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*The Abiding Word*

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*The*  
ABIDING  
WORD

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AN ANTHOLOGY OF DOCTRINAL  
ESSAYS FOR THE YEARS  
1954-1955

*Volume Three*

Continuing the Centennial Series

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## *Publisher's Preface*

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**T**he essays in this volume were selected by the Literature Board of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod from those presented at the District conventions of 1954 and 1955. They are made available as a continuation of Volume I (1946) and Volume II (1947), issued under the direction of the Centennial Literature Committee and edited by Dr. Theodore Laetsch. Since the original two volumes, published under the title **THE ABIDING WORD**, are still in demand, the publisher is encouraged to make these additional essays available as Volume III of the series.

**THE PUBLISHER**

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*The Abiding Word*

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## *Christ in Colossians*

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### INTRODUCTION

**O**UR New Testament is made up of 27 books. We call them "books" from custom and usage. As a matter of fact, many of them are so short that they might rather be called brochures or pamphlets. Thirteen of these 27 "books" bear the name of the apostle Paul as author. But Paul's writings are not books or tracts. They are letters addressed to definite persons with specific relation to certain definite situations. Four of these letters were written to individual persons, one to a group of congregations in Galatia, and the others to individual congregations. Two of these letters are addressed to congregations which had not been founded by the apostle himself and which he had not visited, namely, the Letter to the Romans and the letter to which we are going to give our attention in these sessions, the Letter or Epistle to the Colossians.

Among the writings of Paul, the Letter to the Colossians stands out for its exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. One might say that Christ Supreme or "Christ is All and in All" (3:11) is the theme of the whole letter. To understand the unique and sublime treatment which Paul gives to the person and work of the Savior in this letter, we will have to give some attention to the background and to the circumstances which called it forth.

When Paul wrote the Letter to the Colossians, he was a prisoner, probably in Rome, and he was either held in some dungeon, or, if he was in Rome, he probably still had his own lodging, as the Book of Acts tells us 28:30, but was under the guard of a Roman soldier. News about the Colossian congregation had been brought to him by Epaphras, who was the founder and a minister of the congregation.

The congregation of the Colossians was situated in an old and famous city of Phrygia, about one hundred miles east of Ephesus.

The great highway which led from Babylon to the coast of Asia Minor passed through the city. Two other cities, both younger and probably larger than Colossae, were situated nearby, namely, Laodicea, which is known to us also from the Book of Revelation (3:14), and Hierapolis, which was famous as a health resort, and which was, as its name indicates, a gathering place for the strange religions and cults of Asia Minor and annually drew large numbers of visitors and pilgrims. Both cities are mentioned in this letter, and there were Christian congregations in both (4:13). An epistle of Paul to the Laodiceans, no longer extant, is mentioned 4:16. None of the three congregations was founded by the apostle Paul, and apparently he had not visited any of them. He tells the Colossians that they, as well as others, "have not seen my face in the flesh." (2:1)

The founder of all three churches apparently was Epaphras, a man for whom Paul has words of high praise (4:12, 13). Paul identifies himself with Epaphras as his "dear fellow servant" (1:7), and he recognizes him as his personal representative in his own God-appointed task of bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles, when he says of him: "Who is for us a faithful minister of Christ" (1:7). It seems likely that these congregations were established during the time of Paul's three-year stay in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. This was a time of great missionary activity in all Asia Minor. Luke reports this in the testimony of Paul's enemies, who said: "Not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods which are made with hands." (Acts 19:26)

The information which Epaphras had brought to the apostle Paul about the congregation was in the main very favorable, and Paul, with his deep appreciation of every sign of the working of the Holy Spirit in human hearts, joyfully acknowledges the progress which has been made in this young congregation. It appears that the congregation, which seems to have been made up for the most part of Gentile Christians (2:13), had received the Word of God with joy and had been firmly grounded in the essentials of the Christian faith. After calling them "the saints and faithful brethren at Colossae" in the salutation of the letter, Paul thanks God for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the love which they have

to all the saints on account of the hope laid up for them in heaven (1:3-5), and he also, in generous words, acknowledges the work which Epaphras has done in the congregation (1:7; 4:12, 13). He is ungrudging in his praise, for he wants to win the congregation's favor, and he wants to let them know that he is fully aware of all the good that has been accomplished. The whole tone of the letter is most cordial and appreciative, even though one may sense that there was a distance that separated Paul from these Christians, who were personally unknown to him. He wished to win their complete confidence in view of the warnings he was obliged to give, and to establish a completely friendly and cordial relationship.

