

Bible Study # 64
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Life and Letters of Paul Series—Colossians and Philemon

In the last Bible study, we **came up to the fact of Paul's Roman imprisonment** in the book of Acts. We noted in Acts 19 and 20 that Paul, after a great length of time in Ephesus, wrote the book of 1 Corinthians during the Days of Unleavened Bread of 55 A.D. This was his third evangelistic journey. Then a little later after Pentecost, there came up a great deal of difficulty and problems. Paul left Ephesus and sailed across into Macedonia to the area of Philippi. He stayed there a while then came down through the area of Greece. He came down further south through Athens and into Corinth. He wintered there. He spent the winter of 55 A.D.—56 A.D.

When he crossed from Ephesus to Philippi (Macedonia), perhaps in the fall of 55 A.D., he wrote 2 Corinthians. He wrote 2 Corinthians about six months after he wrote 1 Corinthians. Timothy reported back to him as to how the first letter had been received and what had transpired. He made his way down over the course of the next couple of months to Corinth and wintered there.

The last Bible study we saw how he wrote the book of Romans from Corinth in the winter of 55 A.D.—56 A.D.; perhaps we would date it around February. It was written just prior to the time that navigation occurred once again in the Mediterranean, after the three winter months when there wasn't normal shipping. The book of Romans was taken from Corinth to Rome by Phoebe when she sailed from Corinth. This perhaps would have been in March of 56 A.D.

We see in Acts 20 that Paul had originally intended to sail directly back to Jerusalem, but he changed his mind because of rumors of a plot against him. He went overland back through Philippi and left after the Days of Unleavened Bread. Then we find that he took the boat to Jerusalem, stopped over and met the Ephesian elders on the way.

Verse 16, he was in a hurry to be in Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost. It's interesting. You can go all the way through the book of Acts and you never read where Paul was in a hurry to get somewhere in time for Christmas. But he was in a hurry to get somewhere for Pentecost.

In verse 6, we find that he didn't leave until the Days of Unleavened Bread were over. People go

through the book of Acts and want to claim that the Holy Days and Sabbath, 'Well, that's just Old Testament that doesn't apply to us.' You go through the book of Acts and you find that Paul thought it applied to him. He kept Pentecost and the early New Testament Church kept it. It's good that we note this.

I have made a point over the years that everywhere in the book of Acts, when I come across the word "Sabbath" or the name of a holy day like Days of Unleavened Bread or Pentecost, I have taken that word and colored it in red. As I flip through the book of Acts, all these red words every couple of pages just stand out. You come across Sabbath or Pentecost or the Feast or the Days of Unleavened Bread or Passover over and over. When you do something like that, you realize, as you turn through, how frequently the issue of the Sabbath and Pentecost comes up, or whatever festival it may be they were celebrating.

Paul did get back to Jerusalem in time for Pentecost. You read of that in Acts 21. We find that Paul, in fact, was arrested in the temple on Pentecost weekend. As he was there on that occasion, he was arrested on a "trumped-up" charge. The Jewish religious leadership had a great deal of animosity against him. Acts 22, 23 and 24 all deal with aspects of his trial.

In Acts 24, Paul is before Felix, the Roman governor. He winds up staying in jail two years because the governor didn't want to make a decision. He didn't want to turn him loose and antagonize the Jews, and he didn't want to convict him because he knew he was an innocent man.

We find that Felix would have done well in an elected office in Louisiana.

Acts 24:26, "Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him." This sounds like some recent ones we have had. Felix hoped that money would be given him by Paul so that he might release him. He wouldn't be the last one that did that kind of thing. It simply shows that human nature hasn't changed. Since he was hoping that somebody would pay him off, he just let it "sit" until the next guy came to office. It's known as "passing the buck."

In Acts 25, Paul is on trial before Festus. Because he tried to "pass the buck" to King Agrippa, this matter drags on even further. Finally, Paul gets sick and tired of it.

In Acts 26, Paul appealed to the "Supreme Court." He wanted this case tried in Rome at the

court of Caesar. They didn't have to make a decision; they just loaded him on a boat and shipped him off.

Acts 27 is the account of Paul sailing to Rome in 58 A.D.

Acts 28, he shipwrecked in Malta. He wintered there the winter of 58 A.D.—59 A.D. and finally came to Rome in 59 A.D.

Verse 30, he spends two years there in Rome under house arrest. He was able to live in a place he rented but chained to a Roman soldier. He is allowed to receive visitors but not to go anywhere. He remained there for two years, 59 A.D.—61 A.D.

This is the point at which the book of Acts ends. We will talk more in a future Bible study as to why Acts ends there.

