



Reflections on Colossians

Don Merritt

Introduction

I'm really not sure what to call this; is it a book, a Bible study, a devotional, a small group study, a commentary? To be honest, it isn't quite any of those things, yet it has aspects of all three. It's hardly long enough to be a book; it isn't complete enough to be a commentary. It's not quite a devotional, but it could be used for devotions. It's not quite a Bible study, but it could easily be used for that, too. If you're creative, it could also be used to teach a class, but it isn't in a proper format to be curriculum.

One thing differs here from the first two collections I have released. For this collection, I have not included discussion questions, but anyone could make up their own for use in a discussion or class setting.

This little "document" is freely given to you. By all means, feel free to share it with others for free. Please do not use any of this for commercial purposes! Make use of whatever helps you grow in your relationship with our Lord and anything here that isn't helpful, by all means set it aside. Helping other believers in their walk with Christ is my only purpose here!

All blessings to you in Christ!

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All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version

The Son IS!

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

How can you read these few verses and not just fall into one of those "Wow!" moments? Even if you only read the first sentence: Wow!

It is 'content rich' to say the least. Consider the first sentence, The Son of God, Jesus the Christ, is the image of the invisible God; let that sink in... People sometimes ask how they can know God, and the answer is to look at Jesus Christ; He was here, on this earth as a man. He is a historical figure, who left behind a written record of what He thought, said and did. He was a Teacher, so His teachings are there for all to see. He was the image of God, and He spoke directly to us, so if we want to know what God is like, learn what Jesus was like... and you will have it! Jesus, the Son, is also the firstborn of all creation– don't skip that phrase! You and I are part of the Creation of which Jesus is the firstborn... yes, that means you and I are meant to have a relationship with Him, after all that is why He came to the earth in the first place. Oh, my, reflect on that for a while...

This is exciting!

Moving on, we see that in Him all things were created, both in heaven and on earth. Of course we know that Jesus was present when God spoke the word and the universe came into being, but now it seems that Jesus might have actually done the talking. A careful reading of John 1 will confirm that Jesus was actually the Word itself! He is not only the firstborn, but the Word that created everything. All I can say is "WOW!"

Every single thing there was, is, or will be was created by, through and for Jesus Christ, including you, including me. There are certain times when the enormity of something makes it difficult to describe it with mere words, and honestly this is one of them.

Our Lord, the Son, is the head of the Body, which is the church of which all Christians are a part. Yes, you and I are a part of the Body of the One who created everything.

He is also the firstborn of the dead, which is to say that He is the first to die, and then to rise again in glory, but He is not to be the last, for you and I will also arise in glory in due course.

I hope that you will take a little time to reflect and pray on these few verses. As you do, please consider that this Jesus wants a relationship with YOU! He is there, He is calling your name, will you respond? No, that question was not for the unbelievers– It is directed by me to all of us, including myself, who profess to be His followers. Will we all join together to answer His call to relationship, with the One who created all, who arose from the dead to prepare our way; will we respond to His invitation, to pull up our chairs and listen at His side as He shares with each of us?

WOW!

Making Peace

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 1:19-20

Last time, we had a look at Colossians 1:15-18 and saw an amazing list of who and what the Son is, and those three verses, as we saw, are filled with "wow" moments. In these two verses, Paul mentions the "Why". God, it must be said, had a reason for sending His Son to the earth:

First, notice how verse 19 begins: God was *pleased* to have all of His (God's, the Father's) fullness dwell in Him (the Son, Jesus). It seems telling to me, that this fullness of the reality of the Person of the Son is called "pleasing" to God; to me that sounds like purpose is involved here; God's purpose. Everything about Jesus and His mission to earth is deliberate and purposeful, and Jesus mentioned this quite a bit as I'm sure you recall. God was definitely at work.

So then all of God's fullness was dwelling in Jesus Christ, and through Jesus Christ, God was pleased to reconcile all things to Himself. Again, let's just slow down and consider what this is saying. With God's entire fullness dwelling in Him, Jesus does something to reconcile all things to God, thus pleasing God. All things, in heaven and on earth were reconciled... because Jesus *made peace* by shedding His blood on the cross.