So, while there were matters in the report of Epaphras that filled Paul's heart with thanksgiving and caused him to break out in a rich and beautiful prayer in which he asks that the Colossians might be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that they might walk worthy of the Lord so as to please Him completely (1:9, 10), there were yet items that filled the heart of Paul with great anxiety and that caused him to write this letter with its high exaltation of Christ as the Creator and Redeemer of the world. Serious danger was threatening the congregation, according to the report of Epaphras, in that false teachers were invading the congregation with a message that would in the end destroy their Christian faith. Paul feels compelled to oppose these false teachers. Apparently their teaching was not yet as deadly and destructive as the Judaizing teaching which at a former time had so seriously infected the Galatian congregations, where the eternal salvation of all the believers was definitely at stake, so that Paul wrote a letter that is marked by touches of anger and bitterness. Here the infection does not seem to have progressed as far, and besides, the tone of the apostle is more gentle, since he was writing to a congregation with which he was not personally acquainted. Essentially, however, the problem was the same as in the case of the Galatian congregations. Christ was being robbed of His glory as the Savior and Redeemer of the world, and salvation was being made to depend on other factors. If this teaching should make headway, it would undermine the Gospel and deprive the faith and the hope of the Colossians of their sure foundation and support.

It is not easy to determine just what this heretical teaching was. Many attempts have been made to reconstruct it in detail and to relate it to current religious and philosophical speculations, as far as these can be known. But there is still division of opinion, particularly also with regard to the part which Judaizing teachers played. Paul treats the heresy only in passing, as it were, without arguing about it at great length, and referring to it only sufficiently for identification by his readers. He does not set up thetical propositions of his opponents in order to refute them point by point. On the contrary, his letter is a positive and glorious presentation of the exalted nature of Christ and His complete sufficiency for all spiritual needs, and the references to the heretical teachings come in more or less incidentally. The tone is not controversial in a negative way, but vigorously positive. In addition to the more or less direct statements which refer to the heresy, the letter abounds in unusual words and phrases which do not occur elsewhere in the letters of Paul, and which Paul seems to have taken over from his opponents and changed in meaning by filling them with Christian content. They seem to be a part of the special religious and philosophical terminology of his opponents. So Paul gives Christian meaning to the words "fullness" and "fulfillment," which seem to have played a large part in the teaching of the heretics. This is characteristic of Paul's method of controversy, namely, that he grasps the positions of his opponents and thus makes his way into their fundamental thinking. Then, from their own positions and their premises he works toward a positive statement of the Gospel, and thus destroys the positions of the enemy by offering something which far surpasses the teachings of his opponents.

Paul refers to the false teachers primarily in the following sentences: 2:4: "And this I say lest any man should beguile you with enticing words"; also 2:8: "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." Again, 2:16ff.: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink or in respect of a holy day or of the new moon or of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the

Head." Again, 2:20ff.: "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances (touch not, taste not, handle not; which all are to perish with the using) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship and humility and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh."

One must be cautious, therefore, in attempting to describe this heretical teaching, but two things seem to stand out with some definiteness and clarity. The one is that the false teachers seem to have claimed that the Christian faith was too simple and too easily grasped and that it lacked proper speculative depth in order to make it intellectually and philosophically respectable. The other is that the Christian religion was considered too easy, that it did not demand enough of its followers in that it had none of the ritualistic and ascetic practices which were a common feature of the faiths and cults that flourished in this syncretistic age, particularly in Asia Minor, and that called for various forms and ways of mortifying the body. Kretzmann's *Popular Commentary, N. T.*, II, 317, sums up the matter adequately as follows: "They taught the Colossians that the Gospel as preached by Paul was incomplete and insufficient, that a higher wisdom and knowledge than that of simple Christianity was necessary, which they were prepared to furnish. They maintained that the tenets of the Jewish Ceremonial Law were still in force; they used enticing words, plausible arguments; they pretended a humility which they were far from feeling; they practiced ostentatious self-denial and gave their bodies hard treatment; they professed to have connection with the world of spirits and to be able to communicate with unseen forces. By their speculations and human doctrines and commandments they had placed themselves into opposition to the person of Christ and to His vicarious death on the cross." This teaching of the heretics appears to have been not so much a new religion which would be substituted for the Christian religion, but rather an addition which would be grafted on the religion of the Gospel of Christ or any other religion as well, a kind of supplementary religion.

It is immediately evident that these teachings completely eliminate Christ and rob Him of His glory as the only and all-sufficient

Lord and Redeemer and also as the origin and strength of the new life, which consists in a free and willing service of the Savior and of one's fellow men in full Christian liberty, without the ordinances and precepts of the Jewish law or any other ceremonial law.

All this may seem far away and long ago, but it is necessary for an understanding of this great epistle, and yet the basic attitudes of these heretical teachers are not so far away or so long ago as it may seem. The simple Christian Gospel of God's love in an all-sufficient Christ which speaks as mightily to the heart of the intellectual and the scholar and the man of power and influence in this world as it does to the heart of a little child, has throughout the centuries been subjected to abuse and distortion in order to make it more reasonable or intellectual or philosophical. In such efforts the story of Christ the Savior has been blurred and the way to Him filled with all kinds of handicaps and obstacles, and the Lord's watchmen have again and again been compelled to follow Paul's example in setting forth the superior glory and the complete sufficiency of the word of the truth of the Gospel (1:5) that holds out salvation in Christ alone, as we find it in the Scriptures, without additions and spurious embellishments brought in by the human mind and the human imagination.