This brings us to where we are this evening because we are **at the point of some of the letters Paul wrote while he was in prison in Rome 59 A.D.—61 A.D.**

Colossians and Philemon were evidently written at that time. We are taking these two books together. The reason is that Philemon is a short little book and the two go together because Philemon lived in Colosse, and the books were written at the same time. It was, undoubtedly, carried by the same messenger. **One was a letter to the Church; one was a letter to a Church member. We will take the two of them together because the background ties together.**

Colosse started as a Greek colony. It is located in Phrygia, which is a portion of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). It is in the general area where the Churches were to which John wrote in Revelation 2 and 3. Colosse is right in there. In fact, it was just a few miles from Laodicea. When John wrote Revelation 2 and 3 under God's inspiration and addressed the seven Churches of Revelation, those seven were not the only congregations of the Church of God in that area. There were many others. Colosse and Hierapolis were right in the vicinity (kind of in the middle) of those seven. They were certainly on the same mail route.

The point to understand is that those seven Churches were specifically selected because they typified something—they illustrated certain things that God wanted highlighted. There were some things that had prophetic significance, so they were selected for that reason. It was not just a general letter to all the Churches there, addressed in a random fashion; they were selected because of special significance.

Colosse was in that area. It was located on the main road between Ephesus and the Euphrates River. That made it a city of commercial importance because the main Roman road connected Ephesus, which was a major port there on the coast. It had great significance in terms of trading with Greece. Colosse lay right on the main overland road or route from Ephesus across to the Euphrates River.

There was a Jewish community in the city. There were various Greek schools of thought. There were the Stoics who were a major Greek philosophical school. There were their ideas and various other ideas.

We have to realize that many times the problems that existed in some of these Churches were not simply because some group of outside troublemakers came in and stirred up trouble. People tend to be susceptible to certain types of things because of their own background and experience.

The people in Colosse grew up with a certain religious and philosophical background that was common to the Roman world. They had a certain mindset. Stoicism certainly influenced that quite a bit. Not that all of them were Stoics, by any means, but it was a major philosophical school of thought that heavily influenced the thinking of a large number of people. Whether they actively tried to practice all the tenets or not, it still affected the way they thought.

We are going to talk a little later about another group of people, the philosophical school called the Gnostics. It's kind of like "agnostic," the word we use today. "Gnostic" means "we know." They were proud of their knowledge. They had an inside track. Now, we've made a lot of progress today; we now have "agnostic," which means "we don't know." After 2,000 years, we have come from where the intellectuals prided themselves on what they knew to what they don't know. "Progress" marches on.

Neither of the groups knew, but the Gnostics thought they did. The Gnostics represented a blend of mysticism—Jewish and pagan thought all mixed up together. There were various schools of Gnostics. Many of the early writers give credit to Simon Magus as having been the father of the Gnostics. This is mentioned in the 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Eusebius makes reference to that.

Eusebius was a Catholic Church historian of the fourth century. He was contemporary with the emperor Constantine. If you are looking for something that is a blend of pagan and Jewish thought with a lot of mystic ideas, it shouldn't

come as any surprise to find something like that originating in Samaria. After all, didn't the Samaritans appropriate a lot of the trappings of Jewish religion and pay lip service to certainly accepting the first five books of the Bible? Didn't they acknowledge and utilize the name of the God of Israel and call themselves by that name?

We are told back in 2 Kings 17 that the Samaritans were, in reality, Babylonians by origin; they worshiped the Eternal and served their own god. They paid lip service to the God of Israel. They acknowledged orally, YHWH, the God of Israel, the Eternal, but in reality, they just continued the same old pagan religion. They practiced a mixing. The technical term was "synchronism." It's like pouring it all into a pot and mixing it all up—a little bit of this and that. It's kind of like making a gumbo, and it was just as unclean as some of the unclean gumbos of today.

They borrowed things from a variety of different religions. There was an overlay that had biblical overtones in the sense that biblical terminology was used. There was a certain tie-in to the Old Testament, but it was really more Babylonian pagan religion—the Old Babylonian Mystery Religion—with the addition of much of the Greek philosophy of the day that was kind of all mingled with it. Simon and many of his followers accepted Christ.

Remember Acts 8:13, 'Simon believed.' There were many of his followers who had this sort of acceptance, at least outwardly. They paid lip service to Jesus Christ being the Messiah.

They had an influence that began to pervade in many areas in the New Testament congregation. At first it was simply various competing ideas inside the Church. There were people inside the Church who were a part of this or were heavily influenced. Some were, perhaps, direct followers and disciples of Simon Magus and they influenced others. You have various shades of opinion. There were many in the Church who were influenced by these things. At first, they were a part and seemingly indistinguishable in the Church. It ultimately came to a point that there was a division and a distinction—a separation—between those who were truly the people of God and those who were not.

By the time we get to John's writings in the 90s A.D., in some cases, some were actually being cast out of the Church. When John wrote in 1 John, he is writing to the very area of Colosse, the area of Asia Minor. There is a lot of evidence of the Gnostics and many of their teachings

that come out in 1, 2 and 3 John. The background of 1, 2 and 3 John tie in very directly with the background of Colossians because you're looking at the same geographic area. John is 30 years downstream, so he's another generation removed. Things had degenerated quite a bit from the time Paul had written.