Here's a proposition for us to consider: *If Jesus had to reconcile all things to God by "making peace" then a state of conflict must have existed prior to the cross.*

Of course, we know that there was indeed a state of conflict from the moment that Adam entered into open rebellion against God back in the Garden (Genesis 3). We often refer to "sin" as though it is nothing more than the violation of an ordinance, which is how the Law of Moses codified it, but "sin" was around long before it was so clearly defined, or codified. Sin is actually rebellion. We were in rebellion; God reconciled us by having Jesus make peace. Jesus made a Peace Treaty, and a Treaty is a kind of covenant. Jesus said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matt. 26:28) See how this comes together?

As we go through our day, what an amazing thing we have to reflect upon: God's love for each one of us is so great, that He was pleased to send His Son, full of all of the fullness of the Father Himself, to die on the cross to make peace with us. Can there be a greater expression of boundless love than that?

This is the Gospel

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 1:21-23

In the previous section, we had a look at verses 19-20 and saw that God through Christ made peace with all things by the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross. Now we finish this amazing paragraph...

There was a time when each of us was alienated from God; we saw ourselves as His enemy because of our evil deeds. I broke this into two parts, because I'd like us to think about two ideas here. First, we saw or thought (in our minds) that we were God's enemies. In Scripture, God never made us His enemy; it is we who made the choices that headed us in this direction. It is (or was) our own attitudes that created the problems. It was never God; it was always us.

Second, "because of your evil deeds." Which evil deeds do you think Paul is talking about? I would suggest that most people, certainly most preachers, would assert that Paul is referring to some sort of list of infractions, a Bill of Indictment, so to speak. I hope we might take a different approach, and hope you will give this a little thought. It isn't so much a list of violations that Paul is talking about here; it is the very condition of being in rebellion against God that he is talking about. If we are in rebellion against God, then we are not in relationship with Him. If we are not in relationship with Him, what are the rules, anyway? Consider the Jews and the Gentiles. From the Jewish point of view in the Old Testament, a Jew was good or bad based upon his or her keeping the Law, the 613 laws of Moses. If they disregarded the law, they had problems, if they kept the law all was as it should be. The Gentiles on the other hand, weren't even in the ball game. Nobody expected them to keep, or even to know the law. They had no covenant with God, they had no Law. How could they "get right" with God? Not an easy thing to do: The very fact that they were Gentile made them evil and unclean. We were enemies with God in our minds because of our evil deeds of rebellion against Him, and this transcends a rule book and petty violations.

"But now he has reconciled you..." (v. 22) Because of what Christ has done on the cross, everything is completely different. He made a peace treaty; you accepted its terms and signed on to it. Now you are in a whole new kind of covenant, and that covenant has made you as clean as though you had never sinned, in God's sight. All of that rebellion is forgotten, expunged from the record— over.

Well, now we haven't quite finished the sentence. This is a tough spot, beginning at verse 23 with the word "if." You may agree with me, or you may disagree, but as I see it, the word "if" makes this a conditional statement. "...free from accusation— **if** you continue in your faith,..." As I see it, and I think the rules of grammar back me up in this, we have the blessings of the promises in the New Covenant, unless we decide to totally renounce our faith in Jesus Christ and go off and follow other gods.

This passage ends with Paul pointing out two things, did you catch them? The work of Jesus Christ on the cross has established peaceful relations between God and Man; your sins are taken away and you are blameless before God. This is the Gospel, and it is the first point of summation. Paul has become a servant of this Gospel (and by extension, so have you and I). This is the final point of summation.

So what do you think? Are you thinking that you've heard this a thousand times and there's nothing new in this text for you? I sure hope not, maybe you might reflect a little more, and seek His presence asking what He has to say to you in this. I know that I've taught it a thousand times, and each time is just as exciting as the first time I grasped it...

God loved us so much, while we were still thinking of ourselves as His enemies, that He went and did all of this...? Really...? And not only that, but we are a part of the spreading of this awesome demonstration of the boundless love of our eternal God...?

May He draw all of us closer to Him in His Word today. May He fill our hearts with glad assurance of the truth of His Word, and may He increase in our lives as we grow in our faith and in our desire to draw ever nearer to Him in everything that we do.

Paul's Struggle; Our Struggle

I want you to know how hard I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

Colossians 2:1-5

In these verses, Paul mentions to his readers that he has been "struggling" for them (v. 1) and that his struggle was that they come to know the full riches of a complete understanding of the mystery of God, namely Christ. (v. 2) we know that the "mystery of God" is one of the ways that Paul refers to the Gospel, so he is struggling so that the people might come to see all that they have in the Gospel. To put it another way, Paul is struggling to make disciples, to assist these people in growing in their faith to a mature level of understanding.