Also the legalism and ritualism, the commandments and regulations of the Colossian heretics which were designed to bring about a greater "neglecting of the body" (2:23), that is to say, severe exercises for the purpose of mortifying the body, have been a perennial problem in the church and continue to trouble the church even to this day. The simple and free Gospel of Christ and the forgiveness of sins is not considered sufficient. People today still think that salvation must be earned in one way or another rather than accepted as a free gift. Thus in large ways and small, legalisms and special prescriptions of various kinds creep in, weigh heavily on the consciences of children of God, and rob Christ, the Savior, of His glory.

## I. CHRIST THE SON OF THE FATHER AND THE CREATOR AND PRESERVER OF THE UNIVERSE

Paul simply takes for granted without further argument that the Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Colossians had received in faith, is the Son of God. Paul does not argue this point. He had seen

the risen Lord on the road to Damascus, and he had preached Him as the Redeemer of the world in all his missionary activity. Epaphras and other helpers of Paul preached this same Gospel. To the Romans Paul had written: "His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (1:3, 4). All of Paul's life and activity was built on this foundation, namely, that Jesus Christ, crucified and risen again on the third day, was truly the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world. Whenever Paul speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ in his letters, he refers to Him as the eternal Son of the eternal Father, and he speaks of the Father as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom he gives thanks (1:3). For Paul, Jesus of Nazareth is always God's Son, the promised Messiah, very God of very God.

The relationship between Father and Son is set forth by Paul as one of unspeakable love. Paul says that the Father has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son, or more accurately, the Son of His love (1:13), and all the boundless love which the Father extends to the Son of His love is now also available to all the sons of God, to all believers in Jesus Christ.

In meeting the contention of his opponents that all fullness dwells in certain angelic beings, the "rudiments of the world" (2:8), Paul says that it is in Christ that the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily (2:9), that is to say, He is truly God, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, completely equal with the Father, and possessing to the fullest extent all the divine qualities and attributes. This is the Christ, the Son of God, who humbled Himself and laid aside the continual and full use of His divine attributes and power in the state of humiliation, but whom God exalted, so that He now "sitteth on the right hand of God" (3:1). Of Him Paul said in the Letter to the Philippians (2:9-11): "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The Son is in no way inferior to the Father. The Father has invested Him with all divine

qualities and attributes. All divine fullness exists and finds its place in Him. He is true God, for in Him, in His body, in His temporal and earth-bound existence, there dwells all the fullness of the Godhead, all the divine power and glory, and all His majestic attributes.

It is in this marvelous relationship that the everlasting glory of Christ, our Lord, shines forth. But Paul is writing to people for whom this glory has been obscured. The false teachers who invaded the Colossian congregation apparently endeavored to pass by the Lord Jesus Christ and to make Him something less than the Father. They did not see in Him the glorious and all-sufficient Redeemer of all mankind, through whom the Father reconciled the world unto Himself. And so Paul, before proceeding into the body of his letter, with its warnings and admonitions, sets before his readers in a most striking way, as in no other of his letters, the glory and majesty and all-sufficiency of Christ. This passage has been described as one that is richest in content and most magnificent in the whole New Testament. Paul here exalts the greatness and the majesty of his Lord in presenting Him as the Lord of the universe, the Savior of all men and all things, and the Lord and Head of the church.

Paul begins by saying that Christ is "the Image of the invisible God" (1:15). Paul, too, concurs that "no man hath seen God at any time" (1 John 4:12), that He is forever hidden from mortal eyes and terrible and consuming in His majesty and purity and complete holiness, which is as a consuming fire. To Timothy Paul says: "The King of kings and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see" (1 Tim. 6:15f.). But God has revealed Himself in the Son. In the Son we see the Father revealing Himself to us in His love and grace, in attributes in which His revelation in nature and in the human conscience does not show Him. "No man hath seen God at any time," says John (1:18); "the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." Jesus says to His disciples (John 14:7, 9): "If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also; and from henceforth ye know Him and have seen Him. . . . He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." So also the writer to the Hebrews

eloquently says (1:3): "He is the Brightness of His glory and the express Image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." In Jesus Christ the invisible and unknowable God is seen by us and known by us, for in Him God "hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). The eternal love and the gracious and merciful nature of the Father have been manifested to mankind in Him who is the eternal and living and personal Image of the Father, of the same essence with the Father from all eternity. Paul also calls Him the First-born of every creature. He does not belong in the rank of creatures as the false teachers claim, for He existed before there was any creature. He is the only-begotten Son of the Father, begotten from all eternity. So the writer to the Hebrews says (1:6): "And again, when He bringeth in the First-begotten into the world, He saith: And let all the angels of God worship Him."

