

A Brief Study in Colossians [Dayshare 2020]

02 September 2022 16:27

Colossians - An Introduction * 03/08/2020

What made me choose Paul's letter to the Colossians as the next theme for Day Share. First of all I have to be honest - there is a bit of a personal attachment for me. My first ever experience of Bible Teaching to another church was on Colossians Chapter 3 - away back in 1972. I had my girlfriend (now my wife) in the audience. I had studied this letter with the aid of a wonderful Bible Study book called Explore the Book. The writer was the pastor of Charlotte Chapel in Edinburgh - a good Bible teacher by the name of Sidlow Baxter. The headings in this study come from this book.

However, there is a deeper reason for focusing on this letter. It can be divided into two main sections:-

The first two chapters relate to Paul's prayer that **God will fill them (and us) with the knowledge of his will**, through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives [See Colossian 1:9]

Chapters three and four relate to Paul's prayer that **they (and we) will live a life worthy of the Lord** and please him in every way. [See Colossians 1:10]

The first two chapters contains some of the most powerful statements of the deity of the Lord Jesus. Here is just one example

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. [Colossians 1:15-18 NIV]

The second half of the letter (chapters 3 and 4) contains very practical lessons for everyday living. It gives advice on personal behaviour and how we are to relate to each other as believers. It provides advice on how we behave in the home and in the workplace.

This letter was written to combat some serious error which was creeping into this church. We don't want to get bogged down in the detail of this error but it might help us to understand Paul's teaching if we understand the false teaching he was correcting.

To begin our study, we want to look at the background to this letter. We pray that this study will be a blessing to us all in 2020.

Three Letters * 05/08/2020

Paul wrote three letters within a short time of each other and they were sent by the same messengers.

His letter to the Colossians. The messenger was a man named Tychicus (along with Onesimus)

His letter to a man named Philemon – This was sent by Onesimus.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians - This was also delivered by Tychicus (along with Onesimus).

Philemon was a resident of Colossae and was probably wealthy. Onesimus, his slave had run away from him and had met Paul in Rome. He had been converted possibly as a result of Paul's preaching

and Paul wrote a personal letter to Philemon which he sent back with Onesimus. Onesimus was placed under the care of Tychicus. This is a lovely story which is in the background to the church at Colossae.

Where was Colossae and what sort of place was it? The City of Colossae. Colossae or Colosse was an ancient city in the Lycus River valley, about 100 miles east of the great, cosmopolitan capital city of Ephesus, located in the Roman province of Asia, in present-day Turkey. In this valley, there were three cities which had Christian churches. Hierapolis was a vast and splendid city on a high plateau. 6 miles down-river there was the city of Laodicea (a wealthy city) on the southern bank of the Lycus. This is referred to in the book of Revelation and there is a letter addressed to it. 10 miles further on down the valley was the city of Colossae, the oldest of the three. At one point in the fourth or third centuries BC, Colossae had been the most important of the three cities, known for its flourishing textile industry and high-quality dark red wool, known as "Colossian wool." But after the north-south road was moved west to pass through Laodicea, Colossae began to decline.



Though these cities were far from the big city of Ephesus, they weren't isolated, since they were situated near the great Persian Royal Road that ran from Ephesus and Sardis in the West to the Euphrates and on to Persia in the East.

Paul had not founded the church at Colossae - he had founded the Ephesian church and the church at Corinth and other churches but he had not founded this church. In chapter 1 verse 4 he tells us that he had heard of *your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints*. This would suggest that he is relying on others to give him information about this church.

Paul had almost certainly never visited this valley or any of the cities. In verse 9 of chapter 1 he says that the gospel has 'come to them' indicating that he had no part in it. In chapter 2 he makes it very clear that he had not been there.

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, [Colossian 2:1 ESV]

He may have visited them on his third missionary journey but at the time of writing this letter, he had never been to Colossae. However, he is still taking a personal interest in the church - he is not so selfish as to ignore it because it was not on his list!

And so, from the day we heard, **we have not ceased to pray for you**, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, [Colossians 1:9]

This is a challenge for me. How much interest do I take in all the members of my own church never mind other churches where I have had little personal involvement? It is wonderful to see the affection Paul has for a church which he has never visited in person and has not been involved in his birth.

Prayer

Lord, give me a real genuine interest in Christians everywhere, some of whom are not living in the comfortable surroundings with which you have blessed me. Lord, help me to care for those who are being persecuted or are in prison today and suffering torture. Lord help me to remember that there are Christians in refugee camps - they have had to flee because of their faith.

Closer to home, help me to care for Christians who worship in a different style but they love the same Lord Jesus.

Amen

False Teaching at Colossae * 07/08/2020

It is possible that the nearby highway running from the north to the south of the peninsula would have many travellers and they would bring ideas from other places. This was prior to radio and television let alone social media. In those days, ideas spread by word of mouth. The church at Colossae was probably mixed - that is, it would contain both Jews and Gentiles and there seems to have been some Jewish influence which also affected other churches in the first century. Some philosophy which was contrary to Christianity also was seeping into the church.

Here is a summary of the false teaching

- There are references to keeping the Sabbath and regulations about eating and the circumcision of males which have a link with what is known as Judaism. This is where the religion of the Jewish people has lost its main emphasis and instead is replaced by a whole set of rules and regulations. The Pharisees had similar ideas.
- Everything in this world is made from matter and this is evil. So there were many restrictions and rules to keep people untainted from corrupt evil matter.
- They imagined that there was a hierarchy - with God at the peak and men and women and animals and all earthly things at the bottom. There were many creatures or 'emanations' in between this God who was pure and the evil corrupt people at the bottom. Jesus was one of the many mediators in between.
- There were many rules about keeping clean from handling evil things and as everything on earth is evil or corrupt it was very burdensome to keep untainted from this corruption.
- Those who kept themselves pure were considered very special and there were very few of them.
- There was a small elite group who had special knowledge and were regarded as better than ordinary people.
- Some of these ideas come from a set of false teaching known as Gnosticism from the Greek word for knowledge.

Paul was writing to correct this false teaching and he set out very clearly the truth about who Jesus really is. This was a very positive response to a sad situation - good can come from evil.

It seems likely that this was preventative rather than corrective. If we compare the situation in Colossae with what had happened in Galatia we see a difference. Paul has to correct an error which had come into the churches of Galatia and in his letter to the Galatians, he laments how the church has forsaken the true gospel and has gone after another gospel which is not a real gospel. He does not have any major condemnation of the Colossians.

There are still many false teachers today. Some of them used to visit doors with their literature and they still stand in public areas giving out literature. The secret is to know the truth from the Bible itself. That is why it is so important to study the Bible.

Bad News from Epaphras * 09/08/2020

In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Colossians 1:6-8 NIV

<https://bible.com/bible/111/col.1.6-8.NIV>

We are introduced to a man who played an important role in the founding of the church at Colossae. His name is Epaphras. Paul speaks very nicely about him. He calls him 'a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf.'

Paul says that Epaphras is someone he can rely on. This is a great commendation. Indeed, Paul entrusted Epaphras with the task of visiting Colossae and preaching the gospel there. It was successful. It produced fruit and led to the founding of a church there. Epaphras came from Colossae so he was evangelising in his own city.