Paul is addressing the Church of God, but there was clearly an element that was a part of the Church that had brought in many of these ideas. It was having an influence on many of God's people. I don't want to go into great details, but I will mention a few concepts of the Gnostics. We are going to cover it in quite a bit of detail. When we finish the Life and Letters of Paul, we will have a Bible study on some of the heresies of the first century—some of the things that actually gave rise to what became the Catholic Church.

We need to understand, just a little bit, because it sets the background for why Paul stressed the things he did in Colossians. When a sermon is preached or a letter is written, not everything that can be said on the subject is said. What you tend to do is focus in on the issues that have been raised. You focus in on the questions that have been asked and you stress certain things.

Mr. Herbert Armstrong may have stressed proving the fact that the Sabbath was in force and effect today, in a way that Peter or Paul did not have to stress that in their sermons because it was simply not an issue. The audience to which they were preaching understood that the Sabbath was in effect. That was not the question. The question was: Is Jesus the Messiah?

Most people today don't have a problem with the fact that, yes, Jesus is the Messiah. The problem today is: What did He teach? Now that is an issue. But the issue that He Himself was the Messiah is not that commonly debated, at least among the professing Christian world. We tend to stress, in the context of the truth, those things that are issues and those things that are misunderstood and need to be clarified. Paul stressed certain things about the person of Jesus Christ—about His divinity and the things that He did—in his letter to the Colossians because these things were being challenged.

The Gnostics had this sort of idea that went back to a pagan dualistic approach—the idea that the spirit is good and the flesh is evil. Then the idea was, if flesh is inherently evil and spirit is inherently good, how can God who is inherently good make something that is flesh, which is inherently bad? How can something good make something bad? That created a problem for them.

They came to a solution but not a correct solution. They decided that God had created other spirits that were pretty good but were not quite as good as He was. They were the first things that emanated out from Him. They were kind of a step below Him. And they in turn gave rise to the next spirit realm that was a step below them. They went down through what they called “24 emanations.” They kept getting a little further and further down and finally got down to something that was so far removed from God that it could come into contact with flesh—and that’s what made man.

They developed this elaborate hierarchy of angels, demons and all these crazy things. They identified it with astrology, with all the names of the stars and astrological significance and various groups of angelic order and demonic order all the way down. They identified the God of the Old Testament with something that was pretty far removed from what actually gave rise to people.

If you operate on the premise that the flesh is inherently evil, then what you need to do is punish the flesh. Anything that is physically pleasurable is obviously suspect. This is not that far removed from us today.

The Catholic Church has vows of poverty, chastity and humility. The monastic vow was the idea that if you’re really holy, if you’re really going to be a saint, then everything that would be enjoyable, you forswear. You certainly would never marry. You would never enjoy a physical husband-wife relationship. That involves fleshly pleasure. Since you couldn’t be holy and do that, you have to make this vow of celibacy. You couldn’t sit down and enjoy a good meal or enjoy nice beautiful things.

You get to the basis of all the monastic orders and their vows of poverty, and it kind of trickled down to the masses. By that time, it got down to meatless Fridays. They figured they couldn’t really give up very much, so they give up a little bit. Now, we get down to where people give up chocolate, or whatever it is, for Lent and they figure they are really mortifying the flesh. These are vows of “giving up”—this great asceticism.

You had groups of Jewish thought that absorbed some of these concepts from the pagan world around them and were somewhere between the Jews and the Samaritans in terms of their concepts. You had all these little obscure groups.

The Essenes were one. They were very, very ascetic; they had many of these things that they got from pagan thought. These were pagan

concepts because they didn’t come from God or out of the Bible. If you didn’t get them from God, where did you get them? God is the only source of truth.

Even if they were absorbed into a small sect of Judaism (these groups of varying shades), certain concepts were popular. This concept of asceticism (self-denial) and the concept of penance somehow made you holy. Some of these attitudes of the Gnostics and the concept that was a part of Gnostic philosophy certainly seemed to have impacted the Church in Colosse.

Paul wrote this letter from Rome. We would date it about 60 A.D. Evidently, Epaphras, the minister who had been instrumental in raising up the Churches in Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis, had journeyed to Rome to visit Paul, and it made him aware of certain problems in the area.

Paul dwelt a long time in Ephesus. He had not been to Colosse, though he had met and dealt with many of the people. Some of the individuals in Colosse, certainly some of the long-time Church members and certain ones who had probably traveled to Ephesus, knew Paul.

Philemon, for instance, had evidently been personally taught and baptized by Paul. He was a wealthy individual and would have, undoubtedly, traveled to Ephesus on numerous occasions just on business. Paul had not actually been to Colosse, and there were certainly many brethren there who he did not personally know. But word came to him that there were problems that were creating some misunderstandings and difficulties there in Colosse and through several of the other Churches around there. Laodicea seems to have been impacted.

