

COLOSSIANS CHAPTER ONE PRAYER

Greeting; 1:1-2

1. *Prayer of Thanks; 1:3-8*

- a. For their faith; 1:4a
- b. For their love; 1:4b
- c. Their faith and love were produced by the hope they had learned in the gospel; 1:5-8

2. *Prayer of Request; 1:9-13*

- a. That they be filled with knowledge of God's will; 1:9
- b. That they walk worthily; 1:10-13
 - (1) Bearing fruit; 1:10a
 - (2) Increasing in knowledge of God; 1:10b
 - (3) Being strengthened; 1:11
 - (4) Giving thanks to the Father; 1:12-13

3. *The Preeminence of Christ—the motivation to prayer; 1:14-23*

- a. We have redemption in him; 1:14
- b. He is the image of God; 1:15
- c. He is the firstborn of creation; 1:15b-16
- d. He is before all things; 1:17a
- e. In him all things hold together; 1:17b
- f. He is head of the body; 1:18a
- g. He is the beginning; 1:18b
- h. He is the firstborn from the dead; 1:18c
- i. What God's good pleasure decided about Christ; 1:19-23
 - (1) All the fulness to dwell in him; 1:19
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4. *Paul's Ministry; 1:24—2:5.*

(See next outline)

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 - (a) Bearing fruit; 1:10b
 - (b) Increasing in knowledge; 1:10c
 - (c) Being empowered; 1:11
 - (d) Giving thanks to the Father; 1:12-13
 - [1] He made us meet to partake of the inheritance; 1:12
 - [2] He delivered us into the kingdom of his son; 1:13

1:1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2. to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ that are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Translation and Paraphrase

1:1. (A letter from) Paul, an apostle (one especially commissioned) of Jesus Christ through the will of God (with God's special approval and help), and Timothy the brother (so well known to all),

2. to (all) the saints (the holy ones) and (the) faithful (Christian) brothers in Colossae (who are) in Christ (Jesus—in his church, his service, his care): May favor (that is, grace,) be unto you, and peace (also) from God our father (and the Lord Jesus Christ).

Notes

1. Paul opened his epistle to the Colossians with a greeting that both asserts his apostolic authority and his good will toward the Colossians.
2. Paul calls himself "an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God." He needed to emphasize his office to these Colossians, who had never met him. The word *apostle* means one who is sent, or one specially commissioned. Paul was not merely one sent by some church, but he was one of the special messengers of Christ, on a par with the original twelve apostles of Christ. (Luke 6:13; II Cor. 12:11-12). Paul had divine approval and divine commission for everything he wrote to the Colossians. Compare I Cor. 14:37.
3. Paul's entire work and office was "through the will of God." We also need this sense of divine sending, of doing our service through the will of God, even though we cannot claim the authority that Paul had. As long as we serve God according to the New Testament teachings, we are serving according to the will of God.
4. Timothy is named as co-sender of the epistle, although the composition of the letter was solely the work of Paul. Timothy was also co-sender of II Corinthians, Philippians, I and II Thessalonians, and Philemon. See notes on Phil. 1:1 concerning Timothy.
5. Timothy is referred to as "our brother" (Gr. *the* brother). Evidently the Colossians had sufficient acquaintance with Timothy or his work with Paul to need no further introductions.
The title "the brother" is also applied to Quartus (Rom. 16:23), Sosthenes (I Cor. 1:1), and Apollos (I Cor. 16:12).
The Colossians could read this letter with assurance, for it came from those who referred to themselves as their brothers.
6. Paul addressed the Colossians as *saints*. Our generation (even most church members) seems to be afraid to be saints, or be

called saints. *Saints* means holy ones, sanctified ones, those set apart unto God. Many people are bold to speak evil and do evil. Let us be bold as saints.

7. The expression "saints and faithful brethren" refers to just one group of people, the Colossian Christians. One Greek article relates to both descriptions.
8. Paul addresses this epistle to individuals, rather than to a church. Paul did sometimes address letters to churches in particular cities or areas, but his letters were directed to these smaller groups—to individuals, to saints in particular places, to particular churches. Paul would not approve of the practice of many in our generation who seek to use the whole church everywhere as a corporate pressure group for social revolution.
9. The Colossian Christians lived in two realms. They were *in Christ*, and also *in Colossae* at the same time. Colossae was an ungodly place, like nearly every city. But in the midst of Colossae the Christians had their real residence in Christ. They had not been taken out of the world, but yet they were not of the world. John 17:14-15.
10. Paul wished for the Colossians; (1) grace (outward favor) and (2) peace (inner content). Here in Colossians as in all of Paul's epistles except Hebrews he begins with a wish for grace to be with his readers. Compare Rom. 1:7; Phil. 1:2; Eph. 1:2.
11. Paul's greetings in Col. 1:1-2 reveals much about him. It reveals his firmness as an apostle; his willingness to share the honor of authorship with others like Timothy; his sincere high regard for the Colossians as saints and faithful brethren; his good wishes toward them.

3. We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4. having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have toward all the saints.

Translation and Paraphrase

3. We give thanks (continually) to God (the) father of our Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah), always praying for you,

4. because we have heard of your faith (and faithfulness) in Christ Jesus, and (of) the love which you (always) have toward all the saints.

Notes

1. Most of Colossians chapter one is a prayer. Some of it (like 1:12-23) consists of thoughts that grow out of Paul's remarks about his prayers; but it still relates to prayer.
2. In 1:3-8 Paul expresses his constant thanks for the Colossians. Compare Eph. 1:16. He was primarily thankful for their faith and love.
2. In 1:3-8 Paul expresses his constant thanks for the Colossians. In all cases his thanks were sincere. He did not say he was thankful just because that was a psychologically good approach.
4. Paul expressed his thanks in prayer. Prayer was the constant habit of Paul's life. Compare I Thess. 1:2.
5. The Colossian church had faith, love, and hope, the three great virtues. Col. 1:4-5. Compare I Cor. 13:13 and I Thess. 1:4-5.
6. Colossians 1:4 indicates that the Christian life is primarily directed toward two people: (1) toward Christ Jesus; and (2) toward the saints.
7. Paul was particularly thankful for the faith and love of the Colossians. We in our generation with its organized and militant unbelief should also feel very thankful to God for our brethren who have faith, wherever they are and however imperfect their faith may be.
8. Faith comes first, and then love. Love without faith is only sentimentality and perishable humanitarianism. However, faith without love is cruel; yea worse than that it is utterly nothing. I Cor. 13:2.
9. Paul had heard of the faith and love of the Colossians from their minister Epaphras, who visited him in Rome. Col. 1:4; Cf. Eph. 1:15.

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.

Translation and Paraphrase

5. (You have cultivated this faith and love) because of the hope (that is) laid up (and reserved) for you in the heavens. (This hope is the hope) which you heard about previously in the message of the truth, (that is, in) the gospel.

Notes

1. The message of the gospel tells us about the *hope* laid up for us in the heavens. This hope produces faith and love within us, as it did in the Colossians.