Now Paul is in prison and Epaphras has supported him in prison. This probably involved bringing him food as prisoners were not fed in prison in the first century. They would have time to have a chat - or maybe a long conversation. Paul would ask Epaphras, "How is the church at Colossae progressing?" Epaphras' report was very positive. He spoke of their 'love in the Spirit.' The Colossians were new Christians but they were already demonstrating one of the fruit of the Spirit which we saw in Galatians 5. They had learned what love means - love for God and love for each other. God's grace had touched their hearts and changed their lives. So Epaphras is happy to report to Paul about the faith that the new believers were showing and their love for all the other Christians. Epaphras spoke of the fruit that these believers were bearing in their lives and the hope that they had for the future which was keeping them going strong in their faith.

However, it is possible that Epaphras went on to tell Paul about some wrong teaching that had infiltrated this new church. It may have not done much damage as yet - but there was some error that was being taught and Paul takes the opportunity in this letter to correct this false teaching. We have already taken a whole Day Share to outline the wrong things which were being taught - and we are only skimming over it. We don't want to get too depressed thinking about the wrong message. The good news is that Paul is so eager to correct the error that he gives perhaps the clearest statements of the truth found anywhere in the Bible - especially relating to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Dear Father,

We want to be like Epaphras - someone that people can trust and rely on. We want to be eager to preach the gospel to others - just like this man from Colossae. Help us to have our hope fixed on our future blessings in heaven and we will find it easier to deal with the troubles which we may have here on earth. Give us the faith of the Colossians. Give us the love that they had for all the other Christians in our church and in other churches. Make us alert to false teaching and give us a passion to study your Word and to allow the Holy Spirit to guide us through your Word.

Amen.

What is evil? * 11/08/2020

We are going to be studying a letter written to a New Testament church in the ancient city of Colossae. There were some strange ideas floating around in the area and in his letter Paul tackles some of the wrong teaching that was in the society of the time.

One of these was that 'matter' was evil. This means that the earth and all the substances associated with it are bad. Think about that. Wood comes from trees which grow in the earth so anything wooden would be evil. Does that sound a bit ridiculous to you as it does to me? And yet that is what the false teachers known as Gnostics were teaching. Now wood was used to make a cross and they nailed the Son of God to that cross - that was evil. It was not the wood itself which was evil. It was the conduct of those who wrongly accused the Lord Jesus and then condemned an innocent man to be put to death and it was the vicious cruelty of the Roman army as they carried out the crucifixion. The church building in California Road has lots of wood and wooden objects - and they are used for good things. We often sit on benches which are made from wood and metal - both of which came from the earth. We listen to the Gospel being preached and good teaching from the Bible while sitting on these benches. If you are like me, you would love to be back in the church building meeting with other Christians - but we need to wait God's time and keep everyone safe from the virus.

I guess you don't need more examples - you have got the point. The world or the earth was created by God and all the products of the earth were made for our good. They are not intrinsically evil - that means that they are not in themselves evil. The same argument could apply to other things in our world today. It is how humans choose to use things in our world which determines whether they are good or bad. Take money for example. Coins come from metal which is manufactured from materials which are found in the earth - metals. Notes come from paper which has been manufactured from wood which grows from the earth. [Most notes are now made from chemicals nowadays.] We could use money selfishly to indulge our cravings for whatever and that would be bad for us. We could give our money to help Christian activities and that would be good.

We are all using technology such as computers and mobile phones to access this blog. They are a product of the modern world we live in and they are amazing devices. They have been made using material from the earth and human skill. They can be used for a wide variety of activities which are evil such as pornography and bullying. They can be used to spread nasty stories and rumours and gossip - all of these are evil. However, we can also use modern technology for good such as in the service of the Lord. There is also no doubt that substances such as heroin are causing a lot of harm in the world today. But the same drugs can be used by doctors, nurses and paramedics to relieve pain.

I thought it would be helpful to tackle this issue in a blog before we go into looking at Paul's letter to the Colossians. This is a big mistake which the people of the first century were making and it could cause all sorts of problems. How do you avoid using anything which is made from products that come from this earth? We would be making life very hard for ourselves. My favourite people, the Pharisees were making the same mistake.

Read Matthew chapter 15. The Pharisees made an accusation against Jesus' disciples that they were eating food without washing their hands. This was not about hygiene - it was about their belief that we became defiled morally from what we digested.

Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them."

His disciples could not understand this and were worried that Jesus had offended the Pharisees by what he said to them. So Jesus has to be even more explicit.

"Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them."

This provides a useful backdrop for understanding the false teaching of the Gnostics at Colossae. Sin comes from within our 'hearts and our minds' - we are not defiled spiritually from contact with the created world - but we have sinful natures which cause us to sin and be defiled. We may catch disease from touching things - but the substances themselves are not evil.

Thanksgiving for the Colossians * [Colossians 1:1-8] 13/08/2020

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people—the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

[Colossians 1:3-8 NIV]

Paul had so many reasons to thank God for the Colossians. It is good to begin our prayers with thanksgiving. Paul does that. He thanks God for several things about this new Church he had never visited.

1. **Their faith in Christ.** They had heard the gospel from Epaphras and they had believed it. This faith involves their whole being - their mind, their emotions and their will.
2. **Their love for God's people.** This is evidence that they have been saved. As unbelievers, they would have lived for themselves. When they responded to the message, God changed their lives and the Holy Spirit implanted a love for all fellow Christians. This is a really important aspect of the Christian life. It is not uniformity - that is, some people want all members of the church to be like clones - they want everyone to be in agreement because that is what is expected. They might even want everyone to dress alike. Some sects insist on uniformity. Unity is recognising that we are all different and that is good but we are all one in Christ Jesus. [Galatians 3:28] We love all Christians - even if they are very different from us. We should love all Christians - even if they are not always easy to get on with!
3. **Their hope stored up for them in heaven.** Those who are not Christians are without hope because they are without God (See Ephesians 3:11-12). This hope is 'stored' or 'laid up' in heaven. This means that it is reserved or 'set aside'. The tense of the verb indicates that this hope has once and for all been reserved so that nothing can take it from us. We often use the word 'hope' when we mean wishful thinking. This is not the hope that is spoken about in the Bible. It is real and certain.

Prayer

Lord,

We are so grateful for what you have done for us. You have saved us and changed our lives. You have given us a hope that is real and lasting. It is reserved for us and has been guaranteed by the death of your Son on the cross of Calvary.

May the Holy Spirit produce in us love for all Christians not only in my local church but for Christians everywhere - even if they are very different from us.

Prayer for the Colossians * [Colossians 1: 9-15] 15/08/2020

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience,

[Colossians 1:9-11 NIV]

Paul does not pray for material blessings for the Colossians. He does not ask God to provide food or better houses for them. He does not ask God to give them better health. He prays for their spiritual welfare.

1. He prays that the Colossians would be filled with the knowledge of his will. This implies that there is a void (an empty space) in every human being and this will only be filled if we submit to God's will for our lives.
2. He prays for wisdom and understanding. The word translated 'wisdom' is *sophia* in the Greek and it suggests an insight into the true nature of things. This is not human insight - it is from God. The word translated 'understanding' suggests intelligence or reflective thought. It is sometimes translated as prudence. We can have a great amount of knowledge even of the Bible but we might still lack the understanding of how to act in certain situations.
3. He prays that they will live a life worthy of the Lord. He prays that they will please the Lord in every way. This suggests that we reproduce the life of Christ in our lives and we follow his example and even enter into his thoughts.
4. He prays for fruit in their lives
5. He prays that they will be strengthened
6. He prays that they will get to know God better.