Paul must have written a letter to the Laodiceans about the same time because he specifically made the request in Colossians that he would like them to read the letter he wrote to the Laodiceans and to let the Laodiceans read the letter he wrote to the Colossians. This tells us Paul wrote many letters.

The idea that Paul wrote only 14 letters in his life doesn’t make a whole lot of sense. There’s no telling how many letters Paul wrote. There are certain ones that God selected to be preserved for the Church at all times. It was not necessary to preserve every word Paul wrote. All of it didn’t have a universal message to it. Some of the letters dealt with things that would have been a certain amount of repetition. God selected those things that He wanted preserved. God selected the things that were going to have value for the Church at all times.

At the time this book of Colossians was written, it seems that Archippus was perhaps serving as a local pastor there in Colosse. This seems apparent in the way that he was addressed. It appears very likely that he was the son of Philemon. Philemon was an elder. He was what we would term a “local elder” there in Colosse. He was a wealthy individual in the Church, and they actually met in his home. It was perhaps a Roman villa type of place. He was perhaps a wealthy merchant, and the Church met in his home. He was not the Church pastor, but it’s very likely that his son, Archippus, was the Church pastor.

We find in Colossians that Paul is seeking to smash this philosophy. Understand that the term “philosophy” was a general term that basically referred to “any school of thought” or to any school of thought that was current in the world at that time. It could refer to not merely two or three specific Greek philosophical schools of Stoics or Epicureans, etc., but even the varying groups among the Jews were sometimes designated as philosophies. “Philosophy” was kind of the general term.

He wanted to smash these philosophies that had grabbed hold and were influencing the Church away from the simplicity of Christ. He wanted to expound certain principles of Christian living and also to explain what the mystery of the gospel really was because these Gnostics really went in for the “mysteries.” They would initiate you, and through the secret knowledge, the initiated could move up step-by-step. They could progress by degrees up to a relationship with the supreme god. But you had to be “in the know,” and they had this sort of inner knowledge.

Let’s also look at **Philemon**. It is a short little book. We are going to notice Philemon first and then summarize Colossians.

Philemon was a resident of Colosse. He was a local elder whom Paul had originally baptized. The book was written by Paul from Rome at the time that he wrote Colossians, and it seemed to have been prompted by the conversion of Onesimus who was Philemon’s runaway slave. There are several things that come out in the book of Philemon.

The story seems to be that Onesimus had run away, as was frequently the case. Rome was filled with runaway slaves and people from throughout the empire. Rome was a big place, and if you wanted to get lost, what you did was to go to a big city. There is certain anonymity in a big city.

Onesimus had gotten away and had come to Rome. Somehow he had met up with Paul. He had probably known Paul, maybe not personally, but had known of him. He was somewhat familiar with him because of Paul’s impact on the family of Philemon. At some point, perhaps he wound up “down-and-out” in Rome. Whatever it was, at some point he met up with Paul.

Paul talked and counseled with him. He worked with him over a period of time and ultimately brought Onesimus to conversion. He was baptized, stayed on for a period of perhaps months and served Paul by doing things for him. Paul was confined to the home, and Onesimus probably took care of all sorts of physical duties—going out and shopping for food, fixing things, and running errands—just being a very valuable assistant and servant who was a lot of help to Paul.

Epaphras had come to Rome and had discussed the situation in Colosse. Paul was preparing to write this letter to the Colossians. He knew that Onesimus had been in Rome for a period of time and he needed to go back and “face the music.” He had run away from Philemon and perhaps had stolen some money when he did. That’s the logical thing; you don’t run away broke. It was important that he take responsibility for his actions. He needed to go back to where he had been. Yet, he was apprehensive. He was afraid of what kind of trouble he was going to be in.

Paul was concerned on his behalf. He felt that Onesimus had repented of any sins that had been involved in his actions. He was prepared to follow Paul’s advice and go back to the household of Philemon. **But Paul wanted to do what he could to ensure that Onesimus was not going to be severely dealt with.** He wanted to ensure that he was going to be kindly and gently dealt with and not punished for the problems in the past.

He wrote a personal letter to be sent to Philemon. There are a lot of things we can learn from that. We can learn about proper psychology and tact. Paul was involving himself in what was a personal matter. He didn’t choose to just get in and start ordering Philemon around.

Philemon 1, “Paul, a prisoner [This is part of the basis for knowing he was in Rome.] of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer...” This gives us an indication that Philemon was ordained an elder.

Verse 2, “to the beloved Apphia [a woman’s name and most likely Philemon’s wife],

Archippus our fellow soldier [The indication would be someone that was a part of the household, most likely a son; he is addressed as a fellow soldier, which would indicate that he was part of the ministry.], and to the church in your house...”