It struck me that this is what we are all called to do. To "struggle" so that our brother or sister may come to fully understand the riches that are in Christ is our purpose in this life.

In verse 3, Paul goes on to say that in Christ are all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and it strikes me that this statement runs counter to what the world around us sees as "wisdom and knowledge." Verses four and five are really telling: Paul tells his readers that he is doing this so they will not be deceived by "fine-sounding arguments." I love that, "fine-sounding arguments!" What shall we take from this? As I see it, we have a serious role to play in leading our "younger" brother to stand firm in the knowledge and truth of Christ, to help them, to guide them and yes, to struggle for them so that they will not be deceived by the "wisdom" of this age, and to nurture them into the fullness of Christ. I wonder how often we see this imperative as our goal, rather than looking out for ourselves only...

Seek Him Only

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

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

Colossians 2:6-8

People are sometimes surprised when I say that Christian theology is basically simple to understand, and these three simple verses sum it up pretty well; it is simple to understand them, don't you think?

We received Jesus Christ as Lord; continue to live in Him. We do this by being rooted in Him, built up in Him and if we are strengthened in the faith just as we were taught, we will overflow with thanksgiving. What should our priorities in life be? Simple, we should be in Him, rooted in Him and strengthened by Him, or to put in another way, our life's priorities are all about Jesus Christ.

Verse eight follows with a bit of practical advice, which is to seek Christ and let go of the hollow ways and teachings of this world. It goes without saying that if we are seeking after Christ, then we are not seeking after the things of this world. If we are seeking Christ, then we will find His ways and want to follow them in our lives, rather than worrying about what everyone else is doing.

You see, none of this is complicated, in fact it is so very simple that sometimes we feel the need to complicate it– but then making the simple difficult is one of the ways of this world.

As we seek His face, as we seek His presence, as we seek His Truth, we seek after that which is good, wholesome and true. As we do this, our faith is strengthened, our walk closer and dearer, and our outlook on everything else will change forever. When that happens, we will be filled to overflowing with thanksgiving, praise and... His presence.

Fullness in Christ

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Colossians 2:9-12

Continuing on from last time, we come to a paragraph that is both full and rich in meaning, and yet often cluttered up with unnecessary doctrines. Consider the opening sentence, Paul points out that in the Person of Jesus lives all the fullness of God: Jesus is all God and Jesus is all man: God lived in His physical body. Jesus has also brought you and me to fullness, but fullness of what kind? Here it is in simple terms: All of the fullness of God resided in Jesus Christ, and in Christ the fullness of the Holy Spirit resides in you and me. Neither you nor I are the Messiah, nor are we divine, but we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and He is divine. Kind of makes you wonder why we don't follow His lead more often, doesn't it?

Paul continues to state that Jesus is the head of every power; He is at the right hand of God running the universe... and we are in Him.

Not a bad place to hang out!

The next sentence goes on to say that we have received a circumcision that wasn't performed by human hands. This is puzzling until we recall what circumcision was in the Old Testament. There, circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham; it was how people would recognize a man in covenant relationship with God. That was the covenant that set God's covenant people apart from everyone else, and circumcision was a kind of mark or seal of that covenant. Paul is talking about another kind of seal or sign of our covenant relationship with God, a sign that marks us as belonging to Him.

The last sentence in our text answers a question, and raises another; perfect!

The first part answers a question when it identifies Christ as the one who performed this circumcision without human hands, and that tells us that this circumcision is not a physical procedure at all, but instead a spiritual procedure. In this procedure, our natural self that lives according to the flesh is put off, and I think most of us will agree that this happens when we enter a relationship with Christ. This would be really easy if Paul stopped right there, but he goes on...

Here's the whole sentence again:

Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

The trouble happens when Paul followed the having been circumcised by Christ with "having been buried with Him in baptism" part. I say that there is trouble here, because this is where Christians like to divide into camps and slug it out. We aren't going to do that though, are we?

It appears to me that there is some kind of a connection between this "circumcision" and baptism, but what is the connection? If we were "buried with him in baptism" what were we buried into? Well, when He was buried, He was dead, having died on the cross. So, if we are "buried with him" then we must be buried into His death... right? If this "circumcision" was the link between the old man and the new man, and it is also linked to baptism into His death, then there must be a link of some kind being established here... see it? They are parallel. Notice that Paul also mentions that we are "raised with Him" by our "faith in the workings of God."

