

COLOSSE

[kah luh SEE]-- a city in the Roman province of ASIA (western Turkey), situated in the Lycus River Valley about 160 kilometers (100 miles) east of Ephesus. The apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church at Colosse (Col. 1:2); (Colossae, NASB, NEB, RSV). The Christian community at Colosse apparently grew up under the leadership of Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12) and Archippus (Col. 4:17; Philem. 2). Philemon and Onesimus lived at Colosse (Col. 4:9).



Colosse formed a triangle with two other cities of the Lycus Valley, Hierapolis and Laodicea, both of which are mentioned in the New Testament. As early as the fifth century B. C., Colosse was known as a prosperous city; but by the beginning of the Christian era it was eclipsed by its two neighbors. Thereafter its reputation declined to a small town.

Shortly after the apostle Paul sent his epistle to Colosse, the cities of the Lycus Valley suffered a devastating earthquake in A. D. 61. They were soon rebuilt, even Laodicea, which had suffered the greatest damage. Although Colosse was increasingly overshadowed by Laodicea and Hierapolis, it retained considerable importance into the second and third centuries A. D. Later, the population of Colosse moved to Chonai (modern Honaz), three miles to the south. The mound which marks the site of Colosse remains uninhabited today.

(from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary) (Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

One of four shorter epistles written by Paul while he was in prison, the others being Philippians, Ephesians, and Philemon. The Epistle to the Colossians focuses on the person and work of Jesus Christ. It reaches heights of expression that rival anything said of Christ elsewhere in Scripture. Colossians shares many similarities in style and content with Ephesians. Colossians probably was written as a companion to the brief letter to Philemon (compare (Col. 4:7-13) and (Philem. 12,24)).

Structure of the Epistle. Colossians is neatly divided, as are most of Paul's epistles, into doctrinal (chaps. 1--2) and practical (chaps. 3--4) sections. Following the opening address (1:1-2), Paul expresses his thankfulness for the faith, love, hope, and example of the Colossians (1:3-8). He then develops a majestic hymn to Christ, emphasizing His role in both creation and redemption (1:9-23). In light of the surpassing worth of Christ and His work, Paul willingly accepts the obligation to proclaim Christ and to suffer for Him (1:24--2:5). He also appeals to the Colossians to take root in Christ rather than in confusing speculations (2:6-23).

In the second section, Paul urges the Colossian Christians to mold their behavior to fit

their beliefs. Since believers share in Christ's resurrection (3:1-4), Paul encourages them to continue living to please God. He urges them to "put to death" various vices and to "put on" the character of Christ (3:5-17). True Christianity also works itself out in social relationships between wives and husbands (3:18-19), children and parents (3:20-21), and slaves and masters (3:22-4:1). Paul concludes with a note on witnessing to unbelievers (4:2-6) and his customary greetings (3:7-18).

Authorship and Date. Colossians was written by Paul (and (Timothy, 1:1)) to a Christian community (perhaps "house churches," (1:2; 4:15)) which he had not visited (2:1). Paul had established a resident ministry in Ephesus, 100 miles west of Colossae. For more than two years the influence of his ministry reached "all who dwelt in Asia" (Acts 19:10). Epaphras must have heard Paul in Ephesus and then carried the gospel to Colosse (1:7-8; 4:12-13).

Paul wrote the epistle from prison (4:3,10,18), but he did not indicate where he was imprisoned. Caesarea and Ephesus have been suggested, but the most probable place is Rome (Acts 28:30). This would date the epistle in the late 50s or early 60s.

Historical Setting. False teaching had taken root in Colosse. This teaching combined Jewish observances (2:16) and pagan speculation (2:8); it is possible that this resulted in an early form of GNOSTICISM. This teaching pretended to add to or improve upon the gospel that, indirectly at least, had come from Paul. Some of the additions Paul mentions are feasts and observances, some of them related to ASTROLOGY (2:16), plus a list of rules (2:20). These practices were then included within a philosophy in which angels played a leading role (2:18); Paul calls this philosophy "the basic principles of the world" (2:8).

Theological Contribution. Paul unmasks the false teaching as "empty deceit... of men" (2:8), having the "appearance of wisdom" (2:23), but useless in fact. He declared that the addition of such things dilutes rather than strengthens the faith (2:20).

But Paul does more than denounce false teaching. The best medicine is a firm grip on who Jesus Christ is and what He did for our salvation. In Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3), and "in Him all fullness" dwells (1:19). In fact, "He is the image of the invisible God" (1:15). He has stripped every power opposed to Him (2:15), wiped out every accusation against us (2:14), and actually "reconciled all things to Himself" (1:20). He is not only head of the church (1:18); but He stands before all time and above every power, and at the end of all history (1:16).

This beautiful epistle on the majesty of Jesus Christ speaks to us today as much as to the Colossians. It reminds us that Jesus Christ is sufficient for every need and is still the most powerful force in the world.

(from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary) (Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

The Colossian Heresy

One of the puzzles of the New Testament is what the heresy was at Colosse. It may not have survived to be recorded in the history books. Perhaps it was a form of Gnosticism, as that doctrine took many, sometimes contradictory, forms. Even if we cannot accurately name the heresy, we can see some of its major teachings.

1. An underlying principle of the heresy is that all matter is evil.
2. There was an attack on the adequacy and unique supremacy of Christ. 1:15,19; 2:2,9.
3. There was an attack on Jesus' role in the creation process. 1:16,17.
4. There was a question about Jesus' real humanity. 1:22; 2:9.
5. There may have been an astrological element to the heretical teaching. 2:8,10
6. The heresy made much of the power of demons. 1:16; 2:10, 15.
7. There was an appeal to philosophy in the heresy. 2:8
8. They stressed observance of special days and rituals. 2:16.
9. There was an ascetic element to the heresy. 2:16, 21.
10. There were antinomian tendencies in the heresy. 3:5-8.
11. There was angel worship. 2:18.
12. There was elitism. 1:28.

There are lessons in Colossians beyond the text.

1. Paul wrote to a church in a small town.
2. He wrote against the heresy but did not name the teachers of it.
3. The doctrines of the book are advanced by our standards. The readers were capable.
4. The focus on the book is on the supremacy of Christ. He was not dealing with trivial issues.

Colossians Outlined

(Book outline from Nelson's Bible Dictionary)

Part One: The Supremacy of Christ in the Church (1:1-2:23)

- I. Introduction 1:1-14
 - A. Paul's Greeting to the Colossians 1:1-2
 - B. Paul's Thanksgiving for the Colossians 1:3-8
 - C. Paul's Prayer for the Colossians 1:9-14

- II. The Preeminence of Christ 1:15-2:3
 - A. Christ Is Preeminent in Creation 1:15-18
 - B. Christ Is Preeminent in Redemption 1:19-23
 - C. Christ Is Preeminent in the Church 1:24-2:3

- III. The Freedom in Christ 2:4-23
 - A. Freedom from Enticing Words 2:4-7
 - B. Freedom from Vain Philosophy 2:8-10
 - C. Freedom from the Judgment of Men 2:11-17
 - D. Freedom from Improper Worship 2:18-19
 - E. Freedom from the Doctrine of Men 2:20-23

Part Two: The Submission to Christ in the Church (3:1-4:18)

- I. The Position of the Believer 3:1-4

- II. The Practice of the Believer 3:5-4:6
 - A. Put Off the Old Man 3:5-11
 - B. Put On the New Man 3:12-17
 - C. Personal Commands for Holiness 3:18-4:6
 - 1. Holiness in Family Life 3:18-21
 - 2. Holiness in Work Life 3:22-4:1
 - 3. Holiness in Public Life 4:2-6

- III. Conclusion 4:7-18
 - A. Commendation of Tychicus 4:7-9
 - B. Greetings from Paul's Friends 4:10-14
 - C. Introduction Regarding This Letter 4:15-18

AN INTRODUCTION¹ TO THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

I. AUTHOR: THE APOSTLE PAUL²

A. External Evidence: Paul is strongly affirmed to be the author of Colossians

1. Colossians was undisputedly Pauline until the nineteenth century
 - a. The Later Church Fathers accepted it³
 - b. It was not disputed in the later decades:
 - 1) It was probably used as early Justin⁴
 - 2) It was included in Marcion's canonical list (c. 140) and in the Muratorian canon (c. 170)
2. This letter is included in the Chester Beatty papyri (P46)⁵

B. Internal Evidence:⁶ Even though there are concerns by modern, critical scholars about Pauline authorship, the evidence for Pauline authorship is not overturned:

1. The primary objections to Pauline authorship are the divergence in literary style, vocabulary, and syntax from Paul's other writings.⁷ Also it was believed that Paul was combating the heresy of second-century Gnosticism. But literary differences can be explained by appealing to the new content of the letter, the heresy which he is addressing, and Paul's adaptation of traditional material. Also, there is no need to understand the heresy as a second-century Gnosticism (see below)
2. There are close links between Colossians and Philemon (the latter of which is generally unquestioned as a genuine work of Paul):
 - a. Both include Paul and Timothy's name in the opening greeting (Col. 1:1; Phm. 1)
 - b. Both include greetings from those with Paul at this time, namely, Aristarchus, Mark, Epaphras, Luke, and Demas (Col. 4:10-14; Phm. 23, 24)
 - c. Archippus is called a "fellow soldier" in

- Philemon 2 and directed to fulfill his ministry in Colossians 4:17
- d. Onesimus, concerning whom Philemon is written, is mentioned in Colossians 4:9 as being sent with Tychicus and as bring “one of you”
3. Paul is specifically identified in the letter to the Colossians:
- a. The mention of Timothy along with Paul in the prescript is customary in the undisputed letters of Paul ⁸
 - b. The author follows the Pauline practice of conveying his personal greetings from his fellow workers to the congregation by means of a dispatched message (4:8)
 - c. The author follows the Pauline practice of closing the letter with his personal signature, as well as, making mention of his own situation as prisoner⁹
 - d. Paul is identified in the body of the letter (1:23ff)
 - e. Paul ties his apostleship to the same tradition of Jesus Christ (1:23ff; 2:6)
 - f. The expression, “I, Paul” is typical in the Pauline corpus to render his persona¹⁰

II. LOCATION AND DATE: FROM ROME IN AD 60-61.

- A. Location:¹¹** Paul’s (first) Roman Imprisonment:
1. Until recently, Rome was considered by most to be the location from which Paul wrote¹²
 2. Caesarea: Some¹³ understand Caesarea to be the location of writing, but this is unlikely for the following reasons:
 - a. It is unlikely that a runaway slave (Philemon) would have fled to Caesarea to escape detection and would have found access to Paul like he would have in Rome (where Paul was under house-arrest)
 - b. Paul expects to be released in the near

- future since he requests Philemon to prepare him lodging (Phm. 22) and this probably would not have been the case at Caesarea where Paul knew that his only hope was to appeal to Caesar
- c. It is unlikely that Caesarea was the home of active missionary work requiring such a large staff of Paul's co-workers of Gentile origin for Philemon to seek refuge, and it does not seem that this small harbor city was the center of vigorous propaganda suggested in Colossians 4:3,4¹⁴
3. Ephesus:¹⁵ Some¹⁶ understand Ephesus to be the location of writing, but this is unlikely for the following reasons:
- a. No evidence exists to affirm that Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus (Acts 19)¹⁷
 - b. It is unlikely that a runaway slave (Philemon) would have fled to Ephesus and remained there long enough to know Paul since it was no more than 100 miles away from Colossae
 - c. The "we" sections of Acts do not allow for Luke to have been with Paul while he was in Ephesus (Acts 16:10ff; 20:6,13ff; cf. Col. 4:14)
4. Rome:¹⁸ The most probably location of writing was probably Rome for the following reasons
- a. This is a known imprisonment of Paul's which allows for the events reflected in Colossians and Philemon
 - b. Acts supports Luke's presence in Rome with Paul (the "we" sections; Acts 27:2ff)
 - c. Paul was under house-arrest in Rome which would have allowed him visitors such as co-workers and Onesimus
 - d. The imperial capital would have allowed the run-away slave Onesimus to seek anonymity and then asylum in Paul's presence there
 - e. No other imprisonment in Acts seems to be a