Christ the Lord is great and majestic and altogether God, but not only in His person and in His relation to the Father. He is God, divine and all-powerful, also in His acts. All the great acts of creation and preservation of the universe which are ascribed to the Father are ascribed also to Him. Paul says: "By Him were all things created" (1:16), and he gives an all-embracing explanation to the words "all things." Whatever is in heaven was created by Him. Everything that is in earth is created by Him. The entire invisible world, of which the false teachers apparently liked to speak, and in which they had established ranks and hierarchies of spirits whom they called "the rudiments of the world" (2:8), insofar as it exists at all in fact and not merely in the imagination of the false teachers, all this marvelous world, which Paul then further defines with the words "thrones or dominions or principalities or powers" (1:16), all these are not only His subjects, but actually His creatures. He gave them life and being, and they are totally subordinate to Him and dedicated to His service as good angels or to live in fear and terror of Him in His consuming wrath as fallen angels. Paul then again says: "All things were created by Him" (1:16b). This is the eternal and creative Word of God, of whom John said (1:1 ff.): "In the beginning was the Word,

and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made."

But Paul also says that all things were created for Him. There is a continuing relationship between Christ and His creation. It exists for Him, that is, for His praise and honor and His glory. All created things do homage to Him and show Him awe and reverence. All reflect His mighty power and creator-glory. The stars in the heavens proclaim His majesty, and the song of the spheres resounds with everlasting honor. All created things, visible or invisible, animate or inanimate, honor Him; those who can, with heart and mind and soul sing His praises, and those that cannot, look to Him only in dumb adoration. All were created for His honor and glory.

But the relationship of the created universe to the exalted Christ goes beyond adoration and worship as if He were some separate and detached being with no connection with the world. Paul says: "He is before all things" (1:17), both in time and in rank, and in particular Paul says that "by Him all things consist" (1:17). There is a continuing and never-ceasing interaction that directs itself from Christ to the entire universe. In Him all things consist. He is the One in whom all things come together as their focus and central point, the One on whom everything rests, in whom and through whom everything has its existence. So the writer to the Hebrews says (1:3): "upholding all things by the word of His power." He is the living force, so often celebrated also by the heathen philosophers, which holds together the entire universe, and to Him also apply the words which Paul spoke to the Stoics and Epicureans in Athens (Acts 17:26 ff.): "He hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth. . . . He is not far from every one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being." He is the Creator, Preserver, and Finisher of all things. Everything goes and aims toward Him. Everything must await everything from Him. Everything is in all things wholly dependent on Him. He is the Image of the invisible God, the First-born before all creatures, Creator and Preserver of the Universe, and the One who completes all the counsel of creation of God. "Nothing higher can be said about our Lord Jesus Christ." (Cf. Carl Manthey-Zorn, *Kolosserbrieff*, St. Louis, 1915, pp. 88-118.)

## II. CHRIST THE REDEEMER OF THE WORLD

The chief content and glory of Paul's message to the world is the Gospel of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Also in this Letter to the Colossians he sets forth this central doctrine with beauty and power. Salvation is not through "the rudiments of the world," through hierarchies of angels served in the observance of ascetic practices, but only through Christ, the Redeemer of the world, who is "All and in all." (3:11)

Paul's opponents seem to have recognized the necessity of a redemptive deliverance, but they failed to comprehend the true nature of man before God and his complete helplessness before God's holiness and justice. They seemed to assume that man could reach God and gain His favor if man would strive to make contact with God through the angel intermediaries and through the practice of ascetic exercises involving rigorous severity to the body. They did not understand that the condition of natural man makes a divinely instituted redemption necessary and indispensable.

Evidently Epaphras had instructed the Colossians in this matter. The Colossians had come to faith in Christ Jesus, and this presupposes a knowledge of sin and repentance.

In setting forth the supreme glory of Christ the Savior in this letter, Paul in various ways brings to the mind of his readers the true situation in which they found themselves before the Gospel came to them. Three statements particularly demand our attention. The first is 1:21: "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled." Here Paul says briefly what is said with more elaboration in the Epistle to the Ephesians (2:12): "At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world"; and 4:17f.: "Walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart." The Colossian Christians, most of whom probably were Gentiles by birth, had not just been estranged from God through the breach of a former fellowship, but they had been absolute strangers to Him and were shut out entirely from God's love and mercy. "They

were in a state and condition of estrangement as to their affections, passions, desires, understanding. The sphere in which they were moving was that of wicked works, of deeds which increased the alienation between God and them day after day." (*Pop. Com.*, ad loc.)

Paul frequently gives greater vividness to his charge of wicked works by listing the sins that held the ancient world and his readers in bonds. So he lists them in the third chapter (vv. 5 ff.) as follows: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry, for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience, in the which ye also walked sometime, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds."

The second statement is 2:13: "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him." Paul repeats this judgment in Eph. 2:1: "And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Also the Colossian Christians had been spiritually dead by reason of their sins, and therefore separated from the love of God and subject to eternal damnation. They lacked that circumcision of the heart which Moses (Deut. 10:16) and Jeremiah (4:4) had demanded of their people. Their spiritual condition was that of the sinful nature of natural man, of disobedience and enmity toward God, without even a longing for spiritual life in thoughts that were at variance with God's Word and will. For this condition the opponents of Paul could offer only their ascetic exercises, which Paul dismisses with a word of scorn (2:23): "Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship and humility and neglecting of the body, not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh." The ordinances of the Law of God are against man in his natural state and pronounce judgment upon all men. From this spiritual death man can be raised only by the operation of God in Christ.