This is a great prayer for all of us. Do we know God better this year than last? Is there evidence of divine fruit in our lives? Have we allowed the Holy Spirit to produce fruit in our lives? Are we more loving than we used to be? Are we more patient and long-suffering? Are we kinder and gentler than we were last year?

We all need to pray for each other because we all need to be strengthened. If there is one lesson which I have learned the hard way it is simply this - whenever I think I am strong, I find out to my shame a particular weakness that I had ignored. If I try to do things in my own strength, I fail miserably.

Here is a verse of an old hymn along these lines.

Jesus, Lord, I need Thy presence
As I journey on my way,
For without Thee I am lonely,
And my feet are apt to stray;
But if Thou wilt walk with me
Life will calm and holy be.

Jesus, Lord, I need Thy wisdom,
For perplexing problems press,
And without Thee I am foolish,
Nor can bear the strain and stress;
But if Thou wilt counsel me
I shall true and upright be.

Jesus, Lord, I need Thy power,
For temptations come and go,
And without Thee I am helpless,
With no strength to meet the foe;
But if Thou wilt strengthen me
Life will all-triumphant be.

Jesus, Lord, I need Thy guidance,
Fire by night, and cloud by day,
For without them I am sightless,
Groping for the proper way;

But if Thou dost lead me on
I will follow Thee alone.

Jesus, Lord, Thy love so tender
Is my greatest need of all,
For without Thee pride and anger
From unguarded lips will fall;
But if Thou Thy love impart
I shall have a gracious heart.

Christ the fullness of God in Creation * [Colossians 1:15-18] 17/08/2020

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. [Colossians 1:15-18 NIV]

The false teachers had some very strange ideas about creation and this section of Paul's letter was written to correct their errors and make sure that those who had recently come to faith were not confused and caused to stumble. They taught that matter was evil - by matter they meant the substance of the world. The land and the sea and all the creatures on the land and the sea are all made of an evil substance - according to the false teachers at Colossae. So the substance of our body is evil - they said. So they said that Jesus Christ did not have a real body, so that he would not have anything to do with this evil 'matter' or material. There were two courses of action if you accepted their teaching. First, you would have to avoid touching anything that is evil in case you become contaminated. But another way to look at it is if everything is sinful, you can do what you like and enjoy it to the full. Both of these are not Christian attitudes.

Paul said 4 things about Jesus and Creation. They are really important and a cause for worship and praise.

1. **He existed before creation.** The false teachers got this wrong because they taught that Jesus was the first to be created. Don't get confused with the statement which Paul makes - Jesus is the 'firstborn over all creation.' This does NOT mean that he was the first to be created. The word 'firstborn' would be understood by many who received this letter to refer to Jesus' rank. It was a great honour to be the firstborn in a family. It means that Jesus is ranked as first over all creation. Solomon was named as the firstborn in Psalm 89:27 but he was not the first son David had. There are other expressions in the verses above which underline the fact that Jesus existed before creation. "The Son is the image (which means the exact representation and revelation) of the invisible God. In John 14:9 Jesus stated that anyone who has seen him has seen the Father. God is invisible but Jesus took a body and could be seen and handled and listened to - but he was still essentially God in human flesh and as such he existed eternally - he was there before the world was created.
2. **He created all things.** (verse 16a) This clearly implies that he is uncreated. Jesus Christ is the Firstborn because he created all things. He demonstrated that he was the creator when he was on earth - he gave a command and the storm subsided. He gave a command and Lazarus came from the dead. He was in control of the elements of the natural world and he had power over disease and death.
3. **All things exist for him.** (verse 16b). All the universe was created for his pleasure and glory. So far from this creation being evil, it was created for the glory of the Son of God. So although there is sin in the world, Jesus has power over the creation and it exists to demonstrate his glory. I have worshipped many a time as I have gazed at the wonders of the creation - majestic mountains, powerful waterfalls, raging torrents of rivers. I sat beside an amazing waterfall called the Falls of Glomach and I prayed with a man who was going through a hard time with family problems. My prayer could hardly be heard - but I remember praising God for the

amazing beauty, power and majesty of this waterfall.

4. **He holds all things together.** (verse 17) "In him all things hold together." The planets are in the orbit around the sun because of the power of the Son of God who is in control of the universe. The seasons are in his control. Day and night are in his control. The weather and the climate are held together by him. I know all the talk about climate change and I am not dismissing global warming - but let us never forget that he is in ultimate control. The Bible speaks about the creation groaning as a woman in childbirth waiting for the intervention of God's Son in redemption. That day might not be far off.

I want to provide a quotation from a Bible Commentary on Colossians - Be Complete (Colossians) Become the Whole Person God intends You to be. - Warren W. Wiersbe.

Paul's use of three different prepositions is one way of refuting the philosophy of the false teachers. For centuries, the Greek philosophers had taught that everything needed a primary cause, an instrumental cause, and a final cause. The primary cause is the plan, the instrumental cause the power, and the final cause the purpose. When it comes to creation, Jesus Christ is the primary cause (He planned it), the instrumental cause (He produced it), and the final cause (He did it for His own pleasure). If everything in creation exists for Him, then nothing can be evil of itself (except for Satan and fallen angels, and even those God uses to accomplish His will). Gnostic regulations about using God's creation are all foolish (Col. 2:20–23). It also means that God's creation, even though under bondage to sin (Rom. 8:22), can be used for God's glory and enjoyed by God's people (1 Tim. 6:17). [Warren W Wiersbe : page 60]

Christ the fullness of God in Reconciliation * [Colossians 1:19-23] 19/08/2020

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. [Colossians 1:19-23 NIV]

If anyone ever says anything about Jesus which suggests that he was not really God, you can point them to the first statement in this passage. "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him." Deity and all that is associated with being God was not shared out with a whole hierarchy of angels with Jesus getting a share of this deity. He was fully God.

His work of Reconciliation is highlighted here. Paul reminds the Colossians that they were God's enemies. So were we in our sins. The work of Jesus is called reconciliation. We hear of people who have quarrelled being reconciled - bring made friends again. Usually that means compromise. Not so with this reconciliation because the blame was all on our side. It was the death of the Saviour that made peace - it was the price demanded by a Holy God so that his sinful creatures could become friends instead of enemies.

Notice that Paul emphasises that we are reconciled by Christ's death in his physical body. This was a correction of an error made by the Gnostic false teachers who taught that Jesus did not have a human body.

The reconciliation which Jesus brings about is complete.

to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—

God sees us as holy because of the death of his own Son. There is no blemish or mark on us. No one can accuse us of anything. The fact that we are going on in the faith is evidence that we have been saved. God sees us in the same way as he sees his Son, Jesus. There are no grades of salvation in this statement - what I mean is this. The new Christian is just as holy as the person who has been a Christian for many years. Now of course we are still aware of sins in our lives. And this is not an

excuse to ignore our weaknesses and to live in any way that we please. Paul makes this clear in other passages of his writing. (Read Romans chapter 6.) But the point that is made here is that when Jesus died on the cross he did a complete work which turns a sinner like Robert Neilly into a saint. I have lived my Christian life since my conversion relying on that salvation. I trusted when I was young and I am still trusting at nearer 70 than 60. What a Saviour! What a salvation! Now I have failed many times but I am not relying on my works to please God - I am depending totally on the sacrifice which Jesus made for me.