OK, so here's what we've got so far:

1. What an awesome thing it is to be in Christ!
2. He is the central focus of our lives, our all in all as the old hymn says.
3. In Christ, we have the fullness of the indwelling Holy Spirit: Amazing!
4. Paul has made a comparison between Old Testament circumcision, a new kind of circumcision and baptism.
5. Paul elaborates on that comparison in the next section. We'll leave this as a tease for now, and I'll look forward to seeing you back here next time.

Triumph!

When you were dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Colossians 2:13-15

As we pick up from the last passage, we see right away the connection we discovered. Notice the link between "dead in your sins" and "uncircumcision." Here they are used interchangeably, and since they are used this way, we can be certain, as we were last time, that circumcision here is not the literal procedure done in physical terms. While we were in our sins then, God made us alive in Christ and forgave our sins. So far, this is easy to understand, and wonderful to behold, full as it is with the love and mercy of a loving Father in heaven. It gets even better...

God cancelled the "written code" with its "regulations" that were "against us." So not only have our sins been forgiven, not only have we been made alive in Christ, but the Law that condemned us has been ended; from now on it's all about Christ!

God, in effect, nailed the old laws and rules to the cross with Christ and killed it. Christ rose from the grave, we rose with Him from baptism (2:12) and the written code remains in the grave... and there's still more...

In doing this, God has "disarmed" the "powers and authorities" and triumphed over them at the cross. These "powers and authorities" are the very ones who accuse us. Even now they may try to accuse, but they have been defeated at the cross; the ballgame is really over! Our sins are forgiven, we are alive in Christ, and when they attempt to accuse, they are exposed for the liars they have always been, for there is no written code any more.

This is one of the great liberating facts of our Faith. Those accusers have no audience with God, for they have been humiliated by the cross. Who is the one who accuses? It is Satan, his allies and those who would do his bidding on the earth. What Jesus has done for us on the cross has rendered their accusations altogether irrelevant, and we need not be concerned with them ever again.

What a gracious and loving Heavenly Father we have— what a glorious Lord we follow!

There can be no doubt that we are indeed a blessed people.

No More Shadows

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Colossians 2:16-19

Remember that we left off with God's triumph over the law, the authorities and powers at the cross, and now we draw some conclusions. Since we are newly alive in Christ, have died to sin and have our sins forgiven, and since we have the fullness of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are not to allow people to criticize us for what we eat, drink, or observe, as they might have done under the Law.

Pay careful attention to verse 17: *These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.* All of these festivals, customs and regulations were at best but a shadow of what was to come in Christ, and we often miss that fact. Many elements found in the Old Testament are like that, but we want to focus on them... and that includes the Temple itself, according to the author of Hebrews. Jesus is the reality, and all the old forms were a mere shadow of what He would bring us, and He has now brought us the reality.

In verse 19, Paul refers to the kinds of people who are always critical of a person who has found the liberty that is in Christ. They are puffed up, falsely humble, etc, etc. At the end of this brief passage comes the part that will really give us insight about this sort of thing. People who are hanging on to the forms of religion and seeking to impose them on their brother or sister have sadly been cut off from the Head of the Body. Since we know that Christ is the Head, these poor folks who seek to impose rules are not growing with the Body, being cut off. Maybe God has put them in our path so that we can help them get back in touch with the Head.

Oh, that would bring us back to the concept of relationship, love, serving and making disciples, wouldn't it?

Yes dear reader, most lessons come right back to that.

Following the “Rules”

Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Colossians 2:20-23

My Mom has this great story. It takes place when she was a high school student in a little town in West Texas over 70 years ago. It seems that the school had a street dance one Friday night, and all of the kids were there. There was also a Youth Pastor from a nearby church who was seen there. Well, as she tells the story, his attendance at the street dance came to the attention of the church board, and since everyone knows that dancing is a very wicked, sinful activity, the Youth Pastor was fired. To this day, my Mom will have nothing to do with that denomination. Her reasoning? If his job is taking Christ to the youth, shouldn't he be where the youth are? I can't argue with that kind of reasoning, can you?

