

Paul's Epistle
To
The Colossians



Bible Study Series
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Paul's Epistle To The Colossians.

Purpose of the Epistle:-

It was to combat heresies and false teachings in the church, and to show that the Lord Jesus Christ is everything that the believer needs.

Time of the Epistle:-

It is thought to be between 60 & 62 A.D. during the time when Apostle Paul was in prison (house arrest) in Rome for the 1st time. Please refer to Acts 28:16-31. It is one of the four "prison Epistles" which Paul wrote during that period of time. The other three are Ephesians, Philippians and Philemon.

Recipients of the Epistle:-

The saints of the city of Colosse; and to be read in the church of Laodicea.(4:16) and of course to every church in Asia Minor later.

Who wrote the Epistle:-

Apostle Paul (1:1, 2, 3 & 4:18). No scholar argued this, although they argued about him being the author of Ephesians which is one of the "prison Epistles" as accepted by all scholars. (please refer to the study of Ephesians). However, the early fathers of the church testified to the authenticity of both the Epistle and its author. The great resemblance between this Epistle and the Ephesians as they share over 55 verses should also favor the authorship of Paul to both. Not only that but the names of persons like Epaphras, Marcus (marks), Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, Timothy and Archippus mentioned in this Epistle and Philemon adds to the authenticity of the author. Furthermore, the two Epistles state that Paul was in prison. (4:3, 10, 18 & Philemon 9, 10, 13, 23).

Where was the Epistle written:-

It was in Rome where Paul was in prison. No scholar argued about that, although they argued about Rome being the city where Paul wrote the Ephesians even though they all agreed that Paul is the author of the "prison Epistles". Please refer to the study on Ephesians.

Most prominent verses in the Epistle:-

“For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.” 2:9, 10.

Theme of the Epistle:-

The Lord Jesus Christ is presented as having absolute supremacy and sole sufficiency.

The city of Colosse:-

It was in the province of Phrygia in Asia Minor (Turkey presently); about 100 miles from Ephesus in the region of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 1-3. It was in the Lycus valley surrounded by the Cadmus Mountain which was 8000 feet above the city level.

It was very prosperous in the 5th century B.C. when it was invaded by king Ahasuerus of Persia. (Esther 1:1)

Before the time of Apostle Paul, Colosse was famous about its industry of black wool and dyes formulated from the lime deposits surrounding it.

It was also a center of trading between the north and south, east and west. However during the Pauline time, the city lost all that and the trading routs were channeled to the two cities near by which were Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Its inhabitants were mainly gentiles, yet a sizeable group of Jews inhabited it as well since the time of Antiochus the great (223-187 B.C.). This mixture explains why the heresies in the church contained Jewish elements enforcing the observation of the Mosaic Law as well as pagan mystics.

The church of Colosse:-

Apostle Paul never visited the city of Colosse. (2:1); yet the church was established there during the 3 year period of Paul’s service in Ephesus (Acts 19).

It is believed that Epaphras (1:5-7) was saved during one of his visits to Ephesus while Paul was there, and then started the church after his return.

Several years after, serious heresies -which had no connection to any special political or historical event- plagued the church. These heresies were caused mainly by three influences namely the pagans, the Jews and the Greek philosophy and they were later known as Gnosticism (gnosis means knowledge in Latin) , and this can be summarized in 5 points as follows:-

- 1- God is good.
- 2- Matter is evil.
- 3- Our Lord Jesus Christ is just one of those emissions of God.
- 4- Our Lord Jesus Christ is lesser in degree than God. This belief led them to the denial of His incarnation.
- 5- There is a secret and knowledge higher than the Holy Scripture which is necessary to obtain the enlightenment and salvation.

Moreover, this heresy contained Jewish influences e.g. the necessity of circumcision for salvation, and abiding with laws and rituals of the Old Testament such as the different rituals of food and eating, observing the different Sabbaths, traditions and the different

feast days. It also contained pagan influences such as mystics, severe asceticism, meekness, humility and submission.

This heresy called also for worshiping the Angles and several mystic influences.

This terribly troubled Epaphras, so much so that he had to take the trouble of a long tiring trip to Rome (4:12,13) to meet with Paul and ask his advice.

And so, Paul wrote this Epistle while he was in jail (Acts 28:16-31) with the other 3 Epistles to Ephesians, Philippi and Philemon, and they were carried by Tychicus (Eph 6:21,22 & Gal 4:7,8 to Ephesus and Colosse and to be read in the other churches in Asia Minor. A traveling companion to Tychicus was Onesimus the runaway unsaved slave and now saved returning to his previous master Philemon on Paul's recommendation not as a slave but as a beloved child of God and brother in Christ. So, Tychicus was the one who went back with the Epistles and Epaphras elected to stay in Rome with Paul (Philemon 23) perhaps to receive more instructions and learn more from Paul.

Contents of the Epistle:-

This epistle contained several important doctrines such as:-

- * The Deity of Jesus Christ our Lord. 1:15-20 & 2:2-10
- * Reconciliation. 1:20-23
- * Redemption. 1:13, 14 & 2:13, 14
- * Election. 3:12
- * Forgiveness. 3:13
- * Nature of the church. 1:18, 24, 25 & 2:19 & 3:11, 15
- * Combating the heresies. Chapter 2

Outline of the Epistle:-

A- Personal matters:- 1:1-14

- 1- Paul's greetings. 1:1, 2
- 2- Paul's thanksgiving. 1:3-8
- 3- Paul's prayer. 1:9-14

B- Theological Doctrines:- 1:15-2:23

- 1- About Christ's Deity. 1:15-23
- 2- About Paul's ministry 1:24-2:7
- 3- About the false Philosophy. 2:8-23

C- Practical Exhortations:- 3:1-4:18

- 1- The Christian behavior 3:1-17
- 2- The Christian household. 3:18-4:1
- 3- The Christian speech. 4:2-6
- 4- The Christian friends. 4:7-18.

A- Personal Matters : 1:1-14

1- Paul's greetings :- 1:1, 2

In Paul's days, it was customary to begin the letter by the name of the writer and the receivers followed by greetings of peace.

Paul would usually add Christian elements in his greetings reminding the receivers of his call by God emphasizing that what he is about to say is from God. At the same time ,he wants to show the Colossians by what authority he writes to people whom he did not see or know.

So, here he says "Paul an apostle.....by the will of God"

Apostolos

In Greek it means one who is sent out. So, in essence he is saying what gives him the right is that he had been sent out by God to be His ambassador to them.

"By the will of God"

The office of "Apostle" is not something he has earned or achieved but given to him by God; it has not been something taken but conferred upon him. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" John 15:16. And here right at the very beginning of the epistle Paul declares the whole doctrine of eternal grace. There is no such a thing as a self-made man: there are only men whom God has made, and men who refused to allow God to make them.

Then he addresses Timothy as brother. This is a lovely tender jester considering the great difference in age, knowledge, office and achievement. But in Christ there are no differences; we are all brothers no matter what.

