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Preface

**An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of The Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians**

Colosse was a considerable city of Phrygia, and probably not far from Laodicea and Hierapolis; we find these mentioned together, 4:13. It is now buried in ruins, and the memory of it chiefly preserved in this epistle. The design of the epistle is to warn them of the danger of the Jewish zealots, who pressed the necessity of observing the ceremonial law; and to fortify them against the mixture of the Gentile philosophy with their Christian principles. He professes a great satisfaction in their stedfastness and constancy, and encourages them to perseverance. It was written about the same time with the epistles to the Ephesians and Philippians, A.D. 62, and in the same place, while he was now a prisoner at Rome. He was not idle in his confinement, and the word of God was not bound.

This epistle, like that to the Romans, was written to those he had never seen, nor had any personal acquaintance with. The church planted at Colosse was not by Paul's ministry, but by the ministry of Epaphras or Epaphroditus, an evangelist, one whom he delegated to preach the gospel among the Gentiles; and yet, I. There was a flourishing church at Colosse, and one which was eminent and famous among the churches. One would have thought none would have come to be flourishing churches but those which Paul himself had planted; but here was a flourishing church planted by Epaphras. God is sometimes pleased to make use of the ministry of those who are of less note, and lower gifts, for doing great service to his church. God uses what hands he pleases, and is not tied to those of note, that the *excellence of the power may appear to be of God and not of men*, 2 Co. 4:7. II. Though Paul had not the planting of this church, yet he did not therefore neglect it; nor, in writing his epistles, does he make any difference between that and other churches. The Colossians, who were converted by the ministry of Epaphras, were as dear to him, and he was as much concerned for their welfare, as the Philippians, or any others who were converted by his ministry. Thus he put an honour upon an inferior minister, and teaches us not to be selfish, nor think all that honour lost which goes beside ourselves. We learn, in his example, not to think it a disparagement to us to water what others have planted, or build upon the foundation which others have laid: as he himself, as a *wise master-builder, laid the foundation, and another built thereon*, 1 Co. 3:10.

## Chapter 1

We have here, I. The inscription, as usual (v. 1, 2). II. His thanksgiving to God for what he had heard concerning them—their faith, love, and hope (v. 3-8). III. His prayer for their knowledge, fruitfulness, and strength (v. 9–11). IV. An admirable summary of the Christian doctrine concerning the operation of the Spirit, the person of the Redeemer, the work of redemption, and the preaching of it in the gospel (v. 12–29).

### Verses 1-2

I. The inscription of this epistle is much the same with the rest; only it is observable that, 1. He calls himself an *apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God*. An apostle is a prime-minister in the kingdom of Christ, immediately called by Christ, and extraordinarily qualified; his work was peculiarly to plant the Christian church, and confirm the Christian doctrine. He attributes this not to his own merit, strength, or sufficiency; but to the free grace and good-will of God. He thought himself engaged to do his utmost, as an apostle, because he was made so by the will of God. 2. He joins Timothy in commission with himself, which is another instance of his humility; and, though he elsewhere calls him his son (2 Tim. 2:1), yet here he calls him his brother, which is an example to the elder and more eminent ministers to look upon the younger and more obscure as their brethren, and to treat them accordingly with kindness and respect. 3. He calls the Christians at Colosse *saints, and faithful brethren in Christ*. As all good ministers, so all good Christians, are brethren one to another, who stand in a near relation and owe a mutual love. Towards God they must be saints, consecrated to his honour and sanctified by his grace, bearing his image and aiming at his glory. And in both these, as saints to God and as brethren to one another, they must be faithful. Faithfulness runs through every character and relation of the Christian life, and is the crown and glory of them all.

II. The apostolical benediction is the same as usual: *Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ*. He wishes them *grace and peace*, the free favour of God and all the blessed fruits of it; every kind of spiritual blessings, and that *from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ*; jointly from both, and distinctly from each; as in the former epistle.

### Verses 3-8

Here he proceeds to the body of the epistle, and begins with thanksgiving to God for what he had heard concerning them, though he had no personal acquaintance with them, and knew their state and character only by the reports of others.

I. He gave thanks to God for them, that they had embraced the gospel of Christ, and given proofs of their fidelity to him. Observe, In his prayers for them he gave thanks for them. Thanksgiving ought to be a part of every prayer; and whatever is the matter of our rejoicing ought to be the matter of our thanksgiving. Observe, 1. Whom he gives thanks to: *To God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. In our thanksgiving we must have an eye to God as God (he is the object of thanksgiving as well as prayer), and is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in and through whom all good comes to us. He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as well as our Father; and it is a matter of encouragement, in all our addresses to God, that we can look to him as Christ's Father and our Father, as his God and our God, Jn. 20:17. Observe, 2. What he gives thanks to God for—for the

graces of God in them, which were evidences of the grace of God towards them: *Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love you have to all the saints; for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven*, v. 4, 5. Faith, hope, and love, are the three principal graces in the Christian life, and proper matter of our prayer and thanksgiving. (1.) He gives thanks for their faith in Christ Jesus, that they were brought to believe in him, and take upon them the profession of his religion, and venture their souls upon his undertaking. (2.) For their love. Besides the general love which is due to all men, there is a particular love owing to the saints, or those who are of the Christian *brotherhood*, 1 Pt. 2:17. We must love all the saints, bear an extensive kindness and good-will to good men, notwithstanding smaller points of difference, and many real weaknesses. Some understand it of their charity to the saints in necessity, which is one branch and evidence of Christian love. (3.) For their hope: *The hope which is laid up for you in heaven*, v. 5. The happiness of heaven is called their hope, because it is the *thing hoped for, looking for the blessed hope*, Tit. 2:13. What is laid out upon believers in this world is much; but what is laid up for them in heaven is much more. And we have reason to give thanks to God for the hope of heaven which good Christians have, or their well-grounded expectation of the future glory. Their faith in Christ, and love to the saints, had an eye to the *hope laid up for them in heaven*. The more we fix our hopes on the recompence of reward in the other world, the more free and liberal shall we be of our earthly treasure upon all occasions of doing good.

II. Having blessed God for these graces, he blesses God for the means of grace which they enjoyed: *Wherein you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel*. They had heard in the word of the truth of the gospel concerning this *hope laid up for them in heaven*. Observe, 1. The gospel is the word of truth, and what we may safely venture our immortal souls upon: it proceeds from the God of truth and the Spirit of truth, and is a faithful saying. He calls it *the grace of God in truth*, v. 6. 2. It is a great mercy to hear this word of truth; for the great thing we learn from it is the happiness of heaven. Eternal life is brought to light by the gospel, 2 Tim. 1:10. They heard of the hope laid up in heaven in the word of the truth of the gospel. *"Which has come unto you, as it hath to all the world, and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you*, v. 6. This gospel is preached and brings forth fruit in other nations; it has come to you, *as it hath to all the world*, according to the commission, *Go preach the gospel in all the nations, and to every creature*." Observe, (1.) All who hear the word of the gospel ought to bring forth the fruit of the gospel, that is, be obedient to it, and have their principles and lives formed according to it. This was the doctrine first preached: *Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance*, Mt. 3:8. And our Lord says, *If you know these things, happy are you if you do them*, Jn. 13:17. Observe, (2.) Wherever the gospel comes, it will bring forth fruit to the honour and glory of God: *It bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you*. We mistake, if we think to monopolize the comforts and benefits of the gospel to ourselves. Does the gospel bring forth fruit in us? So it does in others.

III. He takes this occasion to mention the minister by whom they believed (v. 7, 8): *As you also learned of Epaphras, our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ*. He mentions him with great respect, to engage their love to him. 1. He calls him his fellow-servant, to signify not only that they served the same Master, but that they were engaged in the same work. They were fellow-labourers in the work of the Lord, though one was an apostle and the other an ordinary minister. 2. He calls him his dear fellow-servant: all the servants of Christ ought to love one another, and it is an endearing consideration that

they are engaged in the same service. 3. He represents him as one who was a faithful minister of Christ to them, who discharged his trust and fulfilled his ministry among them. Observe, Christ is our proper Master, and we are his ministers. He does not say who is your minister; but *who is the minister of Christ for you*. It is by his authority and appointment, though for the people's service. 4. He represents him as one who gave them a good word: *Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit*, v. 8. He recommends him to their affection, from the good report he made of their sincere love to Christ and all his members, which was wrought in them by the Spirit, and is agreeable to the spirit of the gospel. Faithful ministers are glad to be able to speak well of their people.

### Verses 9-11

The apostle proceeds in these verses to pray for them. He heard that they were good, and he prayed that they might be better. He was constant in this prayer: *We do not cease to pray for you*. It may be he could hear of them but seldom, but he constantly prayed for them.—*And desire that you may be filled with the knowledge*, etc. Observe what it is that he begs of God for them, I. That they might be knowing intelligent Christians: *filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding*. Observe, 1. The knowledge of our duty is the best knowledge. A mere empty notion of the greatest truths is insignificant. Our knowledge of the will of God must be always practical: we must know it, in order to do it. 2. Our knowledge is then a blessing indeed when it is in wisdom, when we know how to apply our general knowledge to our particular occasions, and to suit it to all emergencies. 3. Christians should endeavour to be filled with knowledge; not only to know the will of God, but to know more of it, and to *increase in the knowledge of God* (as it is v. 10), and to *grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour*, 2 Pt. 3:18.

II. That their conversation might be good. Good knowledge without a good life will not profit. Our understanding is then a spiritual understanding when we exemplify it in our way of living: *That you may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing* (v. 10), that is, as becomes the relation we stand in to him and the profession we make of him. The agreeableness of our conversation to our religion is pleasing to God as well as to good men. We walk unto all well-pleasing when we walk in all things according to the will of God. *Being fruitful in every good work*. This is what we should aim at. Good words will not do without good works. We must abound in good works, and in every good work: not in some only, which are more easy, and suitable, and safe, but in all, and every instance of them. There must be a regular uniform regard to all the will of God. And the more fruitful we are in good works the more we shall *increase in the knowledge of God*. *He who doeth his will shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God*, Jn. 7:17.