- real alternative (Philippi in Acts 16:23-40; Caesarea in Acts 24:27)
- f. Travel between Rome and the east was frequent and not too formidable a task to make the communications between the prison epistles possible
 - g. Although not determinative, the doctrinal outlook of Colossians seems to belong to a later rather than to an earlier period supporting a Roman origin over one in Ephesus¹⁹
 - h. It is very probable that Aristarchus accompanied Paul to Rome (Acts 27:2; cf. Col. 4:10) and thus shared in his imprisonment
 - i. Even though Paul intended to go on to Spain from Rome (Rom. 1:10ff; 15:19ff) it is not possible to know with certainty what he did upon his release. He could have changed his mind, or at least changed his immediate plans and thus gone to Colossae
- B. Date: If the Roman hypothesis is accepted, then it is likely that Paul wrote Colossians early²⁰ in his (first) Roman imprisonment (i.e., AD 60-61)

III. THE COLOSSIAN HERESY²¹

A. The Nature of the Heresy--Explicit and Implicit

Indications about the Colossian Problem:²²

1. Explicit Teaching of the Opponents:
 - a. It emphasized abstinence from certain foods and some types of drink 2:16,22
 - b. It required the observance of Jewish feasts and sabbaths at different intervals 2:16
 - c. It stressed "self-abasement" and visions 2:18,23
 - d. It involved angelic worship--either as the object of worship or as the subject of worship (i.e., doing worship) 2:18
 - e. It taught the need for some kind of worship which was human in origin, a "self-made

- religion-worship 2:23
- f. It praised the value of treating the body severely 2:23²³
 - g. It was depicted by Paul as “Philosophy and empty deceit” espousing the “elementary principles of the world” (2:8)
2. Implicit References in the Book:
- a. It demoted Christ from his supreme place 1:13-20; 2:9ff
 - b. It seems to have as a catchword the term/phrase “fullness” [of deity] 1:19; 2:9
 - c. It claimed to promote higher spirituality. Paul counters with the argument that they are spiritually complete in Christ (2:10) and warns that the rules and regulations of this religious system only promote the indulgence of the flesh 2:23
 - d. It probably required circumcision of adherents 2:11; cf. 3:11
 - e. It may have misconstrued the death-burial-resurrection motif 2:12,13,20; 3:1-5
 - f. It cast doubt on the completeness of forgiveness in Christ 1:14; 2:13-14; 3:13

B. Possible Sources of the Heresy:²⁴

1. Essenism:
 - a. B. Lightfoot was the major proponent of this position affirming many parallels between the Heresy and the asceticism of this Jewish group²⁵
 - b. Even though there are some parallels, there is no evidence that they lived in the western portions of Asia Minor
 - c. While this explains the emphasis on higher knowledge and special revelation, it fails to explain the mystical experiences which are apparent in the epistle
2. Greek Pagan Cults:
 - a. There are many theories along this line of thinking: Neopythagoreanism, mystery

- religions, pre-Christian Gnosticism, the Iranian Redemption myth, the initiation into the Isis mysteries
- b. This is an attempt to emphasize the Hellenism on the church at the time
 - c. While some of these “cults” actually fight against one another, there is no doubt that the Heresy in Colossae was influenced by the Hellenism of their day; it is difficult to be even more specific
3. Gnosticism:
- a. Gnosticism was a “religious movement that proclaimed a mystical esotericism for the elect based on illumination and the acquisition of a higher knowledge of things heavenly and divine” ²⁶
 - b. However, there was not a pre-Christian Gnosticism and it is doubtful that the biblical writers were fighting a known foe called Gnosticism
 - c. There may well have be roots of a Christian Gnosticism (incipient Gnosticism) which later became the Gnosticism of the second and third centuries AD
4. Syncretistic Religion:
- a. The heresy contains a combination of parts of many of the above views wherein Jews and Gentiles are attempting to advance beyond apostolic Christianity
 - b. This view is very possible and perhaps even diplomatic
5. Jewish Mysticism--the Merkabah Mysticism²⁷
- a. The merkabah mysticism consisted of “religious exercises designed to facilitate entry into the vision of the heavenly chariot (hb*K*r+m#) with God visibly enthroned above it--the vision granted to Ezekiel when he was called to his prophetic ministry (Ezek. 1:15-28)” ²⁸
 - b. In order to obtain such a vision it was

necessary to observe:

- 1) The Mosaic Law concerning purification
 - 2) A period of asceticism of 12 to 40 days
 - 3) The mediatorial role of angels when the heavenly ascent was attempted
- c. There are possible parallels to this concept in rabbinic experience, Paul's experience (2 Cor. 12), other Jewish writings like 1 Enoch 14:8-23, Daniel 7:9-10, and later Gnosticism²⁹
6. Conclusion:
- a. A definitive conclusion about the source of the heresy is not possible since so many possibilities exist
 - b. It is very possible, however, that the view of Jewish mysticism is more closely tied to the heresy in view of the Jewish elements which are certainly involved
 - c. Perhaps this Jewish mysticism became a later expression of Gnosticism

IV. ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH:

A. The City of Colossae:

1. Was in the Lycus valley
2. Was about 100 miles east (inland) of Ephesus
3. Had the important cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis as its neighbors where Christian churches had been established (Col. 4:13)

B. The Founding of the Church:

1. It seems that Paul had never visited the church (Col. 1:4; 2:1)
2. It seems that Epaphras acquainted Paul with the Colossians' 'love in the Spirit' (Col. 1:8; 4:12-13)
3. It seems reasonable to assume that the church originated as a result of Paul's ministry among those at Ephesus (Acts 19:10)
 - a. Perhaps this was actually accomplished through Epaphras who instructed those in

Colossae (Col. 1:12-13)

- b. Therefore, perhaps Ephahras was converted through Paul's ministry in Ephesus

V. PURPOSES FOR COLOSSIANS:

- A. To provide advice about the dangerous heresy which had arisen in Colossae and was threatening the security of the church in all of the Lycus valley (cf. 4:16)
- B. To answer the heretical issues by asserting the absolute, direct, and continuing supremacy of Christ over all of creation (1:15--3:4)
- C. To encourage his readers to live life (personally, within the church, in the home, and in their relationships) in view of Christ as supreme over all of creation (3:5--4:6)
- D. To encourage the churches in the Lycus valley to maintain their orderly Christian lives as well as their stability in the faith in the face of the threat of the false teachers 2:2-5³⁰

VI. A COMPARISON OF EPHESIANS AND COLOSSIANS:31

EPHESIANS	COLOSSIANS
Emphasizes the Body (Church)	Emphasizes the Head (Christ)
The spirit is pastoral	The spirit is polemical
The emphasis is on oneness in Christ	The emphasis is on completeness in Christ

¹ Much of what follows is adapted from: T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, ICC, pp. xvii-lxlv; F. F. Bruce, "Colossian Problems Part 3: The Colossian Heresy": *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (1984): 194-208; Carson, Herbert M. *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and Philemon*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 11-25; Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction*, pp. 346-350; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp. 454-563; Geisler, Norman L.

“Colossians,” in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, pp. 667-669; Everett F. Harrison, *Colossians: Christ All-Sufficient*, Everyman’s Bible Commentary, 7-16; H. Wayne House, “Doctrinal Issues in Colossians: Heresies in the Colossian Church.” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 149 (1992): 45-59; Ralph P. Martin, Colossians and Philemon, *The New Century Bible Commentary*, pp. 1-41; Peter O’Brien, Colossians, *Word Biblical Commentary*, pp. xxvi-liv; Curtis Vaughan, “Colossians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, pp. 163-171.

2 This is not to deny that Paul may have used other materials (e.g., 1:15-20).

3 Polycarp (c. 110-150) Philippians 10:1 [cf. Col. 1:23]; 11:2 [Col. 3:5]; Ignatius (c. 110), Ephesians 10:2 [Col. 1:23]; Irenaeus (c. 130-202), *Adv. Haer.* 3.14.1; Tertullian (c. 150-220), *De Praescr. Haer.* 7; Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215), *Strom.* 1.1; ; Trallians 5:2 [Col. 1:16]; Epistle to Diognetus 10:7 [Col. 4:1]. See Geisler, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, pp. 188, 193.

4 C. 150-155, *Dialogue*, 85.2; 138.2.

5 The second Chester Beatty Biblical papyrus contains ten Epistles which are considered to be of Paul in the following order: Romans, Hebrews, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians and dates from about the year AD 200 (Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, p. 37).

6 Even though Childs does not hold to Paul himself as the author due to “stylistic and philological evidence,” he must link it with Paul canonically and affirms with Schweizer that it “is not post-Pauline” (*The NT as Canon*, pp. 345-349).

7 The first one to seriously question the authorship of Colossians was E. T. Mayerhoff in 1838, and his theory was developed by F. S. Baur and the Tübingen school.

8 See 2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon.

9 See 1 Corinthians 16:21; Philemon 19; 2 Thessalonians 3:17.

10 See Philemon 19; 2 Corinthians 10:1; Galatians 5:2; 1 Thessalonians 2:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:17; Ephesians 3:1.

11 The only textual clues in Colossians that Paul is in prison are: 4:3,10,18. But none of these cite the location of the imprisonment.

12 Although the Marcionite Prologue had the opinion that the Epistle was written from Ephesus [“The apostle already in fetters

writes to them from Ephesus”] even though the Prologue to Philemon claimed that that letter was written from Rome (Guthrie, NTI, p. 555).

The “subscript” which was added at a later date asserts: “written from Rome by Tychicus and Onesimus.” Also Eusebius reports that Paul was brought to Rome and that Aristarchus was with him (History, 2.22.1; see O’Brien, Colossians. p. 1.).

13 Lohmeyer, Dibelius-Greeven, Reicke, J. J. Gunther, Goguel, deZwaan.

14 O’Brien, Colossians, p. lii.

15 For a more thorough discussion see Guthrie, NTI, pp. 472-478.

16 Deissmann, Michaelis, Duncan.

17 Even though Aristarchus was seized by mob-violence in Ephesus (Acts 19:29), there is no specific mention of arrest for him or for Paul.

18 See O’Brien for counter view (Colossians, p. li).

19 See O’Brien, Colossians, p. liii; Guthrie, NTI, p. 557; Childs, *The NT as Canon*, 346-349; Bruce, *Paul, The Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, pp. 411-412.

20 Philemon 9 suggests that Colossians-Philemon may have been written early in the imprisonment, “yet for love’s sake I prefer to appeal to you--I, Paul, an ambassador and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus--.” The term for “now” (nuniv) is more emphatic than nu’n and suggests that Paul’s imprisonment had only just begun at the time he wrote (O’Brien, Philemon, p. 290).

21 Some good reading on this subject may be found in the survey article by H. Wayne House, “Heresies in the Colossian Church,” *Bib. Sac.* 149 (January-March, 1992): 45-59. Although Bruce once held to an “early and simple form of gnosticism” (Paul: *Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, p. 413), he later changed to a defense of a form of Jewish Mysticism which he identifies as “Merkabah Mysticism” in “Colossian Problems Part 3: The Colossian Heresy,” *Bib. Sac.* 141 (July-September 1984): 195-208.

22 Adapted from a paper by Herb Bateman, “Introductory Matters for Colossians”.

23 This may only be a development of points a and b above.

24 There is no way in which one can be certain about the historical origin of this heresy. Morna Hooker even disputed the existence of a heresy in the Colossian church in her paper, “Were There False Teachers in Colossae?” in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, edited by B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 315-331. However, Bruce seems to be correct when he affirms that “Yes, there were false

teachers in Colossae” (“The Colossian Heresy,” *Bib Sac* 141 [1984]: 195; see also Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free, p. 413).

25 J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (1879; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 73-113.

26 Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960), p. 1.

27 F. F. Bruce, “The Colossian Heresy,” *Bib.Sac.* 141 (1984): 201-204.

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 201-202.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 202-203.

30 These verses express the goal of this letter, and thus explain the applicational section which Paul picks up in chapters 3--4. The false teachers were threatening unified living under the work of Christ (in the home and toward outsiders). Paul is correcting the erroneous instruction which could lead the church astray, and then reaffirming their orderly Christian life and stable faith under the proper view of Christ.

31 Adapted from Stanley D. Toussaint, “Colossians” (unpublished class notes in 308 Pauline Epistles and Revelation, *Dallas Theological Seminary*, Fall 1983), p. 2.

11996 David Malick, <http://www.bible.org>. Anyone is free to reproduce this material and distribute it, but it may not be sold under any circumstances whatsoever without the author's consent.

Introduction:

1. The Book of Ephesians stressed the importance of the church while Colossians puts the main focus on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Usually Paul wrote to churches that he founded. In this case, he is writing to one that was founded by his disciple Epaphras.