If we expect people to have faith and love as the Colossians did, we must tell them of the hope laid up for us. How long has it been since you preached a sermon or taught a lesson about heaven?

2. Our hope is laid up in the heavens. Compare I Peter 1:4, 13; Titus 2:13; Heb. 6:18-19. This is the "one hope" of Eph. 4:1.

Our generation has largely repudiated every religion based on a hope in the world to come, on "pie in the sky." Even many theologians and clergymen (and surely God despises both of these titles) openly scorn the hope of a heavenly home.

But the fact remains that those who believe most earnestly in the world to come live the present life in the best way. Heaven-loving Christians are not lawless anarchists and revolutionaries.

If heaven has lost its appeal to you, go and study Revelation 21 and 22 and John 14. Study these chapters on your knees; meditate; pray over them until the light of heaven's glory crowds out the last bit of love for the world's gaudy glare.

3. The gospel is the word of *truth*. Eph. 1:13; II Pet. 1:12; I Thess. 2:13. We have the gospel in written form, but it is still *truth*. This is indicated by the honesty and sacrifice of its authors; by the endorsement of Christ; by the fulfillment of the prophecies in the Scriptures; by the consistent close agreement in the wording in ancient Bible manuscripts; and by the power of the gospel in our lives.
4. The Colossians had heard of their heavenly hope sometime previously, when the gospel had first been preached to them.

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;

Translation and Paraphrase

6. (The truth of the gospel is) present among you, just as it is (present with saints) in all the world, bearing (good) fruit and increasing (everywhere), just as it also (does) in (the midst of)

you, from the day you (first) heard and accurately knew (of) the grace of God in truth (until now).

Notes

1. Col. 1:6 gives a description of the spread of the gospel: (1) It had come even unto the Colossians. (2) It bore good fruit wherever it spread. (3) It was increasing rapidly. (3) It had done these things consistently among the Colossians, ever since the day they heard the gospel and knew the truth about God's favor.
2. The rapidity of the spread of the gospel in the first century is indicated by Paul's remark "as it is also in all the world."

Compare Col. 1:23, where we are told that the gospel was preached in all creation.

We understand this to mean "in all the known world," and not necessarily as far away as the North American continent at that time.

If the gospel could spread into all the world in the first century with its limited means of communication, we should be assured that it can yet be spread over all the world in our generation with its improved communication and transportation facilities.
3. The gospel bears many fruits, all of them good. See Gal. 5:22-23; Isaiah 55:10-13.
4. The gospel has been increasing ever since it was first preached. "Of the increase of his (Christ's) government and of peace there shall be no end." (Isaiah 9:7). We may sometimes forget that there are more Christians in the world today than there have ever been before. Proportionally the percentage of Christians in the world's population may be less because of the population explosion, but the increase in number is still real.
5. The nature of the gospel: (Col. 1:5-8).
 - (1) It is good news (*gospel* means good news).
 - (2) It tells of a heavenly hope.
 - (3) It is truth.
 - (4) It spreads rapidly.
 - (5) It bears fruit.
 - (6) It tells of God's grace.
 - (7) It is humanly transmitted.

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.

Translation and Paraphrase

7. (All these things about the hope in the gospel, and the way it is increasing, you know. They are realities to you,) just as you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow-slave (of Christ), who is a faithful servant (or minister) of Christ in your behalf.

8. (Epaphras is the one) who also made known to us your love in the Spirit (the love produced by the Spirit within you).

Notes

1. The servants, or ministers, of God from whom we learned the truth of God are worthy of honor. "How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things." (Romans 10:15; Isaiah 52:7). Therefore Paul reminds the Colossians that Epaphras had taught them of the grace of God in truth.
2. Epaphras is referred to in Col. 1:7-8; 4:12-13; and Philemon 23. From these verses we learn the following about him:
 - (1) He first had taught the Colossians of the grace of God.
 - (2) He was a faithful minister.
 - (3) He was one of Colossians.
 - (4) Paul loved him.
 - (5) He was a servant (bondservant) of Christ Jesus.
 - (6) He prayed much for the Colossians.
 - (7) He labored much for them.
 - (8) He also labored for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis.
 - (9) He told Paul about the love of the Colossians, and presumably other things about them also.
 - (10) He was a fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus with Paul in Rome. We do not know any details about this imprisonment.
3. The ancient manuscripts are divided on whether 1:7 says "on *our* behalf," or "on *your* behalf." With some hesitation we choose the reading "on your behalf." Besides the fact that this is the reading given in many old Greek manuscripts, it is also given in the Latin New Testament. But perhaps most convincing to us is the fact that it seems to make better sense than the reading "on our behalf." Epaphras was not a minister

on behalf of Paul, but he was definitely a minister on behalf of the Colossians.

4. Epaphras was Paul's fellow-servant." This title means "fellow-slave" (Gr. *sundoulos*).
5. Epaphras was a faithful minister. *Minister* here is a translation of the Greek *diakonos* (from which we derive *deacon*), which means servant, attendant, waiter, minister, etc. The word should probably not here be taken in a professional sense. Epaphras was a servant (or minister) in the way every Christian should be a minister. He may have been a business man of some type. His job was preaching Christ; he may have made his living at some trade.
6. Epaphras had told Paul of the Colossians' love in the Spirit. Probably we ought not to attempt to dissect and examine this expression "love in the Spirit." It is better to exemplify it in our lives than to examine it minutely. Doubtless it refers to the love which they had in their hearts and displayed in their lives because the Holy Spirit was in them, and they were in the Spirit, yielded to his control, assistance, and guidance. The first fruit of the Holy Spirit is love. Gal. 5:22.

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

Translation and Paraphrase

9. On account of this (love which you have) we also, since the day when we (first) heard (about it), do not cease praying and making request (to God) in behalf of you, that you may be filled with the precise knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

10. (And that you may have the motivation and strength) to walk (and live) worthily of the Lord, (making it your goal to attain) unto ever (thing) pleasing (to God), bearing fruit and increasing in the precise knowledge of God.

Notes

1. 1:9-13 contains Paul's prayer of request for the Colossians. His prayer contains two requests: (1) that they be filled with the

knowledge of God's will; (2) that they walk (that is, live) worthily of the Lord.

These are comprehensive requests. They sum up everything that is of real importance in the Christian life. What more could we ask than that we know God's will and that we do it? Physical needs will be cared for if we know and do God's will.

2. Paul not only had a constant gratitude (1:3), but also a continuing prayer (1:9). Compare Eph. 1:15-19.
3. Let us join Paul in prayer that we all may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. We all have a long way to go to attain this. There are vast portions of the Bible with which most of us have almost no acquaintance. Furthermore it, is probably pure presumption to say that we really know the parts with which we are acquainted.

Until we sense how very little we know, we really know nothing at all. I Cor. 8:2.

We should stop trying to make God listen to us, and begin listening to God.