Timothy's name was specifically mentioned because he shared a permanent ministry with Paul. It was obvious from 4:7-14 that Paul had several other associates with him when the epistle was written. As we look in all the epistles of Paul; we find that Timothy's name is mentioned in all except the ones to the Romans, the Ephesians and to Titus; and together with Silvanus (Silas) in 1st & 2nd Thessalonians.

Timothy was a native of Lystra in Lycaonia (Acts 16:1-5); the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother Eunice and grandmother Lois. (2 Tim 1:5)

He became Christian during Paul's first missionary trip (with Barnabas) to his hometown (Acts 14:8-20).

On Paul's 2nd missionary trip he found Timothy to be well developed spiritually and took him to minister with him and Silas.

Here is the best proof of his dedication to the ministry : he willingly accepted to be circumcised at his age (as adult), and I do not think that Paul asked him to do so out of hypocrisy to the Jews but out of respect to their feelings and tradition; because although Paul was traditionally "The apostle to the gentiles" yet the New Testament (especially Acts) tells us that in every city he entered he first preached in the synagogues even in Rome as a prisoner he asked to talk to the Jews (Acts 28: 17). And of course for a non-circumcised to enter the synagogue is defiling; so Timothy had to be circumcised.

And Paul demonstrated his confidence in Timothy by entrusting him with important responsibilities such as sending him as a personal representative to Corinth during a particularly tense time (1 Cor 4:14-17) though he was not quite successful in this mission; Paul also left him in Ephesus to oversee the young church there (1 Tim 1:3-4). “faithful brothers in Christ who are in Colosse”.

Here he is addressing them as brothers exactly as he addressed Timothy indicating the same principle that in Christ we are all brothers.

But there is something more important about “in Christ, In Colosse” :- The Christian always lives or exists in two dimensions; he lives in the city or the place he chose to live but at the same time he lives in Christ. He may move from one city to another but wherever he is, he is in Christ. And in Christ we are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). And as some said if your religion does not change you, then you better change your religion.

2- Paul's Thanksgiving :- 1:3-8

A- The double commitment : 1:4

Here Paul is showing two great qualities in their lives :-

- * Showing faith in Christ.
- * Love for their fellowmen.

Christians have a double loyalty : a loyalty to Christ and a loyalty to men.

The Christian faith is not only a conviction of the mind; but it is also an outflow of the heart.

Faith in Christ and love to men are twin pillars of the Christian life.

B- The hope and the essence of the gospel : 1:5-8

The Christian hope is the certainty that it is better to stake one's life on God than to believe the world.

“our hope is laid in heaven” Here Paul is emphasizing the secure future of the believer. We know and are sure of our future and final destination.

Paul associates this Christian hope to

“word of the truth of the gospel”:

- * The gospel is the good news of God. It sets us in a right relationship with God.
- * It is the truth. It gives us certainties about God and not guesses.
- * It is universal. The message of the gospel is open without exception to all men.
- * It is productive. It has the power to change the individual life of every person.
- * It tells of God's grace. It is not the message of what God demands but of His gift
- * It is humanly transmitted. That which is divinely given must be passed on. We who have received the privilege of the gospel have also received the responsibility of passing it on.
- * God's word is not for our information; it is for our transformation; and so we increase in His knowledge and start bearing fruits for Him.

Christian love comes from the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22). It is an action and attitude not just emotion. It is the by-product of our new life in Christ (Rom 5:5 & 1 Cor. 13).

3- Paul's prayer : 1:9-14

A- The essence of prayer's request : 1:9-11

Here we have two great requests :

- * The discernment of God's will.
- * The power to perform that will.

The great object of prayer is to know the will of God. We should try to find out what God wants us to do. So often in our prayers we really say "Thy will be changed " rather than saying " Thy will be done ". We should learn to say "speak Lord, for thy servant hearth" (1 Sam 3:9).

Wisdom and understanding : 1 : 9

Wisdom : The Greek word is "**Sophia**" which means knowledge of first principles;

Understanding : The Greek word is "**Sunesis**" which means critical knowledge and by that they mean the ability to apply first principles (wisdom or Sophia) to any given situation which may arise in life.

So here, Paul is praying that they may understand the great truths of Christianity and apply it in their everyday life.

"pleasing to Him" : (1 : 10) meaning to conduct themselves in a way as to please God. Prayer and action go hand in hand. When we pray, we are not to withdraw ourselves from life but to live life as it ought to be in the way that pleases Him.

"The knowledge of God" is not a secret that only a few can discover; it is open to everyone.. God wants us to know Him and help others to know Him.

Paul never met the saints of Colosse, yet he faithfully prayed for them. He also prayed for most if not all the churches mentioned in the new testament.

This teaches us to pray for others even those whom we do not know like the missionaries in foreign countries.

"Strengthened". (1 : 11) We need power to do His will. When we pray, God not only tells us His will, but He also enables us to do it.

B- "The three great gifts" : (v.11) Patience, Longsuffering and Joyfulness.

Patience: in the Greek origin is "**macrothumia**" which means patience with People.

Longsuffering : in the Greek origin is "**hupomone**" which is the ability to deal triumphantly with anything that life can do to us.

So, putting both together means that Paul prays that neither human nor circumstantial efforts can detain the Christian from doing God's will; the spirit which refuses to grow hopeless either about things or people.

Joyfulness : it is the radiant and sunny-hearted attitude to life.

In summary, the Christian prayer should be : " Make me ,O Lord, victorious over every circumstance, patient with every person and give me the joy which no circumstance or man can ever take away from me".

What Christ has done :- 1:12-14

Here Paul gives thanks to God for 5 things He has done for us :

- 1- He made us qualified to share his inheritance. (see also 2 Cor 5:21)
- 2- He rescued us from Satan's dominion of darkness and made us His children. (see also 2:15).
- 3- He brought us into His eternal Kingdom. (see also Eph 1:5-6)
- 4- He redeemed us. He bought our freedom from sin and judgment. (see also Heb 9:12)
- 5- He forgave all our sins. (see also Eph 1:7)

So, in summary we should not fear; because our Lord Jesus Christ has transferred us from darkness to light; from slavery to freedom; from guilt to forgiveness and from under the domain of Satan to the power of God. We have been rescued.

Shouldn't we conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of that!!!

Paul mentions a very peculiar phrase in verse 13 "and hath *translated* us into the Kingdom of His dear Son". In Wars in the ancient world, it was the custom for the conqueror to transfer the population of the defeated nation to some other land not necessarily the victorious land. This was called translation. An example of this is the Northern Kingdom when defeated were taken to Assyria. Also the people of Jerusalem and the Southern Kingdom were taken to Babylon.

So, the picture that Paul is painting here is of the Victorious Triumphant Christ has taken them and of course all of us from where we were under the dominion of Satan to another land which is the Kingdom of His beloved Son. Shouldn't we rejoice?!!!