III. That they might be strengthened: *Strengthened with all might according to his glorious power* (v. 11), fortified against the temptations of Satan and furnished for all their duty. It is a great comfort to us that he who undertakes to give strength to his people is a God of power and of glorious power. Where there is spiritual life there is still need of spiritual strength, strength for all the actions of the spiritual life. To be strengthened is to be furnished by the grace of God for every good work, and fortified by that grace against every evil one: it is to be enabled to do our duty, and still to hold fast our integrity. The blessed Spirit is the author of this strength; for we are *strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inward man*, Eph. 3:16. The word of God is

the means of it, by which he conveys it; and it must be fetched in by prayer. It was in answer to earnest prayer that the apostle obtained sufficient grace. In praying for spiritual strength we are not straitened in the promises, and therefore should not be straitened in our own hopes and desires. Observe, 1. He prayed that they might be strengthened with might: this seems a tautology; but he means, that they might be mightily strengthened, or strengthened with might derived from another. 2. It is with all might. It seems unreasonable that a creature should be strengthened with all might, for that is to make him *almighty*; but he means, with all that might which we have occasion for, to enable us to discharge our duty or preserve our innocence, that grace which is sufficient for us in all the trials of life and able to help us in time of need. 3. It is *according to his glorious power*. He means, according to the grace of God: but the grace of God in the hearts of believers is the power of God; and there is a glory in this power; it is an excellent and sufficient power. And the communications of strength are not according to our weakness, to whom the strength is communicated, but according to his power, from whom it is received. When God gives he gives like himself, and when he strengthens he strengthens like himself. 4. The special use of this strength was for suffering work: *That you may be strengthened unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness*. He prays not only that they may be *supported* under their troubles, but *strengthened* for them: the reason is there is work to be done even when we are suffering. And those who are strengthened *according to his glorious power* are strengthened, (1.) To all patience. When patience *hath its perfect work* (Jam. 1:4) then we are strengthened to all patience—when we not only bear our troubles patiently, but receive them as gifts from God, and are thankful for them. To you *it is given to suffer*, Phil. 1:29. When we bear our troubles well, though ever so many, and the circumstances of them ever so aggravating, then we bear them with all patience. And the same reason for bearing one trouble will hold for bearing another, if it be a good reason. All patience includes all the kinds of it; not only bearing patience, but waiting patience. (2.) This is even unto long-suffering, that is, drawn out to a great length: not only to bear trouble awhile, but to bear it as long as God pleases to continue it. (3.) It is with joyfulness, to rejoice in tribulation, to take joyfully the spoiling of our goods, and rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for his name, to have joy as well as patience in the troubles of life. This we could never do by any strength of our own, but as we are strengthened by the grace of God.

### **Verses 12-29**

Here is a summary of the doctrine of the gospel concerning the great work of our redemption by Christ. It comes in here not as the matter of a sermon, but as the matter of a thanksgiving; for our salvation by Christ furnishes us with abundant matter of thanksgiving in every view of it: *Giving thanks unto the Father*, v. 12. He does not discourse of the work of redemption in the natural order of it; for then he would speak of the purchase of it first, and afterwards of the application of it. But here he inverts the order, because, in our sense and feeling of it, the application goes before the purchase. We first find the benefits of redemption in our hearts, and then are led by those streams to the original and fountain-head. The order and connection of the apostle's discourse may be considered in the following manner:—

I. He speaks concerning the operations of the Spirit of grace upon us. We must give thanks for them, because by these we are qualified for an interest in the mediation of the Son: *Giving thanks to the Father*, etc., v. 12, 13. It is spoken of as the work of

the Father, because the Spirit of grace is the Spirit of the Father, and the Father works in us by his Spirit. Those in whom the work of grace is wrought must give thanks unto the Father. If we have the comfort of it, he must have the glory of it. Now what is it which is wrought for us in the application of redemption? 1. "He hath *delivered us from the power of darkness*, v. 13. He has rescued us from the state of heathenish darkness and wickedness. He hath saved us from the dominion of sin, which is darkness (1 Jn. 1:6), from the dominion of Satan, who is the *prince of darkness* (Eph. 6:12), and from the damnation of hell, which is *utter darkness*," Mt. 25:30. They are *called out of darkness*, 1 Pt. 2:9. 2. "He hath *translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son*, brought us into the gospel-state, and made us members of the church of Christ, which is a state of light and purity." *You were once darkness, but now are you light in the Lord*, Eph. 5:8. *Who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*, 1 Pt. 2:9. Those were made willing subjects of Christ who were the slaves of Satan. The conversion of a sinner is the translation of a soul into the kingdom of Christ out of the kingdom of the devil. The power of sin is shaken off, and the power of Christ submitted to. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes them free from the law of sin and death; and it is the kingdom of his dear Son, or the Son of his peculiar love, his beloved Son (Mt. 3:17), and eminently the beloved, Eph. 1:6. 3. "He hath not only done this, but hath *made us meet to partake of the inheritance of the saints in light*, v. 12. He hath prepared us for the eternal happiness of heaven, as the Israelites divided the promised land by lot; and has given us the earnest and assurance of it." This he mentions first because it is the first indication of the future blessedness, that by the grace of God we find ourselves in some measure prepared for it. God gives *grace and glory*, and we are here told what they both are. (1.) What that glory is. It is the *inheritance of the saints in light*. It is an inheritance, and belongs to them as children, which is the best security and the sweetest tenure: *If children, then heirs*, Rom. 8:17. And it is an inheritance of the saints—proper to sanctified souls. Those who are not saints on earth will never be saints in heaven. And it is an inheritance in light; the perfection of knowledge, holiness, and joy, by communion with God, who is light, and the Father of lights, Jam. 1:17; Jn. 1:5. (2.) What this grace is. It is a meetness for the inheritance: "*He hath made us meet to be partakers*, that is, suited and fitted us for the heavenly state by a proper temper and habit of soul; and he makes us meet by the powerful influence of his Spirit." It is the effect of the divine power to change the heart, and make it heavenly. Observe, All who are designed for heaven hereafter are prepared for heaven now. As those who live and die unsanctified go out of the world with their hell about them, so those who are sanctified and renewed go out of the world with their heaven about them. Those who have the inheritance of sons have the education of sons and the disposition of sons: they *have the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father*. Rom. 8:15. *And, because you are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father*, Gal. 4:6. This meetness for heaven is the earnest of the Spirit in our heart, which is part of payment, and assures the full payment. Those who are sanctified shall be glorified (Rom. 8:30), and will be for ever indebted to the grace of God, which hath sanctified them.

II. Concerning the person of the Redeemer. Glorious things are here said of him; for blessed Paul was full of Christ, and took all occasions to speak honourably of him. He speaks of him distinctly as God, and as Mediator. 1. As God he speaks of him, v. 15–17. (1.) He is the *image of the invisible God*. Not as man was made *in the image of God* (Gen. 1:27), in his natural faculties and dominion over the creatures: no, he is the *express image of his person*, Heb. 1:3. He is so the image of God as the son is



the image of his father, who has a natural likeness to him; so that he who has seen him has *seen the Father*, and his *glory was the glory of the only-begotten of the Father*, Jn. 1:14; 14:9. (2.) He is the *first-born of every creature*. Not that he is himself a creature; for it is *proptotokos paseus ktiseous*—*born or begotten before all the creation*, or before any creature was made, which is the scripture-way of representing eternity, and by which the eternity of God is represented to us: *I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was; when there was no depth, before the mountains were settled, while as yet he had not made the earth*, Prov. 8:23–26. It signifies his dominion over all things, as the first-born in a family is heir and lord of all, so he is the *heir of all things*, Heb. 1:2. The word, with only the change of the accent, *proptotokos*, signifies actively the first begetter or producer of all things, and so it well agrees with the following clause. *Vid. Isidor. Peleus. epist. 30 lib. 3.* (3.) He is so far from beginning himself a creature that he is the Creator: *For by him were all things created, which are in heaven and earth, visible and invisible*, v. 16. He made all things out of nothing, the highest angel in heaven, as well as men upon earth. He made the world, the upper and lower world, with all the inhabitants of both. *All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made which was made*, Jn. 1:3. He speaks here as if there were several orders of angels: *Whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers*, which must signify either different degrees of excellence or different offices and employments. *Angels, authorities, and powers*, 1 Pt. 3:22. Christ is the eternal wisdom of the Father, and the world was made in wisdom. He is the eternal Word, and the world was made by the word of God. He is the *arm of the Lord*, and the world was made by that arm. *All things are created by him and for him; diŌ autou kai eis auton*. Being created by him, they were created for him; being made by his power, they were made according to his pleasure and for his praise. He is the end, as well as the cause of all things. *To him are all things*, Rom. 11:36; *eis auton ta panta*. (4.) He was *before all things*. He had a being before the world was made, before the beginning of time, and therefore from all eternity. Wisdom was with the Father, and possessed by him in the beginning of his ways, before his works of old, Prov. 8:22. And in the beginning the Word was with God and was God, Jn. 1:1. He not only had a being before he was born of the virgin, but he had a being before all time. (5.) *By him all things consist*. They not only subsist in their beings, but consist in their order and dependences. He not only created them all at first, but it is by the word of his power that they are still upheld, Heb. 1:3. The whole creation is kept together by the power of the Son of God, and made to consist in its proper frame. It is preserved from disbanding and running into confusion.

2. The apostle next shows what he is as Mediator, v. 18, 19. (1.) He is the *head of the body the church*: not only a head of government and direction, as the king is the head of the state and has right to prescribe laws, but a head of vital influence, as the head in the natural body: for all grace and strength are derived from him: and the church is his body, *the fulness of him who filleth all in all*, Eph. 1:22, 23. (2.) He is the *beginning, the first-born from the dead, archeu, proptotokos*—the principle, the first-born from the dead; the principle of our resurrection, as well as the first-born himself. All our hopes and joys take their rise from him who is the author of our salvation. Not that he was the first who ever rose from the dead, but the first and only one who rose by his own power, and was *declared to be the Son of God, and Lord of all things*. And he is the head of the resurrection, and has given us an example and evidence of our resurrection from the dead. He rose as the first-fruits, 1 Co.

15:20. (3.) He hath in *all things the pre-eminence*. It was the will of the Father that he should have *all power in heaven and earth*, that he might be preferred above angels and all the powers in heaven (he has *obtained a more excellent name than they*, Heb. 1:4), and that in all the affairs of the kingdom of God among men he should have the pre-eminence. He has the pre-eminence in the hearts of his people above the world and the flesh; and by giving him the pre-eminence we comply with the Father's will, That *all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father*, Jn. 5:23. (4.) All fulness dwells in him, and it pleased the Father it should do so (v. 19), not only a fulness of abundance for himself, but redundancy for us, a fulness of merit and righteousness, of strength and grace. As the head is the seat and source of the animal spirits, so is Christ of all graces to his people. *It pleased the Father* that all fulness should dwell in him; and we may have free resort to him for all that grace for which we have occasion. He not only intercedes for it, but is the trustee in whose hands it is lodged to dispense to us: *Of his fulness we receive, and grace for grace*, grace in us answering to that grace which is in him (Jn. 1:16), and *he fills all in all*, Eph. 1:23.

III. Concerning the work of redemption. He speaks of the nature of it, or wherein it consists; and of the means of it, by which it was procured.