I recall a conversation with an irate lady who was upset because a couple of members of our church were smokers. She wanted them straightened out or kicked out because smoking is a sin. When I asked her how she knew that, she replied that it's a sin because the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. I thought that was interesting and asked her about the context of that verse (1 Cor. 6:19) She had no idea, but everybody knows it means you can't smoke. She turned bright red when I pointed out that in context, Paul is talking about sexual immorality in general, and sex with a prostitute in particular. Sorry, smoking may be crazy, but it isn't a sin (I'm a non-smoker and always have been).

These are the kinds of things Paul is addressing in this paragraph. We have all sorts of "rules" that come from culture, from society and from religious traditions that have nothing to do with any Bible teaching. Now it may be that there are certain things my conscience won't permit me to do, but that doesn't make it a "rule" for everyone else. Paul's logic is simple and clear: We have died to sin, the Law and the ways of this world. Why do we linger? Stop it and follow Jesus Christ.

The end of the passage is quite interesting. All of these rules and traditions lack any value in restraining "sensual indulgence." Let's try not to have our minds go straight to the gutter here, for "sensual indulgence" covers a lot more than sex. Paul gives us some advice on how this can be done in the next chapter, and we'll have a look at that next time...

Raising our Sights

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.

Colossians 3:1-4

In the previous several verses, Paul has been writing about things such as the fact that we are dead to sin and alive in Christ, that our old life was buried with Christ and we are a new creation. Then he went on to challenge us to leave the old things behind and live new lives, free from the old silly rules and traditions. In these verses, Paul moves from the *what* to the *how*.

As these things usually are, the answer is simple: Set your hearts and minds on things that are above, not on earthly things. I've been told that this is very difficult, and that only a small number of people can really accomplish this 'looking above' kind of life... but I totally, completely and utterly reject that notion.

Does that surprise you? Does it irritate you?

Have you ever noticed that you usually find what you're looking for? Well, OK, yes, sometimes you might look for your keys and not find them, but that isn't really what I mean. Have you ever gone somewhere looking for trouble? How about a fight? Have you ever gone in search for a bad relationship, bad company... or a good relationship or good company? OK, if that didn't grab you, let's try this one: Have you ever bought a new car, and then noticed that it seems like everyone has the same kind of car?

See? You really do find what you're looking for!

To set your heart and mind on the things that are above, you need to start looking for such things. Now Paul, in the next sections will get into which things are which, so we'll be talking more about that as we go, but the quick version is that we can seek His presence by just entering it. We can focus on the things that are above, by thinking about them and looking for them... as opposed to things of the earth. Look, if all we think about are our bills, then bills and finances will become our lives. If we think about the things of God, then what will our lives be about?

This passage ends with the reminder that we died with Christ, rose with Christ, and now our lives are hidden with Christ. Now that we have died with Him, to our old way of living, and arisen with Him as new creations, the focus of our lives, and the very reality of our new lives, are "hidden" with Christ in God. Our new creation status is an entirely new kind of life that isn't simply physical and biological; it isn't discerned simply by the physical senses. It is Spirit and Truth. It is eternal. It is about much more than bodies, senses and things, it is the life God created humanity to live. As long as we are focused merely on the things of the earth, the world around us and problems and hassles of this world, we are missing out on that which is wonderful in Christ, *and...* our lives on this earth will be much more difficult as we are pulled in multiple directions at the same time.

For more information about finding God's presence in your daily life, see the extra section at the end of this document.

Unity in Christ

Colossians 3: 5-14

Since this is a longer section, I won't reproduce it here, and I hope you'll read it on your own...

In the last section, we saw Paul tell us how to live our new lives, by setting our hearts and minds on the things that are above, and not on the things of this world. In this section, he expands on this theme by listing items which are of the old life, and certain items that are of the new life in Christ. In verses 5-10a we get a pretty good idea of the kinds of things we are to "put to death" in our lives; these are all from our "old selves" and they include... sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed *which is idolatry*. He says we must rid ourselves of things like anger, rage, malice, slander, lies and filthy language. I'm quite sure that there is no need for me to elaborate on these things, other than to say that when our attention is drawn to any of them, it's time to set our minds on higher things.

Verses 10 and 11 move in transition to the next part by pointing out that we are to move away from those old practices into a new way of living where there is no Jew, no Greek, nor circumcised or uncircumcised... and no other social or ethnic distinctions: only Christ. Verse 12 provides a summing up and conclusion in an interesting way:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

I hope that you will take notice of two things. First, who are "God's chosen people" in the New Covenant? They are not old Israel; they are the redeemed in Christ. Recall that in verse 11 there is no longer Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, and in verse 12 "God's chosen people." Next, note the listing of things that are attributes of our new selves. These are coupled with his admonition in verse 13 to forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us, and then in verse 14 to put love over all of this.