1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

- A. As in most of his letters, **Paul** identifies himself in the opening sentence. These books were originally scrolls and the reader did not need to unroll it to learn who wrote the letter.
- B. He was more than an **apostle**, which means *a person who was sent or a messenger*. He was **an apostle of Christ Jesus**.
- C. In turn, all of this was an expression of the **will of God**. God had selected him from birth. Galatians 1:15 - 16.
- D. It would be hard to imagine a stronger claim to inspiration — to being a spokesman for God.
- E. He was assisted by **Timothy** who was probably the writer, secretary or amanuensis. Christian leaders should have men in training rather than doing everything themselves. Having done things both ways, this writer can affirm that it is easier to do things yourself, but the Lord did not ask us to do things the easiest way, but the most effective.

2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ (that are) at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

- A. The assumption is that the church is like a family. We are **brethren**.
- B. **In Christ** has its familiar meaning. It is by baptism that we enter Christ. Colossians 2:12 - 13.

- C. This is the familiar Gentile / Jewish greeting. The Gentiles commonly used **grace** while the Jews in Israel still use **peace** as a greeting at this time.

3 We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

- A. Nearly every letter from Paul has a comment about **thanks** or thanksgiving near the opening. Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4; Eph. 1:15-16; Phil. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 1:3; Philemon 1:3.
- B. **Thanksgiving** is an anchor in Christian development. Failing to develop it will leave us without the joy and understanding expected in Christian living.
- C. The relationship of the **Father** and Son is clearly laid out. Need we call attention to the virgin birth of Jesus?
- D. The fullest designation is used. He is **Lord** to the Gentiles, **Jesus** to his friends and **Christ** to the Jews. It is reassuring to remember that Saul of Tarsus considered him to be an imposter.
- E. Even though these were not Paul's direct converts, yet he **prayed** for them regularly.

4 having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have toward all the saints, 5 because of the hope which is laid up for you in the heavens, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel,

- A. The kind of news (**having heard**) that Paul listened to was usually positive and upbeat.
- B. This church was focused correctly as we see in the following points:
- C. Their **faith** looked back to Jesus and his resurrection.
- D. Their **love** looked toward all of their brethren in the present time.

- E. Their **hope** looked forward to heaven.
- F. Some writers suggest that the leading feature of Epaphras' preaching was the believer's **hope** in the Lord.

6 which is come unto you; even as it is also in all the world bearing fruit and increasing, as *it doth* in you also, since the day ye heard and knew the grace of God in truth;

- A. The **truth** of the gospel had penetrated their community just as it had others.
- B. The message of Jesus should never be received passively. He intended for believers to bear **fruit**. John 15:16. Note the change of metaphor from that of person to that of a tree **bearing fruit**.
- C. It is the same message in every town. It is not culturally adapted for each community.
- D. This salvation that we enjoy proceeds from the **grace of God**. We didn't earn it and we don't deserve it.
- E. When Paul says **truth**, he speaks without fear of contradiction. There must have been those who considered him arrogant and elitist.
- F. Wherever the **truth** of the message penetrates, lives are changed.

**7 even as ye learned of Epaphras our beloved fellow-servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf,
8 who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.**

- A. **Epaphras** is a shortened form of *Epaphroditus*. However, that does not mean he is the same person as the messenger from Philippi. Paul may have been faced with two men with identical names, so he assigned the full name to one man and the shortened form to the other, just as we would *Frederick* and *Fred*.
- B. **Fellow-servant**. **Epaphras** has worked with Paul over time. One of his tasks has been to represent Paul to the church at Colosse.

- C. It is thought that **Epaphras** may have been imprisoned, too, based on Philemon 23.
- D. Paul's credentials were set forth in the opening sentence. This verse sets forth their credential: **love in the Spirit**.

9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray and make request for you, that ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

- A. While in verse 3 above, Paul gave thanks for them, here he reveals some **requests** that had accompanied that thanksgiving.
- B. **Not ceasing** means not stopping the regular practice of **praying** for them, *not praying continuously*.
- C. The **prayer** was that they might have added **knowledge** with the **wisdom** to use it properly.

10 to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

- A. Doing things that are **pleasing to the Lord** is a principal guideline of Christian conduct. It serves far better than rules and regulations.
- B. For the **pleasing** guideline to work, we need to learn as much as we can about what **God** is like. That way we can make better decisions.
- C. See our extensive notes on Ephesians 5:10.

11 strengthened with all power, according to the might of his glory, unto all patience and longsuffering with joy;

- A. **Strengthened with all power** sounds like Ephesians 3:16 where believers are strengthened by the *Spirit* in the inward person. So God is at work in their lives.
- B. **Patience**; *makroqumian*; Patience with people.- Barclay.

- C. **Longsuffering;** ὑπομονη; *hupomone* -- the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings - Thayer.
- D. One writer says that **joy** not rooted in the soil of suffering is shallow.

12 giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light;

- A. The sense is that the Colossians would be **giving thanks unto the Father**. It is a great objective of the faith that the **Father** would receive **thanks** from his new creation.
- B. **Made us meet** is a left over from King James days. *Qualified us* is used by several translations. Believers have been qualified for the eternal **inheritance**. Jewish Christians would understand this promise.
- C. God qualified his people to leave Egypt. Exodus 12:1 - 8. They had to prepare for the event.
- D. **Inheritance** always looks to the future and final reward. We do not receive it now. That generation that left Egypt looked forward to inheriting the promised land. Leviticus 20:24.
- E. **Light** has always contrasted with darkness (next verse) in the moral realm.

13 who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love;

- A. The text is speaking of the Father **who has delivered us**. God has won a battle with the **power of darkness**. The language is reminiscent of Israel leaving Egypt. See Exodus 18:9 - 10.
- B. Furthermore, believers have been **translated into the kingdom** of Christ. Presently, we are in the **kingdom**, although not its final consummation which is always spoken of as *inheriting*. This idea of being in the kingdom now harmonizes with Matthew 16:18 - 19 where the *kingdom of heaven* and the *church* are used interchangeably.

- C. Indeed, Jesus is the **Son of his love**. Not only does the Father **love** the **Son**, but the **Son** is also an expression of the Father's **love**.

14 in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins:

- A. In the Son, **we have our redemption**. Like helpless slaves in the market place, we have been purchased from the power of darkness by God's gift of grace. God promised to **redeem** his people from Egypt.
- B. The exact outcome of that **redemption** is that **our sins are forgiven**. **Redemption** and **forgiveness** are equals.
- C. The Old Testament has promised forgiveness of sins. Jeremiah 31:31-34

15 who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;

- A. N. T. Wright believes that verses 15 through 20 form a hymn or a poem.
- B. What is the Son like? He is the visible image of the **invisible God**.
- C. This allows us to have a material view of the **invisible God** — through Christ.
- D. Some have read the second phrase and demoted the Son, saying that He was the first creature of God's creation. Not so.
- E. The term **firstborn** also means *the one who is preeminent*.
- F. W. E. Vine says:

FIRST-BEGOTTEN, FIRSTBORN: *prototokos* "firstborn" (from *protos*, "first," and *tikto*, "to beget"), is used of Christ as born of the Virgin Mary, Luke 2:7; further, in His relationship to the Father, expressing His priority to, and preeminence over, creation, not in the sense of being the "first" to be born. It is used occasionally of superiority of position in the OT, see Ex 4:22; Deut 21:16,17, the prohibition being

against the evil of assigning the privileged position of the "firstborn" to one born subsequently to the "first" child.

(from *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

- G. That Jesus is not part of creation is seen in the way **firstborn** is used in Hebrews 1:6. Consider Psalm 89:27 and Hebrews 12:23.

16 for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him;

- A. Jesus is the **creator**. He made everything. If we can see it or touch it, he **created** it. John 1:3 "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." NASU

Psalm 105:22-27; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 3:9.

- B. Hebrews 1:2 ". . . in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world." NASU

17 and he is before all things, and in him all things consist.

- A. This phrase seals the definition of the *firstborn*. Jesus was not the *first of all things* but *before all things* and the *creator of all things*.

- B. The Creator is all powerful:

The Creation is for Him. Hebrews 2:10.

He was prior to creation. Isaiah 44:6.

He maintains the creation. John 5:17-18; Hebrews 1:3.

18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

- A. Paul uses three words in this one sentence to show the preeminence of Jesus: **head, beginning, firstborn.**
- B. In addition to being the head of all creation (vs. 16), He is **head of the church.**

- C. He **heads** the church. Ephesians 1:22.
He is the **beginning**. Revelation 21:6.
He is the preeminent one **from the dead**. 1 Corinthians 15:20-23.
His goal is first place. Psalm 89:27; 1 Corinthians 15:25-28.
- D. **Firstborn from the dead** implies that others will rise, too. John 5:28 - 29.

19 For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fulness dwell;

- A. He is not something like God. He is God. John 1:16; Ephesians 1:23.
- B. The **Father** took **pleasure** in this truth.

20 and through him to reconcile all things unto himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross; through him, I say, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens.

- A. He is the **reconciler**. 2 Corinthians 5:18.
- B. He paid for the **reconciliation** with his **blood**. Similar to Ephesians 2:13-17.
- C. His death **reconciled** man to God.
- D. His death **reconciled** Jews and Gentiles.
- E. Revelation 5:13-14.

21 And you, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works,

- A. Language used of the Gentiles. Ephesians 2:12.

22 yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and unproveable before him:

- A. **Fleshly body**. It was not an apparition. It left footprints.

- B. The phrase has a ring of Old Testament sacrifice to it.
- C. All are now **holy and without blemish**. Similar to Ephesians 1:4.
- D. **Unreprovable**. No more barriers to hurdle.

23 if so be that ye continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye heard, which was preached in all creation under heaven; whereof I Paul was made a minister.

- A. **Steadfastness** is required. Hebrews 3:14. The idea of once-saved-always-saved is not present. Paul said that he himself must remain steadfast. 1 Corinthians 9:27; 2 Corinthians 13:5.
- B. There was some force trying to **move them away** from the **hope of the gospel**.
- C. The message had already been preached universally. Matthew 24:14. Acts 2:5. That is not to say that every village had been reached.
- D. The view of this Colossian church matched the universal message.
- E. The Lord made **Paul** the special messenger that he was. Acts 9:15 - 16.

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church;

- A. **Rejoice** — fulfilling Matthew 5:11, 12.
- B. Paul had **suffered** for the Gentiles, including the Colossian church. Ephesians 3:1,13; Acts 22:21.
- C. There is an extension of the suffering of Christ. 2 Corinthians 1:5-8; 4:8-12; Romans 8:17; 2 Timothy 4:6.

25 whereof I was made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which was given me to you-ward, to fulfil the word of God,

- A. Compare verse 1. This message is directly from **God**. Romans 15:15-19.
- B. **To fulfil the word**. It takes effort to fully preach the Word. 2 Tim. 4:2-5.

26 even the mystery which hath been hid for ages and generations: but now hath it been manifested to his saints,

- A. The **mystery** has now been revealed or **manifested**.
- B. It is the **saints**, in a group called the church, that has received this amazing truth about Gentiles and Jews being reconciled in one body.

27 to whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

- A. **Christ in you**. He may be saying that Christ is in the church as seen in Jesus' question of Acts 9:5.
- B. He may be saying that **Christ** is in each believer. This is true through the *Spirit* that dwells within us. Ephesians 3:16 - 17.