God in His triumphant love transferred us from the realm of sin and darkness into the realm of holiness and light and love.

B-Theological Doctrines:- 1:15-2:23

Before discussing this subject, we must go back to study the heresies which plagued the church in Colosse; because what Paul is doing here, he is answering and correcting these heresies. As we said before these heresies were influenced by the pagans, the Jews and by the Greek knowledge and philosophy. These heresies were basically "Gnosticism" :-

- 1- The spirit or God is good.
- 2- Matter (the world and everything in it) is evil. Accordingly God is not the creator since He is good and cannot create evil. The creating God must be evil, ignorant and hostile to the true God. So here is a questionable God and creator.
- 3- Our Lord Jesus Christ is nothing but one of the emissions or emanations of God. He may be highly esteemed in this series, nevertheless He is one of many. And here they questioned or denied the deity of Jesus our Lord.
- 4- Our Lord Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh because the body is altogether evil. So, He could not have a real body. He could not have a real manhood. He was nothing but a spiritual phantom. They even went that far to say that when He walked He had no footprints. So, in essence they are denying His re-incarnation.
- 5- Between God and man there is a vast series of emissions or emanations the shortest of which is nearer to God and the longest is far away from God. Before the soul can rise to God, it has to get past each one of these emissions. It has to climb up the ladder; and at each step of the ladder there is an opposing power or a barrier. To pass each barrier, a special knowledge and special passwords are needed. It was these passwords and that knowledge that the Gnostics claimed to give. This meant that:-
 - a- Salvation is intellectual knowledge and not redemption and forgiveness of sins as we believe. So, to them the Holy Scripture is not enough to grant salvation.
 - b- If salvation needs elaborate knowledge like that, then it is not for every man. It

can only be for the intellectual. And since the intellectuals were only the rich and the highly esteemed in the society, then the poor had no share in salvation. So, as you see Gnosticism was founded on an intellectual aristocracy from which the common man was shut out.

It is with all of this in mind that Paul wrote this epistle to the Colossians as will follow.

1. About Christ's Deity: 1:15 -23

What the Lord Jesus is in Himself?

"The image of the invisible God" 1:15

The Greek word used here is "*eikon*" which is correctly translated image. But image means representation which if perfect it means manifestation. So, Paul is saying here that our Lord Jesus is the perfect manifestation of God. He perfectly represents and perfectly manifest God to people, in a form which man can see and know and understand :-

- A- To the Jews: The same word *image* is used in Wisdoms of Solomon 7:26 "Wisdom is the image of the goodness of God". As if he is telling them In Jesus Christ this wisdom has come to men in bodily form for all to see. Therefore Jesus is the fulfillment of their dreams.
- b- To the Greeks: The very same word was used again and again by their famous philosopher "Philo" : He calls the invisible and divine Logos, which only the mind can perceive, the *image (Eikon) of God*. as if he is telling the Greek : That Logos of God which you call God's Eikon; in Jesus Christ that Logos has come alive for all to see. Your dreams, thoughts, philosophies and speculations have all come true in him.
- c- In legal documents: In the past they used to include *eikons* (which was physical description of the parties involved by which they are identified) . So, also Jesus is the actual portrait of God. In Him you see nothing less than the personal characteristics and the distinguished marks of God.

"In Him should all Fullness dwell " : 1:19

This also means completeness. Paul simply says here that Jesus is not a summary or a sketch or something short or less than God. He is the full and final revelation of God.

What the Lord Jesus is to creation?

"The firstborn of every creature " : 1:15

We have to be very careful here, because some may interpret it as the Son being a part of the creation, though we know and believe that He is the creator.

Firstborn in Greek means the one born first in its timely sense. But it was also used to indicate high in status or in job (Rom 8 : 29). And in both the Greek and the Jewish nations, the firstborn had the right to be the heir of his father's

estate and title, whether he was actually born first or not. An example of this is the case of Isaac and Ishmael; and Jacob and Esau.

The same word was also used to describe the Jewish nation and the Messiah as being of high and favorable status in the eye of God as follows :

A- Exodus 4: 22 "Israel is My firstborn." Here Israel as a nation is the *firstborn*.

What it means is that the nation of Israel is the chosen, the most honored and the most favored to God. Certainly Israel was not the first nation in the world; but because it was God's favorite God called it His firstborn.

B- Psalm 89: 27 Here firstborn is a title given to the Messiah. It says (I will make Him My *Firstborn*, higher than the kings of the earth).

Clearly the word firstborn here is not used in a timely fashion.

And certainly the Messiah was not born the first among several Messiahs !! Surely, this doesn't have a timely meaning at all as being born first in time.

Here is a clear cut argument :-

- 1- Our Lord Jesus Christ is called in the Scripture as being the only son (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18 and 1st John 4:9). To be a timely born first, a person must have other brothers and sisters. Then how could He be the only Son?!
- 2- When someone or something is called the firstborn, he or it should be of his own species meaning if he is a man, he should be the first born among all men. If it is a cow, a horse or a reptileetc., then it should be the first born among cows, horses or reptilesetc. But it says here that He is the firstborn of every creature. Not of all men; but of every creature; which includes men as well as everything created. How can it be?!
- 3- If Paul is teaching that Christ is created, then he agrees with the same heresy which he is opposing and condemning.
- 4- It is impossible for Christ to be the created and the Creator of everything at the same time. (v.16)

So, according to all of the above; we conclude that this phrase shows or indicates Christ's eminence or highest honor as in verse 18.

And of course, He is appointed Heir of all things. (Heb 1:2; Rev 5:1-7, 13)

Jesus is present before creation; He is honored, glorified and put higher over it. (Ps. 2:7 ; Rom 8:29). He is high and honored among His adopted Brethren.

Now and only then, we can say He is firstborn among His adopted brethren.

"For by Him were all things created" 1:16

Why Paul included heaven in this verse?

Jews as well as Gnostics had a highly-developed and elaborate system of angles.

So Paul is telling them that this Son of God created these angles. He is as far above them as the creator is above the creatures.

So He is not inferior ignorant and hostile secondary to God, but He is God.

"He is before all things" : 1:17

The Son exists before any creation. He created all things to be His, and to give Him glory. The world was created so that it might ultimately belong to Him.

“By Him all things consist”: 1:17

He holds the world together. The law of gravity and all the so-called scientific laws are not only scientific but also divine. That is because every law of science and of nature, is in fact, an expression of God's thoughts. It is by the mind of God, that the universe hangs together.

So, then, the Son is the Creator, the Sustainer and the Final Goal of the world.

What the Lord Jesus is to the church?

“ He is the head of the body” : 1:18

The body is powerless even dead without the head. Since the church is His body, then He is its guiding, directing and dominating spirit . Without Him the church cannot function correctly. The thoughts and actions of the church must be governed, guided and directed by our Lord Jesus Christ.