4. Paul's prayer that they might know God's will was perhaps a dig at the Gnostics, who thought that they knew all. See Introductory Study on *Gnosticism*.
5. We are to be filled with precise knowledge of God's will. The Greek word for knowledge here is *epignosis*, a somewhat stronger word than *gnosis*, basic knowledge. Compare II Tim. 3:7.
6. The implications of the phrase "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" are very broad. These words recall to our minds the introduction to Proverbs, which says that that book was written so that we might "know wisdom and instruction; to discern the words of understanding." (Prov. 1:12.) Thus it seems to us that Paul was praying that the Colossians might know all of the practical godliness portrayed in Proverbs and other parts of God's word.
7. Paul wanted the Colossians to walk (live) worthily of the Lord. They were to translate the knowledge of God into human situations. How sad it is to see a man who is a master of theology and a failure in living.

The concept of a worthy *walk*, a worthy way of life, is very common in Paul's writings. Eph. 4:1; Phil. 1:27; I Thess. 2:12.

8. To walk worthily . . . "unto all pleasing" means simply "unto every pleasing thing." To arrive at the point where pleasing God is more important to us than pleasing ourselves should be our goal.
9. There are four participles or participial phrases in Col. 1:10-12 that describe what Paul meant when he said that we were to walk worthily of the Lord:
 - (1) being fruitful; 1:10.
 - (2) Increasing in the knowledge of God; 1:10.
 - (3) Strengthened with all might; 1:11.
 - (4) Giving thanks; 1:12.
10. "Bring fruitful in every good work" is a primary goal for every Christian's life. A plant or tree lives for the purpose of blooming and bearing fruit and reproducing itself; likewise fruit-bearing should be the purpose of our existence as Christians. The fruit of a Christian's life includes such things as holy living, a good influence, relief of human misery, and soul won to Christ. See Rom. 1:13; John 4:36; 15:4-5, 16; Phil. 1:22; Col. 1:6; II Pet. 1:8.
11. Paul's phrase in 1:10 about "increasing in the knowledge of God" seems at first glance to be a repetition of the prayer in 1:9 that we be filled with the knowledge of God, and in truth it is a repetition. (Both verses use the word *epignosis*, meaning precise knowledge.) In 1:10 increasing in knowledge is mentioned as a part of our worthy walk, and not as something distinct from it. Christian knowledge and Christian living are in one way distinct items (as in 1:9), and yet in another way they are inseparable (as in 1:10).

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

Translation and Paraphrase

11. (and) being strengthened by all (the) strength (from God), according to his glorious manifested power, (until you attain) all endurance (in your own life) and patience (toward others) with joyfulness.

Notes

1. An essential part of walking worthily of the Lord lies in our being strengthened by the Lord's strength, literally "being made powerful by all power." Other scriptures also stress this point. Eph. 1:18-19; 3:16.
2. The degree of power available unto us is indicated by saying that the power is "according to the might of his glory," or "according to his glorious might." The might available unto us is therefore as unlimited as God is unlimited.
3. The strengthening of God is to bring us unto all patience and longsuffering. *Patience* (Gr. *hupomone*) means the ability to endure and bear up and remain faithful under every assault. *Longsuffering* (Gr. *makrothumia*) refers to our ability to keep a forgiving, hopeful attitude toward people, to avoid hastily retaliating a wrong.
4. Our longsuffering is to be with joyfulness, rather than with Stoic submissiveness.
5. Col. 1:11 raises the question as to how God's power is to be released to work in our lives. How do we get hold of God's power, and experience the strengthening that He gives? The world and much of the church too is crying for the answer to this question. People want to see a display of divine power rather than to hear a sermon. This explains in part the appeal of many "Pentecostal" religions. They loudly claim that they have found the secret of loosing God's power suddenly into people's lives, and this is appealing.

However the matter is usually neither simple nor quick. Observe that even when we are empowered with all power we still must have patience and longsuffering. We shall always be faced by opponents, critics, and doubters. Tribulation is never taken from us in this life (Acts 14:22). God never seems to be in a hurry from our point of view of time. He may take centuries to fulfill His objectives (though sometimes He does things so quickly that we are astounded). To us it may appear that God's longsuffering means either that He has no power or does not care to use it. Both of these ideas are totally false. Again, our own sins (even our marital incompatibility! I Pet. 3:7) may keep God's power from working within us. (Isa. 59:1-2). God did tremendous things through Abraham, Jacob, and David. But think of the years God took to do the

great things through their lives and think of the trouble these men had. God always works in such a way that his people must have faith in him at every stage for the future. God's use of his power in our lives does not instantly solve all mysteries, remove all obstacles, and leave us triumphant and crowned. The best approach to gaining the strength from God seems to be: (1) Believe in God's promises always; (2) Work as if everything depended on you; (3) Pray as if everything depended on God; (4) Leave the results to God.

12. giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints, in light; 13. who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love;

Translation and Paraphrase

12. (Also let us be) giving thanks to the father who made us worthy to obtain a share of the inheritance of the saints (who dwell) in the light (of God);

13. (Also we thank the father, for it is he) who drew us to himself out of the authority (and power) of (Satan's kingdom of) darkness, and transferred (us) into the kingdom of his beloved son (which is the church).

Notes

1. The final, and probably climactic, part of walking worthily is to be giving thanks unto God the Father. God certainly deserves our thanks because: (1) he qualified us to be sharers in the inheritance of the saints; (2) he delivered us out of Satan's power into the kingdom of his son.
2. Giving thanks must be a continual process. I Thess. 5:18; Eph. 5:20. Gratitude is the foundation of Christian character. We should not have one day each year for thanksgiving and 364 for complaining. It would be better to have 364 for giving thanks, and one (or none!) for our gripes, grumbles, grunts, and groans.
3. The Father has made us *meet* to be partakers of the inheritance. *Meet* means fit for, or qualified, or good enough for, or adequate, or sufficient for. We are God's workmanship. Eph. 2:10. He makes us meet for the inheritance.

4. We rejoice to share in the inheritance from God with the saints in light. See Acts 20:32.

The "saints in light" are those both living and dead who have come to have fellowship with God, for God is light. (I John 1:5; II Cor. 4:16). "Light" refers to holiness (Acts 26:18), to divine revelation and truth (II Cor. 4:4, 6), to love (I John 2:9, 10), and glory (Isaiah 60:1-3).

5. God *delivered* us from the power of darkness. "Delivered" is in the Greek aorist tense, indicating an action at one point, as opposed to a continuous action. Thus our deliverance is a once-for-all deliverance.
6. God has *translated* us into the kingdom of his son. *Translated* here means transferred. The Gr. is *ruomai*, which means to draw to oneself, to rescue, to deliver. In ancient times conquering generals oftentimes transported conquered peoples from their homelands to other lands. Similarly God, having defeated Satan in our lives, has transferred us to a new realm.
7. Note that Paul speaks of "us" and not of "you." Paul himself was a partaker in the work of God, so that he could not write of salvation abstractly.
8. The "power of darkness" or the "dominion of darkness" refers to the world, or Satan's kingdom. (Acts 26:18; Matt. 4:16; John 8:12; 12:35, 46; I John 1:5-6). The fact that the darkness has *power* (Gr. *exousia*, authority) shows that there is a personal quality about it; a personal devil has the power in the domain of darkness.
9. We are transferred into the *kingdom* of God's beloved son. This is one of numerous verses in the New Testament that teach that Christ's kingdom already exists, that it is practically synonymous with the church, and that we do not have to wait unto Christ comes back for the establishment of His kingdom. See Heb. 12:28; Rev. 1:9; Mark 9:1.