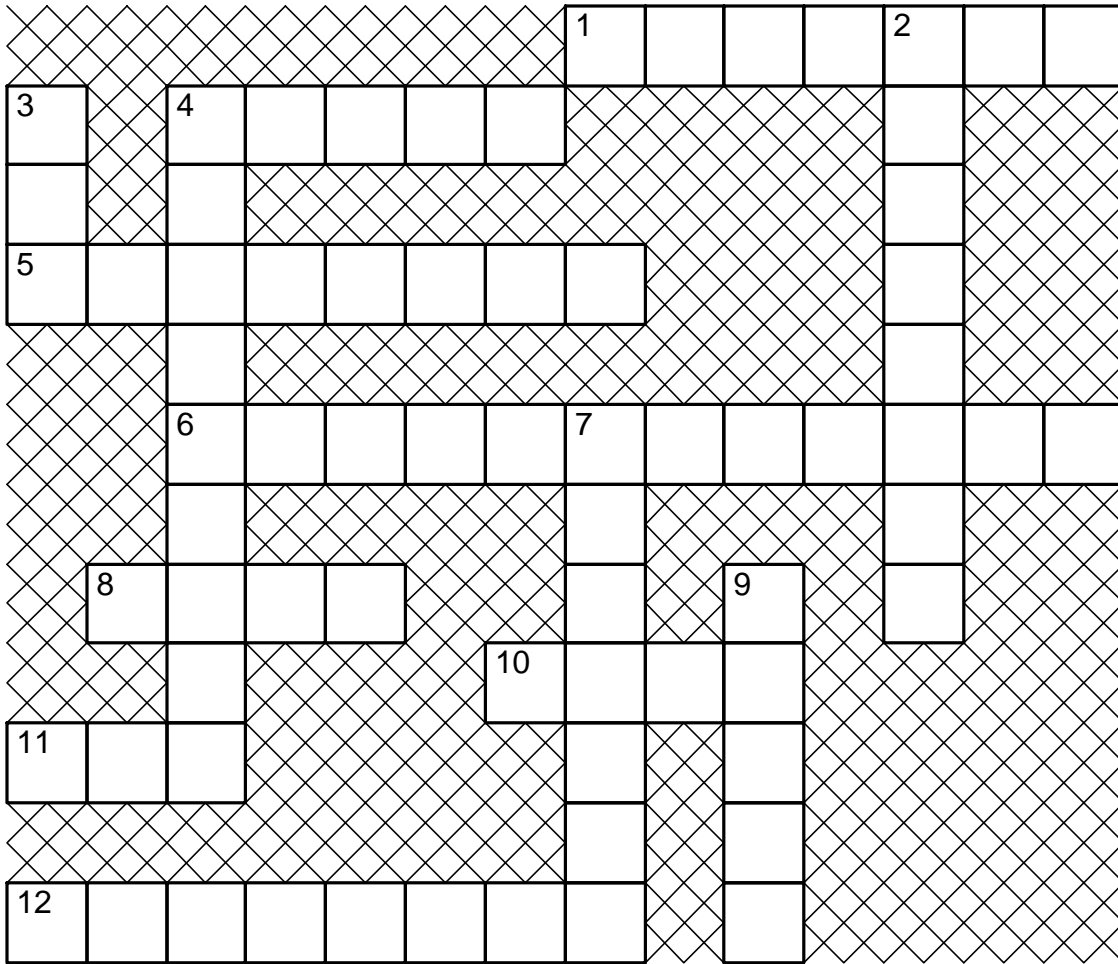
28 whom we proclaim, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ;

- A. **Admonishing** is confrontative; has a warning element.
- B. Christianity is a teaching religion. Compare its meeting places with those of other religions.
- C. While there is a sense that we are perfected by being **in Christ**, in another sense, we must learn and grow towards perfection.

29 whereunto I labor also, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

- A. It is this ongoing teaching that consumes Paul. The strength for it came from God.

Colossians 1
by Lois Dailey



May 14,2001

Across

- 4. Looks back to the resurrection.
- 5. Contrasted with light.
- 6. An anchor in Christian development.
- 8. Looks forward to heaven.
- 10. Looks toward the brethren.
- 11. In whom we have our redemption.
- 12. Founded the church in Colossae.

Down

- 2. Required in Christianity.
- 3. Selected Paul.
- 4. Preeminent.
- 7. Original books.
- 9. Creator.

Introduction:

1. Paul has just stated that God worked in him mightily.
2. One way this happens is mentioned next. Remember, the chapter and verse divisions are artificial.

2:1 For I would have you know how greatly I strive for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;

- A. In a world that contained gnostic salesmen, **knowing** was a very important sales point. These Christians needed to **know** an important truth.
- B. **Strive**, ἀγωνία, agon- (agony) The assembly of the Greeks at their national games, hence the contest for a prize at their games- Thayer.
- C. The **striving** was in prayer for them.
- D. **Laodicea** was about 12 miles away. Both communities were in the Lycus Valley and the churches faced similar problems. Paul had written to **Laodicea** also. Colossians 4:16. The Spirit did not see fit to preserve this letter for us. We wonder if it covered much of the same ground as our Colossian letter.
- E. Paul may have known some of them in person because he refers to those who **have not seen his face**, implying that some had seen his face.

2 that their hearts may be comforted, they being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, that they may know the mystery of God, even Christ,

- A. He speaks of their **love** and that is always **comforting**.
- B. **Knit**, σumbibasqhte\$; from *sumbibazo*- “to cause a person to unite with one in a conclusion.” - Thayer.
- C. We bond, **knit**, through **love**.

- D. “In other words, while the process of knitting together the church into a united body clearly includes the growth of love, it also includes the growth, on the part of the whole community, of that proper understanding of the gospel which leads to the rich blessings of a settled conviction and assurance.”

“Living in a loving and forgiving community will assist growth in understanding, and vice versa, as truth is confirmed in practice and practice enables truth to be seen in action and so to be fully grasped (*cf.* 1:9-11). All of this promotes the encouragement, comfort and strengthening of the heart, regarded metaphorically then as now as the seat of affections and the mainspring of actions.”

N. T. Wright in *Colossians and Philemon*.

- E. Orthodoxy without **love** is sterile, and **love** apart from truth becomes “mush” and is of no value.
- F. Full **understanding** has a **rich** outcome: **full assurance**.
- G. **Understanding**, *suneseu*, from *sunesis* - “a running together, a flowing together with” - Thayer.
- H. **God** has revealed His **mystery** of the ages and that stated in one word is **Christ**.

3 in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden.

- A. Jewish teachers promised **Wisdom**, such as the personified **wisdom** of Proverbs 2:1 - 8.
- B. The false teachers offered to reveal **hidden truth**, usually for a fee.
- C. Generally, **knowledge** relates to the facts, **wisdom** to the application of the facts.
- D. These **treasures** really exist, but in Christ they have been revealed. He is not just the key to **wisdom** and **knowledge**. They exist in Him.

4 This I say, that no one may delude you with persuasiveness of speech.

- A. **Persuasiveness of speech.** *Arguments* were brought against their faith. This is a word from the *law courts*.

5 For though I am absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

- A. Paul might say that he *closely identifies* with the Lycus Valley churches even though he is not able to be present **with** them.
- B. Their godly qualities brought him great **joy**. This is an unpurchasable reward for a church leader.
- C. **Order.** *Discipline*, a military word. The church is drawn up in battle array with a solid wall of defense — **its faith in Christ**.
- D. More than well **ordered**, they were **steadfast** in their faith, very stable people.
- E. He fears that enticing words, i.e., persuasive reasoning (*pithanologia*), will disrupt their order and steadfastness. These paired words are military terms conveying the thought of an enemy breaching a formerly solid formation of troops.

(from *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1962 by Moody Press)

6 As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,

- A. The way they **received Christ** is clear from verse 12. Current attacks on the plan of pardon come from those using the expression “**receive Christ**.” They define it as “receiving Christ into your heart.” They supply the explanation for that. The *correct* definition comes in this context itself.
- B. **Walk:** Lifestyle, conduct, is the issue. Following **Christ** means a whole new way of living.

7 rooted and builded up in him, and established in your faith, even as ye were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

- A. They were **rooted** like a tree. Some trees put down a deep root. The superior root system of the Black Walnut tree is why English Walnut trees are grafted to the Black Walnut base.
- B. Now they are being **built** like a house. **Building** is an ongoing process, but we are **in** Christ all of the while.
- C. Wright says they were “well rooted like a tree, solidly built like a house, confirmed and settled like a legal document, and overflowing like a jug full of wine.”
- D. Paul frequently switches metaphors in mid-sentence and here is another case.
- E. **Thanksgiving.** They were a thankful church. Gratitude is a leading characteristic of believers.

8 Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ:

- A. **Make spoil.** Yet another military term.
- B. **Philosophy** was being added to the gospel. While the word merely means *a love of wisdom*, yet it probably described the world-view of opponents of the gospel message.
- C. Worse, some was plain **deceit**. This was not the **tradition** of the Apostles.
- D. The *idea* of **tradition** is not being condemned. The point is that a **tradition** was coming from men as the source rather than God’s appointed apostles. Matthew 15:2 - 9; Galatians 1:14. Paul was well-versed in the **traditions** of the Rabbinic school of thought.
- E. There is legitimate **tradition**. 1 Corinthians 11:2.

- F. **Rudiments.** The NIV says “basic principles.” Perhaps Paul is speaking of earth, air, water and fire and each of these had their own deities. This is close to Animism, a world-wide religion.
- G. **an-i-mism** *n.* **1.** The attribution of conscious life to natural objects or to nature itself. **2.** The belief in the existence of spiritual beings that are separable or separate from bodies. **3.** The hypothesis holding that an immaterial force animates the universe. [From Latin *anima* soul; See **an** ∴ in Indo-European Roots.] **an “i-mist** *n.* **an “i-mis”tic** *adj.*

9 for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,

- A. Jesus is **God** in human flesh. Pure Spirit and flesh have merged. The Greek Docetics could not accept this merging of God and man.
- B. The following article from the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* may be helpful:

GNOSTICISM

IV. Gnosticism in the Christian Church. - (1) In the New Testament and the Apostolic Age.-The germ of Gnosticism in the Christian church made its appearance in the apostolic age, and is referred to by Paul in several of his epistles, notably in that to the Colossians and in the Pastoral Epistles. It is also referred to by the apostles Peter and Jude; references to it are found, besides, in the Apocalypse, the First Epistle of John and the Gospel of John.

1. Colossians: In Colossians a great deal is said regarding a false teaching, an insidious theosophist doctrine, the teachers of which were alienating the Christians in Colossae from the gospel, and were disseminating their speculations, which led to the worship of angels in contrast to the worship of Christ, to esoteric exclusiveness wholly opposed to the universality of the gospel, and to an asceticism injurious to Christian freedom, and derogatory to the human body as indwelt by the Holy Ghost.

These tenets are identical with the more fully developed Gnosticism of the generation succeeding that of the apostles; and at the root of the Colossian false teaching there lay the same error which the Gnostic mind had no way of meeting, namely, that there could be no connection between the highest spiritual agency, that is God, and gross corporeal matter.

From this theoretical basis arose another error—that as sin is inherent in the material substance of the body, therefore the only way by which perfection can be reached is to punish the body by asceticism, so that through the infliction of pain and the mortification of the flesh the region of pure spirit may be reached, and thus man may be etherealized and become like God. This ascetic tendency is wonderfully widespread; it reappears century after century, and shows itself in many forms of religion, not merely in distorted forms of Christianity, but in the Hindu religions, in Buddhism and elsewhere.

In the Epistle to the Colossians, accordingly, there are definite references to ascetic practices which were inculcated by the false teachers at Colossae. The very terms which they employed have been preserved, “Touch not,” “Taste not,” “Handle not.” It was in this way that these teachers had “at their own hand” invented a worship different from that of the Christian faith, which endeavored to attain the deliverance of the soul by “the neglecting of the body” (Col 2:21,23 the King James Version). These Gnostic teachers showed these tendencies still more boldly when Paul wrote his First Epistle to Timothy (see below), for he describes them as “forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats” (1 Tim 4:3). These ascetic practices were afterward taught by various Gnostic sects, the Encratites, the followers of Saturninus, and others.

These tendencies in the Colossian church Paul set himself to correct in his epistle. The method which he adopts is not so much to demolish error, as to establish the contrary truth, setting before the Colossians the person and work of Christ, Christ the Creator, Christ in whom there dwells not merely some or even much of the fulness of God, but all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; Christ the God of providence, the Upholder of all things, in whom matter and all creatures and all events “consist” and have their being; Christ the Reconciler who has reconciled us unto God through the blood of the cross. In view of truths like these, Colossian error and all other forms of Gnosticism crumble into decay and vanish.

(from *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by BibleSoft)

10 and in him ye are made full, who is the head of all principality and power:

A. “In union with Christ, you have everything.”

- B. Adding philosophy and astrology is deception. We are already complete.
- C. Only Jesus has all **power**, authority, anyway.

11 in whom ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ;

- A. **Circumcision** was being added to the gospel.
- B. There always has been a figurative sense of **circumcision**. Lev. 26:41. Deut. 30:6.
- C. **Not made with hands** is a phrase used several times in the New Testament and often stands in contrast with the humans efforts of times past. Mark 14:58; Acts 7:48; 2 Corinthians 5:1; Hebrews 9:11, 24.
- D. The **circumcision of Christ** is a new kind that is explained immediately. Philippians 3:3.

12 having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

- A. We identify with Christ's **burial in baptism**. It is for instructed adults. His death is counted as our death.
- B. **Baptism** is a **burial**. That description eliminates sprinkling and pouring. The mode of **baptism** is perfectly clear.
- C. We identify **with** Christ's resurrection. Romans 7:4; Ephesians 2:5-6.
- D. Conscious **faith** in **God's workings** is required. This raises a serious question for those who were immersed without reference to the correct purpose.
- E. The power to **raise** Jesus came from the Father. Acts 2:24.