1. Wherein it consists. It is made to lie in two things:—(1.) In the remission of sin: *In whom we have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins*, v. 14. It was sin which sold us, sin which enslaved us: if we are redeemed, we must be redeemed from sin; and this is by forgiveness, or remitting the obligation to punishment. So Eph. 1:7, *In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace*. (2.) In reconciliation to God. God by him *reconciled all things to himself*, v. 20. He is the Mediator of reconciliation, who procures peace as well as pardon for sinners, who brings them into a state of friendship and favour at present, and will bring all holy creatures, angels as well as men, into one glorious and blessed society at last: *things in earth, or things in heaven*. So Eph. 1:10, *He will gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth*. The word is *anakephalaioυσasthai*—*he will bring them all under one head*. The Gentiles, who were alienated, and *enemies in their minds by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled*, v. 21. Here see what was their condition by nature, and in their Gentile state—estranged from God, and at enmity with God: and yet this *enmity is slain*, and, notwithstanding this distance, we are now reconciled. Christ has laid the foundation for our reconciliation; for he has paid the price of it, has purchased the proffer and promise of it, proclaims it as a prophet, applies it as a king. Observe, The greatest enemies to God, who have stood at the greatest distance and bidden him defiance, may be reconciled, if it be not their own fault.

2. How the redemption is procured: *it is through his blood* (v. 14); he has *made peace through the blood of his cross* (v. 20), and it is *in the body of his flesh through death*, v. 22. It was the *blood which made an atonement, for the blood is the life; and without the shedding of blood there is no remission*, Heb. 9:22. There was such a value in the blood of Christ that, on account of Christ's shedding it, God was willing to deal with men upon new terms to bring them under a covenant of grace, and *for his sake*, and in consideration of his death upon the cross, to pardon and accept to favour all who comply with them.

IV. Concerning the preaching of this redemption. Here observe,

1. To whom it was preached: *To every creature under heaven* (v. 23), that is, it was ordered to be preached to every creature, Mk. 16:15. It may be preached to every creature; for the gospel excludes none who do not exclude themselves. More or less it has been or will be preached to every nation, though many have sinned away the light of it and perhaps some have never yet enjoyed it.

2. By whom it was preached: *Whereof I Paul am made a minister*. Paul was a great apostle; but he looks upon it as the highest of his titles of honour to be a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul takes all occasions to speak of his office; for he *magnified his office*, Rom. 11:13. And again in v. 25, *Whereof I am made a minister*. Observe here,

(1.) Whence Paul had his ministry: it was *according to the dispensation of God which was given to him* (v. 25), the economy or wise disposition of things in the house of God. He was steward and master-builder, and this was given to him: he did not usurp it, nor take it to himself; and he could not challenge it as a debt. He received it from God as a gift, and took it as a favour.

(2.) For whose sake he had his ministry: *"It is for you, for your benefit: ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake*, 2 Co. 4:5. We are Christ's ministers for the good of his people, *to fulfil the word of God* (that is, fully to preach it), of which you will have the greater advantage. The more we fulfil our ministry, or fill up all the parts of it, the greater will be the benefit of the people; they will be the more filled with knowledge, and furnished for service."

(3.) What kind of preacher Paul was. This is particularly represented.

[1.] He was a suffering preacher: *Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you*, v. 24. He suffered in the cause of Christ, and for the good of the church. He suffered for preaching the gospel to them. And, while he suffered in so good a cause, he could rejoice in his sufferings, *rejoice that he was counted worthy to suffer*, and esteem it an honour to him. *And fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh*. Not that the afflictions of Paul, or any other, were expiations for sin, as the sufferings of Christ were. There was nothing wanting in them, nothing which needed to *be filled up*. They were perfectly sufficient to answer the intention of them, the satisfaction of God's justice, in order to the salvation of his people. But the sufferings of Paul and other good ministers made them conformable to Christ; and they followed him in his suffering state: so they are said to fill up what was behind of the sufferings of Christ, as the wax fills up the vacuities of the seal, when it receives the impression of it. Or it may be meant not of Christ's sufferings, but of his suffering for Christ. He *filled that which was behind*. He had a certain rate and measure of suffering for Christ assigned him; and, as his sufferings were agreeable to that appointment, so he was still filling up more and more what was behind, or remained of them to his share.

[2.] He was a close preacher: he preached not only in public, but *from house to house*, from person to person. *Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom*, v. 28. Every man has need to be warned and taught, and therefore let every man have his share. Observe, *First*, When we warn people of what they do amiss, we must teach them to do better: warning and teaching must go together. *Secondly*, Men must be warned and taught in all wisdom. We must choose the fittest seasons, and use the likeliest means, and accommodate ourselves to the different circumstances and capacities of those we have to do with, and teach them as they are able to bear. That which he aimed at was to *present every man perfect in Christ Jesus, teleios*, either perfect in the knowledge of the Christian doctrine (*Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus*

*mind*, Phil. 3:15; 2 Tim. 3:17), or else crowned with a glorious reward hereafter, when he will *present to himself a glorious church* (Eph. 5:27), and bring them to the *spirits of just men made perfect*, Heb. 12:23. Observe, Ministers ought to aim at the improvement and salvation of every particular person who hears them. *Thirdly*, He was a laborious preacher, and one who took pains: he was no loiterer, and did not do his work negligently (v. 29): *Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily*. He laboured and strove, used great diligence and contended with many difficulties, according to the measure of grace afforded to him and the extraordinary presence of Christ which was with him. Observe, As Paul laid out himself to do much good, so he had this favour, that the power of God wrought in him the more effectually. The more we labour in the work of the Lord the greater measures of help we may expect from him in it (Eph. 3:7): *According to the gift of the grace of God given unto me, by the effectual working of his power*.

3. The gospel which was preached. We have an account of this: *Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages, and from generations, but is now made manifest to his saints*, v. 26, 27. Observe, (1.) The mystery of the gospel was long hidden: it was concealed from ages and generations, the several ages of the church under the Old-Testament dispensation. They were in a state of minority, and training up for a more perfect state of things, and could not look to the end of those things which were ordained, 2 Co. 3:13. (2.) This mystery now, in the fulness of time, is made manifest to the saints, or clearly revealed and made apparent. The veil which was over Moses's face is done away in Christ, 2 Co. 3:14. The meanest saint under the gospel understands more than the greatest prophets under the law. He who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than they. *The mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit*, Eph. 3:4, 5. And what is this mystery? It is the riches of God's glory among the Gentiles. The peculiar doctrine of the gospel was a mystery which was before hidden, and is now made manifest and made known. But the great mystery here referred to is the breaking down of the partition-wall between the Jew and Gentile, and preaching the gospel to the Gentile world, and making those partakers of the privileges of the gospel state who before lay in ignorance and idolatry: *That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers together of his promise in Christ by the gospel*, Eph. 3:6. This mystery, thus made known, *is Christ in you* (or among you) *the hope of glory*. Observe, Christ is the hope of glory. The ground of our hope is Christ in the word, or the gospel revelation, declaring the nature and methods of obtaining it. The evidence of our hope is Christ in the heart, or the sanctification of the soul, and its preparation for the heavenly glory.

4. The duty of those who are interested in this redemption: *If you continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you have heard*, v. 23. We must continue in the faith grounded and settled, and not be moved away from the hope of the gospel; that is, we must be so well fixed in our minds as not to be moved from it by any temptations. We must be steadfast and immovable (1 Co. 15:58) and *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*, Heb. 10:23. Observe, We can expect the happy end of our faith only when we continue in the faith, and are so far grounded and settled in it as not to be moved from it. We must not *draw back unto perdition*, but *believe unto the saving of the soul*, Heb. 10:39. We must be faithful to death, through all trials, that we may receive the *crown of life, and receive the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls*, 1 Pt. 1:9.



## Chapter 2

I. The apostle expresses concern for the Colossians (v. 1-3). II. He repeats it again (v. 5). III. He cautions them against false teachers among the Jews (v. 4, 6, 7), and against the Gentile philosophy (v. 8–12). IV. He represents the privileges of Christians (v. 13–15). And, V. Concludes with a caution against the judaizing teachers, and those who would introduce the worship of angels (v. 16–23).

### Verses 1-3

We may observe here the great concern which Paul had for these Colossians and the other churches which he had not any personal knowledge of. The apostle had never been at Colosse, and the church planted there was not of his planting; and yet he had as tender a care of it as if it had been the only people of his charge (v. 1): *For I would that you knew what great conflict I have for you, and for those at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh.* Observe, 1. Paul's care of the church was such as amounted to a conflict. He was in a sort of agony, and had a constant fear respecting what would become of them. Herein he was a follower of his Master, who was in an agony for us, and was *heard in that he feared.* (2.) We may keep up a communion by faith, hope, and holy love, even with those churches and fellow-christians of whom we have no personal knowledge, and with whom we have no conversation. We can think, and pray, and be concerned for one another, at the greatest distance; and those we never saw in the flesh we may hope to meet in heaven. But,

I. What was it that the apostle desired for them? *That their hearts may be comforted, being knit together in love,* etc., v. 2. It was their spiritual welfare about which he was solicitous. He does not say that they may be healthy, and merry, and rich, and great, and prosperous; but that their *hearts may be comforted.* Note, The prosperity of the soul is the best prosperity, and what we should be most solicitous about for ourselves and others. We have here a description of soul-prosperity.

1. When our knowledge grows to an understanding of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ,—when we come to have a more clear, distinct, methodical knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, then the soul prospers: *To understand the mystery,* either what was before concealed, but is now made known concerning the Father and Christ, or the mystery before mentioned, of calling the Gentiles into the Christian church, as the Father and Christ have revealed it in the gospel; and not barely to speak of it by rote, or as we have been taught it by our catechisms, but to be led into it, and enter into the meaning and design of it. This is what we should labour after, and then the soul prospers.

2. When our faith grows to a full assurance and bold acknowledgment of this mystery. (1.) To a full assurance, or a well-settled judgment, upon their proper evidence, of the great truths of the gospel, without doubting, or calling them in question, but embracing them with the highest satisfaction, as faithful sayings and worthy of all acceptance. (2.) When it comes to a free acknowledgment, and we not only believe with the heart, but are ready, when called to it, to make confession with our mouth, and are not ashamed of our Master and our holy religion, under the frowns and violence of their enemies. This is called the *riches of the full assurance of understanding.* Great knowledge and strong faith make a soul rich. This is being rich towards God, and rich in faith, and having the true riches, Lu. 12:21; 16:11; Jam. 2:5.

3. It consists in the abundance of comfort in our souls: *That their hearts might be comforted*. The soul prospers when it is filled with joy and peace (Rom. 15:13), and has a satisfaction within which all the troubles without cannot disturb, and is able to joy in the Lord when all other comforts fail, Hab. 3:17, 18.