“He is the beginning of the church “: 1:18

The word beginning in Greek means not only the first in the sense of time but it also means the moving power which sets something into operation.

So, all this means is that Our Lord Jesus Christ is the source of the church's life and the director of its continued activity.

“He might have the preeminence “ : 1:18

By His resurrection, He has shown that He has conquered every enemy and every opposing power and nothing can bind or hold Him. The final triumph of His resurrection has given Him the right to be Lord of all.

So all that, tells us that He is the Living Lord, the Source, Origin and the Constant director of the church. And He is the Lord of all because He conquered death.

What the Lord Jesus is to all things?

“Reconciliation “: 1:20

The object of His coming was reconciliation. The initiative in reconciliation was with God. Men are reconciled to God and not the opposite. The reason is and always will be love. It was God who began the whole process of salvation and reconciliation.

“ The medium of reconciliation “ 1 :20

It is the blood of Jesus on the cross.” He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? “Romans 8: 32. As if God is telling us “I love you like that. I love you enough to see my Son suffer and die for you.” The cross is the final proof of God's love.

“The scope of reconciliation” 1:20

All things unto Him. It is a universal redemption, in which not only the people but all things are redeemed. The Gnostics regarded matter as evil; but Paul here

says that the world is not evil. The world is God's world and shares in the universal reconciliation. God has redeemed all things in earth.

But then he says "or *things in heaven*". Here there are four views:-

1. Even the heavenly places and angles were under sin. (Job 4:18 & 15:15).
2. Origen believed that the devil and his angles will be reconciled to God.
3. It is a resounding phrase to show the magnificent work of Jesus.
4. The heavenly angles were not reconciled to God but to men. The work of Jesus took away the wrath of the angles towards men. (*Theodoret & Erasmus*).

Whichever view one may lean to, the fact remains that God's only aim was to reconcile the whole universe to Himself in earth and heaven alike.

"The aim and obligation of reconciliation "1: 21-23

The aim is *Holiness*: Christ's work on the cross presented us to God consecrated, unblemished and irreproachable.

The obligation is *to continue in faith*. Since that is how we are presented to God, then we have to stand fast in the faith and be worthy of that love.

One last thought; "Out of the wonder of reconciliation are born the strength of unshakable loyalty and the radiance of unconquerable hope."

2- About Paul's ministry 1:24-2:7

The Privilege and the Task: 1: 24 – 29

"Fill up that is behind of the afflictions of Christ" *K.J.v. v. 24*

In other versions it says " fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ."

There are two views for interpreting this phrase :-

- 1- For anyone who is doing the work of Christ; if such service involves sufferings and afflictions (and it will certainly happen); these sufferings are filling up and sharing the very sufferings of Christ himself.
- 2- Satan's purpose was to harm Jesus with the highest suffering he can afflict on Him, But Jesus conquered him by His resurrection. Now, Satan cannot reach Jesus with any harm; so, he takes it on Jesus' faithful followers who call on His name and work in His vineyard (John 15:18,24 ; 16:1-3). I personally lean towards this view.

Jesus foreknowing this, He told His disciples about the suffering to come.

He who persecutes a Christian, is actually persecuting Christ.

Saul himself persecuted Christ in the person of His church (Acts 7: 58; 8: 1-3; 9: 1, 4, 5, 13, 14; Phil 3: 6)

Now, to complete the picture; it is always a privilege and honor to serve Our Lord and share in His sufferings.

Now, what is the *task*? It is to bring the long kept secret which is now revealed in Christ to all men. This secret is that the glory of the hope of the gospel is not only to the Jews but to the whole world. Christ is for gentiles and Jews alike!

That every man could be presented to God, would have seemed incredible and even blasphemous to the Jews. Now how about the Gnostics? To them, knowledge possession is almost spiritual aristocracy as we have seen before.

Even in our present world, it has always been the case that men have openly or

tactfully agreed that knowledge is not for every one. But look at Jesus! He is for every one.

There are gifts a man can never possess, privileges a man can never enjoy, and Heights a man can never reach or achieve, but our Lord Jesus is available to every person.

Love and conflict: 2:1

Here Paul mentions Laodicea. As we mentioned in the introduction, it is one of the three cities located in the valley of the river Lycus. So, I feel that he wants this epistle to be read in all that area.

The word he used here for “conflict” is “agon” from which the word “agony” came. So, he is in agony for his friends. How?

1- Paul wrestled in prayer for those whom he loved but could not see. He was in prison in Rome. He must have wished so much to go and see them and clear this matter personally with them. This teaches us that when time, distance or circumstances separates us from those whom we long to help, there is always another way to help, and that to wrestle in prayer for them.

2- He must have been also wrestling in prayer that he may not weaken and this will be a bad example to those who had their eyes fixed on him, not only in Colosse but also in the whole valley of Lycus.

In life, we may have some people who look up to us or have their eyes fixed on us, then we must remember that our wrong doings may ruin or destroy their faith.

Marks of the faithful church: 2:2 – 7

a- Comforted hearts: v.2

The word used here is “**Parakalein**” which means comfort. As we remember, Jesus before His ascension said to His disciples that He will send the Spirit of comfort “**Parakletus**”. It can also mean to exhort or to enable the person that he can meet some difficult situations with confidence and gallantry. Paul prays that the church may be filled with this courage.

b- Knit together in love: v.2

The one mark which should distinguish a true church is love for God and for each other.

c- Have the full assurance of understanding: v.2, 3

Paul here uses three words: “understanding”, “wisdom”, and “knowledge”.

”**Understanding**” is “**Sunesis**” which we have seen before and it means critical knowledge.

”**Wisdom**” is “**Sophia**” which we have also seen before and it means the power to support and commend or reasoning the truth.

”**Knowledge**” is “**Gnosis**” which we have also seen before and it means the power to comprehend or grasp the truth.

So, Paul is saying here that the church should have the practical knowledge, the reasoning, and the grasping of the truth so that it may be able to deal with any situation called for.

All this is hidden in Christ and therefore it is open to all men everywhere.

And since the Gnostics believe that wisdom is hidden in their books and it is only revealed to certain elite people who had the privilege of having these emissions; Paul is directing this speech to them and telling them that the truth of Christianity is not a secret hidden like your wisdom but it is revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

d- Have the power to resist enticing words : v.4

In other versions it is “seductive *teaching*”; this word in Greek was used in court and it meant persuasive power. So, Paul is saying that the church should have a good and firm grip of the truth that it cannot listen to persuasive, enticing or seductive arguments.

e- Order and steadfastness : v. 5

Both are military words. Order describes rank upon rank in the army.

Steadfastness describes solid unbreakable block. So, Paul says here that the church should be a disciplined order, strong, solid and unbreakable.

f- Walk, be rooted and built in Him : v. 6,7

The church must always live in the conscious presence of Christ.