Christ the fullness of God in the Church * [Colossians 1:24 - 2:7] 21/08/2020

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Colossians 1:17NIV 20-

<https://bible.com/bible/111/col.1.17-20.NIV>

Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. [Colossians 1:24-29 NIV]

Paul speaks about a mystery but this is different from the way we use this word today. We think of mystery to be a story with a puzzle such as who committed the murder. In Colossians and other parts of the New Testament a mystery is a wonderful truth which has been hidden and is now revealed. This mystery was about the church but this is not meaning a church building or even a church in a locality such as Maddiston Evangelical Church. This is much bigger and broader concept. It covers the whole world and covers every age since the death of Jesus Christ and his resurrection. Every single Christian in every country of the world from the first century until now and until the second coming of the Lord belongs to this church. It is wonderful to think that we as believers in the Lord Jesus are part of this invisible church as well as members of a local church. This universal church is made up of Jews and Gentiles (the word used for everyone who is not a Jew).

How did I become a member of this church? When I trusted Jesus Christ as my Saviour, unknown to me I was baptised by the Holy Spirit and became a member of the body of Christ, the Church. Here is the passage in 1 Corinthians 12:12 which explains all this.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. [1 Corinthians 12:12-13 ESV]

Incidentally, imagine if you were a slave in Corinth who had become a Christian and you read this verse - you are part of the same church on an equal footing with your slave master. That will have an impact on the relationship between the slaves and their masters and Paul tackles this in this letter.

Paul tells us that no human being is the head of this church. The metaphor portrays Jesus Christ as the head of the church which is described as his body. So there is a close relationship between Christ and his church. A body cannot survive without a head and vice versa.

The Greek word translated 'head' contained two important truths. The word means "source" or "origin" as well as "leader." So this church which we cannot see and contains so many Christians from different centuries and different countries had its origin in Christ. It was the death of Jesus on the cross which gave birth to this church and it came into being at Pentecost which we read about in the Book of the Acts Chapter 2. It was then that the Holy Spirit came and baptized the believers into one spiritual body. He is also the leader of this church and we look to him as the head of the Church which is His Body.

We should also be part of a local church which represents our risen Head in the locality - town or village or city. We have a responsibility to serve in that local church. Jesus gave gifts to believers to be able to serve Him in that local church. In fact, the Bible teaches that everyone of us has a part to play in that church - even if we are not in the public and not considered to be prominent. The passage in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians goes into detail about this.

He talks about the different body parts all being important and all fulfilling a useful and indispensable function.

As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" [1 Corinthians 12:20-21]

I want us to remember that the important thing is that Jesus is given his place in our local church as he also is the head of the Church which is His Body. In my former church in Stevenston, called Townhead Christian Fellowship, there was a wonderful text above the platform so that we were always reminded of it. It comes from Colossians chapter 1.

That in All things HE Might Have preeminence. [Colossians 1:18 KJV]

This word 'preeminence' means that he will have the first place and will stand out as the first in the church.

I want to quote from a modern translation which is helpful to me to get this point across.

He was supreme in the beginning and - leading the resurrection parade - he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy that everything finds its proper place in him without crowding.

Prayer,

Dear Lord,

You should have the first place in my life because you are first in creation and the head of the church. Help me to make sure that in my life nothing prevents me from making you first in everything. As I serve you in my family, my town and my local church, may I always remember that it is my Lord (and not me) who should be prominent. Help me to give him the place he deserves in my life.

Amen

Christ the fullness of God versus heresy * [Colossians 2:8-23] 23/08/2020

Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and firm in your faith just as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. Be careful not to allow anyone to captivate you through an empty, deceitful philosophy that is according to human traditions and the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form, and you have been filled in him, who is the head over every ruler and authority. In him you also were circumcised – not, however, with a circumcision performed by human hands, but by the removal of the fleshly body, that is, through the circumcision done by Christ. Having been buried with him in baptism, you also have been raised with him through your

faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead. [Read Colossians 2:2-23]

Paul is really sincere and earnest when he is encouraging these new Christians to continue in the faith. They exercised faith in Christ when they were converted, he wants them to continue in the same faith.

just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and firm in your faith just as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

We cannot stand still in the Christian life. We either make progress spiritually or we go back - we cannot just do nothing. One American writer who has written many commentaries says this:- "The Christian who is not making spiritual progress is an open target for the Enemy to attack and destroy" [Warren W Wiersbe: Be Complete (Colossians): Become the Whole Person God Intends: page 87]

He has commended them for their discipline (2:5) - they are behaving like soldiers in the army. They are exercising self-control and also faith. He wants them to be 'rooted' in the faith and he wants them to have secure foundations - 'rooted and built up in him.' It is important that we have deep roots - to use one metaphor and also deep foundations. Reading and thinking about the Bible and praying is the way to ensure that our roots are deep and that we have secure foundations. Notice also he says 'overflowing with thankfulness' - another key ingredient in the Christian life. If we become negative and cynical, we are on the road to spiritual disaster. One of the elders spoke at our group prayer meeting about a conversation he had had with a local man who had read the Bible several times - but to find fault with it. He must have been anxious to prove the Bible wrong if he was disciplined enough to read it several times - but it only made him more bitter. As the sun is shining as I am word processing this blog, it is easy to be thankful. The sun is not always shining - but God wants us to be thankful in all weathers and in all circumstances. I have just uttered a prayer of thanksgiving for what God has done in my life. I have so much to be grateful for. It is important that we get into a habit of reading and meditating about the Word of God. Day Share can be part of this routine - but you may need more. Get into the habit of having a quiet time alone with God and praying and reading His Word.

Why is this important? The answer is clearly stated in the passage

*Be careful not to allow anyone **to captivate you** through an empty, deceitful philosophy that is according to human traditions and the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.*

The false teachers preyed on young Christians who were not sure of their faith but I have to add a word of caution for those of us who have been on the Christian pathway for a long time. We can never say that we have arrived and are totally secure in our faith. The advent of social media can be destructive. Paul says to the Colossians - "Be careful!" and these words are relevant today. The next time some member of a cult tries to persuade you to read their literature - remember to be careful. They are prone to go for evangelical Christians - they find it easier to convince them than the atheists and agnostics. They will try to seduce us into thinking that they believe the same as us. After all, they quote the Bible too. They have been trained in kidnapping or making captive. They go for our weak points - I will not enter into an argument with them at the door or in the street. Not because I have doubts about the truth I have been taught over the years. But they want to trap us - to make us think that we have been wrong and that they know better. The internet also is a dangerous place for Christians - You Tube videos contain many preachers who are preaching error.

Notice that the false teachers wanted to 'captivate' the Colossian believers. They wanted to add all sorts of burdens and restrictions which were not in the Word of God. They wanted to destroy their freedom in Christ. We have already looked briefly at the false teaching. They wanted the Colossians to have to follow a whole set of new rules - e.g. men being circumcised which was part of the Old Testament laws. They wanted them to start celebrating certain feasts. They wanted them to start worshipping angels. And so on.