When you go back to Colossians, we find the last admonition Paul had.

Colossians 4:17, “And say to Archippus, ‘Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.’” Archippus is addressed as a minister, undoubtedly as the pastor of the Church there in Colosse. He is addressed in the final admonition of Colossians, as the pastor there, to follow through on the things Paul had told the Church and to fulfill his ministry. When you put Colossians 4:17 together with Philemon 2, we would conclude that Archippus was most likely the pastor of the Church there, and based on Philemon 2, he was very likely the son of Philemon.

In Philemon 2, Philemon and his wife are addressed, as well as Archippus and the Church that meets in Philemon’s house. That would be the Colossian Church. Paul addressed and greeted them.

Philemon 4, “I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers...” He says, ‘I always thank God for you.’ He starts out in a very nice, kind, gentle and positive way. ‘I’ve been praying for you.’

Verses 5-7, ‘I’ve heard a lot of the things you have done and how you have helped and served many people.’

Verses 8-9, “Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love’s sake I rather appeal to you—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ...” He says, ‘I realize that I could start giving you orders as an apostle, but I don’t want to do that. I’d rather, for love’s sake, just ask you a favor. I’m an old man. I’m in jail and I’d like for you to do me a favor.’

Verse 10, “I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains...” This would certainly be a reference to the fact of Onesimus having been baptized by Paul while Paul was in a Roman prison.

Verse 11, “who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me.” Paul says, ‘I know in times past he was unprofitable to you, but now he’s profitable to both of us.’

Verse 12, “I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart...” ‘I have sent him back to you and I want you to receive him.’

Verse 13, “whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel.” ‘I would have liked to keep him with me. He was helping me. He was serving me and taking care of a lot of needs that I had. He was really kind of taking your place here because I know that if you had been here, you would have been anxious to help, to serve me and do whatever you could. It’s like he’s been doing it in your stead. He’s your servant and he’s been here; that’s kind of like you being here doing it.’

Verse 14, “But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary.” He tells him, ‘I wouldn’t want to do anything without instructions from you because then your service would be of necessity, not willingly. I started to keep him, but any service you were rendering to me would have been because you were “between a rock and a hard place.” And I wanted any service to be willingly, not because you couldn’t get out of it.’

Verses 15-16, “For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me but now much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.”

‘I am going to send him back to you. Maybe the whole point of his running away and coming here was lessons he had to learn. Now, he can come back and enter back into a relationship with you that is going to last forever—not simply as a servant, but above a servant, a brother. He is beloved to me, but I know more so to you because you have known him for a long time.’

Verses 17-18, “If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. But if he has wronged you or owes you anything, put that on my account.” This is an allusion to the fact that he may have stolen some money when he left. Paul says, ‘Put it on my account; charge it to me.’

Verse 19, “I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay—not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides.” He says, ‘I will repay it. Though I am not going to mention to you how you owe me even your own life. If he stole the 20 bucks, charge it to my account. I’ll repay it if you want me to pay it. And I certainly will never mention to you how much you owe me.’ About this time, it’s going to be kind of hard for old Philemon to be too upset at Onesimus.

Verse 20, “Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.” ‘I really want to hear some good news.’

Verse 21, “Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.” ‘I know you are going to do a whole lot more than what I am suggesting. I’ll leave to your imagination ways that you can do this.’

Verse 22, “But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.” He says, ‘I would like for you to prepare a room for me because I know you’re praying that I am going to be released from prison; as soon as I get out, I am going to come visit you.’ That carries the very subtle implication—‘I am going to know whether or not you did as I suggested. Because you’re praying for me to get out, I’m sure God is going to hear your prayers, and when I get out, I am going to come see you. Then I will really know whether or not you did as I suggested for you to do.’

He ends up with conclusions. He mentions various others who were there with him.

There is a lot of tact and wisdom used in Philemon. We can certainly learn an important lesson in tact and gentleness in dealing with people about personal matters. **That’s one of the most important lessons we can learn from the book of Philemon in terms of how to deal with people in personal matters.**

We now get on into the book of **Colossians**.

Colossians 1:7-8, Paul mentions, “as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.” Epaphras was the one who had told them these things when he had come there. He remained there in Rome with Paul. He is referred to as a fellow prisoner with Paul in Philemon 23.

Colossians 4:12-13, “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.” Very likely, he had actually been the one to raise up those three congregations.

When Paul was based in Ephesus, he had various ones working with him whom he sent out and they raised up these congregations. Certain ones, particularly some of the leading ones, probably

traveled to Ephesus and were personally instructed by Paul.

Epaphras had traveled from Colosse and had come to Rome. He told Paul what was going on.

Paul’s writing in Colossians is based on what Epaphras had said was going on in Colosse.

Paul was sending back Tychicus.

Colossians 4:7-9, “Tychicus, who is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you all things which are happening here.”