The church like a tree must be deeply rooted in Christ. Christian life is strong against any storm because it is founded and rooted in Christ.

g- Established in faith : v.7

The church must hold fast to the faith which it has been taught. This does not mean to be a frozen orthodoxy in which all changes and all adventure of thought is heresy; but to see that the foundation of all belief does not change.

h- Abounding with thanksgiving : v. 7

It is an abounding and overflowing gratitude. A Christian should tell in words and show in life his gratitude to God. He should always praise God from whom all blessings flow.

3. About the false philosophy: 2:8-23

This false philosophy taught:

- a- That Jesus Christ is not sufficient, not unique and that He is just one of many emissions of God. So, it is necessary to worship and serve other so-called divine and angelic powers.
 - b- The simple truth preached by Jesus was not enough. It had to be completed by an elaborate system of thoughts which was very difficult for the common to apprehend and only few intellectuals can understand it.
 - c- Their lives were controlled by astrology. Jesus’ teaching was not enough to liberate them from that.
 - d- Circumcision was imposed on them because faith in Jesus alone is not enough.
 - e- Jewish ascetic traditions (food, drinks, days and festivals) were also imposed.
 - f- Angels are heavenly and divine and must be worshipped. Jesus is not.
- From all the above it is evident that all these philosophies were of Jewish and Gnostic influence
Simply they say that Jesus, His teaching and His works are not enough.

Traditions and faith : v.8-10

Spoil is a word of war. The conquered nation including the king, men, women, children and all their belongings become a spoil to the conqueror.

So, Paul tells them not to allow themselves to be spoils or slaves to these philosophies because :-

- 1- It is human tradition. Gnostics went far to claim that what they teach was actually what Jesus himself said to the chosen like Mary
How could that be while it contradicts Jesus' teaching !
- 2- It is after the *rudiment* of the world. The word rudiment has two meanings:-
 - A. Elementary or set out in a row like A B C . We tend to use this term to describe something so elementary like A B C . So, Paul says here that this philosophy is not elaborate, it is a step backward and retrograde.
 - B. The elemental spirits of the world especially the spirits of the stars. People were influenced by the spiritual power of the stars in their lives. They believed that their whole lives were fixed and settled by the stars. Alexander the great believed implicitly in the influence of the stars. People wouldn't do anything before consulting the stars, something like the Horoscope in our days.
Gnostics claimed to give the devotee the power to escape this influence. Paul's answer to this is "You need nothing but Christ to overcome any power in the universe; for in Him is nothing less than the fullness of God; and He is the head of every power and authority, for He created them."

The real and unreal circumcision: v. 11, 12

Circumcision was the badge of God's chosen people (the Jews). It doesn't matter if a person is good or bad, he is a chosen person so long as he is circumcised. Few body organs were mentioned uncircumcised in the Old Testament e.g. **Lips** in Exd. 17:10 , **Heart** in Lev. 26: 41, Ezek. 44: 7,9 and Deut. 30: 6, **Ear** in Jer. 4:10. It is claimed that this means dedication to God. I do not share this view. How about women? I thought I throw this in! They were not circumcised, yet the Holy Scripture mentioned a good number of dedicated women e.g. Sarah, Ruth, Hanna (Samuel's mother), Mary and Hanna who held the baby Jesus at the temple. This has nothing whatsoever to do with dedication. It was just a mark in the flesh for the covenant between God and Abram. See if you will Gen. 17:10, 11. The real circumcision to us Christians is to die and rise with Christ in baptism.

Triumphant forgiveness: v.13-15

Here, Paul painted four pictures:-

1- *Dead in your sins.* v. 13

Sin renders man helpless or practically dead. He cannot overcome sin nor can he atone for it. Christ's work is power. It puts life into that dead man.

2- *Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances.* v. 14

Our Lord Jesus Christ wiped out the charge list of all our self-admitted debts or sins which was based on the ordinances of the law.

What does Paul mean by the word *Handwriting*? The Greek word for this literally means *Autograph*. But is commonly used to indicate a note signed by a debtor acknowledging his indebtedness, exactly like the I.O.U. note we have now. It is a signed admission of debt. Men's sins had piled up a vast list of debts to God. So, Paul is telling the Colossians that there was a list of charges which they

themselves had signed admitting its accuracy.

3- *Blotting out.* v. 14

The ink in the past did not have acid base. So, it did not make permanent impression on the papyrus paper, the skin or the parchment paper used at that time. So, one could wipe it out clean with a sponge as if it had never been.

So, the picture that Paul is painting here is that God in His amazing mercy, banished the record of our sins completely as if it had never been.

4- *Nailing it to His cross.* v. 14

In the ancient time, when a law, a decree or an ordinance was cancelled, it was fastened to a board and a nail was driven through it indicating that it is void and useless. They used to do the same with forged coins in my country to render it void and useless.

So, Paul says here that on the cross, the indictment that was against us was itself crucified and nailed to render it void and ineffective.

In these four pictures, Paul painted the complete mercy of Christ who destroyed banished and wiped out the condemnation that was against us and gave us life.

And here is the **Grace of God**. Man is no longer a criminal who has broken the law and has to face the judgment of God. He is now a son who was lost and can come home.

The last picture which Paul has painted here is **Christ the Triumphant conqueror**.

He uses the word *spoiled* again which as we saw before is a war term and here it literally means stripped the weapons and the armor from a defeated foe.

So, here he is talking about the different classes of angels, elemental spirits and Demons.

He defeated them, stripped them out of their weapons and armament, put them openly to shame and lead them captives in His triumphant train.

By all that, Paul is emphasizing the total adequacy of the work of Jesus namely "sin is forgiven and evil is conquered". What more is needed?!

Retrogression: v. 16-23

Back to asceticism: v. 16, 21

Gnostics believed that since the body is evil, then it makes no difference if it is used properly or abused; it must be beaten and starved.

But Jesus said it is not the food that defiles; it is what comes out of our mouths. (Mat 15:10-20 & Mark 7: 14-23) . Peter learned that in Acts 10.

These things are to perish. v. 22 and Mat 15:17 & Mark 7:19.

Day, moon or Sabbath : v. 16

Gnostics and Jews alike observed certain days, moon, Sabbaths and feasts. They identified religion with rituals and certain days observance.

Paul says: you have been delivered and freed from all that. Why then do you go back and enslave yourselves all over again?

Intruding into those things: v. 18

The Gnostics prided themselves upon special visions and revelations of secret things which were not open to the eyes of ordinary men and women.

The problem with that people will so often see not what God sends them, but what they want to see.

Worshipping of angels: V. 18, 20

Jews and Gnostics worshipped angels because they believed they intercede between them and God. But Christianity teaches us that worship is only for God.