Again, I doubt that I should need to expand this picture any further, other than to point out that love is over all things in the Christian life. How we interact with others, is all about love. How we relate to God, is all about love... and the old way of living is loveless, for it is all about self.

Over riding love amongst Christians is where unity can be found. We often wonder why it seems that the Church is divided; can you see why after reading this section? It's because we are more interested in disputes about doctrine, tradition and being first, than we are on loving our brothers. May we all come to the day when we can live our lives as new creations, when we finally get that "old self" put into the grave for good.

Living Christ

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:15-17

God has called us to peace, in community as the community of believers, and in that community is where peace and love and healing should be found in Christ. So, as we enter His presence today, let His peace rule in your heart... and give thanks. Next, let's let His word dwell within us, as we teach, admonish and sing spiritual songs to our Lord. Note the teaching and admonishing are for us to do with one another... as His Body so that all will benefit by it. This isn't really for the lost; they need the Gospel of the love of God through Jesus Christ.

Finally, whatever we do this day, let's do it in the name of Jesus our Lord, filled to the brim with thanksgiving and gratitude to God for all that He has done for us, and in our lives. What a great recipe for living, what wisdom and simplicity for a life that is not only godly, but that is a testimony to the world of what it is to dwell in his love.

You know what? Whatever this day may bring, I think it's going to be a good one!

Christian Relationships

Colossians 3:18-4:1

In this section, Paul gives insight to how Christians should behave in the major personal relationships of daily life. In 3:18-19, he speaks of husbands and wives, in 3:20-21 he speaks of parents and children, and from 3:22-4:1, masters and slaves, or today we would say employers and employees. If you think about it, we spend most of our waking lives in one of these relationships, at least most of us do.

We can easily sum up all of these relationships by saying that in each, we are to put others ahead of ourselves. This is certainly true in Paul's instructions to husbands and wives, even though he uses language in verse 18 that isn't modern. That wives should put their husbands first may not sound contemporary, but husbands are also to put their wives first. This might be a little clearer in the parallel passage in Ephesians 5:22-33.

The same thing is true of the relationship between parents and children. Both are to put the other first, giving honor where honor is due and giving love and nurture where they are due. In the case of master and slave, or employer and employees, we have again the idea that both are to consider the other, with workers doing their very best always "as working for the Lord" and the boss is told to always do what is fair and right "because you know that you have a Master in heaven."

I think that what is really important in this passage is the principle of putting others first. This principle is at the very heart of "love your neighbor as yourself." All too often, people approach the concept of love looking at what they will get out of it, but this is surely not what Jesus had in mind when He taught us that the first will be last and the last will be first. We love and serve others because we love Jesus Christ, not because we want something. In short, we serve others because we have been called to serve, and in doing so we are serving our God, because we love Him.

Yes, there are always some who will want to take advantage, but we know that we are serving the Lord, and that "Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism." (v. 25)

One final thought, for some this is a hard concept to embrace, but it lies at the heart of Christian discipleship. It is all so normal to expect that we receive something from our efforts, be it money or appreciation or loyalty, and people often disappoint us. The key is that we are not merely serving the other person, we are serving our Lord, and He never disappoints. Seek His presence, seek His love, focus your thought process on your relationship with Him... and follow where He leads. He will lead you to serve where you should serve, and to avoid what should be avoided.

Prayer and Grace

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Colossians 4:2-6

This is a really neat little passage; there's so much to see. As Paul closes out his letter, he reminds the people to be devoted to prayer, and while this may seem routine, after all, Apostles talk about prayer a lot, Paul here seems to bring it to life. I'm always struck by the idea of prayer being "watchful and thankful." Maybe thankful, as in giving thanks isn't so surprising, but watchful! How often do you hear someone say that we should be watchful in our prayers?

Watchful for what? Things you want God to give you, like little favors? "Oh yes, and Father please send me that new Lexus..." something like that? Somehow I doubt it. Maybe watchful for someone who needs intercession, maybe an opening for the Gospel, maybe something that is within God's priority system— yes that seems more like the kind of "watchful" that Paul has in mind. He continues by asking for the people to pray for him, but again, not in the way we might expect. Notice, that even though he is in prison, he didn't ask them to pray for his release, he asked them to pray that he might preach the Gospel effectively.