Study and Review

Questions Over Colossians 1:1-13

1. What title does Paul use for himself as he begins Colossians? (1:1)
2. Whose will was it that Paul be an apostle?
3. Who was co-sender of the epistle with Paul?

4. How is the co-sender described?
5. What two terms does Paul use to describe the Colossians? (1:2)
6. What does grace *mean*?
7. In what two places, or realms, were the Colossians?
8. What two things did Paul wish for the Colossians?
9. When did Paul give thanks for the Colossians? (1:3)
10. How did he express his thanks?
11. What two things about the Colossians had Paul heard? (1:4)
12. What caused the faith and love of the Colossians? (1:4-5)
13. Where was their hope laid up?
14. Where had the Colossians heard about their hope?
15. What is referred to as "the word of the truth"?
16. To where had the gospel come (two areas)? (1:6)
17. What two things did the gospel do when it came to any place?
18. From whom had the Colossians learned the gospel? (1:7)
19. What does the word *minister* in 1:7 mean?
20. What particular thing about the Colossians had been declared to Paul? (1:8)
21. To what cause does Paul refer in 1:9?
22. What did Paul not cease to do after hearing about the Colossians?
23. What two things did Paul pray for and request concerning the Colossians? (1:9-10)
24. What sort of knowledge did Paul want the Colossians to have?
25. What does "to walk" in 1:10 mean?
26. What are the four participles (or participial phrases) in 1:10-12 which describe the worthy walk?
27. In what are we to bear fruit? (1:10)
28. In what are we to increase?
29. With what are Christians strengthened? (1:11)
30. Unto what two things are we to be strengthened?
31. What two facts are told about the father in 1:12-13 that should cause us to give thanks?
32. Define the word *meet* in 1:12.
33. Of what are we made partakers?
34. What is meant by the expression "the saints *in light*"? How are the saints in light?
35. What has God delivered us out of?
36. What is the power of darkness?
37. Give a synonym for the word *translated* in 1:13.

38. Into what are we translated?
 39. What is the kingdom of God's son?

Outline of 1:14-23

- B. CHRIST—His supremacy and work; 1:14-23
1. In Christ we have redemption; 1:14
 2. Christ is the image of God; 1:15
 3. Christ is the firstborn of all creation; 1:15b-16
 - a. Because in him all things were created
 - b. Through him and unto him all were created
 4. Christ is before all things; 1:17a
 5. In Christ all things consist; 1:17b
 6. Christ is head of the body; 1:18a
 7. Christ is the beginning; 1:18b
 8. Christ is the firstborn from the dead; 1:18c
 9. What God's good pleasure decided concerning Christ; 1:19-23
 - a. All the fulness would dwell in him; 1:19
 - b. He would reconcile all things; 1:20-23
 - (1) Who?—Things in heaven and earth; 1:20
 - (2) Need for reconciliation—alienation; 1:21
 - (3) How?—By Christ's death; 1:22
 - (4) Goal of reconciliation—To present men perfect; 1:22-23
 - (a) Condition for presentation: that we continue in the gospel; 1:23
 - [1] The gospel was preached in all creation
 - [2] Paul was made a minister of the gospel

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

Translation and Paraphrase

14. (The Son is he) in whom we have redemption, (we are bought back from the slavery of sin; and our redemption is provided to us by) the forgiveness of (our) sins;

Notes

1. Col. 1:14 begins a new section in our outline (1:14-23), which deals with the supremacy and preeminence of Christ. Many things are listed which indicate his supremacy. Some of these involve his work; some involve his nature; some involve

his offices. They all show that in all things he has pre-eminence. (Col. 1:18). Here we see very plainly what was stated in our introductory studies, that Colossians is the most Christ-centered epistle in the New Testament.

2. We have *redemption* in Christ, and from no other source. *Redemption* is the act of buying back something that has been sold. We sold ourselves into condemnation in order to practice sin. (I Kings 21:20). Christ bought us back, not with decaying material wealth like silver and gold, but with his own precious blood. I Peter 1:18-19. He gave his life that we might live with God.
3. All of this Bible teaching about redemption sounds ridiculous to modern modes of thinking. Instead of accepting the truth that we are sold into sin, this generation thinks it owns and controls everything. But our need for redemption is solidly based on the infinite holiness, justice, and love of God. God's holiness cannot tolerate our sin. His justice and law requires that a life be given for a life forfeited by sin. His love caused him to send his only begotten son into the world to suffer the penalty due to sinners, that whosoever believes on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.
4. Our redemption is identified as being "the forgiveness of our sins. Forgiveness of sins stands in apposition to redemption. Redemption and forgiveness of sins are the same work of Christ, viewed from two points. When we speak of redemption, we emphasize our helpless condition and Christ's act of buying us back. When we speak of forgiveness, we emphasize our own guilt in the matter. Eph. 1:7.

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

Translation and Paraphrase

15. (Yea further, the Son) is the (very) likeness (—the picture, the manifestation and representation—) of the invisible God; (and he is) the firstborn of all (the) creation (having authority over all creation as the firstborn in a tribe rules the tribe).

16. (Now Christ occupies this rank of the firstborn, not because he was the first being created by God, but) because all things were created by him, (the things) in the heavens and (the things) upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether (they be) thrones, or lordships, or rulers, or authorities (these being titles and offices among the unseen hosts in our universe), all (these) things have been created through him, and for him.

Notes

1. Christ is so close to God that he is God's very *image* (Gr. *eikon*). *Image* means likeness, or figure. The word has the added suggestion of representation and manifestation. (Thayer). II Cor. 4:4.
2. One ancient letter preserved for us tells how a man sent a artist's small sketch of himself to his family, saying that he was sending them an *eikon* of himself. This illustrates the meaning of the word *image*. Christ is the picture of God, his very likeness.
3. Christ is the image of the invisible God. No one has ever seen God. John 1:18; I Tim. 6:15. Christ has declared and revealed unto us what God is like. (Because no one has ever seen God, no one can make an idol of Him.)
4. The Gnostics regarded Christ as one of the intermediaries between God and men, and as inferior to God. Jesus was to them by no means unique. They further felt that if he was divine, he could not have had a material body, for divinity had no contact with material things. For the same reason Christ could not have had been involved in the creation of the universe. Note how emphatically Paul asserts that Christ was both the creator, and also the very image of God at the same time. (See the Introductory Study on *Gnosticism*.)
5. Note Christ's relationships to creation: (1:16)
 - a. All things were created *in* (or by) him.
 - b. All things were created *through* him.
 - c. All things were created *unto* (or for) him.
6. Christ is the *firstborn* of all creation. This title has little to do with time. It is more a title of rank and honor. See Psalm 89:27 and Ex. 4:22. The firstborn in a nomadic desert tribe is the ruler of the tribe. Rom. 8:29.