4. The more intimate communion we have with our fellow-Christians the more the soul prospers: *Being knit together in love*. Holy love knits the hearts of Christians one to another; and faith and love both contribute to our comfort. The stronger our faith is, and the warmer our love, the greater will our comfort be. Having occasion to mention Christ (v. 2), according to his usual way, he makes this remark to his honour (v. 3): *In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*. He had said (ch. 1:19) *that all fulness dwells in him*: here he mentions particularly the *treasures of wisdom and knowledge*. There is a fulness of wisdom in him, as he has perfectly revealed the will of God to mankind. Observe, The treasures of wisdom are hidden not from us, but for us, in Christ. Those who would be wise and knowing must make application to Christ. We must spend upon the stock which is laid up for us in him, and draw from the treasures which are hidden in him. He is the wisdom of God, and is *of God made unto us wisdom*, etc., 1 Co. 1:24, 30.

II. His concern for them is repeated (v. 5): *Though I am absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying, and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ*. Observe, 1. We may be present in spirit with those churches and Christians from whom we are absent in body; for the communion of saints is a spiritual thing. Paul had heard concerning the Colossians that they were orderly and regular; and though he had never seen them, nor was present with them, he tells them he could easily think himself among them, and look with pleasure upon their good behaviour. 2. The order and steadfastness of Christians are matter of joy to ministers; they joy when they behold their order, their regular behaviour and steadfast adherence to the Christian doctrine. 3. The more steadfast our faith in Christ is, the better order there will be in our whole conversation; for we live and walk by faith, 2 Co. 5:7; Heb. 10:38.

#### **Verses 4-12**

The apostle cautions the Colossians against deceivers (v. 4): *And this I say lest any man beguile you with enticing words*; and v. 8, *Lest any man spoil you*. He insists so much upon the perfection of Christ and the gospel revelation, to preserve them from the ensnaring insinuations of those who would corrupt their principles. Note, 1. The way in which Satan spoils souls is by beguiling them. He deceives them, and by this means slays them. He is the *old serpent who beguiled Eve through his subtlety*, 2 Co. 11:3. He could not ruin us if he did not cheat us; and he could not cheat us but by our own fault and folly. 2. Satan's agents, who aim to spoil them, beguile them with enticing words. See the danger of enticing words; how many are ruined by the flattery of those who lie in wait to deceive, and by the false disguises and fair appearances of evil principles and wicked practices. *By good words, and fair speeches, they deceive the hearts of the simple*, Rom. 16:18. "You ought to stand upon your guard against enticing words, and be aware and afraid of those who would entice you to any evil; for that which they aim at is to spoil you." *If sinners entice thee, consent thou not*, Prov. 1:10. Observe,

I. A sovereign antidote against seducers (v. 6, 7): *As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk you in him, rooted and built up*, etc. Here note, 1. All Christians have, in profession at least, *received Jesus Christ the Lord*, received him

as Christ, the great prophet of the church, anointed by God to reveal his will; as Jesus the great high priest, and Saviour from sin and wrath, by the expiatory sacrifice of himself; and as Lord, or sovereign and king, whom we are to obey and be subject to.—*Received him*, consented to him, taken him for ours in every relation and every capacity, and for all the purposes and uses of them. 2. The great concern of those who have received Christ is *to walk in him*—to make their practices conformable to their principles and their conversation agreeable to their engagements. As we have received Christ, or consented to be his, so we must walk with him in our daily course and keep up our communion with him. 3. The more closely we walk with Christ the more we are *rooted and established in the faith*. A good conversation is the best establishment of a good faith. If we walk in him, we shall be rooted in him; and the more firmly we are rooted in him the more closely we shall walk in him: *Rooted and built up*. Observe, We cannot be built up in Christ, unless we be first rooted in him. We must be united to him by a lively faith, and heartily consent to his covenant, and then we shall *grow up in him in all things*.—*As you have been taught*—"according to the rule of the Christian doctrine, in which you have been instructed." Observe, A good education has a good influence upon our establishment. We must be *established in the faith, as we have been taught, abounding therein*. Observe, Being established in the faith, we must abound therein, and improve in it more and more; and this with thanksgiving. The way to have the benefit and comfort of God's grace is to be much in giving thanks for it. We must join thanksgiving to all our improvements, and be sensible of the mercy of all our privileges and attainments. Observe,

II. The fair warning given us of our danger: *Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ*, v. 8. There is a philosophy which is a noble exercise of our reasonable faculties, and highly serviceable to religion, such a study of the works of God as leads us to the knowledge of God and confirms our faith in him. But there is a philosophy which is vain and deceitful, which is prejudicial to religion, and sets up the wisdom of man in competition with the wisdom of God, and while it pleases men's fancies ruins their faith; as nice and curious speculations about things above us, or of no use and concern to us; or a care of words and terms of art, which have only an empty and often a cheating appearance of knowledge. *After the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world*: this plainly reflects upon the Jewish pedagogy or economy, as well as the Pagan learning. The Jews governed themselves by the traditions of their elders and the rudiments or elements of the world, the rites and observances which were only preparatory and introductory to the gospel state; the Gentiles mixed their maxims of philosophy with their Christian principles; and both alienated their minds from Christ. Those who pin their faith on other men's sleeves, and walk in the way of the world, have turned away from following after Christ. The deceivers were especially the Jewish teachers, who endeavoured to keep up the law of Moses in conjunction with the gospel of Christ, but really in competition with it and contradiction to it. Now here the apostle shows,

1. That we have in Christ the substance of all the shadows of the ceremonial law; for example, (1.) Had they then the Shechinah, or special presence of God, called the glory, from the visible token of it? So have we now in Jesus Christ (v. 9): *For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*. Under the law, the presence of God dwelt between the cherubim, in a cloud which covered the mercy-seat; but now it dwells in the person of our Redeemer, who partakes of our nature, and is



bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and has more clearly declared the Father to us. It dwells in him bodily; not as the body is opposed to the spirit, but as the body is opposed to the shadow. The fulness of the Godhead dwells in the Christ really, and not figuratively; for he is both God and man. (2.) Had they circumcision, which was the seal of the covenant? In Christ we are *circumcised with the circumcision made without hands* (v. 11), by the work of regeneration in us, which is the spiritual or Christian circumcision. *He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart*, Rom. 2:29. This is owing to Christ, and belongs to the Christian dispensation. *It is made without hands*; not by the power of any creature, but by the power of the blessed Spirit of God. We are *born of the Spirit*, Jn. 3:5. And it is *the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit*, Tit. 3:5. It consists in *putting off the body of the sins of the flesh*, in renouncing sin and reforming our lives, not in mere external rites. It is not the *putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God*, 1 Pt. 3:21. And it is not enough to put away some one particular sin, but we must put off the whole body of sin. *The old man must be crucified, and the body of sin destroyed*, Rom. 6:6. Christ was circumcised, and, by virtue of our union to him, we partake of that effectual grace which puts off the *body of the sins of the flesh*. Again, The Jews thought themselves complete in the ceremonial law; but we are *complete in Christ*, v. 10. That was imperfect and defective; *if the first covenant had been faultless, there would no place have been sought for the second* (Heb. 8:7), and *the law was but a shadow of good things, and could never, by those sacrifices, make the comers thereunto perfect*, Heb. 10:1. But all the defects of it are made up in the gospel of Christ, by the complete sacrifice for sin and revelation of the will of God. *Which is the head of all principality and power*. As the Old-Testament priesthood had its perfection in Christ, so likewise had the kingdom of David, which was the eminent principality and power under the Old Testament, and which the Jews valued themselves so much upon. And he is the Lord and head of all the powers in heaven and earth, of angels and men. *Angels, and authorities, and powers are subject to him*, 1 Pt. 3:22.

2. We have communion with Christ in his whole undertaking (v. 12): *Buried with him in baptism, wherein also you have risen with him*. We are both buried and rise with him, and both are signified by our baptism; not that there is anything in the sign or ceremony of baptism which represents this burying and rising, any more than the crucifixion of Christ is represented by any visible resemblance in the Lord's supper: and he is speaking of the *circumcision made without hands*; and says it is *through the faith of the operation of God*. But the thing signified by our baptism is that we are buried with Christ, as baptism is the seal of the covenant and an obligation to our dying to sin; and that we are raised with Christ, as it is a seal and obligation to our living to righteousness, or newness of life. God in baptism engages to be to us a God, and we become engaged to be his people, and by his grace to die to sin and to live to righteousness, or put off the old man and put on the new.

### **Verses 13-15**

The apostle here represents the privileges we Christians have above the Jews, which are very great.

I. Christ's death is our life: *And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him*, v. 13. A state of sin is a state of spiritual death. Those who are in sin are dead in sin. As the death of the body consists in its separation from the soul, so the death of the soul consists in its separation from God and the divine favour. As

the death of the body is the corruption and putrefaction of it, so sin is the corruption or depravation of the soul. As a man who is dead is unable to help himself by any power of his own, so an habitual sinner is morally impotent: though he has a natural power, or the power of a reasonable creature, he has not a spiritual power, till he has the divine life or a renewed nature. It is principally to be understood of the Gentile world, who *lay in wickedness*. They were *dead in the uncircumcision of their flesh*, being *aliens to the covenant of promise, and without God in the world*, Eph. 2:11, 12. By reason of their uncircumcision they were dead in their sins. It may be understood of the spiritual uncircumcision or corruption of nature; and so it shows that we are dead in law, and dead in state. Dead in law, as a condemned malefactor is called a dead man because he is under a sentence of death; so sinners by the guilt of sin are under the sentence of the law and *condemned already*, Jn. 3:18. And dead in state, by reason of the *uncircumcision of our flesh*. An unsanctified heart is called an *uncircumcised heart*: this is our state. Now through Christ we, who were dead in sins, are quickened; that is, effectual provision is made for taking away the guilt of sin, and breaking the power and dominion of it. *Quickened together with him*—by virtue of our union to him, and in conformity to him. Christ's death was the death of our sins; Christ's resurrection is the quickening of our souls.

II. Through him we have the remission of sin: *Having forgiven you all trespasses*. This is our quickening. The pardon of the crime is the life of the criminal: and this is owing to the resurrection of Christ, as well as his death; for, as he *died for our sins*, so he *rose again for our justification*, Rom. 4:25.

III. Whatever was in force against us is taken out of the way. He has obtained for us a legal discharge from the *hand-writing of ordinances, which was against us* (v. 14), which may be understood, 1. Of that obligation to punishment in which consists the guilt of sin. The curse of the law is the hand-writing against us, like the hand-writing on Belshazzar's wall. *Cursed is every one who continues not in every thing*. This was a hand-writing which was *against us, and contrary to us*; for it threatened our eternal ruin. This was removed when he *redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us*, Gal. 3:13. He cancelled the obligation for all who repent and believe. "Upon me be the curse, my father." He vacated and disannulled the judgment which was against us. When he was nailed to the cross, the curse was as it were nailed to the cross. And our indwelling corruption is crucified with Christ, and by virtue of his cross. When we remember the dying of the Lord Jesus, and see him nailed to the cross, we should see the hand-writing against us taken out of the way. Or rather, 2. It must be understood of the ceremonial law, the *hand-writing of ordinances*, the ceremonial institutions or *the law of commandments contained in ordinances* (Eph. 2:15), which was a yoke to the Jews and a partition-wall to the Gentiles. The Lord Jesus *took it out of the way, nailed it to his cross*; that is, disannulled the obligation of it, that all might see and be satisfied that it was no more binding. When the substance came, the shadows fled away. It is abolished (2 Co. 3:13), and *that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away*, Heb. 8:13. The expressions are in allusion to the ancient methods of cancelling a bond, either by crossing the writing or striking it through with a nail.