I don't know about you, but that gets my attention every time! When Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6:5 ff. He taught us to pray for God's priorities. "**Your** kingdom come, **your** will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." Do we remember to do that? Are we watchful for specifics that fit into this category? Well, I can only speak for myself, but truth be told, I forget or overlook this more often than I'd care to admit. Paul seems to continue in this line of thinking when he advises us to be wise when speaking to "outsiders," non-Christians. We are to be ready to make the most of every opportunity, to show them the love of Jesus Christ: Maybe we should pray for those opportunities. We are to speak to them "with grace, seasoned with salt..." Grace is often defined as "unmerited favor" meaning that we are to deal with them in love; more love than they might deserve.

I have a little secret for you to consider: Speaking to someone with grace is not telling them that they are wrong, even if they are. It doesn't mean calling them names, or being critical of the way they live. Yes, there is a fair chance that they live as unbelievers, but guess what? They are unbelievers, and that may be just how they are supposed to live. Our job isn't to correct the world, it is to save the world for Christ. This requires grace, not criticism. Salt is an interesting metaphor; I've heard many different explanations for this, so I'll throw out my thoughts. When we season food with salt, we add it to bring out the full flavor of the ingredients, and when we speak with grace, seasoned with salt, we are sharing the full love of God who so loved the world that He sent His Son to die to save it. We need our speech to be so full of His grace, that nobody hears the slightest little bit of condemnation come from our lips!

So, when you put this all together, maybe I should remember to pray that God will bring me opportunities, and give me the words to share, so that some may be saved. What do you think; do you need to join me in praying this way? If not, I'd love to hear why that is.

Extra Section: Finding God's Presence

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

What is God's will for us? Where can we find joy? Is it God's will that we find joy? What should we pray about?

All these questions are answered in the three short verses above: God's will for us is that we be joyful, that we pray *continually*, and that we give thanks in all circumstances.

I don't know about you, but this seems rather simple to me. Why do so many people say that it is so hard?

When we pray, whose presence are we in? God's of course.

How easy is it to slip back into the old ways when we are in His presence? Not very, for we are centering on our relationship with Him. We fall backwards when we are looking away from Him, isn't that right? So, maybe the key is to do what Paul said, and pray continually.

But how— we have families, chores, jobs, school...! The answer is so easy and so obvious that most of us miss it; just talk to Him!

Yes, that's right, *just talk to Him!!!*

Talk to the Lord all the time. Start when you wake up, "Good morning, Lord, thanks for a new day." Was that difficult? Then, as you get ready, keep talking to Him about your day, about the things on your mind, about how much you love Him, and how thankful you are for all that He has done in your life, and the lives of those around you. Talk to Him about how much you want to serve Him today, and that you want to serve Him today because you love Him. Talk to Him on your way out the door, on the bus, in traffic, at your work station. Talk to Him about your work and how you want to do the very best you can so that that He can be glorified... because of how much you love Him. Talk to Him at lunch, on your way home, in the kitchen, at the dinner table...

Develop the habit of talking to God! Approach this not in fear and trembling, but as though you are with your very best friend in all the world... because you are. He is the friend that you can say everything to, your fears, your sins, your mistakes... He knows about them anyway, so why not get these things off your chest? You see, we don't need any formal written prayers, that are of dubious value anyway, for this isn't a corporate or ceremonial thing. It's just you and the Lord. Nobody needs to know, except for the Lord... but soon, everybody will see the difference it makes in who you are and how you behave. They will see your joy, your inner peace and your new inner strength. Your whole outlook on life will change as you make this practice a part of who you are in Christ, for this is where spiritual growth will take place.

None of this means that you should not have a more formal time set aside for prayer and reflection—this will enhance it. This does not mean that you don't study the Word— it will enhance your study. This does not mean that you skip church— it will enhance it.

Some of you will note that I'm not saying anything that hasn't been said before by others, and that is true. This practice of continual prayer is as old as the Scriptures, and over the centuries many have written about it, including Brother Lawrence in the classic "The Practice of the Presence of God." You need not take my word for it; you can get that on the internet for free.

Or, you can just start talking to God right now. Tell Him how much you love Him in your own simple words, in your own heartfelt way, and be ready to be amazed at where He will lead you.