Most cults today have a wrong idea of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. They usually are

weak when it comes to declaring that Jesus was and is the Son of God and that he was fully God and also became fully human. This is a fundamental part of our beliefs. Notice what Paul says -

For in him all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form, and you have been filled in him, who is the head over every ruler and authority

The false teachers did not accept that Jesus was fully and completely God. He had some aspects of deity, they said but he was somewhere between God and us. No Paul says, Jesus is God - all the fullness (plenitude) of deity lives in him in bodily form. He was fully God but he became fully human. He had a human body the same as you and me but he was also at the same time fully God. Yes, it's mind blowing - but true. The word 'deity' means all that is associated with God.

But Paul slips in a very important truth into this statement - - you have been filled in him. In other words, you and I don't need anyone else or anything else to please God. I love the expression - 'in him' - that's something that cannot be changed. I am seen in the Son of God who is the complete deity - nothing lacking in his deity. Paul said in another letter

'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.' I don't need anything from any of the cults who might visit my door or meet me in the street. I have Christ - what want I more. I am in Christ and I have everything - what can they offer me to add to what I have already got.

Prayer,

Lord, we come to you today in thankfulness and gratitude for what you have done for us. When I trusted in Jesus as my Saviour, I came into a wonderful relationship with him. He is the Son of God who came down to take a human body but he is and was eternally God. I have everything in him and help me never to forget that.

There are those who don't have the freedom and the joy we have and they want to destroy our blessings. They want to take us captive. May the Holy Spirit preserve us from all evil in whatever shape and form it may come. Help us all today to realise what we have in your Son. We worship Him and we adore Him. Help us to be rooted in our faith. Give us strong foundations that will help us to stand against the attacks of the devil.

Amen.

[The New Life - and believers individually * \[Colossians 3:1-11\] 25/08/2020](#)

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.
[Colossians 3:1-11 NIV]

As believers in the Lord Jesus, we are 'raised with Christ.' We are vitally linked with the risen Christ in His resurrection. In chapter 2 Paul told us that when we were baptised, we were buried with our Lord Jesus. [Colossians 2:12] Our baptism was also a sign of resurrection to live a new life. As we were buried by baptism, we died to our sins, and we rose from then to live a different life.

This union with Christ is in the past, present and future.

Past - you have been raised with Christ

- you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God

Present - set your hearts on things above, not on earthly things

Future - When Christ who is our life appears, then you shall also appear with him in glory.

We are living in a world that is hostile to Christ. Our spiritual life will not survive, unless we maintain our links to the world to which we belong. A diver can go deep under the ocean but s/he has an umbilical cord which keeps him or her supplied with oxygen from the world to which s/he belongs. It only takes a blockage in the pipe, and the poor diver is in trouble.

There are some things in our lives which will block the airway with the world above. Paul provides us with a list of deadly sins which will choke our spiritual life. We are instructed to put these sins to death. They are deadly and dangerous - they belong to our old sinful nature which we still have. The list begins with sexual sins which can wreck our spiritual life - in a world where there has been a sexual revolution and these are considered harmless. The list also includes greed which can be just as harmful. Again, in Scotland in 2020 there are adverts promoting greed and encouraging us to desire more and more material things such as cars and houses.

Paul has another list of sins which will harm our spiritual life. This list includes a number of sins relating to our speech. He warns us to get rid of anger, rage, malice (from which we get the word - 'malicious' - a good word for nastiness) slander or gossip which is harmful to another person. We have to get rid of all filthy language - not just swearing or blasphemy - but conversation which is not appropriate for a Christian. We have to avoid lying - how easy it is to make a story more interesting by adding a few details. We should be careful to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth!

How are we going to achieve this new life? We have to 'set our hearts on things above, not earthly things.' It is good to keep our minds full of lovely things - and make sure that all the nasty things are kept outside our mind. The word heart is not just the mind: it is also the affection. We should be sure to value things relating to this new life. We should keep our minds filled with Jesus and what he has done for us. We are in a constant battle with our old nature which still wants to muscle in and gain a foothold in our lives.

There is a lovely expression in this passage which I want to mention in this blog - we have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. My daughter and son-in-law have recently bought an old Victorian school-house. It had to be gutted - the old wall-paper had to be stripped off the walls. The floor-boards had to be ripped up and replaced. The old lead paint had to be removed. The old lead pipes had to be taken out. Even the electricity cable from the mains supply had to be replaced. The roof tiles had to be replaced. There has been a gradual transformation from an old house which was hardly fit to live in to a comfortable family home. God wants a transformation like this in our lives - getting rid of the old stuff that is harmful and filling our lives with the new. Above all, we are to become more like our Creator - our Saviour, the Son of God. God wants to see more of His Son in our lives - we should become more in his image - more Christ-like.

Prayer

O Lord,

As I read this passage of your Holy Word, I am deeply challenged. I am aware of things which are in my life and they need to be thrown out. There are things from the old nature that creep into my thoughts - and they cause harm. Help me by your Holy Spirit to have a spring clean - getting rid of the old and replacing it with the new. Make me more like your lovely Son. Help me to focus my mind on things above - not on the horrible filthy things of this world.

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me
All His wondrous compassion and purity
O thou Spirit divine
All my nature refine

Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.

Amen

The New Life - and believers reciprocally * [Colossians 3: 12-17] 27/08/2020

*Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with **one another** and forgiving **one another**, if someone happens to have a complaint against anyone else. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also forgive others. And to all these virtues add love, which is the perfect bond. Let the peace of Christ be in control in your heart (for you were in fact called as one body to this peace), and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and exhorting **one another** with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, all with grace in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. [Colossians 3:12[NET 17-*

Let me apologise for using this fancy word - reciprocally. The headings came from an old book which I used regularly in my teens and twenties. It is by Sidlow Baxter and is called - Explore the Book. I have used his headings - but they are a bit old-fashioned .

'Reciprocal' means 'giving and receiving' and the words each other and one another are usually involved. The first part of chapter three dealt mainly with our conduct as individuals: this passage is dealing with how we relate to other members of the church. Notice the number of times the phrase 'one another' is used in the passage above. I have highlighted three references but there are four things we should do with one another

1. **Bear with one another** - This means that we accept each other as we are and not the way we would ideally like them to be. We put up with the things that might annoy us. In the church there will be folk that we find easy to get on with but there may be one or two who tend to rub us up the wrong way. We are encouraged to 'bear with one another'. By the way, the word 'reciprocal' means that it is a two-way process and they are supposed to 'bear' with you in the same way as you 'bear' with them. It may be that there is something about you which irritates other people - you may not even be aware of it.
2. **Forgive one another** - this goes a bit further. Someone in the church has upset you in some way. They have done something wrong to you and you have a genuine grievance. They have maybe said some nasty things about you and it has got back to you. They have ignored you or laughed at you and made you feel bad. One of the responses to all of these is to forgive. Jesus forgave the soldiers who were enjoying nailing him to a cross. They had whipped him with a scourge - a whip with metal bits or pieces of sharp bone inserted into the leather. He forgave them. I don't suppose anyone has done anything on that scale to you.
3. **Teaching one another** - there's a lot of that goes on in Maddiston Evangelical Church. This is mainly from the Bible and it is not meant to be a one-way process. The blog is a good example - it is about sharing the Word of God. Notice that wisdom is required. We need to pray for all those who teach whether it is at the evening service or the Ladies Bible Study. We all need wisdom from above.
4. **Exhorting one another** - This word means 'putting in mind' and it can take several forms. It may be a word of correction where one of us sees something that is not right and a quiet word can help that Christian to avoid making a mistake. It can also be a word of encouragement where one Christian notices that someone is a bit downhearted and needs a bit of an uplift. We need wisdom for both of these - maybe especially the first of the two. It is not easy to tell someone that something they have done is not right. We need to avoid being smug and superior or condescending. We also need wisdom if we are trying to offer encouragement. If this is a bit artificial it is referred to as 'plastic praise' and it can over as patronising and insincere.