IV. He has obtained a glorious victory for us over the powers of darkness: *And, having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it*, v. 15. As the curse of the law was against us, so the power of Satan was against us. He treated with God as the Judge, and redeemed us out of the hands of his justice by a price; but out of the

hands of Satan the executioner he redeemed us by power and with a high hand. *He led captivity captive*. The devil and all the powers of hell were conquered and disarmed by the dying Redeemer. The first promise pointed at this; the bruising of the heel of Christ in his sufferings was the breaking of the serpent's head, Gen. 3:15. The expressions are lofty and magnificent: let us turn aside and see this great sight. The Redeemer conquered by dying. See his crown of thorns turned into a crown of laurels. He *spoiled them*, broke the devil's power, and conquered and disabled him, and *made a show of them openly*—exposed them to public shame, and made a show of them to angels and men. Never had the devil's kingdom such a mortal blow given to it as was given by the Lord Jesus. He tied them to his chariot-wheels, and rode forth conquering and to conquer—alluding to the custom of a general's triumph, who returned victorious.—*Triumphing over them in it*; that is, either in his cross and by his death; or, as some read it, in himself, by his own power; for he *trod the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with him*.

### Verses 16-23

The apostle concludes the chapter with exhortations to proper duty, which he infers from the foregoing discourse.

I. Here is a caution to take heed of judaizing teachers, or those who would impose upon Christians the yoke of the ceremonial law: *Let no man therefore judge you in meat nor drink*, etc., v. 16. Much of the ceremonies of the law of Moses consisted in the distinction of meats and days. It appears by Rom. 14 that there were those who were for keeping up those distinctions: but here the apostle shows that since Christ has come, and has cancelled the ceremonial law, we ought not to keep it up. "Let no man impose those things upon you, for God has not imposed them: if God has made you free, be not you again *entangled in that yoke of bondage*." And this the rather because these things *were shadows of things to come* (v. 17), intimating that they had no intrinsic worth in them and that they are now done away. *But the body is of Christ*: the body, of which they were shadows, has come; and to continue the ceremonial observances, which were only types and shadows of Christ and the gospel, carries an intimation that Christ has not yet come and the gospel state has not yet commenced. Observe the advantages we have under the gospel, above what they had under the law: they had the shadows, we have the substance.

II. He cautions them to take heed of those who would introduce the worship of angels as mediators between God and them, as the Gentile philosophers did: *Let no man beguile you of your reward, in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels*, v. 18. It looked like a piece of modesty to make use of the mediation of angels, as conscious to ourselves of our unworthiness to speak immediately to God; but, though it has a show of humility, it is a voluntary, not a commanded humility; and therefore it is not acceptable, yea, it is not warrantable: it is taking that honour which is due to Christ only and giving it to a creature. Besides, the notions upon which this practice was grounded were merely the inventions of men and not by divine revelation,—the proud conceits of human reason, which make a man presume to dive into things, and determine them, without sufficient knowledge and warrant: *Intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind*—pretending to describe the order of angels, and their respective ministries, which God has hidden from us; and therefore, though there was a show of humility in the practice, there was a real pride in the principle. They advanced those notions to gratify their own carnal fancy, and were fond of being thought wiser than other people. Pride is at the bottom of a great many errors and corruptions,

and even of many evil practices, which have great show and appearance of humility. Those who do so do *not hold the head*, v. 19. They do in effect disclaim Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man. It is the highest disparagement to Christ, who is the head of the church, for any of the members of it to make use of any intercessors with God but him. When men let go their hold of Christ, they catch at that which is next them and will stand them in no stead.—*From which all the body, by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.* Observe, 1. Jesus Christ is not only a head of government over the church, but a head of vital influence to it. They are knit to him by joints and bands, as the several members of the body are united to the head, and receive life and nourishment from him. 2. The body of Christ is a growing body: *it increaseth with the increase of God.* The new man is increasing, and the nature of grace is to grow, where there is not an accidental hindrance.—*With the increase of God*, with an increase of grace which is from God as its author; or, in a usual Hebraism, with a large and abundant increase.—*That you may be filled with all the fulness of God*, Eph. 3:19. See a parallel expression, *Which is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, maketh increase of the body*, Eph. 4:15, 16.

III. He takes occasion hence to warn them again: *"Wherefore, if you be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you subject to ordinances?"* v. 20. If as Christians you are dead to the observances of the ceremonial law, why are you subject to them? Such observances as, *Touch not, taste not, handle not*," v. 21, 22. Under the law there was a ceremonial pollution contracted by touching a dead body, or any thing offered to an idol; or by tasting any forbidden meats, etc., *which all are to perish with the using*, having no intrinsic worth in themselves to support them, and those who used them saw them perishing and passing away; or, which tend to corrupt the Christian faith, having no other authority than the traditions and injunctions of men.—*Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship and humility.* They thought themselves wiser than their neighbours, in observing the law of Moses together with the gospel of Christ, that they might be sure in the one, at least, to be in the right; but, alas! it was but a show of wisdom, a mere invention and pretence. So they seem to neglect the body, by abstaining from such and such meats, and mortifying their bodily pleasures and appetites; but there is nothing of true devotion in these things, for the gospel teaches us to worship God in spirit and truth and not by ritual observances, and through the mediation of Christ alone and not of any angels. Observe, 1. Christians are freed by Christ from the ritual observances of Moses's law, and delivered from that yoke of bondage which God himself had laid upon them. 2. Subjection to ordinances, or human appointments in the worship of God, is highly blamable, and contrary to the freedom and liberty of the gospel. The apostle requires Christians *to stand fast in the liberty with which Christ hath made them free, and not to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage*, Gal. 5:1. And the imposition of them is invading the authority of Christ, the head of the church, and *introducing another law of commandments contained in ordinances*, when Christ has abolished the old one, Eph. 2:15. 3. Such things have only a show of wisdom, but are really folly. It is true wisdom to keep close to the appointments of the gospel, and an entire subjection to Christ, the only head of the church.

### Chapter 3

I. The apostle exhorts us to set our hearts upon heaven and take them off from this world (v. 1-4). II. He exhorts to the mortification of sin, in the various instances of it (v. 5–11). III. He earnestly presses to mutual love and compassion (v. 12–17). And concludes with exhortations to relative duties, of wives and husbands, parents and children, masters and servants (v. 18–25).

#### Verses 1-4

The apostle, having described our privileges by Christ in the former part of the epistle, and our discharge from the yoke of the ceremonial law, comes here to press upon us our duty as inferred thence. Though we are made free from the obligation of the ceremonial law, it does not therefore follow that we may live as we list. We must walk the more closely with God in all the instances of evangelical obedience. He begins with exhorting them to set their hearts on heaven, and take them off from this world: *If you then have risen with Christ*. It is our privilege that we have risen with Christ; that is, have benefit by the resurrection of Christ, and by virtue of our union and communion with him are justified and sanctified, and shall be glorified. Hence he infers that we must *seek those things which are above*. We must mind the concerns of another world more than the concerns of this. We must make heaven our scope and aim, seek the favour of God above, keep up our communion with the upper world by faith, and hope, and holy love, and make it our constant care and business to secure our title to and qualifications for the heavenly bliss. And the reason is because *Christ sits at the right hand of God*. He who is our best friend and our head is advanced to the highest dignity and honour in heaven, and has gone before to secure to us the heavenly happiness; and therefore we should seek and secure what he has purchased at so vast an expense, and is taking so much care about. We must live such a life as Christ lived here on earth and lives now in heaven, according to our capacities.

I. He explains this duty (v. 2): *Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth*. Observe, To seek heavenly things is to set our affections upon them, to love them and let our desires be towards them. Upon the wings of affection the heart soars upwards, and is carried forth towards spiritual and divine objects. We must acquaint ourselves with them, esteem them above all other things, and lay out ourselves in preparation for the enjoyment of them. David gave this proof of his *loving the house of God*, that he diligently sought after it, and prepared for it, Ps. 27:4. This is to be spiritually minded (Rom. 8:6), and to *seek and desire a better country, that is, a heavenly*, Heb. 11:14, 16. *Things on earth* are here set in opposition to *things above*. We must not dote upon them, nor expect too much from them, that we may set our affections on heaven; for heaven and earth are contrary one to the other, and a supreme regard to both is inconsistent; and the prevalence of our affection to one will proportionably weaken and abate our affection to the other.

II. He assigns three reasons for this, v. 3, 4.

1. That we are dead; that is, to present things, and as our portion. We are so in profession and obligation; for we are *buried with Christ, and planted into the likeness of his death*. Every Christian is *crucified unto the world, and the world is crucified unto him*, Gal. 6:14. And if we are dead to the earth, and have renounced it as our happiness, it is absurd for us to *set our*

*affections* upon it, and *seek* it. We should be like a dead thing to it, unmoved and unaffected towards it.

2. Our true life lies in the other world: *You are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God*, v. 3. The new man has its livelihood thence. It is born and nourished from above; and the perfection of its life is reserved for that state. It is *hid with Christ*; not hid from us only, in point of secrecy, but hid for us, denoting security. The life of a Christian *is hid with Christ*. *Because I live you shall live also*, Jn. 14:19. Christ is at present a hidden Christ, or one *whom we have not seen*; but this is our comfort, that our *life is hid with him*, and laid up safely with him. As we have reason to *love him whom we have not seen* (1 Pt. 1:8), so we may take the comfort of a happiness out of sight, and *reserved in heaven for us*.

3. Because at the second coming of Christ we hope for the perfection of our happiness. If we live a life of Christian purity and devotion now, *when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we shall also appear with him in glory*, v. 4. Observe, (1.) Christ is a believer's life. *I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me*, Gal. 2:20. He is the principle and end of the Christian's life. He lives *in us* by his Spirit, and we live to him in all we do. *To me to live is Christ*, Phil. 1:21. (2.) Christ will appear again. He is now *hid*; and the *heavens must contain him*; but he will appear in all the pomp of the upper world, with his *holy angels*, and in *his own glory and his Father's glory*, Mk. 8:38; Lu. 9:26. (3.) We shall then appear with him in glory. It will be his glory to have his redeemed with him; he will come to be glorified in his saints (2 Th. 1:10); and it will be their glory to come with him, and be with him for ever. At the second coming of Christ there will be a general meeting of all the saints; and those whose life is now *hid with Christ* shall then appear with Christ in that glory which he himself enjoys, Jn. 17:24. Do we look for such a happiness, and should we not set our affections upon that world, and live above this? What is there here to make us fond of it? What is there not there to draw our hearts to it? Our head is there, our home is there, our treasure is there, and we hope to be there for ever.