The third statement is 1:13: "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness." Here at the very beginning of the body of his letter, Paul flashes upon his readers in just a few words the com-

plete hopelessness of the situation of a man without God. Whoever is still estranged from God and has not been brought into communion with Him through faith in Christ, is in darkness, in spiritual darkness into which no light can break and out of which no man can by himself find the way to the light of God's presence. It is the captivity of a slavery from which there is no human way of release and in which there is no ray of light or hope. In this darkness man is under the control of the power of Satan and all his evil angels, a power whose hold no human being can break. This is a dominion of mighty hosts, of principalities and powers whom Christ had to defeat and over whom He had to triumph. Whoever is under the control of this power of Satan is, as Paul's imagery suggests, being swept along toward eternal damnation as a leaf is carried down a rushing stream, and only the intervention of a still stronger power can save from this everlasting destruction. When human beings are aware of this situation and the full weight of the consciousness of their guilt before God weighs down upon them, their hearts are filled not only with fear and anxiety, but with downright bitterness, hostility, and deep-seated hatred, which draws its strength from the feeling of despair which is aroused and sustained by the knowledge of utter helplessness and the certainty of eternal damnation, of being forever separated from God and never being able to find one's way to His grace and favor. This is the carnal mind that is enmity against God, as Paul says (Rom. 8:7): "For it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be."

Paul brushes aside the schemes of redemption of his opponents. They were ineffective, and he apparently saw no need to dwell upon them and to prove their inadequacy. Instead, he sets forth in powerful language the redemption and reconciliation that is in Christ Jesus. He says (1:19): "For it pleased the Father that in Him," that is, in Christ, "should all fullness dwell," that is to say, the totality of all of God's thoughts and purposes of grace and kindness toward fallen mankind should find fulfillment in Christ, and it furthermore pleased God, "having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven" (1:20). In Christ, the Son of God's love, a glorious reconciliation is effected,

and the thoughts of God toward man are thoughts of peace and not of evil, of the peace which "passeth all understanding" and which keeps the hearts and minds of men through faith in Christ Jesus. Here is the means by which God snatches helpless man out of the power of darkness and translates him into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Here is the great mystery which Paul is privileged to make known to all the world (2:2), the mystery of God's love in Christ, the mystery of the great Redeemer, who in His redemptive work on the cross shows forth the riches of the glory of this mystery. This is the mystery of which Paul writes to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 2:7, 9): "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory. . . . As it is written: Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

The reconciling initiative came from God Himself, and Paul declares to his readers that God has effected this reconciliation. He made peace with mankind through the blood of Christ's cross. Through Him He reconciled all things to Himself, things on earth and things in heaven. In the body of Christ's flesh through Christ's death He has accomplished the reconciliation for all mankind to present sinners to be "holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in His sight" (1:22). He sent the Son of His love into this world, and the Son of His love worked out a perfect redemption through the shedding of His blood, through the blood of His cross, so as to provide forgiveness for the sin of all mankind. To the Corinthians Paul tells this great truth as follows: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the Word of reconciliation." (2 Cor. 5:19)

To effect this glorious reconciliation, the sacrifice of Christ was necessary. And Christ, the Son of the Father's love, brought about this reconciliation in the redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins (1:14), the Son of God who humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross in the body of His flesh. But God did not leave Him in His suffering and in His bloody sacrifice. He raised Him from the dead, and Christ now sits at the right hand of God. He is in that great and

wonderful world which is the home of "the things which are above" (3:1), all those things which are precious and pleasing in the sight of God.

It is the will of God that the story and the proclamation of this reconciliation should be given to all mankind. Here are the great treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hid in Christ (2:3). Here also is the resolution of the mystery of the ages, the mystery of the relation between God's chosen people under the old covenant, the Children of Israel, and the Gentile world round about them. All are creatures of God, and all equally the object of the love of God, and yet there was between them a mighty and mysterious wall. This mystery the Father also has solved by Christ (1:26). He made known in Him the riches of the glory of this mystery as consisting in this, that there is no longer any wall separating Jew and Gentile, that Christ, by the will of the Father, came into this world with salvation for all, and where there is faith, there Christ dwells in the hearts, the hearts of all believers without distinction. It is now: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:27), Christ in every believer's heart as fruit of the great reconciliation, Christ as the comfort and the strength of every believing heart, Christ the hope and glory for every believer.

Paul makes it clear that it was not human effort that broke the bonds of darkness and established sinful man in God's favor. Everywhere in the letter the language points to the gracious act of God, of the Father who "hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son" (1:12, 13). For the Colossians this came to pass when they came to faith, the faith in Christ Jesus, when, to use Paul's language, they received Christ the Lord (2:6), and this faith came through the hearing of the Word of God (1:5, 6). This faith is the hand that grasps the reconciling hand of God and appropriates forgiveness of sins and effects translation into the kingdom of His dear Son. Paul reminds his readers early in the letter that they came to faith when they heard and apprehended the grace of God in truth, when they learned the good news from Epaphras, when the Spirit became active in their hearts, when through Baptism they were buried with Christ into death of the

old nature and were quickened in the faith which was awakened in their hearts through the working of God Himself.