Paul has four comments in this section:-

- 1- The real truth is in Christ. V. 17. All the rest is the shadow of things to come.
- 2- False humility v.18, 23. Yes, the way to God is open to the humble and the simple but that is because it was open by Christ and no man can ever close it.
- 3- Sinful pride v. 18, 23 A meticulous observant of the days, moon, Sabbaths and Feasts as well as ascetic abstinence is in grave status.
The basic truth of Christianity is that he who thinks he is good is no good.
- 4- Unchristian slavery vs. Christian freedom v.20. The freedom they think of, is actually keeping them on the leash. V. 23. Freedom from all that, is in Christ.

C- Practical Exhortations:- 3:1-4:18

1. The Christian Behavior: 3:1-17

The risen life 3: 1 - 4

Seek those things which are above v. 1, 2

In baptism, the Christian dies and rises again. He is not the same. He lives a new life. His thoughts must be set on the things which are above. He must be concerned with the heavenly matters. This does not mean he becomes withdrawn and isolated. He is expected to go on with the work of this world but will see everything in the light and background of eternity.

This will give him a new way of judgment and a new set of values : e.g. giving than getting, serving than ruling and forgiving than avenging.. His standard of values will be God's not man's.

Hid in Christ. v.3

The Greeks spoke of the dead buried man as being hidden in the earth. But the Christian is hidden in Christ because he died of the worldly matters. What does this mean to the Gnostics? They said their treasures of wisdom are hidden in secret books., but for us Christ is the treasure of wisdom and we are hidden in Him.

Christ who is our life v.4

See what Paul says about Christ :

"Christ means life to me." Phil. 1: 21

"I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me." Gal. 2: 20

Sometimes we say of a man "music, sport or work is his life" This means such a man finds all what life means in music, sport or work For the Christian, Christ is his life, He dominates his thought and fills his life.

The Christian looks at all his values in the light of the cross.

Shall appear with Him in glory v.4

That which is hidden is concealed and unseen. The true greatness of the

Christian is hidden from the world. The day will come when Christ will return in glory and then the Christian will share that glory and it will be seen by all. The judgment of God will overturn the judgment of men.

The things which lie behind 3 : 5 - 9

Paul in his epistles always brings in exhortation after theology. He always ends with an uncompromising and crystal clear statement of the ethical demands of Christianity.

Mortify your members v.5

This means to put to death every part of your self and personality which keeps you from fulfilling the will of God.

See what Jesus said in Mat. 5:29,30 "If your eye offend you, pluck it out, and if your right hand offend you, cut it out; for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not that your whole body should be cast into hell".

See what Paul says in Rom 8 :13 "If you kill the deeds of sinful human nature. you will live."

Then Paul gives a list of the things which a Christian should abstain of :

Fornication and uncleanness : v.5

In the ancient world, pre- and extra- marital affairs were normal and accepted socially. Sexual appetite was regarded as a thing to be gratified and not to be controlled. Christianity teaches that relationship between the sexes is so precious that indiscriminate use of it , destroys it in the end.

Inordinate affection : v.5

This is uncontrolled passion or desire for the wrong things. A person like that is ruled by his own desires.

Evil concupiscence : v.5

Means inflamed with desire. It is more grave than the above.

Covetousness : v.5

The Greek word for it is **Pleonexia**. The 1st half of it means more and the 2nd half means to have. So the whole word basically means the desire to have more. They define it as the sinful desire for that which belongs to others, or the passion of acquisitiveness, or the ruthless self-seeking. Moule described it as "the opposite of the desire to give." It is the desire to get- and always to get what man has no right to have. Such a desire, says Paul, is idolatry. Moule also says that idolatry is an attempt to use God for man's purpose, rather than to give oneself to God's service. He who is dominated by the desire to get things, has set up things in the place of God. In fact he worships them and not God.

And in verse 6, he says that upon all such things the wrath of God must fall.

Anger and wrath : v. 8

wrath means a blaze of sudden anger quickly comes and quickly goes.

Anger on the other hand is slow burning and long-lasting. It refuses to be pacified. For Christians, both are forbidden.

Malice: v.8

It is that state of mind from which all the individual vices spring.

Blasphemy, filthy communication and lie not : v. 8,9

Blasphemy means slander or insulting speech (obscene language). When it is directed against God it is called blasphemy, and when it is directed against man it is called slander.

Now the old rule still applies: “ Before we say anything about anyone, we must ask ourselves, Is it true ? Is it necessary? Is it kind?

Christian speech must be **KIND, PURE** and **TRUE**.

It is so easy to distort the truth, not necessarily by lying. A change in the tone of voice in which a story is told, a certain look, a facial expression, silence or even using the phrase “ you know what I mean “ will serve the purpose.

Now let us go back to verse 8. Here Paul says all of the above must be put off.

In the early Christian life (and I think it is still practiced in some countries), when the Christian was baptized, he put off his old clothes before going down into the water, and when he emerged, he was clothed in a new and pure white robe.

Paul adds one more garment which is the perfect bond of love which holds the whole Christian body together.

The peace of God: v. 15

He says let the peace of God rule in your hearts. Which means let the peace of God be the umpire in your heart. Appoint Jesus Christ as the arbitrator between the conflicting emotions in your hearts. His decision cannot go wrong.

Admonishing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs: v. 16

Pliny, the Roman governor of Bithynia sent a report about the Christians to the Roman Emperor Trajan, saying: “They meet at dawn to sing a hymn to Christ as God.” We should note the best example that Paul and Silas gave to us while they were in prison in Philippi :”And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God.” Acts 16: 25. Singing shows our gratitude to God.

The great basic Christian virtues are the virtues which govern and set the tone of human relationship.

It is not too much to say that everything that has been done for the aged, the sick, the weak in body and mind, the animal, the child, the slave and the woman, has been done by and under the inspiration of Christianity.

And finally in verse 17, Paul gives us the greatest principle of all which is:

“Whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

The best test for our actions is to ask ourselves: “Can we do it in His Name? “

Can we do it knowing that He will hear ? If a person brings every word and deed to the test of the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, he will not go wrong.

2- The Christian household: 3:18-4:1

We have seen when we studied the Epistle to Ephesians how the wives, children and slaves were treated in the ancient days. Here is a brief summary:-

* Under both Jewish and Greek laws, all privileges belonged to the husband and all the duties belonged to the wife. She is looked at as a thing possessed by her husband , just as much as his house, farm, flocks and material goods. She had no legal rights whatsoever. He can divorce her for any reason or no reason at all.

The respectable Greek wife should live in entire seclusion, never to appear in The streets alone not even to go shopping. She was to live in the women’s

Quarters and wouldn't even join her husband for a meal. Now her duties were Servitude and chastity. But her husband could go out as much as he liked, and could enter into extramarital affairs with no stigma at all.

But now, in Christianity and for the first time, we have an ethic of mutual and respectable obligations.

* As for the children, they were not much better off than their mothers. Both the Romans and the Greek had the "***Patria Potestas***" which is the law of the father's power.

Under this law, the father could do anything he liked with his child. He could deny his paternity at his birth. He could leave him in the street if he was born with a defect. He could sell him like a slave. He could make him work like a laborer on his farm. He could even condemn him to death and execute him by his own hands.