### **Verses 5-7**

The apostle exhorts the Colossians to the mortification of sin, the great hindrance to seeking the things which are above. Since it is our duty to set our affections upon heavenly things, it is our duty to mortify our *members which are upon the earth*, and which naturally incline us to the things of the world: "Mortify them, that is, subdue the vicious habits of mind which prevailed in your Gentile state. Kill them, suppress them, as you do weeds or vermin which spread and destroy all about them, or as you kill an enemy who fights against you and wounds you."—*Your members which are upon the earth*; either the members of the body, which are the earthly part of us, and were *curiously wrought in the lower parts of the earth* (Ps. 139:15), or the corrupt affections of the mind, which lead us to earthly things, the members of the body of death, Rom. 7:24. He specifies,

I. The lusts of the flesh, for which they were before so very remarkable: *Fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence*—the various workings of the carnal appetites and fleshly impurities, which they indulged in their former course of life, and which were so contrary to the Christian state and the heavenly hope.

II. The love of the world: *And covetousness, which is idolatry*; that is, an inordinate love of present good and outward enjoyments, which proceeds from too high a value in the mind, puts upon too eager a pursuit, hinders the proper use and enjoyment of them, and creates anxious fear and immoderate sorrow for the loss of them. Observe, Covetousness is spiritual

idolatry: it is the giving of that love and regard to worldly wealth which are due to God only, and carries a greater degree of malignity in it, and is more highly provoking to God, than is commonly thought. And it is very observable that among all the instances of sin which good men are recorded in the scripture to have fallen into (and there is scarcely any but some or other, in one or other part of their life, have fallen into) there is no instance in all the scripture of any good man charged with covetousness. He proceeds to show how necessary it is to mortify sins, v. 6, 7. 1. Because, if we do not kill them, they will kill us: *For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience*, v. 6. See what we are all by nature more or less: we are *children of disobedience*: not only disobedient children, but under the power of sin and naturally prone to disobey. The *wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies*, Ps. 58:3. And, being children of disobedience, we are *children of wrath*, Eph. 2:3. The wrath of God comes upon all the children of disobedience. Those who do not obey the precepts of the law incur the penalties of it. The sins he mentions were their sins in their heathen and idolatrous state, and they were then especially the children of disobedience; and yet these sins brought judgments upon them, and exposed them to the wrath of God. 2. We should mortify these sins because they have lived in us: *In which you also walked some time, when you lived in them*, v. 7. Observe, The consideration that we have formerly lived in sin is a good argument why we should now forsake it. We have walked in by-paths, therefore let us walk in them no more. *If I have done iniquity, I will do no more*, Job 34:32. The time past our lives may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, 1 Pt. 4:3.—*When you lived among those who did such things* (so some understand it), then you walked in those evil practices. It is a hard thing to live among those who do the works of darkness and not have fellowship with them, as it is to walk in the mire and contract no soil. Let us keep out of the way of evil-doers.

### **Verses 8-11**

As we are to mortify inordinate appetites, so we are to mortify inordinate passions (v. 8): *But now you also put off all these, anger wrath, malice*; for these are contrary to the design of the gospel, as well as grosser impurities; and, though they are more spiritual wickedness, have not less malignity in them. The gospel religion introduces a change of the higher as well as the lower powers of the soul, and supports the dominion of right reason and conscience over appetite and passion. Anger and wrath are bad, but malice is worse, because it is more rooted and deliberate; it is anger heightened and settled. And, as the corrupt principles in the heart must be cut off, so the product of them in the tongue; as *blasphemy*, which seems there to mean, not so much speaking ill of God as speaking ill of men, giving ill language to them, or raising ill reports of them, and injuring their good name by any evil arts,—*filthy communication*, that is, all lewd and wanton discourse, which comes from a polluted mind in the speaker and propagates the same defilements in the hearers,—and lying: *Lie not one to another* (v. 9), for it is contrary both to the law of truth and the law of love, it is both unjust and unkind, and naturally tends to destroy all faith and friendship among mankind. Lying makes us like the devil (who is the *father of lies*), and is a prime part of the devil's image upon our souls; and therefore we are cautioned against this sin by this general reason: *Seeing you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man*, v. 10. The consideration that we have by profession put away sin and espoused the cause and interest of Christ, that we have renounced all sin and stand engaged to Christ, should fortify us against this sin of

lying. Those who have put off the old man have put it off with its deeds; and those who have put on the new man must put on all its deeds—not only espouse good principles but act them in a good conversation. The new man is said to be *renewed in knowledge*, because an ignorant soul cannot be a good soul. Without knowledge the heart cannot be good, Prov. 19:2. The grace of God works upon the will and affections by renewing the understanding. Light is the first thing in the new creation, as it was in the first: *after the image of him who created him*. It was the honour of man in innocence that he was made after the image of God; but that image was defaced and lost by sin, and is renewed by sanctifying grace: so that a renewed soul is something like what Adam was in the day he was created. In the privilege and duty of sanctification *there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free*, v. 11. There is now no difference arising from different country or different condition and circumstance of life: it is as much the duty of the one as of the other to be holy, and as much the privilege of the one as of the other to receive from God the grace to be so. Christ came to take down all partition-walls, that all might stand on the same level before God, both in duty and privilege. And for this reason, because *Christ is all in all*. Christ is a Christian's all, his only Lord and Saviour, and all his hope and happiness. And to those who are sanctified, one as well as another and whatever they are in other respects, he is *all in all*, the *Alpha and Omega*, the *beginning and the end*: he is all in all things to them.

#### **Verses 12-17**

The apostle proceeds to exhort to mutual love and compassion: *Put on therefore bowels of mercy*, v. 12. We must not only put off anger and wrath (as v. 8), but we must put on compassion and kindness; not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well; not only not do hurt to any, but do what good we can to all.

I. The argument here used to enforce the exhortation is very affecting: *Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved*. Observe, 1. Those who are holy are the elect of God; and those who are the elect of God, and holy, are beloved—beloved of God, and ought to be so of all men. 2. Those who are the elect of God, holy and beloved, ought to conduct themselves in every thing as becomes them, and so as not to lose the credit of their holiness, nor the comfort of their being chosen and beloved. It becomes those who are holy towards God to be lowly and loving towards all men. Observe, What we must put on in particular. (1.) Compassion towards the miserable: *Bowels of mercy*, the tenderest mercies. Those who owe so much to mercy ought to be merciful to all who are proper objects of mercy. *Be you merciful, as your Father is merciful*, Lu. 6:36. (2.) *Kindness* towards our friends, and those who love us. A courteous disposition becomes the elect of God; for the design of the gospel is not only to soften the minds of men, but to sweeten them, and to promote friendship among men as well as reconciliation with God. (3.) *Humbleness of mind*, in submission to those above us, and condescension to those below us. There must not only be a humble demeanour, but a humble mind. *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart*, Mt. 11:29. (4.) *Meekness* towards those who have provoked us, or been any way injurious to us. We must not be transported into any indecency by our resentment of indignities and neglects: but must prudently bridle our own anger, and patiently bear the anger of others. (5.) *Long-suffering* towards those who continue to provoke us. *Charity suffereth long, as well as is kind*, 1 Co. 13:4. Many can bear a short provocation who are weary of bearing when it grows long. But we must suffer long both the injuries of men and the rebukes of



divine Providence. If God is long-suffering to us, under all our provocations of him, we should exercise long-suffering to others in like cases. (6.) Mutual forbearance, in consideration of the infirmities and deficiencies under which we all labour: *Forbearing one another*. We have all of us something which needs to be borne with, and this is a good reason why we should bear with others in what is disagreeable to us. We need the same good turn from others which we are bound to show them. (7.) A readiness to forgive injuries: *Forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any*. While we are in this world, where there is so much corruption in our hearts, and so much occasion of difference and contention, quarrels will sometimes happen, even among the elect of God, who are holy and beloved, as Paul and Barnabas had a *sharp contention, which parted them asunder one from the other* (Acts 15:39), and Paul and Peter, Gal. 2:14. But it is our duty to forgive one another in such cases; not to bear any grudge, but put up with the affront and pass it by. And the reason is: *Even as Christ forgave you, so also do you*. The consideration that we are forgiven by Christ so many offences is a good reason why we should forgive others. It is an argument of the divinity of Christ that he had *power on earth to forgive sins*; and it is a branch of his example which we are obliged to follow, if we ourselves would be forgiven. *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us*, Mt. 6:12.

II. In order to all this, we are exhorted here to several things:—1. To clothe ourselves with love (v. 14): *Above all things put on charity: epi pasi de toutois—over all things*. Let this be the upper garment, the robe, the livery, the mark of our dignity and distinction. Or, Let this be principal and chief, as the whole sum and abstract of the second table. *Add to faith virtue, and to brotherly-kindness charity*, 2 Pt. 1:5-7. He lays the foundation in faith, and the top-stone in charity, *which is the bond of perfectness*, the cement and centre of all happy society. Christian unity consists of unanimity and mutual love. 2. To submit ourselves to the government of the *peace of God* (v. 15): *Let the peace of God rule in your hearts*, that is, God's being at peace with you, and the comfortable sense of his acceptance and favour: or, a disposition to peace among yourselves, a peaceable spirit, that keeps the peace, and makes peace. This is called the *peace of God*, because it is of his working in all who are his. *The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace*, Rom. 14:17. "Let this peace *rule in your heart*—prevail and govern there, or as an umpire decide all matters of difference among you."—*To which you are called in one body*. We are called to this peace, to peace with God as our privilege and peace with our brethren as our duty. Being united in one body, we are called to be at peace one with another, as the members of the natural body; for *we are the body of Christ, and members in particular*, 1 Co. 12:27. To preserve in us this peaceable disposition, we must be thankful. The work of thanksgiving to God is such a sweet and pleasant work that it will help to make us sweet and pleasant towards all men. "Instead of envying one another upon account of any particular favours and excellence, be thankful for his mercies, which are common to all of you." 3. To let the *word of Christ dwell in us richly*, v. 16. The gospel is the word of Christ, which has come to us; but that is not enough, it must dwell in us, or *keep house—enoikeiton*, not as a servant in a family, who is under another's control, but as a master, who has a right to prescribe to and direct all under his roof. We must take our instructions and directions from it, and our portion of meat and strength, of grace and comfort, in due season, as from the *master of the household*. It must dwell in us; that is, be always ready and at hand to us in every thing, and have its due influence and use. We must be familiarly acquainted with it, and *know it for*