Notice that one activity which we can share is singing - a vital part of church life. You don't need to be a great singer to contribute to the worship in church. It is done with grace in your hearts to God. It is not about boosting our egos or putting on a show in the church. The Message renders this as

follows - "And sing, sing your hearts out to God." I like that.

Each one of us need a certain attitude for this mutual support to be effective. Pauls talks about how we clothe ourselves - this is not referring to new coats or suits or dresses. It is the godly features we need to display - a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. All these features will help us to be tolerant and loving in our relationships. And there is an overarching grace which binds them all together - love. Love is described as the perfect bond. This is the New Testament word *agape* - the sacrificial, selfless love which is described beautifully in 1 Corinthians chapter 13.

Paul gives us the church motto which should influence all our conduct and relationships in the church

And whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Every detail of our lives - all our words and actions - should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus. This is recognising that He is the head of the church and not any one of us. And we should give thanks to God the Father through him.

The New Life - and Domestic Relationships * [Colossians 3:18-21] 29/08/2020

Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. [Colossians 3:18-21 NIV]

This is a controversial topic and I am aware of the reality in our modern world where sadly many marriages end in divorce. I am also aware that even in Britain in 2020 domestic violence and abuse are still only too prevalent. There are situations where the female has mistreated the male - I just watched an episode in the long-running BBC drama, *Casualty* where the hospital staff at first were inclined to suspect that the man (who was physically much stronger) was the violent partner - but then they discovered horrific wounds which the slightly built girl had inflicted on her very loving partner. This sometimes happens - but it is far more common for the woman to suffer physical, verbal or psychological harm from the man. I recently listened to a lecture given at the Keswick Convention in 2019 on the subject of violence against women. It is an international disgrace and the Bible nowhere condones this [unlike the sacred book of other religions].

This passage is not giving the husband the right to treat his wife badly. I want to state this in the strongest possible terms. A couple of years ago, I conducted a wedding ceremony where I outlined what a Christian marriage is like or should be like. I was surprised by the number of non-Christians who said that they liked what I had said. One non-Christian said that it was a pity that we had ignored the Bible in the 21st century.

The key to understanding what Paul is saying is to focus on the phrase - 'husbands love your wives.' We have already looked at the meaning of the Greek word used here. This is the word *agape* which we looked at in the blogs on the Fruit of the Spirit. [Day Share 04/03/2020 and Day Share 06/03/2020] This is speaking about a love which is totally unselfish and is sacrificial. In other words, the Christian husband will prioritise his wife's needs over his own. He will do everything to look after her and care for her. This is the opposite of a selfish marriage where the husband expects the wife to look after him and be his 'slave' in many senses.

Notice that Paul emphasises this negatively - 'do not be harsh with them.' This would totally condemn any form of abuse of power or physical strength. One Contemporary English Version translates this phrase like verse like this - "A husband must love his wife and not abuse her." There are many types of abuse - it is not only physical abuse that can destroy a marriage - there is psychological abuse and emotional abuse. Any action which is hurtful to the partner is abuse. Some husbands are controlling - want to dominate their wives. This is about who is the boss - I used to hear men bragging about how they made sure that 'she' knew her place. In a Christian marriage the

Lord is the 'boss'. It is also abuse when the husband deliberately makes the woman seem stupid and makes her feel inadequate.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, [Ephesians 5: 21-33] he goes into more detail and he sets his remarks on Christian marriage in the context of an important verse

..... submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ

This is a key principle in the Christian marriage - both husband and wife are living to please God and the Lord Jesus is the Lord of the home. They both behave towards each other and to other people in a way that would please the Lord.

So we come to the verse about the woman which might seem old-fashioned and outdated.

Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands.

When he was writing, this would not have been in any way considered inappropriate. Husbands regarded wives as their property. Can you imagine if Paul had suggested that the wives should not accept the authority of the husband? There would have been a major revolt. However, I am not suggesting that this verse does not apply in today's liberal egalitarian society. The word 'egalitarian' means that all are equal. The Bible teaches that both men and women were both made in God's image. In New Testament times the same salvation applied equally to both men and women and both sexes experienced the blessings of the Holy Spirit. The new covenant to which we as believers belong recognises no barriers - we are all one in Christ Jesus. So this verse must be interpreted in that overall context. It is not a licence for domination of men over women; it is not the invitation for women to be treated as inferior or subordinate to men. However, in God's plan men are supposed to be the spiritual head of the household with the responsibility to act as God's representatives in ensuring the spiritual welfare of the home. And of course, a godly wife will accept that. John Stott points out that the person to whom the wife is to submit is not an ogre, or a tyrant but a lover. The husband is expected to love his wife in the same way that Christ loves the Church. It is true that the Bible makes a distinction – husbands are to love and wives are to submit. However, although these are two different words, when we begin to examine them it is interesting to discover that love and submission are two examples or expressions of that basic self-giving which is the secret of enduring happiness in married life. What does it mean to submit – it means to give yourself up to somebody; what does it mean to love in the way that it is spoken of in the New Testament – it also means to give yourself up to somebody.

I am going to have to leave discussion of the relationship between parents and children to another blog.

[The New Life - and Domestic Relationships 2 * \[Colossians 3:18-21\] 31/08/2020](#)

This is the second study on the subject of domestic relationships - that is, in the home but we are now looking at the relationship between parents and children.

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. [Colossians 3: 20-21 ESV]

Last year, I did a talk at the Family Service at Maddiston Evangelical Church with the controversial title - Honey, I shrunk the Kids.



You might not have seen this film - an eccentric inventor has a weird scientific gadget in his study at home and his children discover it and when they try to find out how this thing works, they shrink to become almost invisible. Here he and his wife are using a magnifying glass to find the children.

There are some families where the parents regret having children and wish they were invisible. They ignore the children as they interfere with their busy lifestyle or get in the way of them having a good time. There are two examples where children were forgotten about in the Bible. In the Old Testament, God gave the prophet Samuel the task of finding a new king. Samuel arrived at a house of a man named Jesse and he was introduced to Jesse's son's one by one - they were all big and impressive but God had warned Samuel not to judge by appearances. He asked if he had seen all of the sons - and suddenly they remembered that there was another son - almost forgotten about. Young David had been given the task of looking after the sheep - all he was good for and they had almost forgotten about him. Then, there is the well-known story in the New Testament where Mary and Joseph travelled for at least a day back to Nazareth from Jerusalem - completely unaware that they had left Jesus behind in Jerusalem.

In our modern society, there are sadly many parents who neglect their children. I was heavily involved in the world of child protection and I have been aware of many incidents of child neglect and child abuse. But there is also the opposite extreme - where the parents spoil their children. I remember visiting a home where the three year old daughter was allowed to choose the best seat in the house and would insist on getting that seat. She also decided what programmes the family would watch on TV and what meals they would eat. Some parents find it hard to stop their children from misbehaving. They ignore unacceptable behaviour as they are afraid to discipline their children.