In their present situation, their present status within the kingdom of God's Son, the Colossians are sustained in their faith, remain in it, and are rooted and grounded in it. Paul rejoices when he sees how their faith in Christ the Redeemer has brought order to them in their congregational life and has given them firmness and stability (2:5-7). In this faith in Christ, which resulted from the teaching of Epaphras, they now are rooted and built up and made firm. The great work of Christ the glorious Redeemer has become the cherished possession of every Christian in Colossae.

In speaking of the appropriation of the blessed reconciliation and peace which God offers to the sinner, Paul lays great emphasis on Baptism, and as he had done in the Epistle to the Romans (ch. 6), he connects the Christian's coming to Christ in Baptism with the resurrection of Christ Himself from the dead. He tells the Colossians that they were buried with Christ in Baptism (2:12). Baptism is a death and burial. Something dies in Baptism that will never have full life and strength again. It is the old man within us, the unregenerate element which Paul so frequently calls "the flesh," thereby signifying everything in our human nature that is not completely in the control of Christ. When we are yet enemies of God and alienated, we are just this old man and nothing more, completely controlled by the evil nature that is within us, and even the good that we do, with the remnant of reason and conscience left to us, even that is contaminated and cannot stand in the sight of God and win His reconciliation. The power of this old man dies in Baptism. His strength is broken, his absolute sway over the human heart is ended. What is yet left of him and will continue as long as Christians are in this world is weak and on the defensive before the new man who operates by the power and strength which the Holy Spirit grants. This new man is the result of the Baptism that kills the power of the old man and forever buries it. The new man arises and comes to life and strength when faith is created. This is a glorious event indeed, a great miracle of God, and so Paul, in order to give it dramatic color and power, likens it to the most glorious event in the life of the Savior Himself, namely, His resurrection from the dead. And even as God the

Father is connected with Christ's resurrection from the dead — Paul says: "God hath raised Him from the dead" (2:12) — even so this new life, which is the effect that is wrought in Baptism, is a resurrection, and emphatically, a resurrection with Christ, which takes place when faith is created through the operation of God, who raised Christ from the dead (2:12). Human beings, dead in trespasses and sins and in the uncircumcision, that is, in the rebelliousness of their flesh, God Himself has quickened (2:13), that is, has brought them to spiritual life, and Paul specifically says that God did this with Him, that is, with Christ, in that He has forgiven all trespasses. (2:13)

Paul's opponents made great promises to the Colossians in their petty schemes of building a way and a ladder to the throne of God. Paul brushes all this aside as unnecessary. Whoever has come to faith in God is numbered among the elect of God, holy and beloved, and can stand boldly in the sight of God. The reason for this is that the barrier has been removed, that Christ has taken it away in that He took upon Himself the burden of all their sin, its guilt and its punishment, when He secured for them and appropriated to them the forgiveness of sins. So Paul says (1:14): "In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins," and 1:22 he says: "To present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in His sight," and in 2:13 he tells the Colossians that God, in quickening them together with Christ, forgave them all their trespasses. That is why Paul can call the Colossians "saints and faithful brethren" in the salutation of the letter.

With the forgiveness of sins, Paul's readers have access to hope. This hope is a genuine hope, already secured for them. Paul says that it is laid up for them in heaven, a treasure secured by Christ the Savior and held for them for their enjoyment in eternity. There was nothing like this that Paul's opponents could hold forth or promise. Paul speaks of this hope in eloquent words. It has its origin in the Gospel which the Colossians have heard. It is described when Paul (1:12) speaks of giving thanks to the Father, who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. In His reconciling grace God has delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son, the Son of His love. He has taken us into His King-

dom of Grace, and His Kingdom of Grace is continued into His Kingdom of Glory. These are not two but one, and the Kingdom of Glory is the continuation of the Kingdom of Grace, and death, the departure from this life, in which man is also yet involved here in the Kingdom of Power, is only a passing incident. Whoever has been translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love, the Kingdom of Grace, has thereby been made meet to partake of the inheritance of the saints in light, the pure light of perfect holiness that surrounds the throne of God. This great hope becomes the Christian's possession when faith is awakened. Here a new life begins with dying to sin and being raised together with Christ, which is not visible to human eyes, the life in the kingdom of God's dear Son. This life begins with faith, and it never ends. It is hidden in this world with Christ in God (3:2). But when Christ will be made manifest on the Last Day, then Christ, who, as Paul says, is our Life, will appear in glory, and all children of God will be made manifest with Him in glory.