*our good*, Job 5:27. It must dwell in us richly: not only keep house in our hearts, but keep a good house. Many have the word of Christ dwelling in them, but it dwells in them but poorly; it has no mighty force and influence upon them. Then the soul prospers when the word of God *dwells in us richly*, when we have abundance of it in us, and are full of the scriptures and of the grace of Christ. And this in all wisdom. The proper office of wisdom is to apply what we know to ourselves, for our own direction. The word of Christ must dwell in us, not in all notion and speculation, to make us doctors, but in all wisdom, to make us good Christians, and enable us to conduct ourselves in every thing as becomes Wisdom's children. 4. To teach and admonish one another. This would contribute very much to our furtherance in all grace; for we sharpen ourselves by quickening others, and improve our knowledge by communicating it for their edification. We must *admonish one another in psalms and hymns*. Observe, Singing of psalms is a gospel ordinance: *psalmois kai hymnois kai oudais*—the Psalms of David, and spiritual hymns and odes, collected out of the scripture, and suited to special occasions, instead of their lewd and profane songs in their idolatrous worship. Religious poesy seems countenanced by these expressions and is capable of great edification. But, when we sing psalms, we make no melody unless we sing with grace in our hearts, unless we are suitably affected with what we sing and go along in it with true devotion and understanding. Singing of psalms is a teaching ordinance as well as a praising ordinance; and we are not only to quicken and encourage ourselves, but to *teach and admonish one another*, mutually excite our affections, and convey instructions. 5. All must be done in the name of Christ (v. 17): *And whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*, according to his command and in compliance with his authority, by strength derived from him, with an eye to his glory, and depending upon his merit for the acceptance of what is good and the pardon of what is amiss, *Giving thanks to God and the Father by him*. Observe, (1.) We must give thanks in all things; whatsoever we do, we must still give thanks, Eph. 5:20, *Giving thanks always for all things*. (2.) The Lord Jesus must be the Mediator of our praises as well as of our prayers. *We give thanks to God and the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*, Eph. 5:20. Those who do all things in Christ's name will never want matter of thanksgiving to God, even the Father.

### **Verses 18-25**

The apostle concludes the chapter with exhortations to relative duties, as before in the epistle to the Ephesians. The epistles which are most taken up in displaying the glory of divine grace, and magnifying the Lord Jesus, are the most particular and distinct in pressing the duties of the several relations. We must never separate the privileges and duties of the gospel religion. I. He begins with the duties of wives and husbands (v. 18): *Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord*. Submission is the duty of wives, *hypotassesthe*. It is the same word which is used to express our duty to magistrates (Rom. 13:1, *Let every soul be subject to the higher powers*), and is expressed by subjection and reverence, Eph. 5:24, 33. The reason is that *Adam was first formed, then Eve: and Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived, was in the transgression*, 1 Tim. 2:13, 14. He was first in the creation and last in the transgression. *The head of the woman is the man; and the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man; neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man*, 1 Co. 11:3, 8, 9. It is agreeable to the order of nature and the reason of things, as well as the appointment and will of God. But then it is submission, not to a rigorous lord or absolute tyrant, who may do his will and is without restraints, but to a

husband, and to her own husband, who stands in the nearest relation, and is under strict engagements to proper duty too. And *this is fit in the Lord*, it is becoming the relation, and what they are bound in duty to do, as an instance of obedience to the authority and law of Christ. On the other hand, *husbands must love their wives, and not be bitter against them*, v. 19. They must love them with tender and faithful affection, as Christ loved the church, and as their own bodies, and even as themselves (Eph. 5:25, 28, 33), with a love peculiar to the nearest relation and the greatest comfort and blessing of life. And they must not be bitter against them, not use them unkindly, with harsh language or severe treatment, but be kind and obliging to them in all things; for the *woman was made for the man, neither is the man without the woman, and the man also is by the woman*, 1 Co. 11:9, 11, 12.

II. The duties of children and parents: *Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord*, v. 20. They must be willing to do all their lawful commands, and be at their direction and disposal; as those who have a natural right and are fitter to direct them than themselves. The apostle (Eph. 6:2) requires them to honour as well as obey their parents; they must esteem them and think honourably of them, as the obedience of their lives must proceed from the esteem and opinion of their minds. And this is *well-pleasing to God*, or acceptable to him; for it is the *first commandment with promise* (Eph. 6:2), with an explicit promise annexed to it, namely, *That it shall be well with them, and they shall live long on the earth*. Dutiful children are the most likely to prosper in the world and enjoy long life. And parents must be tender, as well as children obedient (v. 21): *"Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged*. Let not your authority over them be exercised with rigour and severity, but with kindness and gentleness, lest you raise their passions and discourage them in their duty, and by holding the reins too tight make them fly out with greater fierceness." The bad temper and example of imprudent parents often prove a great hindrance to their children and a stumbling-block in their way; see Eph. 6:4. And it is by the tenderness of parents, and dutifulness of children, that God ordinarily furnishes his church with a seed to serve him, and propagates religion from age to age.

III. Servants and masters: *Servants, obey your masters in all things according to the flesh*, v. 22. Servants must do the duty of the relation in which they stand, and obey their master's commands in *all things* which are consistent with their duty to God their heavenly Master. *Not with eye-service, as men-pleasers*—not only when their master's eye is upon them, but when they are from under their master's eye. They must be both just and diligent. *In singleness of heart, fearing God*—without selfish designs, or hypocrisy and disguise, as those who fear God and stand in awe of him. Observe, The fear of God ruling in the heart will make people good in every relation. Servants who fear God will be just and faithful when they are from under their master's eye, because they know they are under the eye of God. See Gen. 20:11, *Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place*. Neh. 5:15, *But so did not I, because of the fear of God*. "And whatsoever you do, do it heartily (v. 23), with diligence, not idly and slothfully:" or, "Do it cheerfully, not discontented at the providence of God which put you in that relation."—*As to the Lord, and not as to men*. It sanctifies a servant's work when it is done as unto God—with an eye to his glory and in obedience to his command, and not merely as unto men, or with regard to them only. Observe, We are really doing our duty to God when we are faithful in our duty to men. And, for servants' encouragement, let them know that a good

and faithful servant is never the further from heaven for his being a servant: "*Knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for you serve the Lord Christ*, v. 24. Serving your masters according to the command of Christ, you serve Christ, and he will be your paymaster: you will have a glorious reward at last. Though you are now servants, you will receive the inheritance of sons. But, on the other hand, *He who does wrong will receive for the wrong which he has done*," v. 25. There is a righteous God, who, if servants wrong their masters, will reckon with them for it, though they may conceal it from their master's notice. And he will be sure to punish the unjust as well as reward the faithful servant: and so if masters wrong their servants.—*And there is no respect of persons with him*. The righteous Judge of the earth will be impartial, and carry it with an equal hand towards the master and servant; not swayed by any regard to men's outward circumstances and condition of life. The one and the other will stand upon a level at his tribunal.

It is probable that the apostle has a particular respect, in all these instances of duty, to the case mentioned 1 Co. 7 of relations of a different religion, as a Christian and heathen, a Jewish convert and an uncircumcised Gentile, where there was room to doubt whether they were bound to fulfil the proper duties of their several relations to such persons. And, if it hold in such cases, it is much stronger upon Christians one towards another, and where both are of the same religion. And how happy would the gospel religion make the world, if it every where prevailed; and how much would it influence every state of things and every relation of life!

## Chapter 4

I. He continues his account of the duty of masters, from the close of the former chapter (v. 1). II. He exhorts to the duty of prayer (v. 2-4), and to a prudent and decent conduct towards those with whom we converse (v. 5, 6). III. He closes the epistle with the mention of several of his friends, of whom he gives an honourable testimony (v. 7-18).

### Verse 1

The apostle proceeds with the duty of masters to their servants, which might have been joined to the foregoing chapter, and is a part of that discourse. Here observe, 1. Justice is required of them: *Give unto your servants that which is just and equal* (v. 1), not only strict justice, but equity and kindness. Be faithful to your promises to them, and perform your agreements; not defrauding them of their dues, nor *keeping back by fraud the hire of the labourers*, Jam. 5:4. Require no more of them than they are able to perform; and do not lay unreasonable burdens upon them, and beyond their strength. Provide for them what is fit, supply proper food and physic, and allow them such liberties as may fit them the better for cheerful service and make it the easier to them, and this though they be employed in the meanest and lowest offices, and of another country and a different religion from yourselves. 2. A good reason for this regard: "*Knowing that you also have a Master in heaven*. You who are masters of others have a Master yourself, and are servants of another Lord. You are not lords of yourselves, and are accountable to one above you. Deal with your servants as you expect God should deal with you, and as those who believe they must give an account. You are both servants of the same Lord in the different relations in which you stand, and are equally accountable to him at last. *Knowing that your Master also is in heaven, neither is there respect of persons with him,*" Eph. 6:9.

### Verses 2-4

If this be considered as connected with the foregoing verse, then we may observe that it is part of the duty which masters owe their servants to pray with them, and to pray daily with them, or *continue in prayer*. They must not only do justly and kindly by them, but act a Christian and religious part, and be concerned for their souls as well as their bodies: "As parts of your charge, and under your influence, be concerned for the blessing of God upon them, as well as the success of your affairs in their hands." And this is the duty of every one—to *continue in prayer*. "Keep up your constant times of prayer, without being diverted from it by other business; keep your hearts close to the duty, without wandering or deadness, and even to the end of it: *Watching the same.*" Christians should lay hold of all opportunities for prayer, and choose the fittest seasons, which are least liable to disturbance from other things, and keep their minds lively in the duty, and in suitable frames.—*With thanksgiving*, or solemn acknowledgment of the mercies received. Thanksgiving must have a part in every prayer.—*Withal praying also for us*, v. 3. The people must pray particularly for their ministers, and bear them upon their hearts at all times at the throne of grace. As if he had said, "Do not forget us, whenever you pray for yourselves," Eph. 6:19; 1 Th. 5:25; Heb. 13:18. *That God would open to us a door of utterance*, that is, either afford opportunity to preach the gospel (so he says, *a great door and effectual is opened to me*, 1 Co. 16:9), or else give me ability and courage, and enable me with freedom and faithfulness; so Eph. 6:19, *And for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am*

*also in bonds*; that is, either the deepest doctrines of the gospel with plainness, of which Christ is the principal subject (he calls it the *mystery of the gospel*, Eph. 6:19), or else he means the preaching of the gospel to the Gentile world, which he calls the *mystery hidden from ages* (ch. 1:26) and the *mystery of Christ*, Eph. 3:4. For this he was now in bonds. He was a prisoner at Rome, by the violent opposition of the malicious Jews. He would have them pray for him, that he might not be discouraged in his work, nor driven from it by his sufferings: "*That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak*, v. 4. That I may make this mystery known to those who have not heard of it, and make it plain to their understanding, in such a manner as I ought to do." He had been particular in telling them what he prayed for on their behalf, ch. 1. Here he tells them particularly what he would have them pray for on his behalf. Paul knew as well as any man how to speak; and yet he begged their prayers for him, that he might be taught to speak. The best and most eminent Christians need the prayers of meaner Christians, and are not above asking them. The chief speakers need prayer, that God would give them a door of utterance, and that they may speak as they ought to speak.