Paul sent Onesimus back and Tychicus to accompany him. Onesimus had a legal obligation to go back to Philemon. Paul did not presume to start interfering in some of those things, though he wanted Philemon to learn some lessons and to deal with things in a godly way. There are responsibilities depending on the state in which we find ourselves in society. That is why in Colossians Paul gives admonition both to servants and masters.

Colossians 3:22, “Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.”

Colossians 4:1, “Masters, give your servants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.” Just coming into the Church doesn’t change all the physical and social relationships and things that exist. The point Paul makes is that there is a transformation of those relationships. If someone was in a position of a master, what he needed to realize was that he had a Master, and he had better deal with those who were his servants the way he hoped God would deal with him.

That would certainly transform the relationship, wouldn’t it? Then you have a relationship that is based on love, giving, serving and helping. You have a transformation from a despotic tyrannical overlord sort of relationship to a relationship like God has with us. God expects us to do what He says, but God deals with us in love, kindness, gentleness and mercy—all these attributes.

Paul addresses husbands, wives, parents, children, servants and masters. He addresses the whole social fabric of the world. He addresses the fact that when we become a Christian, it should transform relationships because the basis of the way we treat others has changed.

In Colossians 1:7-8, he mentions that Epaphras is the source of his information.

Colossians 1:10, Paul's desires for the congregation are given, "that you may have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God..."

Verses 12-13, "giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love..." God the Father has already done this. It's not a matter that you have to work yourself up by degrees, as the Gnostics taught, from darkness to light. God has already translated us into the Kingdom of His dear Son. He has already delivered us from the power of darkness. You don't work your way up degree, by degree, by degree.

It's an interesting aside. If you were to read in the writings of the Masonic Order, they have their 33 degrees, 32 of which are earned degrees. They will tell you in the official writings of the Masonic Order that they trace their system of degrees back to the Gnostics philosophers. The whole basis of working your way up by degrees goes back to that concept. They readily acknowledge that.

I have a book that is the official standard. It's not some book written against or about them. It is the standard work, morals and dogma of the Masonic Order. Most Masons have no idea that's the case and would probably deny it. If you have ever seen the book, you would realize that most Masons have never read it. It's a great big thick book. For most, the Masonic Order is a social or fraternal matter. They go through the degree work just as so much "mumbo-jumbo," never realizing where some of it went back to. There are a lot of things that go back to these concepts. Most involved in that today really don't take it seriously as the way of salvation. However, if you look at what it says, that's what it purports to be.

Paul makes plain that we have already been delivered out of the power of darkness. You don't have to work your way out degree by degree.

Verses 14-16, "in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him." All of that didn't

emanate one out from another. Everything that exists was created by Jesus Christ as the instrument of creation.

Verses 17-19, "And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell..." This really blows the minds of some of these philosophers because the idea that all the fullness of deity would dwell in flesh was kind of beyond them. That flew right in the face of what the Gnostics would have taught.

Verse 20, "and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." In other words, He brought everything into harmony with Him.

It's important to understand the direction that reconciliation works. We are to be reconciled to God. God does not bring Himself to be in harmony with us. We have to come to be in harmony with Him because He is right and we are wrong. Why should God change to be like us? Why would God say, 'I'll meet you halfway'? Then He'd be half wrong, and half wrong is as good as being entirely wrong. It's kind of like drinking half poison. Generally, it doesn't even take that much to "finish you off." He made peace through the blood of His cross. He paid the penalty for sin. The reason we need to be reconciled is because we have sinned.

Let's go through the context.

"To reconcile all things to Himself."

Verses 21-22, "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight..."

Notice what Paul is saying. We were at one time alienated from God, enemies in our mind because friendship with the world is enmity with God. You can't be the friend of the world and the friend of God.

James 4:4, "...Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." The world is not on God's wavelength. We were, at one time, friends of the world. We were comfortable with the world and the world was comfortable with us. The only problem was that when that was the case, we were alienated from God. The reason we got along well with the world was because we lived like the world and acted like the world. We were motivated by the

world's set of values. We blended in as a part of the world. We fit in. We don't fit in anymore.

You can't fit in with God and with the world. That's why we're here and not down on Bourbon Street in New Orleans this evening. You don't fit in down there. If you do, then you don't fit in here. If you would feel right at home and in place down there tonight, in the midst of all that Mardi Gras revelry, well, you wouldn't entirely feel in place here. And if you took some of that Mardi Gras crew from down there and stuck them here, they wouldn't feel comfortable. Their mindset is different.

God is going to solve the problem by sending Jesus Christ to condemn sin in the flesh and to pay the penalty for sin to make possible the reconciliation of humanity to God. Paul stresses this to the Colossians. He stresses that we have been reconciled in the body of His flesh. When you understand the overtones of the concepts they had, as far as the distinction between flesh and spirit, this really went against the grain for them.