As his mother, he had no rights but had all the duties and obligations.

*If this was the case with the wife and the child, then it is obvious that the slave had no hope whatsoever. Of course, he was a thing, a living tool, a possession of his master with no legal rights at all. His master could beat him to death, starve him to death, Inflict any type of corporal punishment, could deny him treatment when sick, could even deny him his daily ration (which was very little anyway) on the account that he was not productive when sick, and leave him to die. Worse than that, when old and of no use to his master, he could be left out in a deserted area to die of hunger, exposure and disease.

As you see, here again another human being had no rights but all obligations.

But thanks to our Lord, in Christianity, no person is without his rights and at the same time no person is without his obligations.

In Christianity, we are to ask our-selves : "What do I owe to others?" not "What others owe to?"

We must realize that all relations are in the Lord ; the whole Christian life is lived in Christ . We must be aware that our Lord Jesus Christ is the unseen but the ever-present guest. He said :” For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.” Mat 18:20.

We must learn to treat our wives and children as God treats His children.

Both masters and servants are servants of God. We shall discuss this in detail.

The mutual obligation : 3:18 - 4:1

Husband and wife : v. 18,19

The wife is to be submissive to her husband ; but the husband is to love his wife as himself. Marriage in Christianity is co-operation and partnership.

Parents and children : v. 20,21

Parents have the obligation to discipline their children and to bring them up in the fear of God , but some parents are always on the top of the child (you should or shouldn't do that, you are not studying, see your cousin Sam he is smarter than you are and they keep banging). This is what Bengel calls "*broken spirit*". You are actually breaking your child's spirit. Yes, you should Discipline your child, but you should also encourage him. Discipline and encouragement should go hand in hand. Neither of them can work alone.

Martin Luther said: "Spare the rod and spoil the child. It is true. But beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he does well."

Masters and servants : 3:22 - 4:1

This section is much longer than the preceding ones because it is important. I have heard a lot of criticism about this passage. People expected Paul to deny, attack and abolish slavery. But this is not the case. He was dealing with a case of a runaway slave who probably robbed his master (Philemon 18,19). So, he is teaching that things should go back to its lawful owners. Not only that, but one should not jump and criticize others without studying the situation.

At the Pauline time, the existence and function of the whole Roman Empire was dependant on slavery. There were 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. They were public servants. Roman nobles and elites were lazy engaged in eating, drinking and lust all day through and most of the night as well. History tells us that Romans used to eat till they were full, then they induce vomiting so that they could go back to eat, and keep doing that all the time they were awake. As we have seen when we were studying Ephesians, slaves were the backbone of the Roman Empire.

They worked as physicians, lawyers, teachers, scribes and practically every Job that kept the Empire going plus the house work.

So, attacking this system means attacking the government and causing chaos and revolt against authority the thing which Paul wouldn't do because defying the governing authority is against Christian teaching.(Titus 3:1).

Not only that, but Paul and Christianity would be looked at as revolting against the Empire and will be openly opposed and Paul would have been imprisoned forever or even killed.

This is the total effect on the whole skeleton of the Empire.

But on the other hand Paul certainly wouldn't encourage the slaves to riot against their masters. Plus, he wouldn't allow a person to do something wrong and get away with it even he is a Christian or a converted Christian. So, Onesimus had to go back to his master and mend the wrong he had done.

Christianity enables us to meet difficulties as better and stronger persons.

Then Paul says that the servant must not render eye-service. The workman must do everything as if he is doing it for Christ.

Then he puts a beautiful contrast here: Slaves never owned anything, but in Christianity, he will receive his inheritance.

As for the masters, they must realize that all work is for God; and that he too has a master- Christ in heaven. He too is answerable to God. He must think in terms of : "This business is God's ; and that God has put him in charge"

So, he must run it as He would run it, and that he is responsible to Him.

The Christian doctrine of work is that both master and servant work for God.

3- The Christian speech: 4:2-6

The Christian prayer: 4:2-4

Paul asks them to continue in prayer and watch.

In Luke 18:1, Jesus spoke a parable unto the disciples that man ought to always pray and not to faint.

And in 1st Thes. 5: 17, Paul urges the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing. Then the word “watch”. One cannot watch without being awake. So, in a sense he is telling them to stay awake and not to fall asleep when they pray. Isn't that true !! So often we are wide awake when we do something important or even when we are playing around, but when we start praying we also start yawning.!!.

This is no wonder, for the three chosen disciples slept while Jesus was praying in Gethsemane although He urged them to stay awake three times.

Then Paul asks them to pray for him. But this request was for his work and not for himself. Nevertheless, this teaches us to pray for others as we discussed in the second week of this study.

Paul asks to pray that he would be given strength and opportunity to do the work which God had sent him to do.

The Christian speech : v. 5,6

*The Christian must conduct himself with wisdom and with tact towards his fellow Christians as well as non-Christians. He must never give the impression of superiority and of censorious criticism.

He must not be a bad advertisement for the faith he represents.

The Christian's responsibility is not only talking about Christ; but showing Him in his daily life.

*The Christian should always be on the look for opportunity, not to profit himself, but to serve Christ and his fellowmen.

*The Christian must have a charm and wit in his speech that he may know how to give the right answer in every case.

4- The Christian friends: 4:7-18

Faithful Friends : 4 : 7-15

It took courage to declare oneself a friend of Paul, and to visit him in prison on regular bases. So, all the men whose names are mentioned in these verses are faithful, sincere and courageous.

Tychicus :

Most probably he was the representative of his church carrying its offerings to the poor saints of Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). He was also the carrier of the Epistle to the Ephesians (Eph 6:21). Here, he is also carrying a verbal message about Paul's personal state, which has no place to be conducted through this Epistle.

Paul gave him three excellent qualities: Beloved brother, Faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. He was the personal convoy of Paul

Onesimus:

We know that he is the runaway slave who is accompanying Tychicus to join Philemon who was his master in Laodicea. But Paul does not call him runaway slave, he calls him a faithful and beloved brother.

Paul here, sets an example: “Try always to find something nice about whom you talk of. If you cannot find something nice at all; then don't talk. But for

sure in the spirit of Christian love to others, you will certainly find something nice to talk about.”

Aristarchus:

A Macedonian from Thessalonica (Acts 20:4), who was a good man to have around.

He was there when the people of Ephesus rioted against Paul and was Captured by the mob (Acts 19:29). He was there when prisoner Paul set sail for Rome. It is not clear how he got on the same ship. It is said that he enrolled himself as Paul’s slave in order that he might be allowed to make the last trip with him.

He is the picture of a man who indeed was a faithful and sincere companion.

Mark:

He was also called Marks, Marcus, John or John Mark. Was a close friend to Peter who called him his son (1 Peter 5:13). When Mark wrote the gospel named after him, it was the preaching material of Peter that he was setting down.