### **Verses 5-6**

The apostle exhorts them further to a prudent and decent conduct towards all those with whom they conversed, towards the heathen world, or those out of the Christian church among whom they lived (v. 5): *Walk in wisdom towards those who are without*. Be careful, in all your converse with them, to get no hurt by them, or contract any of their customs; for *evil communications corrupt good manners*; and to do not hurt to them, or increase their prejudices against religion, and give them an occasion of dislike. Yea, do them all the good you can, and by all the fittest means and in the proper seasons recommend religion to them.—*Redeeming the time*; that is, either "improving every opportunity of doing them good, and making the best use of your time in proper duty" (diligence in redeeming time very much recommends religion to the good opinion of others), or else "walking cautiously and with circumspections, to give them no advantage against you, nor expose yourselves to their malice and ill-will," Eph. 5:15, 16. *Walk circumspectly, redeeming the time, because the days are evil*, that is, dangerous, or times of trouble and suffering. And towards others, or those who are within as well as those who are without, "*Let your speech be always with grace*, v. 6. Let all your discourse be as becomes Christians, suitable to your profession-savoury, discreet, seasonable." Though it be not always of grace, it must be always with grace; and, though the matter of our discourse be that which is common, yet there must be an air of piety upon it and it must be in a Christian manner *seasoned with salt*. Grace is the salt which seasons our discourse, makes it savoury, and keeps it from corrupting. *That you may know how to answer every man*. One answer is proper for one man, and another for another man Prov. 26:4, 5. We have need of a great deal of wisdom and grace to give proper answers to every man, particularly in answering the questions and objections of adversaries against our religion, giving the reasons of our faith, and showing the unreasonableness of their exceptions and cavils to the best advantage for our cause and least prejudice to ourselves. *Be ready always to give an answer to every man who asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear*, 1 Pt. 3:15.

### **Verses 7-18**

In the close of this epistle the apostle does several of his friends the honour to leave their names upon record, with some

testimony of his respect, which will be spoken of wherever the gospel comes, and last to the end of the world.

I. Concerning Tychicus, v. 7. By him this epistle was sent; and he does not give them an account in writing of his present state, because Tychicus would do it by word of mouth more fully and particularly. He knew they would be glad to hear how it fared with him. The churches cannot but be concerned for good ministers and desirous to know their state. He gives him this character, *A beloved brother and faithful minister*. Paul, though a great apostle, owns a faithful minister for a brother and a beloved brother. Faithfulness in any one is truly lovely, and renders him worthy our affection and esteem. *And a fellow-servant in the Lord*. Ministers are servants to Christ, and fellow-servants to one another. They have one Lord, though they have different stations and capacities of service. Observe, It adds much to the beauty and strength of the gospel ministry when ministers are thus loving and condescending one to another, and by all just means support and advance one another's reputation. Paul sent him not only to tell them of his affairs, but to bring him an account of theirs: *Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts*, v. 8. He was willing to hear from them as they could be to hear from him, and thought himself as much obliged to sympathize with them as he thought them obliged to sympathize with him. It is a great comfort, under the troubles and difficulties of life, to have the mutual concern of fellow-christians.

II. Concerning Onesimus (v. 9): *With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you*. He was sent back from Rome along with Tychicus. This was he whom Paul had begotten in his bonds, Philem. 10. He had been servant to Philemon, and was a member, if not a minister, of their church. He was converted at Rome, whither he had fled from his master's service; and was now sent back, it is probable, with the epistle to Philemon, to introduce him again into his master's family. Observe, Though he was a poor servant, and had been a bad man, yet, being now a convert, Paul calls him a *faithful and beloved brother*. The meanest circumstance of life, and greatest wickedness of former life, make no difference in the spiritual relation among sincere Christians: they partake of the same privileges, and are entitles to the same regards. *The righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ is unto all and upon all those that believe; for there is no difference* (Rom. 3:22): *and there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*, Gal. 3:28. Perhaps this was some time after he was converted and sent back to Philemon, and by this time he had entered into the ministry, because Paul calls him a brother.

III. *Aristarchus, a fellow-prisoner*. Those who join in services and sufferings should be thereby engaged to one another in holy love. Paul had a particular affection for his fellow-servants and his fellow-prisoners.

IV. *Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas*. This is supposed to be the same who wrote the gospel which bears his name. *If he come unto you receive him*. Paul had a quarrel with Barnabas upon the account of this Mark, who was his nephew, and *thought not good to take him with them, because he departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work*, Acts 15:38. He would not take Mark with him, but took Silas, because Mark had deserted them; and yet Paul is not only reconciled to him himself, but recommends him to the respect of the churches, and gives a great example of a truly Christian forgiving spirit. If men have been guilty of a fault, it must not be always remembered against them. We must forget as well as forgive. *If a man be overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness*, Gal. 6:1.

V. Here is one who is called *Jesus*, which is the Greek name for the Hebrew *Joshua*. *If Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterwards have spoken of another day*, Heb. 4:8. *Who is called Justus*. It is probable that he changed his name for that of Justus, in honour to the name of the Redeemer. Or else Jesus was his Jewish name, for he was of the circumcision; and Justus his Roman or Latin name. *These are my fellow-labourers unto the kingdom of God, who have been a comfort unto me*. Observe, What comfort the apostle had in the communion of saints and ministers! One is his fellow-servant, another his fellow-prisoner, and all his fellow-workers, who were working out their own salvation and endeavouring to promote the salvation of others. Good ministers take great comfort in those who are their fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God. Their friendship and converse together are a great refreshment under the sufferings and difficulties in their way.

VI. *Epaphras* (v. 12), the same with *Epaphroditus*. He is *one of you*, one of your church; *he salutes you*, or sends his service to you, and his best affections and wishes. *Always labouring fervently for you in prayers*. Epaphras had learned of Paul to be much in prayer for his friends. Observe, 1. In what manner he prayed for them. He laboured in prayer, laboured fervently, and always laboured fervently for them. Those who would succeed in prayer must take pains in prayer; and we must be earnest in prayer, not only for ourselves, but for others also. It is the effectual fervent prayer which is the prevailing prayer, and availeth much (Jam. 5:16), and *Elias prayed earnestly that it might not rain*, v. 17. 2. What is the matter of this prayer: *That you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God*. Observe, To stand perfect and complete in the will of God is what we should earnestly desire both for ourselves and others. We must stand complete in all the will of God; in the will of his precepts by a universal obedience, and in the will of his providence by a cheerful submission to it: and we stand perfect and complete in both by constancy and perseverance unto the end. The apostle was witness for Epaphras that he had a great zeal for them: *"I bear him record; I can testify for him that he has a great concern for you, and that all he does for you proceeds from a warm desire for your good."* And his zeal extended to all about them: to *those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis*. He had a great concern for the Christian interest in the neighbouring places, as well as among them.

VII. *Luke* is another here mentioned, whom he calls the *beloved physician*. This is he who wrote the Gospel and Acts, and was Paul's companion. Observe, He was both a physician and an evangelist. Christ himself both taught and healed, and was the great physician as well as prophet of the church. He was the beloved physician; one who recommended himself more than ordinary to the affections of his friends. Skill in physic is a useful accomplishment in a minister and may be improved to more extensive usefulness and greater esteem among Christians.

VIII. *Demas*. Whether this was written before the second epistle to Timothy or after is not certain. There we read (2 Tim. 4:10), *Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world*. Some have thought that this epistle was written after; and then it is an evidence that, though Demas forsook Paul, yet he did not forsake Christ; or he forsook him but for a time, and recovered himself again, and Paul forgave him and owned him as a brother. But others think more probably that this epistle was written before the other; this in *anno* 62, that in 66, and then it is an evidence how considerable a man Demas was, who yet afterwards revolted. Many who have made a great figure in profession, and gained a great name among Christians, have yet shamefully apostatized: *They went forth from us, because they were not of us*, 1 Jn. 2:19.



IX. The *brethren in Laodicea* are here mentioned, as living in the neighbourhood of Colosse: and Paul sends salutations to them, and orders that this epistle should be read in the church of the Laodiceans (v. 16), that a copy of it should be sent thither, to be read publicly in their congregation. And some think Paul sent another epistle at this time to Laodicea, and ordered them to send for that from Laodicea, and read it in their church: *And that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea*. If so, that epistle is now lost, and did not belong to the canon; for all the epistles which the apostles ever wrote were not preserved, any more than the words and actions of our blessed Lord. *There are many other things which Jesus did, which if they should be written every one, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books which would be written*, Jn. 21:25. But some think it was the epistle to the Ephesians, which is still extant.

X. *Nymphas* is mentioned (v. 15) as one who lived at Colosse, and had a church in his house; that is, either a religious family, where the several parts of worship were daily performed; or some part of the congregation met there, when they had no public places of worship allowed, and they were forced to assemble in private houses for fear of their enemies. *The disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews* (Jn. 20:19), and the apostle preached in his *own lodging and hired house*, Acts 28:23, 30. In the former sense it showed his exemplary piety; in the latter his zeal and public spirit.

XI. Concerning *Archippus*, who was one of their ministers at Colosse. They are bidden to admonish him to mind his work as a minister, to *take heed to it, and to fulfil it*—to be diligent and careful of all the parts of it, and to persevere in it unto the end. They must attend to the main design of their ministry, without troubling themselves or the people with things foreign to it, or of less moment. Observe, (1.) The ministry we have received is a great honour; for it is *received in the Lord*, and is by his appointment and command. (2.) Those who have received it must fulfil it, or do the full duty of it. Those betray their trust, and will have a sad account at last, who *do this work of the Lord negligently*. (3.) The people may put their ministers in mind of their duty, and excite them to it: *Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry*, though no doubt with decency and respect, not from pride and conceit.

XII. Concerning himself (v. 18): *The salutation of me Paul. Remember my bonds*. He had a scribe to write all the rest of the epistle, but these words he wrote with his own hand: *Remember my bonds*. He does not say, "Remember I am a prisoner, and send me supply;" but, "Remember I am in bonds as the apostle of the Gentiles, and let this confirm your faith in the gospel of Christ:" it adds weight to this exhortation: *I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy*, Eph. 4:1. "*Grace be with you*. The favour of God, and all good, the blessed fruits and effects of it, be with you, and be your portion."