- F. Circumcision in the Old Testament is not directly equivalent to immersion into Christ. The Old Testament rite was just that, a requirement for being among the covenant people called Israel. Salvation was not an issue. See the story in Genesis 34:22.
- G. Colossians 2:11-12 shows a comparison between circumcision and baptism. *The Message* translation says,

“Entering into this fullness is not something that you figure out or achieve. It’s not a matter of being circumcised or keeping a long list of laws. No, you’re already in — insiders — not through some secretive initiation rite but rather through what Christ has already gone through for you, destroying the power of sin. If it’s an initiation ritual you’re after, you have already gone through it by submitting to baptism. Going under the water was a burial of your old life; coming up out of it was a resurrection, God raising you from the dead as he did Christ.”

- H. We have included comments from Dr. Jack Cottrell found in his *Baptism, a Biblical Study*, published by College Press in 1989:

IV. BAPTISM AND CIRCUMCISION

A final point that draws our attention in Colossians 2:11-13 is the relation between baptism and circumcision. For various reasons many Christians believe that baptism is the New Testament replacement for Old Testament circumcision. For some this is an incidental belief, but for others it is the determining factor in their whole doctrine of baptism. It is used not only to prove the validity of infant baptism, but also to define the very meaning of baptism. That is, if baptism simply replaces circumcision, then it must have the same meaning for us today as circumcision had for Old Testament believers. Since circumcision is usually interpreted as a sign of membership in the covenant people, this is the meaning assigned to baptism, too. By virtually ignoring everything the New Testament actually says about baptism as God’s work of salvation, and by assuming this relationship with circumcision, many Protestants interpret baptism simply as the outward sign that marks one as a member of the church.

It is impossible to overestimate the impact that this equating of circumcision and baptism has had on the doctrine of baptism in modern times.

One of the most striking points in connection with this problem is the fact that

outside of Colossians 2:11-13, *no* Biblical passages connect baptism and circumcision *in any way*. With this one exception, the alleged equation of the two is completely inferential. But what about the Colossians passage itself? Isn't one passage enough to establish a doctrinal truth? It would be, if that one passage did indeed teach that truth. And indeed, this is the way Colossians 2:11-13 is often cited, namely, as affirming a continuity in meaning between Old Testament circumcision and New Testament baptism. But does it actually teach this? I believe that it does *not*, and that this can be easily shown as follows.

There are two distinct categories of Old Testament references to circumcision. On the one hand there are many references to physical circumcision as the sign of the covenant God made with Abraham (Gen. 17:10ff) and as the continuing mark of covenant membership under the Law of Moses (Lev. 12:3). On the other hand there are a number of passages which refer to circumcision in figurative senses that have no intrinsic connection to physical circumcision at all. For instance, Moses complains that he is "uncircumcised of lips" (Ex. 6:12,30), meaning that he is an incompetent and unpersuasive speaker. The fruit of certain trees is called "uncircumcised" (Lev. 19:23), meaning forbidden or off-limits like any Gentile.

The most significant figurative sense in this second category is the prophetic use of circumcision and uncircumcision to represent certain spiritual states or conditions of the heart. Jeremiah speaks of uncircumcised ears, meaning ears that would not hear the word of God (Jer. 6:10). Others speak of the more basic condition of an uncircumcised heart, meaning a heart filled with sin and rebellious against God, whether Jewish (Lev. 26:41; Jer. 9:26) or Gentile (Ezek. 44:7,9). The Lord exhorted the sinners among Israel to circumcise their hearts: "Circumcise then your heart, and stiffen your neck no more" (Deut. 10:16). "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and remove the foreskins of your heart" (Jer. 4:4). In what I take to be a Messianic promise God says, "Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live" (Deut. 30:6)

Now, the important point to notice is this: *there is no intrinsic connection between physical circumcision and the state of spiritual circumcision of which the prophets speak*. The former was not given to represent the latter, and the latter was not necessarily present in everyone who had the former. In fact, the relationship between them is casual and incidental. Physical circumcision as the covenant sign was a fact of life within Israel, and as such it served as a convenient and ever-present illustration or analogy for the point the prophets wanted to make about the spiritual state of the heart. Except for this relationship of an incidental analogy, the two kinds of circumcision are independent and unconnected.

How does this relate to baptism and to Paul's teaching in Colossians 2:11-13? In this way: the only Old Testament circumcision to which baptism has *any* relation is the *spiritual* circumcision of which the prophets spoke. Colossians 2:11 speaks of such a circumcision, a change in the inner spiritual condition. In Old Testament times this kind of change was limited to what the individual could bring about for himself; thus the Israelites were exhorted to circumcise their own hearts. But according to the prophecy (Deut. 30:6) there would come a time when God Himself would circumcise the hearts of penitent believers. This I believe refers to the new-age gift of the Holy Spirit, who Himself works true regeneration upon the sinner's heart. This is the "circumcision made without hands" of which Colossians 2:11 speaks.

The important point is *that there is no reference to physical circumcision at all in Colossians 2:11-13*. It is present only in the same sense as it was in the prophetic references, namely, as a background analogy. Paul is making no affirmation whatsoever about any relation between baptism and the Abrahamic covenant sign of circumcision. His only reference is to the inner, spiritual circumcision of the heart.

How is this spiritual circumcision related to baptism? Paul says that this marvelous "working of God," this regenerating and life-giving "circumcision of Christ" *takes place in baptism*. It is ironic that a passage which so clearly and forcefully teaches such a strong view of baptism should be used so often in an effort to establish an opposite view. Perhaps it is a matter of uncircumcised ears (Jer. 6:10)

Thus we conclude that the attempt to equate baptism and circumcision based on Colossians 2:11-13 is a misuse of the passage. The alleged equation is without foundation.

V. SUMMARY

In this chapter we have seen that Colossians 2:11-13 makes these points. First, baptism is the time when we are buried with Christ into His death to bring about the death of our sinful nature, an event called spiritual circumcision, thus preparing the way for our resurrection to new life. Second, baptism is the time when this resurrection to new life occurs. This resurrection has two senses: we are raised up after we have died *to* sin, and we are raised up out of the state of death *in* sin. Third, though it occurs in baptism, this burial and resurrection with Christ take place *through faith*, thus ruling out baptismal regeneration and infant baptism. Finally, the only circumcision connected with baptism is the spiritual circumcision of the heart, which occurs at the time of baptism. There is no intrinsic relationship

between physical circumcision and baptism at all.

13 And you, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, you, I say, did he make alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses;

- A. Two causes of spiritual **death** are cited for the Colossians. One is their **trespasses** and the other is their **uncircumcision**.
- B. But they were resurrected and **made alive together with** Christ. as per verse 12.
- C. The **forgiveness** came without physical circumcision.

14 having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and he hath taken it out that way, nailing it to the cross;

- A. Barclay says this is like an IOU. Both Jew and Gentile have a sense of breaking God's law, hence we owe something to God. Romans 2:14,15.
- B. Some see this as the responsibility for keeping Law of Moses being **nailed to the cross**. It shut up the Jews under sin and shut out the Gentiles who ignored it altogether.
- C. The sign **nailed** to the cross at Pilate's command said that he was King of the Jews. Paul figuratively sees that piece of paper as the Law of Moses.
- D. No longer can the Law keep Gentiles out of the Kingdom.
- E. The record has been wiped from the vellum or papyrus and it can be used again because it is clean. See Barclay.
- F. **Nails** were used at the cross! Some artists have suggested that Jesus was tied to the cross, but this speaks of nails at the site, anyway.

15 having despoiled the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

- A. **Despoiled**, or better, stripped (*apekdyomai*) is a compound not essentially different from another Pauline expression, *ekdyo*. The latter, as used in the LXX (and classical Greek) of the defeating or “stripping” of enemies in war, provides a clue to the meaning here.

In O.T. times captives were stripped of most or all clothing. This action came to symbolize defeat, and for the prophets it signified the judgment of God (cf. Ezek 16:39; 23:26).

In the NT this idea moves into the realm of ‘last things,’ when the righteous will be clothed, in contrast to the wicked, who will stand stripped and naked under God’s judgment (cf. Matt 22:11; Rev 3:17-18; 16:15; 2 Cor 5:3-4).

The present verse, picturing Christ as “stripping” principalities and powers through his death and resurrection, probably refers, on one hand, to angelic powers (through whom the handwriting of ordinances had been given, Gal 3:19) who control human rulers, and on the other hand, to such personified evils as death.

Christ died, “that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb 2:14-15). For the individual, death remains to be destroyed (1 Cor 15:25-26); “in Christ” its destruction occurred when, in his triumphant ascension, the Saviour led captive this and all other powers (Eph 4:8). Similarly, stripping or putting off (*apekdyomai*) the body of flesh (Col 2:11, RSV) may refer to the corporate judgment on the cross of the Adamic body of flesh, i.e., the whole man under sin, under judgment, under death. If so, this phrase stands in contrast to the ‘body of Christ’ (cf. 1 Cor 15:22; Robinson, *The Body*, p. 31).

God’s gracious forgiveness (Col 2:13) is to be understood in the light of the meaning of the cross: in it man’s debt is canceled and the powers holding man captive are themselves openly defeated and made captive. Realizing this, the absurdity of turning, as an aid to redemption, from the triumphant Christ to the subjected powers becomes apparent.

(from *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1962 by Moody

Press)

16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a sabbath day:

17 which are a shadow of the things to come; but the body is Christ's.

- A. Practices of the Jewish law were being added to the gospel. Certain foods were Kosher, others were not. The dietary rules isolated Jewish people from others.
- B. The objectionable observances, which evidently had been imposed by the false teachers, not only flew in the face of Christian freedom (cf. Rom 14; Gal 5:1) but, as among the Galatians (Gal 3:1-12; 4:9-10), threatened to draw them from Christ back into the shadow of the former age (cf. Heb 10:1-10).

Paul points out that shadowy symbolisms and prohibitions have faded before Christ, the daylight reality. To impose such laws (today we call them by different names) on others as tests of spiritual maturity are most evident signs of Christian immaturity and error.

(from *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1962 by Moody Press)

- C. Their critics/false teachers were **judging** them on a phony basis.
- D. **Feast day:** Lev. 23:1-44; Passover prefigured the sacrifice of the Lamb; Pentecost the Ingathering of the Church; the Sabbath prefigured heaven. Hebrews 4:9.
- E. The terms are Jewish: 2 Kings 4:23; 1 Chronicles 23:31; Isaiah 1:13.
- F. There were special **Sabbaths**. Lev. 16:31; 23:32.
- G. **Shadow:** Hebrews 8:5; 10:1. All of these shadows led to the reality of **Christ** and his church.

18 Let no man rob you of your prize by a voluntary humility and worshiping of the angels, dwelling in the things which he hath seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

- A. Their salvation was in question.
- B. The description reflects an athletic contest in which the contestant is disqualified (RSV) or deprived of reward because of some impediment

(cf. 1 Cor 9:24; Gal 5:7; Phil 3:14; 2 Tim 4:7). The false teachers either (1) hindered the Colossians in their Christian race or (2) intimidated them by declaring them disqualified if they did not follow the prescribed course. Humility, which in Col 3:12 is a virtue, is here condemned because of the object toward which this submissive attitude and activity is directed.

(from *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1962 by Moody Press)

- C. The **worship of angels** was being added to the gospel.
- D. The false teachers proudly claimed visions. Visions are a product of the **fleshly mind**. Romans 8:6. They isolate people because only one person had the vision.

19 and not holding fast the Head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increasing with the increase of God.

- A. Visions and the like bypass the **Head** of the Church and His Word.
- B. Is there an **increase** that is not from God?

20 If ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances,

- A. The believer's death revealed in verse 12.
- B. The false teachers had made some progress with them.

21 Handle not, nor taste, nor touch

- A. Could this refer to food choices? 1 Timothy 4:3.