Colossians 1:23, "if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister." Paul mentions that you have to continue in the faith, grounded and settled, not being stirred up and going off on some tangent. You have to keep anchored on the hope of the gospel.

Verse 24, "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, ..."

Verses 25-26, "of which I became a minister according to the stewardship [KJV, "dispensation"] from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints." The Gnostics talked about mysteries. He is going to explain the mystery.

Verses 27-28, "To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." The mystery has to do with Christ in us, the hope of glory. Jesus dwells in us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He lives His life in us.

Galatians 2:20, that is what Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I

now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Paul explained that to the Galatians. The mystery that has been hidden for generations, the mystery that had never been understood before, was the mystery of conversion and of Christ dwelling in us through the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to be transformed from the inside—renewed and transformed from within.

Colossians 2:1, "For I want you to know what a great conflict [KJV, margin, "care"] I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh..." This is an indication that he had not actually been to those cities. He knew a number of the individuals personally. He had a special concern for some of these areas that did not have the same personal relationship with him.

Verses 2-3, "[desiring] that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Where are the treasures of wisdom and knowledge? Are you going to find that in some of these various philosophies? No. It is hidden here in God the Father and Christ.

God consists of the Father and of Christ. Just in terms of the trinity, can you imagine a Catholic epistle leaving out the so-called third person of the trinity?

Colossians 1:2, "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Over and over you go through Paul's epistles, and it's always "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The pope would never write anything that way. It would be 'from Father, Son and the Holy Spirit (or Ghost).' There would always be the trinity.

If it had been left out of one or two verses, it wouldn't be so bad. But if the Holy Spirit is a person, it should be getting its feelings hurt by now because it got left out here. Why didn't Paul mention it? Maybe Paul didn't know that. Maybe he hadn't read the Nicene Creed. He was about 300 years too early. He only knew what Christ had said. He hadn't found out what Constantine and the Bishop of Rome had come up with.

Colossians 2:6, "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him..." Stick to the trunk of the tree.

Verses 7-8, "rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware

lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”

Verse 10, “and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.” What he is saying “flies in the face” of what some of these people were saying, introducing various philosophical ideas. They weren’t coming in trying to teach against Christ. The Gnostics that came in were not trying to say, ‘Don’t be a Christian anymore.’ They were saying, ‘That’s fine. We are Christians, too. Simon Magus claimed to be a Christian, didn’t he?’ They said, ‘We have some deeper understanding; there are some things that you haven’t heard. There’s a way. We have the “inside track” to spiritual growth and to enlightenment.’

Paul says that you need to be “rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught.” You need to be anchored and steadfast. Beware of this philosophy, vain deceits, from the society around that didn’t originate with Christ.

Verse 9, “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily...” –Which is the idea that the fullness of the Godhead could dwell in flesh—something that flew in the face of the Gnostic teaching.

Verse 10, “and you are complete in Him,”

Verse 11, “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands [the circumcision of divine origin], ...” The expression “made without hands” signifies divine origin.

In Daniel 2:31-35, Daniel saw the great image, and then at the end, a ‘stone cut without hands’ smashed the image on its toes and the whole thing turned to dust. “A stone cut out without hands” means that it was “not of human origin.” It was of divine origin.

The circumcision “made without hands” is a circumcision of divine origin.

Colossians 2:11, “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ...”

Evidently circumcision was a factor here. There was a misinterpretation of the significance of circumcision. The Samaritans practiced circumcision. That was one thing they acknowledged because that was mentioned in the first five books of the Bible. They did acknowledge that was right. Many of the Jewish philosophical groups did that. But we find that those in Colosse who were discussing

circumcision completely misunderstood or incorrectly taught what it was all about.

Verses 12-14, “buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses [KJV, “sins”] and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” If you look up this term “handwriting of requirements” (KJV, “handwriting of ordinances”), most of the commentaries will bring out that the Greek expression, the sense of it, is a technical term that has reference to a bond of indebtedness.

It is a reference to a handwritten bond of indebtedness, a bill of debt, which is what Christ blotted out. He blotted out our bond of indebtedness, our handwritten “IOU,” as it were, as a result of our sins. This is what was against us—our sins. It was contrary to us. He nailed our sins to the cross. He didn’t do away with the law. Why would He do away with the law? The law was not against us or contrary to us. What He blotted out was our sins. He blotted out the bond of indebtedness, the catalog of our sins, the things that are against us.

Verse 15, KJV, “And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” He triumphed over Satan and his entire realm.

Verse 16, KJV, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days...”

As a result of what Christ has done, of blotting out our sins and taking them out of the way, having triumphed over everything, don’t let anybody call you into question in respect of matters of eating and drinking.

“Eating and drinking” is the sense of the word “meat”; it is translated meat and drink. My margin says, “for eating and drinking.” It’s not so much “food or drink” as it is the act of eating and drinking. Our sins have been taken out of the way and blotted out. Christ has triumphed over everything. Don’t let somebody call you into question in matters of eating and drinking or in respect of Holy Days or a new moon or Sabbath.