Christ the Redeemer also brought with Him freedom from the Law, for He fulfilled the Law in our stead. No new legalisms may be brought forward to place burdens on God's children. No ritual observances and ascetic practices, no painful mortification of the flesh, can be demanded. The old Law is dead. Paul says this in colorful language and bold figurative speech (2:14): "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross." The false teachers in Colossae wanted to make the Colossian Christians believe that there was need of observance of Jewish rites and ceremonies, of attention to dietary laws and the careful observance of the Sabbath days and festival days. Paul presents the glorious Christ as the great Liberator from the ancient Law and its multifarious and burdening demands. Those things, Paul says, were but shadows (2:16, 17). Now the reality has come in Christ Himself, and the old laws are abrogated and no longer valid. The Colossian Christians in faith and love and hope can enjoy with all other Christians the glorious liberty of the children of God. Paul emphasizes this great truth when he says that the handwriting of the ordinances, that is to say, the precepts of the ancient Law, which accuse the children of God and multiply the record of irremovable

guilt, have been blotted out, wiped away, so that they no longer exist. Then, suddenly shifting the figure with extreme boldness, he says that all these ordinances were nailed to the cross when Christ was nailed to the cross. He perfectly and fully fulfilled the divine Law in the stead of all men, also the ancient Ceremonial Law, and He took it with Him to the cross, together with the masses of guilt that had accumulated under the Law, and in dying on the cross and thus putting to an end the old covenant and creating in Himself the final and perfect and validating sacrifice, He also did away with the heavy claims and demands of the Law.

The opponents of Paul appear to have laid great emphasis on "knowledge," for which the Greek word *gnosis* was current. In the later developments of this attitude, which is called Gnosticism, this emphasis was very strong in that a distinction was made between the select few who seemed to have a higher gift for knowledge and many others who could not aspire to such knowledge and would have to be satisfied with a blind faith. Paul has a great deal to say in this letter about knowledge, and over against the false knowledge and wisdom of his opponents he sets the true wisdom and true knowledge. It is another blessed result of the redemption in Christ Jesus that those who are risen with Christ have access to unlimited treasures of wisdom and knowledge. They learn to understand in ever greater measure the gracious will of God, whose aim is to bring salvation to all mankind. As they contemplate this great purpose, they are enabled to look ever more deeply into the loving heart of God and to have their own hearts warmed by His love and stirred to ever greater love of all the brethren. As they learn to understand the forgiveness which is in Christ Jesus, they also learn with ever greater willingness to forgive one another. As the new life grows within them and continually brings fruit in many ways, they grow in the ability to exercise true Christian wisdom and understanding in their dealings with their fellow men. They learn to know Christ ever better in all His glory as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, and they are able to penetrate ever more deeply into the greater treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hidden in Christ and that are revealed to His children. As they remain faithful to Him and conscientiously abide in His Word, they experience for themselves the realization of Christ's

great promises that they shall know the truth, and that the truth shall make them free. In Christ lie hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge, so Paul says (2:3), and no lifetime is long enough for the acquisition and the development and the conversion into Christian action of the wealth of these great treasures. Paul assured his readers that for intellectual depth and riches there is no match for the treasures that are hid in Christ, and there is no need of the philosophy which the heretics wished to spread. The knowledge and the wisdom that are hidden in Christ far surpass all human reason and knowledge, and it is only in the light of this divine knowledge that all the multiplicity of human knowledge and wisdom will be rightly understood and seen in its proper relation and given its right application to the glory of God and the service of one's fellow men. And since there was such emphasis on knowledge among the Colossians, we will understand and appreciate Paul's prayer for them in the first chapter when he prays for their growth in knowledge and understanding in these words: "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing [so as to please Him in all things], being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." (1:9, 10)

### III. CHRIST THE SOURCE AND STRENGTH OF THE NEW LIFE

Paul told the Colossians that they were at one time alienated from God and dead in trespasses and sins. It is God's own reconciliation through the blood of the Son of His love that has rescued them from the kingdom of darkness and has translated them into the kingdom of the Son of His love (1:13). The reconciliation which was meant for all men comes into the possession of the individual only as he grasps this gift in faith. This happens when Christ grants the new life through His Word and through Holy Baptism. It is Christ who gives and sustains this new life.

Paul describes this new life in both general and specific terms. He calls the Colossians "saints," that is, men set aside from an evil and wicked world as God's own possession, awakened to faith in

Christ, receiving forgiveness of sins in daily repentance, and living the new life in the Spirit. In this new life the Christian virtues develop. The first one which Paul mentions is faithfulness, when he addresses the Colossians as "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ" (1:2). This designation in the very beginning of the letter has special significance for his readers in Colossae, whom the false teachers were endeavoring to draw away from the Word of truth into their heresies. Paul gives his readers testimony that though these dangers are threatening, nevertheless his readers have remained faithful to their Lord and to the teaching of the Gospel as they had heard it from Paul's fellow servant and their own faithful minister, Epaphras. So Paul encourages them and tells them that great spiritual blessings await them if they will "continue in the faith grounded and settled" (1:23) and will not let themselves be moved away from the hope of the Gospel which they have heard. As they live in His Word, they will in ever greater measure be "rooted and built up in Him and stablished in the faith." (2:7)