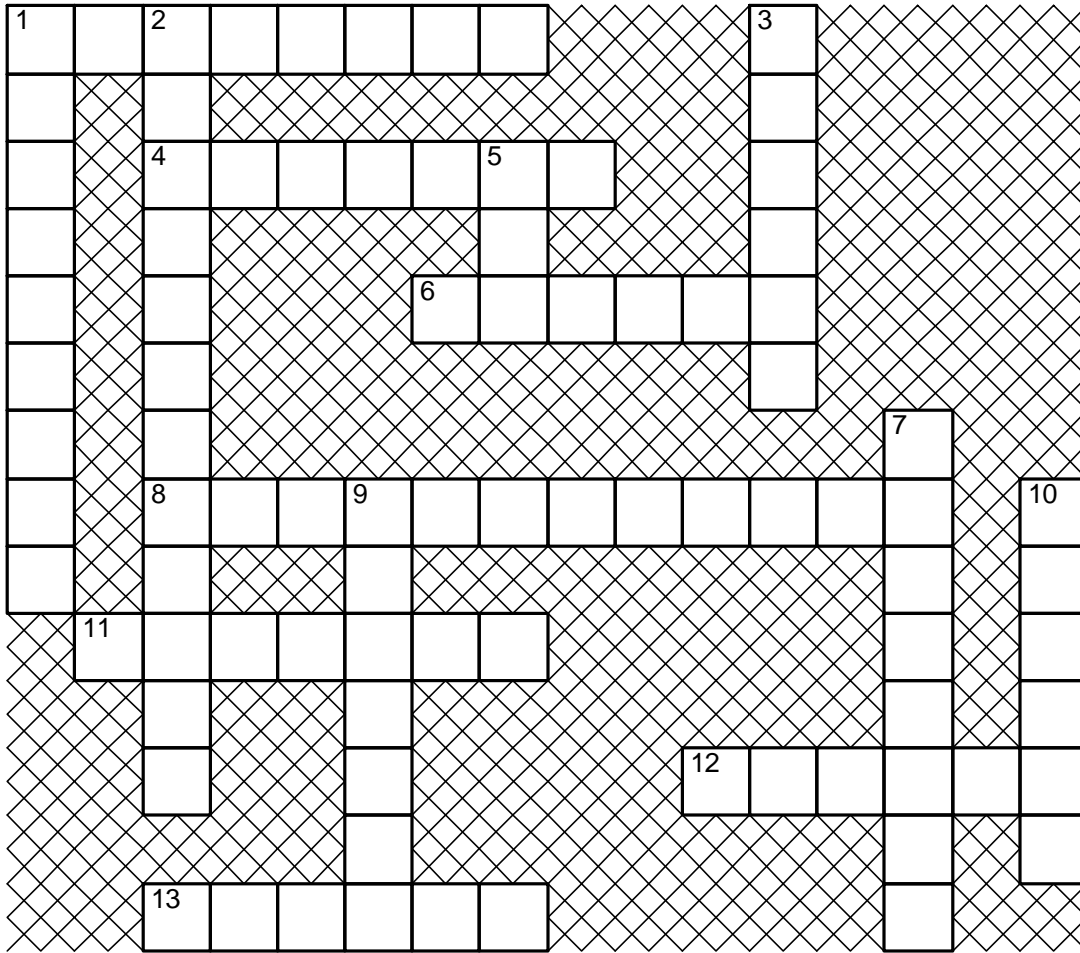
22 all which things are to perish with the using, after the precepts and doctrines of men?

- A. As compared with the commandments from the Lord. Matthew 15:3-9; Titus 1:14.

23 Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and severity to the body; *but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh.*

- A. Self-made religion differs from revealed religion.
- B. What looks like strong self-discipline is actually a form of self-**indulgence.**
- C. Genuine holiness is not accomplished by ascetic treatment of the body. Rather it comes through our union with Christ.

Colossians 2
by Lois Dailey



May 14, 2001

Across

- 1. Despoiled.
- 4. Orthodoxy without love.
- 6. Miles from Laodicea to Colossae.
- 8. Was being added to the gospel.
- 11. Product of the fleshly mind.
- 12. Baptism.
- 13. Promised by Jewish teachers.

Down

- 1. In question in verse 18.
- 2. In baptism we identify with it.
- 3. Prefigured by the Sabbath.
- 5. It is no longer a barrier for Gentiles.
- 7. Knowing ones.
- 9. Opposite of #1 across.
- 10. Their worship was being added to the gospel.

Introduction:

1. After showing the believer's new life in Christ in chapter 2:13, Paul then contrasts one or more unnamed religions that were based on rule-making systems.
2. N. T. Wright believes that just Judaism is being described, but others suggest some of the mystery religion.
3. Either way, Paul then shows his readers that they are far above those man-made systems and demonstrates the true and workable basis for leading a holy life.

3:1 If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God.

- A. **If then** refers to something previously said and that is in 2:12 where being **raised together with Christ** in baptism was in view. It goes without further comment that baptism is essential for the process.
- B. There is no *personal struggle* required to attain that status. Believers have it automatically following their initial acceptance of Jesus as Lord.
- C. **Seek the things that are above.** Probably *more* than a comment on location, it includes the *higher life*.
- D. Jesus is uniformly pictured as seated at **the right hand of God**. This is His place of rule over his willing subjects. This alludes to Psalm 110:1.

2 Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth.

- A. **Setting our minds**, *phroneite*, shows the choices are ours. Love heavenly **things**. The social forces around us want to do the mind setting for us. Each have their own agenda. Schools, the entertainment industry, and government are examples.
- B. The **things above** are contrasted sharply with the **things on the earth**. Many of them cannot coexist in one mind.

3 For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

- A. **Died:** at baptism. Romans 6:2.
- B. Barclay says the Greeks spoke of burial as “hidden in the earth.” As baptized believers, we are hidden with Christ. The false teachers liked *hidden wisdom*. Compare 2:3.

4 When Christ, *who is our life*, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory.

- A. **Christ** is more than *important*, he is **our life** itself. The point, the purpose, the goals of **life** are in Him.
- B. Christ will return for his saints. This is visible because Paul uses **manifested** to describe it. His coming is a common thread in the Gospels and the letters.
- C. **In glory:** Jesus asked for this. John 17:24; Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:17; Philippians 3:21.

5 Put to death therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry;

- A. **Put to death** is a process that requires our effort; it is not automatic.
- B. **Therefore** shows that the following lists are based on what a person believes. He must believe that he is *in Christ*, that *He reigns* and that He is *coming again*. Unless these are believed, the lists merely become burdensome rules.
- C. **Your members.** As Jesus taught cutting off a hand or foot. Matthew 5:29-30; Romans 6:6. Clearly, this was figurative.
- D. **Upon the earth.** Again, the reference is not to location as much as to the truth that our bodies and attendant emotions are carnal and need to be dealt with.
- E. The list may be presented in reverse order with the outcome listed first and the causes itemized following it.

- F. **Fornication:** Sexual immorality. It was not considered a sin in Gentile society. Visiting prostitutes, both religious and otherwise, was common.

Thayer includes homosexuality, lesbianism and bestiality in the definition. Compare Ephesians 5:3. For homosexuality as part of the definition, note Jude 7.

- G. While some people restrain themselves from **fornication**, they relish the **uncleanness** that leads eventually to it. This may include **unclean** humor and sexual involvement that stops short of **fornication**.
- H. Both Romans 1:26 and 1 Thessalonians 4:5 show the negative use of **passion**. Believers are not to be driven by their passions. When sexual **passions** take over, the mind and its values are put on hold. This is illustrated by the wild promise of King Herod in Mark 6:21-23.
- I. **Evil desire:** from *epithumia*- “desire, craving, longing, desire for what is forbidden, lust”- Thayer. Barclay includes controlling food, too. If the theme of the sentence is sexual, then pornography would fit here very well. It becomes a destroyer of men in our society, although ancient societies had a limited kind of porn in their art.

Court decisions generally protect indecent speech in written and broadcast material but not obscenity. The courts have defined obscenity as having no redeeming social, political or literary value as measured by contemporary community standards.

Magazines, videos and the Internet are major suppliers of porn to our society. A US center of manufacture is Northridge, California. Other material comes from overseas locations.

- J. **Covetousness:** Barclay defines as “The desire to have more.” Money, honor, prestige.” It is the opposite of giving. The word can have sexual connotations as well as seen in the Decalogue:

Ex 20:17 - Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house, thou shalt not *covet thy neighbor’s wife*, nor his man-servant, nor

his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

- K. **Idolatry** is closely linked with immorality. It was the introduction for pagan men into a world that accepted promiscuity as normal. In our nation, the entertainers are treated as **idols**. In fact, they are called **idols** and goddesses.

6 for which things' sake cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience:

- A. **Wrath:** *orge*- "anger exhibited in punishment, hence used for punishment itself; used of punishments inflicted by magistrates." - Thayer Matches Ephesians 5:6.
- B. **Sons of disobedience: Sons** is a metaphor for disciples. God is angry with the wicked every day. Romans 1:18.
- C. Without justice mercy loses its meaning.

7 wherein ye also once walked, when ye lived in these things;

- A. **Once walked:** Indicating their Gentile background. Ephesians 2:2.
- B. The following group of items appear to be centered around anger:

8 but now do ye also put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, railing, shameful speaking out of your mouth:

- A. Those baptized changed to white garments. The figure repeats in 10,12,14. **Put away** certain garments:
- B. **Anger:** *Orge* Strong speaks here of violent passion. Anger is most often the quick flare up that leads to other results.
- C. **Wrath:** *thumos*. Longer term anger.
- D. **Malice:** "Desire to injure." - Thayer
- E. **Railing:** *blasphemia*; "detraction, speech injurious, to another's good name" - Thayer

F. **Shameful speaking out of your mouth:** *aischrologia*- foul speaking, low and obscene speech. - Thayer. Barclay says: Obscene language.

G. N. T. Wright comments of the health of free expression:

It is not “healthy”, as is sometimes supposed, to allow such thoughts to find expression. It is certainly healthy to recognize and face up to one’s own anger or frustration, and to search for proper and creative ways of dealing with it. But words do not merely convey information or let off steam. They change situations and relationships, often irrevocably. They can wound as well as heal. Like wild plants blown by the wind, hateful; words can scatter their seeds far and wide, giving birth to more anger wherever they land.

9 lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings,

- A. **Put off lying**, too. It is an evil practice. Any successful society is based on honesty. This includes NSF checks and promises to pay.
- B. N. T. Wright says that truth is often inconvenient, untidy or embarrassing and we are constantly tempted to bend it into a less awkward shape.

10 and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him:

- A. **Put on the new man** as a garment.
- B. **Being renewed:** Not an event, but a process.
- C. True **knowledge** has been identified before in Colossians 2:2.
- D. The character model is **Jesus**, the one who **created** mankind (or the new man) in the first place.

11 where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all.

- A. Barclay: The ancient world was full of barriers. **Christ** breaks down many distinctions of birth and upbringing.
- B. **Greeks** looked down on all others as less cultured. Greeks hailed from Egypt, Turkey and other populous areas following the armies of Alexander the Great.
- C. **Jews** viewed all others as religiously uninformed. They despised Greeks as polytheistic and pagan.
- D. **Circumcision** was thought to be a mark of acceptance with God among Jews. This set them aside from other people and enabled them to feel superior.
- E. **Barbarians** were considered just short of beasts. Greeks used the term to denote those who could not speak Greek.
- F. **Scythians** were more barbarian than the barbarians. They came from the northern reaches of the empire.
- G. **Slaves** were not considered human and had no rights.
- H. There is oneness among all from these groups that are **in Christ**. He is resident (probably through the Spirit) in people of every heritage and national background.

12 Put on therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering;

- A. **God's elect:** originally a Jewish distinction!. Deuteronomy 7:6.
- B. **Holy.** Exodus 19:6 and **beloved,** Isaiah 44:2 Jeshrun = **Beloved** in LXX. More Jewish titles!
- C. **Put on . . . a heart of** - attitudes can be consciously changed.
- D. **Compassion:** We must learn to feel with others. When they hurt, we hurt.
- E. **Kindness:** has to do with one's approach to other people.

- F. **Lowliness:** *tapeinophrosune*- “the having a humble opinion of oneself”- Thayer.
- G. **Meekness:** *prautes*- “mildness of disposition, gentleness of spirit”
- H. **Longsuffering:** The spirit which never loses its patience with its fellow-men. - Barclay

13 forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye:

- A. **Forbearing:** “Putting up with each other.” - Charles’ paraphrase.
- B. “The forgiven man must always be **forgiving.**” - Barclay
- C. Some of these may have had feuds from the days before becoming believers. **Forgiveness** is the requirement.
- D. There will always be **complaints** and grounds for grudges.
- E. The model here is the **Lord’s forgiveness** of us. It can’t get any better than His example.

14 and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness.

- A. **Put on love.** This garment is the key to **bonding** the church. It holds all other garments (virtues) in place.
- B. When churches split and divide, **love** is weak or non-existent.

15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to the which also ye were called in one body; and be ye thankful.