Observe carefully that Paul says that Christ is the firstborn of all creation NOT because he was the first thing God created, but because he, Christ, created all things. (John 1:3, 10; Heb. 1:2). If Christ created ALL things, he is therefore not a created being himself. He was himself "in the beginning with God" (John 1:2), and he thought it not robbery to be equal with God (Phil. 2:6).

7. Rev. 3:14 is sometimes set forth as proving that Christ is a created being. There he is called the *beginning* of the creation of God. The word *beginning* in Rev. 3:4 is a translation of the Gr. *arche*, which is the same word used in Luke 20:20, where it is translated "power" (KJV), "rule" (ASV), or "authority" (RSV). (*Arche* is also applied to Christ in Col. 1:18, where it is translated *beginning*.) Thus it appears that both Colossians and Revelation teach that Christ has authority over creation, but that definitely neither indicates that he is a created being.
8. As if to stress the completeness of Christ's part in creation, Paul itemizes the things that Christ created: things in heaven and things on earth; things visible and things invisible; thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers. (Compare Eph. 1:10; I Tim. 1:17; II Cor. 4:18). We suppose that the last four terms refer to ranks and offices within the unseen hosts of angels and spirits in the universe.

Observe that Christ's supremacy embraces the entire universe. When astronauts land on the moon and other heavenly bodies, Christ will still be the Lord and creator of those bodies.

Note that Christ's supremacy is particularly opposed to all heretical teachings that degrade him.

9. Paul's remark that all things were created through Christ and for Him recalls the description of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22-31. There Wisdom speaks as God's master workman in creating the world. Since Christ is God's wisdom (I Cor. 1:30), the passage in Proverbs may well picture Christ's description of His part in the work of creation.
10. Some scholars feel that Col. 1:15-20 is a unit, and was either a hymn written by Paul himself, or one used in the early church. Certainly its thoughts are presented in concise lines (stichs) like poetry, and this contrasts with the more extended paragraph 1:19-23. It has been argued that 1:15-17 is one stanza,

emphasizing Christ's preeminence in creation; and 1:18-20 is a second stanza, emphasizing Christ's preeminence in redemption and the church. The "who is" in 1:15 and 1:18 are alike. Both verses 15 and 18 use the title "firstborn." Verses 16 and 20 both mention the heaven and the earth, though in reverse order. These similarities point to a purposeful pattern of resemblance in the verses.

In spite of these arguments the words of 1:15-20 still must be considerably forced to be made to fit a song or chant. We really do not feel that anyone has proved that this is a song.

11. As supreme creator of the universe and as firstborn of all creation, Christ can deliver us, though we face bombs, space invaders, communism, old age, financial hardship, or the day of judgment!

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

Translation and Paraphrase

17. (Yea) and he exists before all things, and all things hold together in him (by virtue of his will and power).

18. And he is the head of the body, (that is,) the church. (It is he) who is the beginning (the ruler), the firstborn from the dead (the first to rise never to die again), so that he might have the preeminence (first place) in all things.

Notes

1. Col. 1:17 refers to the *pre-existence* of Christ. By this we mean his eternal existence with God before he emptied himself of much of his divine glory and was conceived in Mary. Many other Bible verses refer to his pre-existence. John 1:1-2, 10; Phil. 2:6-7; Micah 5:2; Heb. 1:8-12.
2. Col. 1:17 says that Christ *is* before all things, not that he *was* before all things. To God and Christ all events of all time are eternally in the present tense. Christ himself said, "Before Abraham was, I *am*." (John 8:58).
3. In Christ all things *consist*, that is, all things hold together. There is a wonderful cohesion in the universe. Atoms resist breaking apart with awesome energy. Gravity and other laws

of physics regulate the heavenly bodies with astounding order. No one really knows why gravity works, except that the supreme power so wills it. There is an interdependence among natural creatures that defies naturalistic explanations as to its origin. Even history and the social order, as chaotic as man's sinfulness has made it, seems rushing on to a foredetermined conclusion—perhaps to self-destruction, Armageddon, and (definitely!) to a new heaven and earth.

4. Christ is supreme to the church. He is its head and it is his body. Compare Eph. 1:22-23. As the head of a human body rules the body, so Christ rules the church.

Note that there is one head and one body, one Christ and one church of Christ. Let us be loyal to HIS church, and not to human churches.

5. Christ is the *beginning*. This term signifies the first in a series of things. Thus of all the sons that God has drawn from among men unto himself, Christ is the beginning, the first, the unique son. He is the firstborn among many brethren. Romans 8:29.

In Luke 20:20 the term *arche* (here translated *beginning*) means *rule* or *authority*. According to this meaning of the word, Christ is the ruler; and truly he is.

6. Christ is the firstborn *from* the dead. He was the first to rise from the dead, never to die again. Christ himself resurrected Lazarus (John 11) and some others; there were a few resurrections in Old Testament times (e.g. II Kings 13:21). But all these died again with no recollection of their former experiences after death. But death has no more power over Christ. Romans 6:9; Rev. 1:5.

In the time to come all the dead shall rise, and shall never face physical death again. (Some, alas, shall face the second death of hell. Rev. 20:14-15). John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; I Cor. 15:22. Even then Christ will always be the firstborn from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep. I Cor. 15:20.

7. The last phrase of 1:18 may also be translated, "That he might have the preeminence among all," referring to Christ's preeminence among the dead as well as the living. Christ has preeminence both among all things and among all people, living and dead alike.

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

Translation and Paraphrase

19. (Christ has this universal preeminence) because it was well-pleasing (to God for) all the fulness (of God-hood) to dwell in him;

Notes

1. With the beginning of Col. 1:19 a new style of composition appears. The short independent clauses of Col. 1:16-18 cease, and the new section comes as an extended paragraph (through 1:23) relating the things which God's good pleasure decided concerning Christ.
2. Col. 1:19-20 says that it was well pleasing (pleasing presumably to God) for Christ to have two honors:
 - (1) All the divine fulness would dwell in him.
 - (2) All things would be reconciled through him.
3. Those using modern translations like the R.S.V. will quickly notice a difference in translation of 1:19 between the newer versions and the older King James and American Standard versions.

King James: "For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all the fulness dwell." (The A.S.V. is similar)

Revised Standard: "For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell."

The difference in translation does not indicate any variation in the ancient manuscript readings. The difficulty lies in the fact that Col. 1:19 in Greek has no subject clearly stated, unless the term *fulness* is taken as the subject, which is done in the R.S.V. But the word *fulness* seems to be the subject of the infinitive "to dwell," and it further seems a bit incongruous as a subject for "was pleased." The Gnostics used the word *fulness* as a title for God, and the Colossians were probably familiar with this usage. But its basic meaning is abstract, signifying a full quantity, the full character, the full measure, an abundance. There is no indication that Paul used the word in any sense other than its usual meaning. Fulness is a quality rather than a person. How can a quality "be pleased"? The R.S.V. reading makes it sound as if the quality

of divine fulness is to be thought of as apart from God himself. The R.S.V. reading, while grammatically unobjectionable, leaves us somewhat unsatisfied with the meaning.