Verse 17, KJV, “which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” Don’t let somebody call you into question in these regards. He specifically mentions eating and drinking, as

well as other aspects of these festive occasions. The one thing Holy Days, Sabbath and new moons all had in common (new moons were never commanded as holy time) was they were festive occasions. They were occasions that were normally accompanied by eating and drinking, a time of festivity. The festive nature of all these things looked forward to a time when Christ is going to make a feast of fat things for all people (Isaiah 25:6).

Verse 18, KJV, “Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind...”

This gets into some of these mystic ideas of the Gnostics. There were various sectarian groups and the influence of many of the Samaritans. Many of them were influenced by the pagan thought that filtered through the Samaritans and influenced other little groups of Jews with all this sort of mystic ideas. ‘Don’t let anybody beguile you in this, intruding into things with all these human ideas and these dogmas.’ He summarizes what they are.

Verse 21, “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle...” That’s pretty much the equivalent of the ascetic vows of touch not (being a reference to celibacy), taste not (this ascetic forswearing of meat or wine and milk—some of these ascetic groups gave up all sorts of things, living on very rigorous diets, which were all human ideas) and do not handle (giving up or forswearing physical wealth).

Verse 22, “which all concern things which perish with the using— ?...”

Verse 23, “These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.” These things all look impressive to the world. People are impressed with that. They look at somebody who sits cross-legged wearing nothing but a loincloth and lives on grapes. They think that this is a holy man. The term referring to these men in India is “faikers.” I think they are closer to the truth than they realize. They are “fakers.” It’s a distorted concept of holiness and of sainthood.

If you want to get some laughs about the misunderstanding of what is a saint, go to a library and get a Catholic book on all the saints. You will come up with the craziest things you can imagine. One guy stayed perched on top of some tall obelisk for so many years that this really made him a holy man. People made

pilgrimages to come and hear his “wisdom.” Just crazy! But the pagan world has gone in for that, whether it’s the Catholic world or you can go over to Asia and the Buddhists.

Paul said not to let someone call you into question about these festive occasions. These things foreshadow; they are a shadow of Christ. The whole festive nature of God’s celebration and the things that God’s people did, all look forward—they foreshadow a reality. Don’t let them trick you out of your reward by getting you to go and do all these things, getting involved in worshipping angels and all this silly mysticism that they have and not focusing on Christ, the Head.

Verses 19-20, “and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase which is from God. Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations...” If you are no longer a part of this world, then why get tangled up in some of these concepts. These things that look impressive to the world certainly require a lot of willpower and tremendous exercise in self-discipline, but that’s not the way to salvation. They miss the whole point. It’s a distorted concept.

Colossians 3:1, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above,” That’s the point.

We realize that if our lives are wrapped up in Christ, then, verse 4, when He appears, we are going to be like Him in glory, just like He is.

Verses 5-9, therefore, what you need to mortify, get rid of, are the old ways of living. We are to put to death the sexual uncleanness and the covetousness, the things for which the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience. We may have formerly done those things, but we are not to do them any more. We have to get rid of the anger, malice, wrath, blasphemy and the filthy communication. Don’t lie to one another. You’re getting rid of the old man.

Verses 10-11, “and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge [the real knowledge] according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.”

From a spiritual standpoint, the physical divisions are not relevant. From a physical standpoint, our ethnic origin or our social status does not impact our relationship with God. Paul

is not talking about a physical revolution in the sense that some have tried to distort it. There are crazy ideas like communal living, having everything in common. Certain communes share everything: wives, property, etc. People want to read things into what the Bible says.

Verses 18-25—4:1 speak of wives, husbands, children, fathers, servants and masters. Physical relationships still exist in the physical realm, but they, themselves, are transformed. Our relationship with God and our opportunity to be a part of God's Kingdom is not based on our physical standing, either from an ethnic standpoint, gender, economic status or social status.

Colossians 3:10-12, we are to put on the attitude of God.

Verse 13, "bearing [KJV, "forbearing"] with one another, and forgiving one another," This is one thing we all owe one another. This is the attitude we are to have: if a misunderstanding or a dispute arises, "Forbearing and forgiving one another." "Forbear" means "to put up with." Sometimes that's all you can do with some people. But then, God puts up with us. That should tell us something. God forgives us. We should forgive one another.

Verse 14, "But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection." That's what binds us together.

Verse 15, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful."

He talks about the transformation of physical relationships that should take place. Our lives as a Christian should be different.

Colossians 4:6, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." What does that mean "seasoned with salt"? Sometimes we have heard the reference of somebody being a "salty" character. This is not what you think of. What does it mean? When we think of salt, most of us think of a flavor enhancer. Salt enhances the flavor.

[End of tape]