- A. **The peace** of Christ is to rule in the church **body.**
- B. **Rule:** Arbitrate - Thayer. Barclay says the word is used in the athletic arena as an umpire who settles things with his decisions. Let Jesus umpire!

- C. N. T. Wright suggests that the *pax Christiana* rule in the church as the *pax Romana* did in the empire. This allowed the citizens of the empire to pursue their lives without fear of war.
- D. The **oneness of the body** is important and is to be maintained. Ephesians 2:16-17.
- E. **Thankfulness** is the antidote for criticism, a frequent malady of the church world.

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God.

- A. Memorize and internalize the Word (logos). Psalm 119:11. N. T. Wright comments on **richly** by saying the church is to be stocked with good teaching as a palace is with treasure.
- B. **Teaching** is to be done **wisely** because **Christ** is **Wisdom** personified. The teachers of the church will be **wise** in their presentations. They will be prepared to use presentation time **wisely**. They will present so the audience understands.
- C. In **singing** we **teach** one another. Christian music needs to have this **teaching** component in it.
- D. **Admonishing** is a step toward maturity. Romans 15:14.
- E. **Psalm**: *psalmos*- a striking, a twanging; used of the striking of the chords of a musical instrument. See W.E. Vine under *Hymn*.
- F. **Hymn**: Used in contexts that would not have allowed instruments. Acts 16:25
- G. **Spiritual song**: The general song, whether accompanied or unaccompanied.
- H. **Singing** is for more than entertainment. Psalm 119:54 1 Corinthians 14:15.

17 And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

- A. **Whatever you do.** The broad scope of the believer's life, both his **words** and actions, were to be under the control of the **Lord Jesus**.
- B. **Name:** To do something in one's **name** is to do it in their authority. Every act of life is to be measured by the Master's example.
- C. **Thanks.** This new conduct is not to be a burden, but a source of **thanksgiving** because we are learning how to live and be victorious as we learn of **Christ**.
- D. This Christ-centered life begins right at home as seen in the following sentence:

18 Wives, be in subjection to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

- A. It is basic to God's life pattern that believers be married if they live together.
- B. **Subjection**, rather than obedience. "A Greek military term meaning 'to arrange [troop divisions] in a military fashion under the command of a leader.' In non-military use, it was 'a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden'". - Thayer
- C. She is not to use domestic blackmail to rule her **husband**.
- D. W. T. Wright says the alternative to having rules is not freedom but the unconstitutional (and often unconscious) tyranny of the most selfish member.
- E. Your (own) **husbands**. Genesis 3:16; Esther 1:20; Ephesians 5:22-24.
- F. This is **fitting in the Lord** because it sets up a chain of authority and responsibility.

19 Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.

- A. There is a problem with **husbands loving wives**. They are easy to take for granted. With some men, their **wives** are a threat to their

centrality and they do not want their **wives** to succeed in public areas of achievement.

- B. **Bitterness** is readily possible after the honeymoon is over. Prov 5:18; Eccl. 9:9; 1Cor. 7:33.

20 Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing in the Lord.

- A. **Children** are to **obey** their **parents**. Prov. 6:21-22.
B. **All things**. Notice the phrase in vs. 22. Ephesians 5:24
C. The goal of adults and **children** alike is to **please** Him. Ephesians 5:10.

21 Fathers, provoke not your children, that they be not discouraged.

- A. This must be easy to do. **Fathers**, more than mothers, tend to be perfectionists that cannot tolerate imperfection. This disheartens children.
B. **Children** are to be developed and encouraged. Demonstrations and recitals can be a part of this.

22 Servants, obey in all things them that are your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord:

- A. Like the children (vs. 20), **servants** are to **obey**.
B. The then-current order of society included **masters** and slaves. **Servants** were to conduct themselves within that framework.
C. **Eye-service** is hypocritical and omits **heart** obedience, something that believers must have. Ephesians 5:6.
D. Service must be with **singleness of heart**. The focus needs to be on the task at hand and not on how to do as little as possible and not get into trouble.
E. **Fearing the Lord**: Eccl. 12:13.

23 whatsoever ye do, work heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men;

24 knowing that from the Lord ye shall receive the recompense of the inheritance: ye serve the Lord Christ.

- A. The **Lord** is the real Master.
- B. The servant may have been treated as a soulless animal by his master, but to the Lord he was just as important as anyone else. He would be rewarded by the **Lord**.
- C. **Inheritance.** Bible writers consistently use this to describe the eternal kingdom.
- D. While it seems like the master is in charge, the real Master is the **Lord**.

25 For he that doeth wrong shall receive again for the wrong that he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

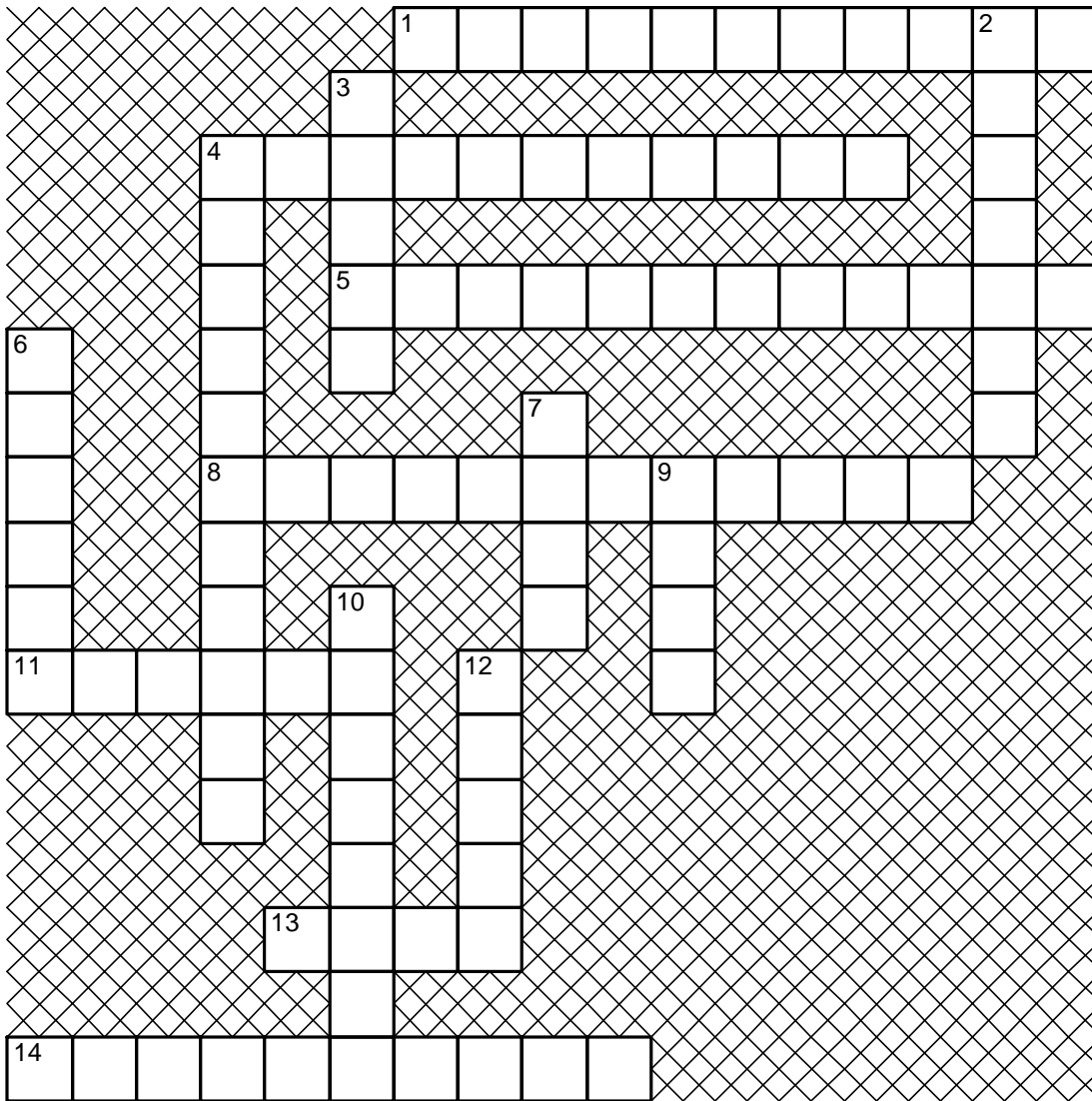
- A. The Lord will correct injustices.
- B. N. T. Wright says:

The task may appear unimportant or trivial, but the person doing it is never that, and he or she has the opportunity to turn the job into an act of worship. This attitude cannot be motivated by earthly reward, and so cannot be distracted if such prospects seem remote: *since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward*. One should properly read ‘*the inheritance*’; the reference is clearly to the life of the age to come. This is ironic, since in earthly terms slaves could not inherit property. Here, then, is the third point: the ‘master’ in heaven will reward you. The fourth one is perhaps not to be taken (with NIV) as a statement (*It is the Lord Christ that you are serving*) but, as is equally possible in the Greek, as a command: ‘Serve the Lord Christ!’ The force of this unusual phrase (Paul nowhere else allows the titles ‘Lord’ and ‘Christ’ to stand together without the name ‘Jesus’ as well) could be brought out by a paraphrase: ‘so work for the true Master) Christ!’

- C. We need to quote Wright one last time in this chapter.

If one is serving Christ, one need not fear, as with earthly masters, that those who cover up shoddy work by putting on a good show in the boss's presence will get away with it, or that the master's own favourites will be rewarded however hard others may work.

No: *anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.* This last idea, repeated by Paul in other contexts (e.g. Rom. 2:11), is a commonplace of Jewish and Christian views of God's justice. The slave has thus both encouragement and warning: he need not imagine that being a Christian will excuse poor or half-hearted work.



May 28, 2001

Across

1. The Internet is a major supplier.
4. Putting up with each other.
5. The antidote for criticism.
8. The opposite of giving.
11. Desie to injure.
13. Viewed others as religiously uninformed.
14. To feel with others.

Down

2. Needed for a successful society.
3. Longer term anger.
4. Sexual immorality.
6. False teacher liked hidden _____.
7. The kind of life believers are to lead.
9. Metaphor for disciples.
10. Gentleness of spirit.
12. Another name for entertainers.

Introduction:

1. Based on subject matter, verse one could be hooked to the previous chapter.

4:1 Masters, render unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

- A. **Masters** are themselves **servants** under the Great **Master**.
Ephesians 6:9
- B. A Christian **master** must treat his servants with **justice and equality**. These would be strange sounding words to the average master of the times. The general view was that **servants** were subhuman and merely items owned like as the family animals.
- C. “Justice and equity required that they should have proper food, proper raiment, due rest, and no more than moderate work.”
— Adam Clarke's Commentary
- D. While Christianity did not immediately destroy slavery, its message attacked the unjust treatment of slaves.
- E. All Christian business is ultimately a stewardship from God. Those who employ others must consider their welfare, whether bond or free. In today's world, fair wages and safe working conditions are a part of the employer's responsibility.

2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, watching therein with thanksgiving;

- A. **Prayer** is not just for formal and church occasions. Believers are to be **steadfast** in it. (*Stedfast* is an older spelling.)
- B. Perhaps the **watching** element has to do with **watching** for the answer to the **prayer**.
- C. **Prayer** and **thanksgiving** are interwoven and interdependent. If prayer has the overtones of *asking*, then **thanksgiving** has the overtones of *appreciating the answers* when they come. We must remember that not all **prayer** answers are what we were wanting but what God sees as best. Accepting this is faith.

3 withal praying for us also, that God may open unto us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds;

- A. In prescribing **prayer**, Paul inserted his name on the **prayer** list.
- B. It is **God** that supplies the opportunities for personal and public testimony. We must recognize his role and respond to his open doors.
- C. Paul's interest is that God would **open a door** for the preaching of the **Word**, primarily the **mystery of Christ** that Gentiles are included in God's plan of the ages.
- D. It was this message that had him jailed (**in bonds**), we believe, in Rome.

4 that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

- A. Paul prayed that he might **speak** skillfully. He was fully aware that the human element requires **speaking** skill. Compare the case of Apollos in Acts 18:24-28.
- B. Many in the role of **speaking** for the Lord put little or no effort into learning how to do this with skill. We must study the art of speaking. There are classes in colleges and other institutions. *Toastmasters* clubs are an effective and low budget approach to gaining speaking skills.
- C. Public speakers for the Lord should put careful preparation into their presentations and not rely on a natural aptitude with words to substitute for informed preparation.

5 Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.