He accompanied Paul and Barnabas (his uncle) in their first missionary trip. but he quit in Perga Pamphylia and went back home (Acts 13 : 5 - 13).

On their 2nd missionary trip, Barnabas wanted to take him with them, but Paul refused to take a quitter; and on this issue they parted company (Acts 15 : 36-40). Then he served with Barnabas but there is no detailed account on this in the scripture. However he ended up as one of those who accompanied Paul in his 2nd imprisonment in Rome. And Paul found him most useful to have him around as is obvious in Philemon 24 & 2 Tim 4 : 11. So, it seems that he redeemed himself and became useful. Fearing that the church in Colosse may not welcome him on account of this previous stigma; Paul instructs the church to receive and welcome him.

His last achievement was in Egypt where he founded the church at Alexandria.

This is a good example of the work of grace in the useless to make him useful and productive. But the best example of all is what the Grace of God did with Paul who was not only useless to Christianity but harmful . he did his utmost best to destroy and kill it while it was just a tiny baby.

Justus:

He was also called Jesus. The scripture did not mention anything about him.

Epaphras:

He was the minister of the church at Colosse (Col 1 :7). He was also the overseer of the churches in the group of three cities : Hierapolis, Laodicea and Colosse. He was a faithful servant of God who was so much disturbed by the heresies which plagued the church which prompted him to travel to Rome to seek Paul’s advice.

Luke:

The beloved physician who was with Paul to the end (2 Tim 4:11). He gave Up his lucrative career to preach the gospel and perhaps to attend to Paul’s thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12 :7)

Dumas:

His name was also mentioned among the group of Paul's fellow-laborers in Philemon 24. But one must wonder why Paul did not mention any appreciation or praise attached to his name like the others?

The answer is found in 2nd Timothy 4: 10 where we read "For Dumas has forsaken me, having loved this present world and is departed unto Thessalonica."

Here is one example of those who refused to be remade by Christ.

Nymphas:

He lived in Laodicea and had the church gathering in his house. From this, we know that there were at least two churches in Laodicea: one in this house and the other in Philemon's. As we know, there was no church buildings in those times but the faithful believers used to gather for prayers, hymns and sharing the Lord's supper in one of the houses which would be big enough to accommodate them all ; and if not, then they meet in a second house. And if they suffer persecution, then they meet under ground as was the case in Rome.

We mentioned the church in the house of Philemon, and the scripture tells us also about the house of Aquila and Priscilla in Rome and in Ephesus (Rom. 16: 3 -5 & 1 Cor 16 : 19).

Those great faithful people had churches in their homes.

Shouldn't our homes be a church of our Lord?!

As for the mystery of the letter to Laodicea in verse 16, I prefer to leave this for discussion at the end of this study.

The closing blessing : v. 17,18

"Remember my bonds" Again and again, Paul refers to his bonds (Eph 3:1 ; 4:1 ;6:20 and Philemon 9). In his letter to Galatia, he also says : " I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus " (Gal 6:18). Here he does not self-pity himself, nor does he ask for sympathy. These chains and sufferings are his Qualifying documents which give him the right and authority to speak. As if he is saying : "This is not a letter from someone who did not experience the suffering for Christ, or someone who is asking others to do what he himself is not prepared to do. My only right to speak is that I too have carried the cross of Christ my Lord.

Alford comments movingly : "When we read of his chains, we should not forget that they moved (with noise) over the paper as he signed it. His hand was chained to the soldier who guarded him."

Then the letter comes to its end (as in all his epistles) by commending others to that **Grace** which he himself had found sufficient for all things. (2 Cor. 12: 9)

The Mystery of the letter to Laodicea:

There are four views to this so called mystery; but whichever view one takes, the fact still remains that there was a letter to Laodicea because Paul said so :-

1- We have at hand 13 letters written by Paul; all (but one) are for different Churches and disciples of his. This one is to Philemon.

Paul must have written several other personal letters during the span of his fifteen year ministry, which we do not know of; and they were all lost or

disregarded by the early church fathers as being personal. They may have kept the one to Philemon because it tells about the transformation of a runaway criminal slave who became a useful child of God.

Fifty years later, the history of the church tells us that **Ignatius** a martyr from Antioch, passed by Ephesus on his way to Rome to be executed, wrote a letter speaking highly of the bishop of Ephesus whose name was **Onesimus** . If this was the same person mentioned in the letter to Philemon, then since we know that collecting the scripture of the New Testament started in Ephesus, we should think in the role Onesimus played to keep the letter to Philemon though it is a personal letter to show the whole world the work of Grace in him.

- 2- The letter referred to may have been the one we know now as the epistle to the Ephesians. Please refer to our previous study of Ephesians.
- 3- It may have been the letter to Philemon who had the church meetings in his House. In some new translations of the New Testament; verse 12 in Philemon is translated as such “ I am referring his (Onesimus) case to you “ which was taken as addressing the church; and this means that the letter was to the church.
- 4- There actually exists an alleged letter of Paul to Laodicea written in Latin, and which is actually included in the **Codex Fuldensis** of the Latin New Testament. It was mentioned by **Jerome** in the 5th century A.D.; who pronounced it forgery.

It is literally a translation of a Greek original. It is clearly as we shall see, made up of phrases taken from the epistle to Philippians with the opening introduction taken from Galatians. The common belief, is that it was written by a Pious writer (probably a monk) who read about it in the Epistle to Colossians and knew that it was lost, and so he proceeded to compose what he thought appropriate to be such a letter.

Here is a copy of this alleged letter:-

Paul an apostle, not by men neither through any man, but through Jesus Christ to the brothers who are at Laodicaea, Grace be to you and peace from God the father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ. I thank Christ in every one of my prayers that you remain steadfast in Him, and that you persevere in His work, awaiting His promise on the day of judgment.

let not the empty words of certain men seduce you, words of men who try to persuade you that you should turn away from the truth of the gospel which is preached by me(There follows a verse where the text is uncertain).

And now my bonds which I suffer in Christ are plain for all to see; in them I delight and joy. And this will result for me in everlasting salvation, a result which will be brought about by your prayers, and by the help of the Holy Spirit, whether by my life or by my death. For to me to live is to be in Christ, and to die is joy. And may He in His mercy bring this very thing to pass in you, that you may have the same love, and that you may be of the one mind.

Therefore, my best-beloved, as you have heard in my presence, so hold to these things and do them in fear of God, and then there will be to you life for eternity; for it is God who works in you. And do without wavering whatever you do.

As for what remains, best-beloved, rejoice in Christ ; beware of those who are sordid in their desire for gain. Let all your prayers be made known before God; and be you firm in the mind of Christ.

Do the things which are pure, and true, and modest, and just, and lovely .

Hold fast what you have heard and received into your heart; and you will have peace.

The saints salute you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Cause that this letter be read to the Colossians, and that the letter of the Colossians be read to you.

+++ God Bless You All +++