So there are two extremes which seem to me unacceptable

- The children are ignored and left to their own devices
- Mum (and dad) worship the children and the whole world revolves around them.

Christians should unequivocally condemn any form of child abuse or neglect. It is not only the physical welfare of the child which is important - we must look after their emotional wellbeing and their spiritual welfare. All children have the right to feel safe and to be protected from harm and abuse. However, it is not in the child's interests to have no boundaries and to allow them to behave in any way they please.

These verses in Colossians would not, in any way, contradict these statements. Children should be

brought up to respect their parents and to obey them. Fathers should not embitter their children - Paul wants to be sure that the fathers have the welfare of the children always in mind. This is a very balanced statement about bringing up children. Admittedly, the responsibility lies with the father and the mother is not mentioned - but that would have been the norm in the first century. Discipline was the father's concern. However, in our day if we substitute 'parents' for fathers, we are able to apply the principle to our family life. It pleases the Lord when a child obeys his parents but parents should be mindful of the need to look after the welfare of the child. Unnecessary or excessive punishment is not called for in this verse - we must think of the effect of any sanctions we impose on our children. Are we punishing them for our benefit or for their good?

This is a controversial subject and we have only touched on the fringe of it. Perhaps in closing, I will quote Eugene Peterson in the Message and how he interprets these verses

Children, do what your parents tell you. This delights the Master no end. Parents, don't come down too hard on your children or you'll crush their spirits.



Honey I
shrunk th...

The New Life - and Employment Obligations * [Colossians 3:22 - 4:1] 02/09/2020

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.
[Colossians 3: 22 - 4:1 ESV]

I remember when I was a student, I was a labourer most summers trying to earn some money to get a start on my married life. I was a bit naïve and did not know the tricks of the trade. Some men were experts at pretending to work hard when a boss was around. They had been wasting time and fooling around and then the boss was spotted in the distance - suddenly they bent their backs and started working hard - they even managed to break a sweat.

This is exactly what Paul was condemning in the expression - "not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers." We can all fall into the trap of doing something right for the wrong motives.

But I never worked as a slave or a bondservant as the ESV and other translations translate the Greek word. Oh no, you are probably saying. We have had the wee story from many years ago, now it is time for the Greek word! The Greek word *doulos* is often translated as servant and bondservant. It is rarely translated as slave although the servant was in many senses a slave. He was owned by his master and could not leave his employment to seek alternative employment. The translators are reluctant to use the word 'slave' as it has bitter associations, especially in the black population in the U.S.A. The Bible does not condone slavery but it does not condemn it either.

Instead, Paul gives instruction on the conduct of slaves who have become Christians. Paul's letter to Philemon is interesting as he is writing to a master on behalf of a slave who had run away.

Perhaps you are unhappy at your work. You feel that you are not treated fairly - maybe you have been ignored for promotion or your boss is very unfair. I venture to say that your working conditions are better than the people to whom Paul was writing.

He tells them how they should behave at their work. They should serve "with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord." He is making the point that the real boss is our Master in heaven. The Christian should be the most conscientious worker in the team. He is not serving the company or the agency or whatever. She or he is serving the Lord. This elevates the most boring work and the most thankless employment.

In fact, Paul says "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men." I was the site manager for several years at Rawnsley site at Keswick and I used to quote this to the members of the Welcome Teams when they were cleaning the toilets or standing in the rain. It was in my mind when I had to clear a blocked toilet or deal with an angry local resident. We suddenly see the most unpopular task from a different perspective.

He also reminds them that they may not be well paid on earth - but they will be rewarded for this service in heaven. We tend to play this down - thinking that it is not appropriate to do a task for reward but the Bible often reminds us of future reward for service done on earth. We should feel honoured to have the privilege of serving our divine master - even though we may not get the appreciation or the reward we expect or deserve on this earth. He reminds them that they are really serving the Lord Christ. It is interesting that the word Lord comes first - this reminds us that Jesus is our Lord and master. We have acknowledged him as Lord over our lives.

This does not mean that we can behave as we like - we will suffer loss if we are careless or lazy in our workplace.

For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

There are plenty of examples of injustice in this world. Many women have earned much less than men for doing a similar if not identical job, for example. Many bosses have their favourites who do wrong and the boss turns a blind eye to this. Many bosses are bullies who have a grudge against a particular employee for some reason or another. But our Lord is a fair master who is totally impartial and fair in all his dealings with us. We might manage to 'pull the wool over the eyes' of a human boss - but God sees and knows our hearts.

Paul is totally balanced. He gives instructions to slaves or servants to make sure that they are serving their earthly masters in the way a Christian should. He also has a word for Christian masters.

Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

I love that. You may be the master of these slaves in this earth but you have a master who is above all and your responsibility is to him. He is telling them to behave fairly towards their slaves. If the Christian slave should have been the best slave in the household, so the Christian master should have been the fairest slave master in the city. This applies today to anyone who is in a position of responsibility - as a Christian we have an added responsibility to be just and fair. The standard is far higher for the Christian than for the non-Christian.

Here is the same passage in Eugene Peterson's interpretation, The Message

Servants, do what you're told by your earthly masters. And don't just do the minimum that will get you by. Do your best. Work from the heart for your real Master, for God, confident that you'll get paid in full when you come into your inheritance. Keep in mind always that the ultimate Master you're serving is Christ. The sullen servant who does shoddy work will be held responsible. Being a follower of Jesus doesn't cover up bad work.

And masters, treat your servants considerately. Be fair with them. Don't forget for a minute that you, too, serve a Master - God in heaven.

[The New Life - and "Outsiders" * \[Colossians 4:1-6\] 04/09/2020](#)

Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

[Colossians 4:1-6 ESV]

Who are the outsiders? Paul tells us to "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders," - who is he speaking about? He is referring to those who are not Christians. In 1 Corinthians 5:12 Paul speaks about not being in a position to judge outsiders - meaning those who are not members of the local church in Corinth. There is also a reference in Mark 4:11 which would help us to clarify what Paul is meaning by outsiders. It sounds a bit superior and we must be careful when and how we use this expression - but it is Biblical. It should not lead us to feel in any way superior or better than anyone else.

He tells us to 'walk in wisdom towards outsiders.' This means that we have to be careful about how we live because those who are not Christians are watching us very carefully. Their opinion of Christians and the message we preach and most importantly the Saviour we serve will be formed by their observations of us. They might not go near church and they will not read the Bible for themselves. They will not expect us to be nasty or spiteful. They will not expect us to be bad-tempered. What kind of advert would that be for Christianity. On the other hand, if we are kind and gracious in all of our dealings with those who are not Christians this will have make a big impression on them. I was working as a labourer in the Council parks department and I worked alongside a young man who claimed to be a Christian. He said to me one morning, "Robert, we need to witness more to these men." I don't remember what I said but what I should have said is. "Try doing a day's work for a change and that might be the most effective witness to these men." He did not realise that they had noticed that he was good at avoiding hard work and they were very critical of him.

Paul does tell us that we should be on the lookout for opportunities to witness - that is what he means when he says "making the best use of the time." I have not a great track record of this - I wish I could have found it easier to witness. However, I am grateful that God has given me opportunities to speak a word for the Lord and more commonly to pray for someone when an opportunity presented itself.