- A. Believers are not at liberty to run rough shod over the views and lifestyles of the unconverted. We are to use **wisdom** in dealing with them.
- B. Some Christian leaders are rude and insolent and drive people away unnecessarily while cloaking the outcome as a result of their firm stand for the Lord.

- C. Using the term **without** shows that Paul and the church had a clear view as to who was in the church and who was not. Some churches cannot define their membership, always hoping that so-and-so is with us.
- D. **Time** is among the most important dimensions of life. Believers must buy up the opportunities opened for us by the Lord.

6 Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer each one.

- A. Another phase of using wisdom toward unbelievers is in our **speech**. Our words are to be **gracious** and kindly.
- B. **Seasoned with salt**, according to N. T. Wright, carries the idea of concise and crisp answers. He says, "Paul knows that a tedious monologue is worse than useless in evangelism." One author, writing a book for salesmen, entitled a chapter "Don't Write, Telegraph."
- C. **Answer** implies that people are inquiring about the believer's faith and lifestyle.
- D. Perhaps not all people should be **answered** in just the same way. Some require detailed **answers** that would be unintelligible for other inquirers. Children need different levels of **answers** than teens. High school graduates may need different **answers** than College graduates.

7 All my affairs shall Tychicus make known unto you, the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord:

- A. There were matters of living that Paul did not want to include in the letter. They were better communicated by word of mouth.
- B. **Tychicus** is mentioned in Acts 20:4 as a native of Asia accompanying Paul on his journey to Jerusalem. His name appears also in 2 Timothy 4:12 and Titus 3:12.

- C. Here Paul gives **Tychicus** high recommendations as the bearer of this letter and the dispenser of private information about Paul's conditions.

8 whom I have sent you for this very purpose, that ye may know our state, and that he may comfort your hearts;

- A. Communication between Christian centers is important in the growth of the church worldwide. Here Paul was dispatching Tychicus to be a **comfort** to the Colossian Church.
- B. We need to devise ways to keep in touch with other congregations and leaders of congregations. Perhaps this points to a wider use of the printed page for news of other places.

9 together with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things that *are done* here.

- A. **Onesimus** had been a slave of Philemon and had escaped to Paul in Rome. Paul had taught him the Way of Christ and now he was returning home to once again serve Philemon who evidently lived at Colosse.
- B. This is the subject of the epistle to Philemon.
- C. Saying that **Onesimus is a faithful and beloved brother** makes his conversion very clear.
- D. Notice the respect and responsibility that Paul gives this runaway slave.

10 Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner saluteth you, and Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (touching whom ye received commandments; if he come unto you, receive him),

- A. It appears that **Aristarchus** was also in prison in Rome. We do not know why. N. T. Wright suggests that statement may be metaphorical, but finally settles on the literal meaning.

- B. He had a heart tuned to the churches and wanted to be remembered to the church at Colosse. It is only in this passage that we learn that **Aristarchus** is Jewish, based on the statement of verse 11.
- C. **Mark** may have had an unsatisfactory reputation among the churches that Paul dealt with. Paul wanted to assure the church on how to handle his case if he shows up among them. Sometimes churches can continue a controversy that the original disputants have long ago cleared up.
- D. Fences had been mended with **Mark** over the issue of Acts 13:13 and 15:39. While Paul had, in a sense, been wronged by Mark's departure from the evangelistic team at a critical moment, yet Paul forgave any wrong connected with the event.
- E. **Mark** is almost universally accepted as the writer of the Gospel of Mark and a companion of Peter. Both men had similar episodes in their walk with the Lord. Peter had denied Christ at a crucial time and Mark had refused to go to the work of preaching at a crucial time.
- F. The consensus among the translators is that **Mark** was a **cousin** of **Barnabas**.

11 and Jesus that is called Justus, who are of the circumcision: these only are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, men that have been a comfort unto me.

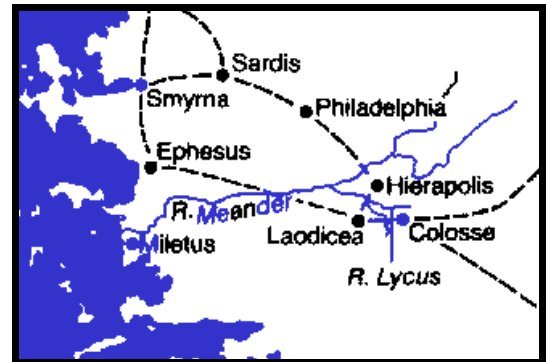
- A. The alternate name of **Justus** distinguishes this Jewish man from the Lord.
- B. The **kingdom** was present. Most translators say **for the kingdom** rather than **unto the kingdom**.
- C. Encouragement and **comfort** are needed for the most self-contained.

12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, saluteth you, always striving for you in his prayers, that ye may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.

- A. **Epaphras** had originally preached the message among them. Colossians 1:7-8.
- B. While **Epaphras** had other responsibilities at this moment and was not coming with this letter, yet he **prayed** for them in a dedicated way, asking the Lord for their continued development.
- C. The favorite Greek sport was wrestling and that is the word Paul uses. It is translated **striving** in this translation. A large amount of Greek art of the time, including pottery, depicts wrestling.

13 For I bear him witness, that he hath much labor for you, and for them in Laodicea, and for them in Hierapolis.

- A. This may refer to Epaphras laboring in prayer or it may simply say that he was a great zeal for them.
- B. His interest extended to Laodicea and Hierapolis as well. They were neighboring churches in neighboring communities.



14 Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas salute you.

- A. Since verse 11 specifies the Jewish men, it follows that **Luke** is not included and is therefore a Gentile. This is the commonly held view.
- B. It is clear that **Luke** is a **physician**, both from his choice of words and general sensitivity to humans. See the book by W. E. Hobart entitled *The Medical Language of Luke*. Mr. Hobart makes a good, but not irrefutable, case for **Luke** being a **physician**.
- C. It is widely accepted that **Luke** is the author of both the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Book of Acts*. He was a traveling companion of Paul beginning in Acts 16 and continuing to the end of *Acts*. Indeed, he was **loved** by Paul.

- D. Some have thought that **Luke** was once a ship's doctor because of his familiarity with seafaring in Acts 27 and 28. If we exclude Hebrews, **Luke** penned more words than Paul.
- E. Demas is mentioned here in a positive way. Later, he "went back to the world." 2 Timothy 4:10.

15 Salute the brethren that are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church that is in their house.

- A. A house church is identified. Ladies owned property, provided hospitality. Rom. 16:5; Philemon 2.
- B. Experts disagree on whether **Nymphas** is male or female. Fortunately, it is not an important point.
- C. What is clear is that a **church** met in a **house**. The **church** did not have the same limitation as the synagogue where 10 men had to be available before an organization could be set up. Jesus has said that "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of you." Matthew 18:20.
- D. There is no record to indicate that any of the churches of the time had their own buildings. Some religious groups have pressed this incidental as part of the New Testament model, but without success. The so-called *Two by Twos* is a case in point.

16 And when this epistle hath been read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye also read the epistle from Laodicea.

- A. The letter was to be publicly **read**. This enables even the illiterate in the church to hear the written Word. This practice should be restored in the church of today, as well as at bedsides and other appropriate places. While nearly all in the United States can read, some are practical illiterates. They cannot read and make sense of the text.
- B. It is beyond question that Paul considered his letter to be authoritative.

- C. While it is not stated, yet the text makes room for copying the **epistle** rather than sending the original onward. This would be the beginning of multiple manuscripts of the sacred text. Such a practice would ensure the integrity of the original. A lone original could be tampered with, but the multiplication of copies assures that this will not happen.
- D. Unlike the Old Testament that was copied only by dedicated professionals, the New Testament books were copied by anyone who could do it.
- E. There has been much debate over the **epistle from Laodicea**, some arguing that it was one written by them. However, now it is widely accepted that Paul had written *to Laodicea*. The question is what was in the letter?
- F. Lightfoot argues that it was really the circular letter that we call *Ephesians*. It may not have had a greeting originally and does not name any individuals such as in the verses we are reading here. N.T. Wright accepts this argument.
- G. There was a fraudulent Epistle to Laodicea circulating at an early time. There is a detailed discussion on the Internet at:
<http://reluctant-messenger.com/epistle-laodiceans.htm> See also:
<http://www.studydrive.org/dic/ebd/view.cgi?number=T2239>

17 And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.

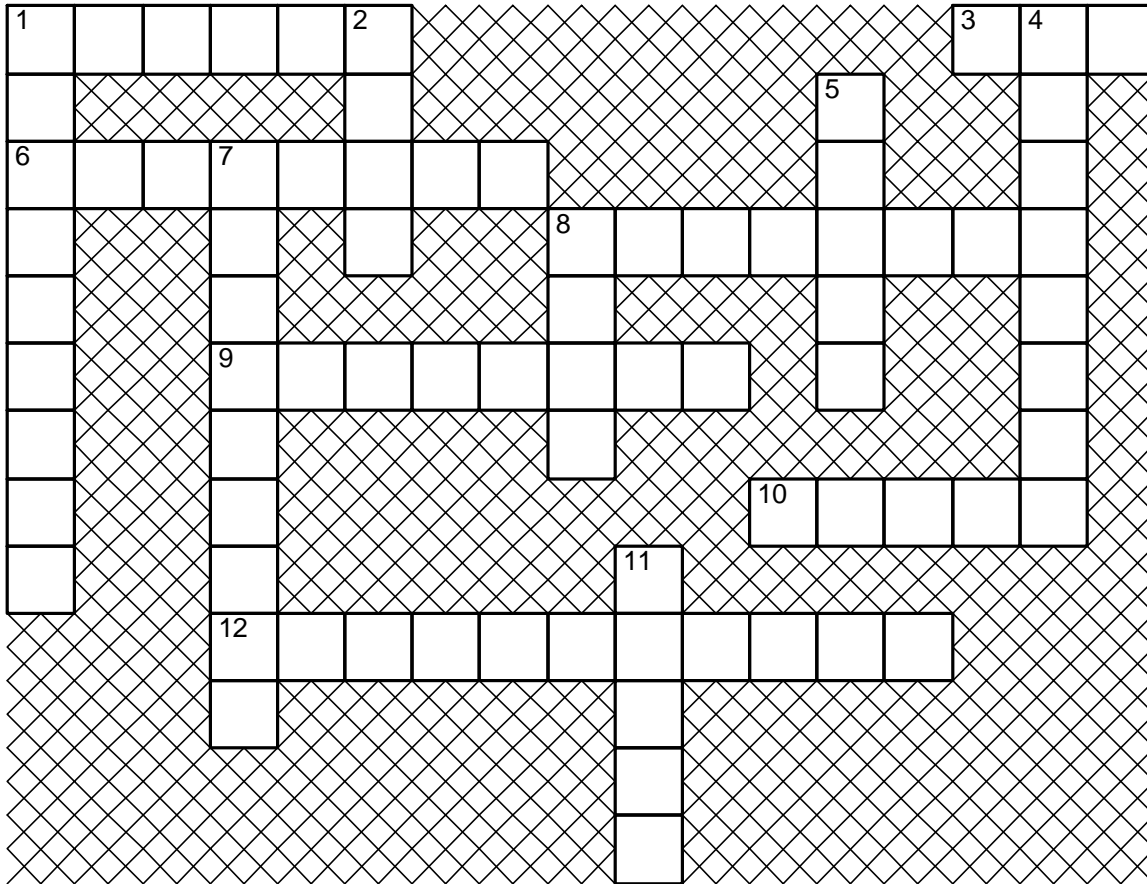
- A. **Archippus** needed some exhortation. He had taken on some task that was languishing.

18 The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you.

- A. This is evidence that the epistle is genuine. Paul takes the pen from the secretary and writes two sentences. It is similar to us signing a letter that has been typewritten. It adds a bit of both authenticity and humanity.

- B. Paul did not want to be out-of-sight-out-of-mind to them. After all, he is in **bonds**, chains, on behalf of all Gentile believers.
- C. The letter has opened with **grace** as a greeting in verse two and closes with the same reminder of God's matchless **grace**.

Colossians 4
by Lois Dailey



May 28, 2001

Across

1. Use it when dealing with the unconverted.
3. Supplies opportunities for testifying.
6. Had originally preached at Colosse.
8. A native of Asia.
9. General view of servants.
10. Paul asked them to remember his.
12. Paul's fellow-prisoner.

Down

1. Another word for striving.
2. A cousin of Barnabas.
4. Philemon's slave.
5. Accepting prayer answers.
7. Luke.
8. A most important dimension of life.
11. The letter opens and closes with the same Gentile word.