to consider what is pleasing to the Lord. We must remember that the servants contemplated here were bondmen — they were practically slaves. There was very little or no profit for themselves in all their labour. Yet they were to work exactly as if they were working for the Lord. And indeed they were working for Him, and they will ultimately receive from His hands a full reward for their labour, though they might never get as much as a "Thank you" from a churlish master. "Ye serve the Lord Christ," is what the Apostle says.

Subjection, we must remember, does not necessarily imply inferiority, but it does imply the godly recognition of the divinely established order.

Moreover, God's arrangements are never lop-sided. If there is a word of instruction and guidance for those who have the subject place, there is equally a word for those who take the lead. In each case the Spirit of God puts His finger upon the weak spot. The husband is exhorted to love. Mere natural love can easily turn to bitterness, but this can never happen when his love is a reflection of the divine. If the husband is marked by love the wife has no difficulty in being subject.

So with the fathers, they are not to provoke or vex their children. Discipline is necessary and good, but, if not itself controlled by love, it may easily become excessive and vexatious to the utter discouragement of the child.

Chapter 4

IN THE THIRD case, that of the masters, the prominent thought is not that of love but of righteousness. Every Christian master should be continually asking himself in regard to his servants, "What is just? What is fair?" And further he is to remember that he himself is a servant with his Master in the heavens — a Master who has laid it down that, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

Here, then, are six items of instruction which if obeyed would go far towards producing a heaven upon earth. Family discord and industrial discord would be a thing of the past! But the point here is that we, believers, should anticipate the blessedness of the millennial day, and carry out God's will in our several relationships, while waiting for the day when God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Verses 2 to 6 of chapter 4 bring us back to exhortations of a more general sort; first as regards prayer, then as regards the relations of the believer with the unconverted.

We are to pray, and not only so but to persevere in it, and to watch God's dealings that we may not miss His answers to our requests, nor fail to render thanks to Him for grace received. Moreover our prayers are not to be mainly of a personal or even selfish nature. Paul urged the Colossians to intercession on his behalf, that he might make manifest that "mystery of Christ" to which he had alluded in the epistle. He wanted them to be intercessors on behalf of the work of God, and thus taking a share in the conflict connected with it.

We are very, very weak today in this matter of prayer. Modern life is organized on the principle of rush, and prayer gets crowded out all too often. Again, what about persevering? When we deeply desire a thing we do persevere, but how often are we creatures of very shallow desires! Our sympathies are called forth on some point and we join in a prayer — but that is the end of it! We soon forget and there is no perseverance.

In verse 5 the unconverted are spoken of as "them that are without." There are those within the Christian circle and those without it, and it is very important that we should be right in our relations with those without. We are set in a place of testimony in regard to them. First our general behaviour towards them is to be marked by wisdom. That being so we are sure to have opportunities for witnessing which we are to redeem by seizing them as they present themselves.

It is one thing, however, to seize an opportunity, and another to use it to best advantage. Words not fitly spoken are often more to be deplored than no word being spoken at all. Our words are to be always with grace. Never are we to descend to the censorious, or the bitter, or the cutting remark. But then on the other hand our words, while full of grace, are not to aim at merely pleasing men. They are to be seasoned with that which salt represents — the pungent quality of truth. Grace and truth were found in our Lord and they should mark those who are His, even characterizing their words.

The standard here set is a very lofty one. We come far short of attaining to it. Yet let us not lower the standard in our minds.

Let us maintain it at its full height as seen in Christ, and let us press on toward it.

With verse 7 the closing messages and salutations begin. They present many points of interest. Tychicus, of whom the Apostle writes so warmly, was evidently to be the bearer of this letter to the Colossians. Onesimus, who is called "a faithful and beloved brother," was the run-away slave with whom the epistle to Philemon is concerned. What but the grace of God can turn a defaulting and absconding slave into a faithful and beloved brother in Christ? So Tychicus carried the letter to the Colossians and Onesimus the letter to Philemon when they travelled to Colosse together. Philemon does not appear in our chapter, as is natural, seeing there was the special letter for him. But Archippus appears in both letters.

At the time of writing Paul had with him Aristarchus, Mark and Justus. He was able to speak of each of them in high terms as workers for the Kingdom and as a comfort to himself. It is most encouraging to find Mark mentioned in this way since the glimpses we have of him in the Acts are so unpromising. It shows how one who was a failure at the beginning of his service was yet thoroughly recovered to complete usefulness. So

much so that he eventually became the writer of the second Gospel which specially portrays the Lord as the perfect Servant. An illustration, this, of how the power of God can ultimately make us strongest in that very thing wherein at first we were weakest.

Epaphras also was with Paul but he was "one of you," that is, a Colossian, and so not "of the circumcision." Separated as he was from his own people he yet had a great zeal for them and he was fervently labouring on their behalf. This labour was accomplished in prayer.

Prayer, you see, is labour: or rather, it may be labour. Epaphras carried it to such a point that it was truly labour for him, and continued labour too, since Paul bears witness that it was always his practice. The word translated "labouring" really means striving or combatting. Epaphras though absent from his friends was engaged in a real prayer combat on their behalf, the object of which was that they might stand in the will of God, perfect and complete.

It is a great thing to have a full knowledge of the will of God; that the Apostle desired for the Colossians in Col. 1:9. It is a

greater thing to stand perfect and complete in that will. Standing in it implies that we are subject to it and characterized by it, according to that which is said in Col. 1:10. It is evident that the desires and prayers of Epaphras, for the saints of Colosse and neighbourhood, ran exactly parallel with the prayers of Paul for them.

Laodicea was in the neighbourhood. It is mentioned in Col. 2:1, as well as three times in our chapter. The very name has a sad sound about it in view of what the Lord has to say to this church in Revelation 3:14-22. In spite of the prayers and conflict on their behalf of a Paul and an Epaphras, in spite of the circulation of Apostolic epistles in their midst, it fell to the lowest depths. The "epistle from Laodicea," was no doubt an epistle which just at that time was being circulated from assembly to assembly.

This epistle to the Colossians and the Laodiceans sets forth exactly that truth which, had it been heeded by the Laodiceans, would have preserved them. It sets forth the glory of Christ, the Head of His church. It exhorts them to "hold the Head." Alas! they heeded it not; and the epistle to them sent from Patmos re-

veals them as supremely self-satisfied, and Christ, their Head, entirely outside their door.

We are, as regards the flesh, no better than they. So let us take to heart the warning with which they furnish us.

Let us also accept the word of admonition given to Archippus as applicable to ourselves. Has the Lord given a service to you? Then take good heed to perform it, however insignificant it may appear to be. Non-fulfilment of the service means laziness, which at once opens the door to decline and spiritual disaster. Nothing can preserve us but that grace, which is the closing word of the epistle.