Notice Paul advises them that their speech should always be gracious - that is easy to say but more difficult when we are under pressure with things not going the way we have planned. He adds a reference to having our speech seasoned with salt. What does he mean by this? I would refer to verses in the Gospels where Jesus tells his disciples that they are the salt of the earth. He also says that if the salt has lost its saltiness it is useless. He goes on to say that they should live in peace with each other. Salt was the main preservative in Bible times. It is still uses today as a preservative - it keeps food from becoming corrupt and harmful to the stomach. [See Matthew 5:13 and Mark 9:50] We can be so gracious that we have lost our preserving qualities - we are not stopping the corruption in the world. We are so nice and inoffensive and we just allow everyone to do what they like without any challenge. Salt would suggest that we maintain the standards of the Word of God. This requires great wisdom and we need to pray for the Lord to help us to give us the right words to say at the appropriate time -*so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.* We need to be balanced in our approach - we don't want to come over as superior, for that will just close their minds to what we are saying about Jesus. However, we can strive too hard to be nice and so we can become ineffective in our witness.

Notice that this section begins with an instruction to continue steadfastly in prayer. Paul is asking for special prayer in his ministry so that a door of opportunity would be opened. We need to pray for those who are taking a very active role in evangelism. Those of you from MEC will know that David Campbell has an open door to go into schools such as Braes High School and Maddiston Primary School. Pray that this door will remain open. Pray that he will continue to be granted wisdom and grace as he meets with staff in the schools and speaks to children and parents. Pray for the youth club when a team from the church work with young people from the community. Pray for all the outreaches - the Parents and Toddlers, the Discovery Club. Pray for the many people from the

community who come into the Lighthouse Café and pray for those of us who are on the front line there that we will say the right thing to lead those who are 'on the outside' to faith in Christ so that they would come inside!

Final Greetings * [Colossians 4:7-18] 06/09/2020

Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord."

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.
[Colossians 4: 7-18 ESV]

This is a homely end to this lovely letter from a man in prison. There are some people who are very critical of Paul and make him out to be a nasty person. I don't agree. He did not personally write his letters - he had a scribe to do it for him. But he often wrote the very last words of greetings in his letter and he does this here. He says, "I am Paul and I am writing this greeting with my own hand." Then he adds "Remember my chains." Prisons were easier to escape from in the first century than they are today - not that I have had any experience of trying to escape from prison! The prisoner was chained all of the time to prevent escape. So our modern picture of life in prison goes out the window. There would have been no heating and they were not provided with food - they needed friends to bring food with them. They would not have had anything resembling a bed. I think we have got the idea. And yet, Paul is not in a moaning mood. He is surprisingly upbeat. He just asks the Colossians to remember that their living conditions are better than his. He wants them to pray for him. On Sunday evening, we heard a report of the street pastors in Falkirk and the speaker reminded us that when we are tucked up in our warm beds on a Saturday evening, there is a team of street pastors out in the rain and the cold helping those who are attending night clubs and have often got into a mess under the influence of alcohol. They are showing kindness to them in the name of Jesus. The report helped me to pray more intelligently - especially from 10pm on the Saturday until 4.00 am on the Sunday.

Paul mentions several names in his Final Greetings. I want to say a word or two about some of them.

Tychicus - Paul has a lovely commendation about this man. *He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.* What a nice thing to say about him. Three things about him

1. He demonstrated Christian love - a beloved brother
2. He was reliable and faithful - faithful minister. The Greek word *diakonos* is where we get our modern word 'deacon.' The origin of the word came from a person who ran errands - or as we would say 'they were sent on messages.' It could sometimes be a waiter at a table - but there was no Lighthouse Café in Colossae and Tychicus was really a messenger for Paul. But the important thing was that he could be trusted.
3. He is described as a fellow servant in the Lord. This is about serving the same Master. Paul knew that he and Tychicus were on the same side and were serving the same Lord Jesus

Onesimus - He is the runaway slave who had been converted. Paul writes a personal letter to his

slave master who is a Christian. Onesimus had done wrong by running away - and he was 'unprofitable' to Philemon because of this. He is no use to him. Paul says that he is now a changed man and will be profitable to him again.

Aristarchus - He is in prison with Paul and he is sending his greetings to the Colossians. It must have been a blessing to have another Christian in the same prison.

John Mark - This is the writer of the second gospel. He had been on a missionary journey with Paul along with Mark's cousin - a man named Barnabas. For some reason or other, Mark suddenly left the two men and went back to Jerusalem. This must have been a real nuisance - who would do the work that Mark had been doing whether it was making the meals or carrying the luggage. He had left them in the lurch and hopped off back home. This incident ended up in a dispute between the two men - Paul and Barnabas. But here Paul has no mention of the past history - he simply says "Welcome him, if he comes to you." Good that the past has been put behind and sometimes we have to let bygones be bygones. We need to stop harbouring grudges from the past.

Jesus Justus - interesting that he had the same first name as Jesus. This would suggest that our Lord had a name which was fairly common in the society of the first century.

Epaphras - We have already talked about him in the Day Share for 28/03/2020. He is described here as

1. A servant or slave of Jesus Christ. This is the word *doulos* which can be translated as bondservant or slave . It tells me that Epaphras recognised that the Lord Jesus was his master and that he was serving him faithfully.
2. He was a man of prayer - always struggling on your behalf in prayer. He was not in a hurry to say his prayers - he prayed from the heart. He was contending on their behalf in his prayers. He was tireless, sincere and earnest in his prayers - not casual or half-hearted. He prayed that the Colossians would 'stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.' This is a lovely prayer and relevant to all of us today.
3. He worked hard for the Colossians and for the Christians in nearby Laodicea and Hierapolis. There is no place for laziness or selfishness in the Christian pathway.

Luke - the writer of the third Gospel. So there are two Gospel writers mentioned in this short passage. Luke is a doctor or a physician. He is described as the 'beloved Physician.'

Demas - This name literally means 'governor of the people.' He seemed to have been with Paul at this time and he is also mentioned in the letter to Philemon (verse 24) when he is described as a fellow-worker. Much later, sadly there is a reference to the same man but by this time he has deserted Paul because of his love for the world. So in this list, we have not only two Gospel writers, we also have two men who deserted Paul when he needed their help.

Nympha - At last we have a woman mentioned. But not every translation has this person as a woman. The King James Version uses the name Nymphas and refers to the church in **his** house. I prefer to accept the more modern translations and use the word Nympha (feminine) and to mention the fact that she opened her house to allow other Christians to meet there as a church.

Archippus - Only a very brief mention of him, but an instruction from the apostle in prison - "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord." He is called a fellow-soldier in Philippians chapter 2 but here Paul feels it is necessary to remind him to complete the work he has been given. This might be a reminder to us that we are given tasks in the church and we are doing these tasks - in the Lord. So if we are not completing our task, we are not only failing our fellow-Christians - more importantly, we are disappointing the Lord and letting him down.

This is the end of our study in Colossians. We pray that they have been a blessing to us all and that we have a better appreciation of the person and work of the Lord Jesus, who was being attacked by the false teachers. We pray too that we have learned practical lessons for our Christian conduct whether as an individual or together as a church or in the home or at our workplace.