To get around this difficulty the K.J.V. and A.S.V. supplied the words *the Father* as a subject for "was pleased." This was done because it apparently is the father who, according to 1:20, is reconciling all things through Christ. The same subject seems to go with "was pleased" in 1:19 that goes with "to reconcile" in 1:20.

It probably would be simpler and safer just to render the verb in 1:19 as having an impersonal subject: "It was well-pleasing for (for) all the fulness to dwell in him." This is quite literally the way the Greek text has it. Also the particular verb here (*eudokeo*) often is used with an impersonal subject.

4. It was well-pleasing (presumably to God and everyone else involved) that in Christ should all the fulness dwell. All the qualities of God-hood dwell in Christ to a fulness. There is no jealousy or rivalry in heaven.

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. 21. And you, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works, 22. yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and unreprouable before him:

Translation and Paraphrase

20. And (it was also well-pleasing) to reconcile all (the alienated things in our universe) to (God) himself through him (that is, through Christ; and Christ does this work of reconciliation as a result of his) having made peace (between God and man) through the blood of (his sacrifice upon) his cross; (Yea, this reconciliation is made) through him (between God and all beings,) whether (they be) the things upon the earth or the things in the heavens.

21. And you (yourselves), though you were formerly alienated (and estranged) and enemies (toward God) in (your) mind by the evil works (which you did),

22. (Yet) he has now reconciled (you) by (offering) his fleshly body through death (upon the cross), to present you holy and without blemish and blameless before him.

Notes

1. God's good pleasure decided that the alienated things in our universe should be reconciled to God through Christ. No other means is provided for this reconciliation.
2. Sin has ruined and alienated our universe. Romans 8:21. The natural world is full of suffering and disorder. Men on earth and the things in the heavens are alike out of harmony with God because of sin. We do not know what (or who) those things are that are in the heavens which need to be reconciled to God, but Col. 1:20 indicates that there are such alienated celestial things. Compare Phil. 2:10.
3. The teaching of Col. 1:20 that God desires to reconcile all things unto himself could be used as an argument that God will ultimately take everybody and everything to heaven. This notion is called universalism. Some theologians have even argued that Satan himself will ultimately be reconciled. But this teaching so utterly contradicts many other Scriptures concerning eternal punishment that it simply cannot be true. Mark 9:43-48; Matt. 25:46; Rev. 14:11; 20:10, 15.

Apparently, while it is God's good pleasure that all things be reconciled, many people simply will not cooperate with God that it be so. God has never forced anyone to accept His blessings, although we cannot escape the consequences of refusing to accept the blessings.

4. Our evil works alienated us from God in times past and made us enemies in our minds toward God. But this enmity was one-sided, and existed only in *our* minds. God *loved* the world. The world because of its sins hated Him. Any time someone wrongs someone else (a child its parent, a pupil his teacher, a workman his employer, a criminal society, a husband his wife, etc.) hostility and estrangement grow up within the one who has done the wrong. This seems so backward; it seems that the one who has been wronged should be offended. But human nature works the other way. The one doing the wrong is alienated, even if the one wronged has forgiven him.

God himself was confronted with this situation. In order to convince man's alienated heart that God truly loved him, God made the supreme sacrifice. He gave up his own son. If the sacrifice of God's own son cannot bring our hearts to

love God, nothing can. See II Cor. 5:19; Eph. 2:13-17. God has made peace between man and himself through the blood of Christ's cross. Eph. 3:16, 14.

5. When once we have been reconciled to God by the message of Christ's death, then it is God's further goal to present us holy, and without blemish, and blameless before Him. There should be a constant process of growth, and self-purification, and service following our conversion until our death (or the Lord's return).

On the day of judgment Christ will deliver those on his right hand unto the father. (Matt. 25:34; I Cor. 15:24). Let us labor to be ready for that day, so that we may be presented holy, without blemish, and unprovable. (The word *unprovable* is Gr. *amegkletos*, a word which is often translated as *blameless*, and means "that cannot be called to account." I Tim. 3:10.)

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.

Translation and Paraphrase

23. (While Christ has reconciled you and designs to present you faultless before God, this will happen only) if you preserve in the faith, builded upon the foundation, and firm, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which you heard about (and which has been) preached in all (the) creation under heaven, (and) of which I Paul was made a minister, (that is, a minister of the gospel).

Notes

1. If we desire to be in that number "when the saints go marching in" and to be presented before God holy and without blemish, there is a condition that we must meet: we must continue in the faith. Compare Heb. 4:14.
2. The necessity of continuing in the faith is the theme of the whole book of Hebrews. It is stated briefly here in Col. 1:23. If we shrink back from the faith, we shrink back unto perdition (destruction). Heb. 10:39.

3. The aim and obligation of reconciliation:
 - (1) Aim—holiness.
 - (2) Obligation—steadfastness.
4. Paul describes the condition of those who continue in the faith as "grounded" (which literally means "built upon a foundation"), and "steadfast" (immoveable), and not moved away from the hope of the gospel (the hope presented in gospel). I Cor. 15:58. Concerning the hope in the gospel, see notes on Col. 1:5.
5. Paul's allusion to the hope of the gospel caused him to make two observations about the gospel:
 - (1) It was preached in all creation under heaven.
 - (2) Paul himself had been made a minister of the gospel. (Paul's reference here to his ministry led into the following section, 1:24—2:5.)
6. The fact that the gospel was preached "in all creation under heaven" in the first century alone, shows that the gospel can be spread over the world in one generation. We seem to lack the faith or the courage to attempt to do this. Compare notes on 1:6.

In Matthew 24:14 Jesus said, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come." In view of the fact that Paul said that in his generation alone the gospel had been preached in all creation, we cannot say that the end cannot come yet because the gospel has not been preached in all nations.

Study and Review

Questions Over Colossians 1:14-23

1. What is the topic of 1:14-23 that is given in our outline?
2. In whom do we have our redemption? (1:14)
3. Define the word *redemption*. From what are we redeemed?
4. What is the relation of redemption to forgiveness of sins?
5. What does the word *image* mean? (1:15)
6. Why is it impossible to make an idol of God?
7. What rank does a *firstborn* have?
8. According to Col. 1:15-16, why is Christ the firstborn of all creation?
9. Explain the phrase "the firstborn of all creation."

10. Where are the things which Christ created located? (1:16)
11. To what do "thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers" refer?
12. What is the difference in meaning between the assertions that all things have been created *through* Christ, and created *unto* him?
13. How far back did Christ exist? (1:17)
14. What do we mean by the *pre-existence* of Christ?
15. What is the tense of the verbs in 1:17? What significance can be attached to this?
16. What does *consist* mean in the clause "in him all things consist"?
17. What is Christ's relation to the church? (1:18)
18. What does the assertion "who is the *beginning*" indicate about Christ?
19. Why is Christ called the firstborn from the dead? Were not others resurrected before Christ arose?
20. What is Christ to have in all things? (1:18)
21. Is Christ preeminent just over those things now living? Give the Scriptural statements that prove the answers to this question.
22. Define the word *fulness* in 1:19. What did the Gnostics mean by this word?
23. In whom does all the fulness dwell? Is this a grudgingly granted concession to him? How do you know?
24. Through whom are all things to be reconciled?
25. Does 1:20 teach that ultimately everybody and everything will be reconciled to God and saved? Give a reason for your answer.
26. Through what has Christ made peace.
27. Where do those who are to be reconciled live? (2 answers)
28. What was our mental attitude in the times before we received Christ? (1:21)
29. What had caused us to be in this frame of mind? (1:21)
30. Where was this alienation and enmity that formerly existed? Was it in God's heart?
31. To what event does the phrase "in the body of his flesh through death" refer? (1:22)
32. What does Christ intend (or hope) to do with us, now that we are reconciled?
33. What is our condition to be when we are presented unto God?

34. What condition must we meet if we are to be presented as holy unto God? (1:23)
35. Explain the term "grounded." (1:23)
36. From what must we not be moved away?
37. Where did we learn of our hope?
38. Where had the gospel been preached within Paul's lifetime?
39. To what does the *whereof* in 1:23 refer? (Or, to put it in another way, Of what had Paul been made a minister?)

PAUL'S MINISTRY

(1:24—2:5)

1. *Attitudes in Paul's ministry; (1:24)*
 - a. Joy
 - b. Dedication to suffering
2. *Source of Paul's ministry; (1:25)*

(It was a stewardship from God given to him.)
3. *The new message in Paul's ministry; (1:26-27)*
 - a. It had been hidden for ages; 1:26a
 - b. It was now manifested to the saints; 1:26b-27a
 - c. The message is Christ in you; 1:27b
4. *Activities in Paul's ministry; (1:28a)*
 - a. Proclaiming Christ
 - b. Admonishing and teaching
5. *The effort in Paul's ministry; (1:29—2:1)*

(It was a striving, according to Christ's working within him.)
6. *Goals in Paul's ministry; (1:28b; 2:2-3)*
 - a. To present every man perfect in Christ; 1:28b
 - b. That their hearts be comforted; 2:2
 - c. That they be knit together;
 - (1) Knit in love.
 - (2) Knit unto the riches of full understanding.
 - d. That they know God's mystery, which is Christ; 1:3
(In him are all treasures hidden.)
7. *Paul's personal involvement in his ministry; (2:4-5)*
 - a. He desired that they be not deceived; 2:4
 - b. He was present with them in spirit; 2:5

Outline of 1:24—2:5

C. CHRIST—The goal of Paul's ministry; Col. 1:24—2:5

Observe in this section how every facet of Paul's ministry was related to Christ:

- (1) Paul sought to fill up the afflictions of CHRIST in his flesh. 1:24.
- (2) The message which Paul was given to preach was, in brief, CHRIST in you, the hope of glory. 1:27.
- (3) Paul labored to present every man perfect in CHRIST. 1:28.
- (4) In CHRIST are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, about which Paul worked to tell people. 2:3.
- (5) Paul rejoiced to see the steadfastness of people's faith in CHRIST. 2:5.

This section (1:24—2:5) is impossible to outline in twentieth century outline forms, if a purely grammatical analysis is used as a basis for the outline. Therefore we give only the expository outline on page 160.

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;

Translation and Paraphrase

24. Now I rejoice in the sufferings (I endure) in behalf of you; and (by my sufferings) I fill up the things that are lacking of the sufferings of Christ (which he appointed unto me, that I may repay in turn the benefits which Christ conferred on me by filling up the measure of the sufferings appointed unto him. These sufferings I fill up) in my flesh for the sake of his (Christ's) body, which is the church.

Notes

1. Col. 1:24 begins a new section, in which Paul discusses his ministry of the gospel. In this Paul discusses his privilege (the privilege of suffering for Christ) and his task (the task of making known the mystery of God among the Gentiles).
2. Paul characterizes his ministry first of all as a work of joyful sufferings for the sake of the Colossians. When we are experiencing the joy of serving others, we scarcely notice the exertions and strains that are often required. Thus Paul rejoiced in his sufferings. Eph. 3:13; II Tim. 2:10.

3. Paul considered his various sufferings as part of a necessary and welcome process of filling up the quota of the afflictions of Christ that had been appointed unto him.

Col. 1:24 does not indicate that Paul felt that he had to endure as much suffering as Christ himself endured. This is so obviously beyond human attainment (even for Paul!) that the very idea smacks of mental imbalance.

Rather Paul indicates that he knew that Christ had appointed unto him to endure certain things in his flesh, and he joyfully sought to fill up his cup of sufferings. Jesus once said of Saul (Paul), "I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake." (Acts 9:16). Thus the expression "the afflictions of Christ" means "the afflictions appointed to me by Christ."

Paul felt that he yet lacked some in filling up the sufferings that he ought to bear, and he joyfully faced any difficulty for the sake of Christ's body the church. Eph. 1:23; Col. 1:18.

4. Paul describes his own sufferings as the afflictions of Christ. While this phrase refers to Paul's own sufferings that Christ had appointed for him, it also has a deeper meaning. That which hurts Christ's body the church (of which Paul was a member) also hurts Christ. Christ is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Acts 22:7; Heb. 4:15. When Paul suffered, Christ suffered; when we suffer, Christ is afflicted.
5. The verb *fill up* (*antanapleroo*) means "to fill up in turn." Paul speaks here of suffering as if it were measured out in cupfuls. Christ by his life filled up his cup of suffering; he endured all that was required of him, so that we might be saved. Now we in turn fill up our cup of service and suffering for the sake of Christ and his church to repay (in a small degree) what Christ did for us.

25. whereof I was made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which was given me to youward, to fulfill the word of God,

Translation and Paraphrase

25. I was made a servant (or minister of the church) in accordance with the (gracious terms of the) stewardship (entrusted to me) of God, (which was) given to me for your sake, to make fully known the word of God.

Notes

1. Paul indicates in 1:25 that his ministry was a gift to him. He was *made* a minister. He did not choose the office himself.

Furthermore the nature of the work that God laid out for Paul was chosen not according to what Paul might have thought best, but it was rather a dispensation, or stewardship, from God.

2. The word *dispensation* here means "that which is dispensed by God." It is a translation of the Gr. *oikonomia*, which is often translated *stewardship*. Stewardship is the managing of the goods or property of someone else. A steward might operate a farm or a vineyard for the owner.

God gave Paul a particular stewardship, or dispensation, a special privilege and responsibility. Paul's ministry then consisted of that which GOD had given him to do. It was a challenging stewardship and occupied every bit of the time and talent Paul could give to it, but it was still God's choice for Paul, not Paul's choice for himself. Eph. 3:2, 7-9.

3. Paul's stewardship was given him "for you." It was designed to help others. Our service to the Lord should always be done to help others, rather than to make ourselves appear outstanding.
4. Paul's ministry was given to him "to fulfill the word of God," that is, to cause the word of God to abound, to carry it into effect, to carry it through to the fullest.

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

Translation and Paraphrase

26. (For the word of God is) the mystery (the revealed secret) which has been hidden from the ages (past) and from the generations (past), but has now been made manifest to his (God's saints;

27. To them (the saints) God was well pleased to make known that which (makes up) the riches of the glory of this mystery (which is now being spread) among the nations—(and that mystery, simply and marvelously stated, is this:) Christ in you, the hope of glory (glory now, and glory hereafter)!

Notes

1. Paul had been chosen by God to reveal to many nations the marvelous mystery that God had held back from human knowledge in preceding ages. That revealed mystery was the very secret of glory. It is, simply stated, CHRIST IN YOU, the hope of glory! Compare Col. 2:2.

Paul in Eph. 3:6 adds the further explanation about the mystery, that it consisted in the revelation of the fact that the Gentiles could now be fellow-heirs, fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, through the gospel.

HISTORY'S
MOST GLORIOUS SECRET
NOW REVEALED!

CHRIST IN YOU,
the hope of glory!

(Colossians 1:27)

1. Glorious power to live a godly life.
2. Glorious power to work victoriously.
3. Glorious joy available.
4. Glorious peace for your soul.
5. Glorious comfort in troubles.
6. Glorious victory over death.
7. Glorious eternal life with God.

2. Paul declares that the word of God which he was sent to fulfill (1:25) was a *mystery* which God had hidden from previous ages and generations. Rom. 16:25-26; I Cor. 2:7-8; Eph. 3:2-5.

The term *mystery* in New Testament usage means a *revealed secret*. The mysteries of a lodge are the secrets that are revealed when one is initiated into it. The gospel was a

mystery in that it once was not revealed, but is now made known. The term *mystery* does not carry the ideas of incomprehensibility, or obscurity, or mysteriousness, or profundity. It is just about the absolute opposite of all of these.

3. Why should God have hidden his glorious mystery from preceding ages and generations when there was so much sin and suffering in the world during those times? We cannot know all of God's reasons for doing what he does. But we believe that God knows best, even when we do not know why He does as He does. As for God's choice of time for revealing His grand secret of the ages, we can only state this: by the time the gospel was revealed, man had had full opportunity to learn by hard experience that he could not save himself nor his world by laws, by philosophy, by military might, by economic progress, by any inherent goodness within man, by idolatry, by magic, by great architecture and culture, or by any other means imaginable to man.

It is a fact that at the time when Christ came that many people felt an intense longing for God to send a savior, and were looking for his coming. See Luke 3:15; Matt. 2:1-2; John 12:20-21. Perhaps this was the reason God waited as long as He did to send Christ and reveal the gospel.

4. Now finally God has revealed his glorious mystery unto his saints. God has not revealed it to the philosophers, the emperors, the theologians, the professors, the generals, the economic executives, the lawmakers. He revealed it to his saints—to shepherds, to fishermen, to tax collectors, to tentmakers, to slaves, to the lowly, to babes!! Luke 10:21; I Cor. 1:26-29.

There have been a few learned, wealthy, and powerful in every generation who have opened their hearts to God's revealed mystery. But even today most people in these categories do not comprehend the truth, riches, and importance of the gospel.

5. God sent the news of His revealed mystery out into all nations, among the *Gentiles*. God has always planned to do this, even though many of the Jews in ages past wrongly came to feel that they were the exclusive people of God. See Isaiah 49:6; 42:6; Luke 2:30-32; Acts 14:46-47.
6. Paul's ministry among the Gentiles, along with the ministries of others since then, has been the most wonderful thing that has ever happened among the Gentiles in human history.

Christian doctrines have changed the world, its music, its laws, the attitudes of its peoples, its customs, its architecture, its morals, and all changes have been for the better. All men now have the benefits of divine wisdom freely available. Most people are not wise, but Christ is wisdom for all. The laws and prophetic messages which made the Jews a devout people are now equally available and significant to the Gentiles; and to these laws are added the even greater words of God's own son and the power of the Holy Spirit.

7. God was *pleased* to make known among the Gentiles the divine mystery. God is utterly good, gracious, and generous.
8. God made known the *riches* of the glory of the divine mystery. God did not grant us a small sampling of his blessings, but the riches of them. Rom. 9:23; Eph. 1:18.
9. The hope of glory in God's mystery is primarily the hope of glory in the life to come. See Rom. 8:18; I Cor. 15:42-43; Rev. 21:23. However, there is glory in the mystery that is available to us NOW also. See I Peter 1:8; II Cor. 3:18.
10. There have been various arguments advanced that supposedly prove and guarantee to us glorious things from God. But all such arguments break down when confronted with the realities of life. There is only one hope of glory that is certain to deliver the glory: Christ in you.

It has been argued, for example, that God never creates within men basic desires without providing fulfillments for those desires. Since we have a desire for everlasting life, this indicates that we should obtain it. While it is true that God has granted many fulfillments of our desires, life still overflows with unfulfilled desires. There is only one guarantee of glory: Christ in you.

28. whom we proclaim, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ; 29. whereunto I labor also, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

Translation and Paraphrase

28. (Yes, God's mystery is Christ,) whom we are proclaiming (by) admonishing every man and teaching every man with all (the) wisdom (we can muster), so that we may present every man perfect in Christ (Jesus).

29. Toward this (goal of presenting every man perfect in Christ) I toil, contending (against all obstacles in a manner) according to his (Christ's divine) working, which works in me with (great) power.

Notes

1. In Col. 1:28-29 Paul assured the Colossians that he taught and labored with much effort to tell every man about God's glorious mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.
2. Paul's proclamation of Christ consisted both of admonitions (warnings) and teachings.
3. Paul admonished and taught *in all wisdom*. He recognized that people come from many backgrounds, and have many different prejudices. He became all things to all men that he might by all means save some. (I Cor. 9:19-22)
4. The goal of Paul's teaching was that he might present every man *perfect* in Christ. This is the goal also of Christ Jesus himself. Col. 1:22. It is a goal too huge for human power. Our generation with its immortality, its selfishness, its violence, and lack of moral principles needs to be converted, and transformed, and presented perfect in Christ. This was what Paul set out to do for his generation. Will we attempt it for our generation?
5. Three times in 1:28 Paul repeats "every man," as if to emphasize the universal appeal of the gospel, the free offer of salvation for all, and the need of all humanity for the gospel.
6. Paul *labored* (Gr. *kopiaō*) to present every man perfect in Christ. This word means to grow weary and exhausted; to labor with wearisome effort; to toil. I Tim. 4:10; I Cor. 4:12; 15:10.
7. Paul describes his toil as "striving". "Striving" (Gr. *agonizomai*) refers to contests, contending against adversaries, struggling with difficulties and dangers. The point is that there are opponents to be subdued.
8. Paul was able to strive as he did against all obstacles because Christ helped him. Paul was striving "according to his (Christ's) working, which worketh in me mightily." He could do all things in Christ who strengthened him. Phil 4:13. Compare Col. 1:11; Eph. 1:19; 3:7. For examples of how Christ helped Paul see Rom. 15:18-19; Acts 23:11; 27:23-24.