The greatest virtue which comes to them as the Lord Jesus Christ dwells in their hearts and which develops and grows in ever greater measure, is the love of the brethren. The Colossian Christians have received in fullest measure the love of the Father, the same love which He bestows in immeasurable ways upon the Son of His love, and their lives will also be a reflection of the love which they themselves have experienced. Love is the greatest of the virtues, and it is the fountainhead of all other virtues. So Paul says: "Above all things put on charity [love], which is the bond of perfectness" (3:14). They had shown this love to the brethren everywhere (1:4), as Epaphras had reported, and this love had also been extended to their unknown friend and counselor, the apostle Paul, and it had come into their hearts through the work of God's Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. (1:8)

When Paul admonishes his readers to walk worthy of the Lord and to please Him in every way, to be fruitful in every good work (1:10), he can tell them that from Christ as the Source they will receive both guidance and strength to walk worthy of the Lord (1:11). The Colossians thought that they were lacking in proper knowledge, and so they seem to have been lending willing ears to

the false teachers who stressed knowledge and philosophy. But Paul tells them, warning them not to be led astray by the vain deceit and the persuasive blandishments of false philosophies (2:8), that in Christ they will find all treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:3), that they will be filled with the knowledge of His will and will increase in the knowledge of God (1:9, 10), and that they will be able to apply the knowledge of His will in all the varying circumstances and situations in life with spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding. So he tells them that as they have received Christ the Lord, so they also should walk in Him. (2:6)

A very important part of their new life is prayer, and so Paul admonishes them and says: "Continue in prayer and watch in the same" (4:2), and he asks that they might also pray for him that the Lord would prosper his own work (4:3). It is particularly striking how Paul in connection with his admonition to prayer stresses the Christian duty of thanksgiving (4:2). The references to thanksgiving run like a refrain through the entire epistle. In the beginning Paul himself gives thanks for the progress of the congregation (1:3). When he expresses the hope that they will be rooted and built up in Christ and established in the faith as they have been taught (2:7), he says that they should abound in this faith "with thanksgiving." Again, he tells them that they are all called in one body (3:15), that is, that they are all members of the body of Christ, and so he asks them to let the peace of God, God's peaceful intentions toward them, rule in their hearts, so that it may color all their dealings with their fellow men, and then he says: "And be ye thankful." And so also in this particular admonition to continue in prayer and to watch in the same (4:2), he reminds them again that they must do this with thanksgiving. As he holds before them their blessed hope which the Father has prepared for them in that He has made them "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (1:12), he begins this great passage, in which he speaks of the glory of the Christian state and the majesty of Christ, the Lord and Creator of all things, by saying, "giving thanks unto the Father" (1:12), who has done all this for us.

When the child of God has risen with Christ in Baptism and has come to faith, he is connected with great sources of power. Christians also suffer and are downhearted, and the problems and ills of

this world sometimes appear so great as to threaten a complete overwhelming. But Paul tells the Colossians to be patient and long-suffering with joyfulness (1:11), for they are never weak. They are always strong, under all circumstances, for they are strengthened with Christ's own might in accord with His own glorious and invincible power (1:11). They are "complete in Him which is the Head of all principality and power" (2:10). They are grounded and settled in the faith, and there is no reason why they should be moved away from the hope of the Gospel (1:23). There is nothing lacking. They are not yet perfect, to be sure; absolute completeness or fulfillment, of which the false teachers apparently had much to say, is not yet there, but in essence and in truth, even though the full realization has not yet come about, they are complete in Him, they find fulfillment, protection, and strong support in Him, the all-powerful One who is the Head of all principality and power. (2:10)

The entire process of sanctification is called by Paul the putting on of the new man. This putting on is a process, and its goal is, as Paul says (3:10), the renewal of knowledge after the image of God that created man, the image of God of complete righteousness and holiness and the perfect knowledge of God which was lost in the Fall. Off in the distance, on the Last Day, Paul sees himself presenting his Colossian Christians holy and unblamable and un-reprovable in the sight of God (1:22). The purpose of his preaching sanctification is to warn every man and to teach every man in all wisdom, that he may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus (1:28). The setting for this process in the hearts and minds of men lies in the words: "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (3:2). People who are risen with Christ in Baptism and who have entered the new life should seek "those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (3:1). In this renewal and this growth of the new nature much will be done in word and in deed, great and small, important and unimportant, but Paul says that it should all be done "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (3:17). And in addition, he says, in his specific admonitions: "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (3:23), and he holds forth here also the prospect that lies in the Christian hope when he says: "Knowing

that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Christ." (3:24)

In Christ and in the love which He engenders in the heart Christians will find comfort in all circumstances, for they are knit together in love, in mutual helpfulness and comfort, and as they remain in Christ, they attain to ever deeper understanding of the love of God for man and are made aware of "all riches of the full assurance of understanding." (2:2)

In his description of the new life in Christ, Paul presents specific detail, both negative and positive. He warns and he gives directions. The most powerful warning which goes throughout the letter is the warning against being led astray by false teaching and false doctrine. Paul does not set forth the false doctrine in detail, and we build our picture of it as best we can by the scattered and somewhat casual and undeveloped references. But that there lies grave danger in playing with false doctrine and false teachings, of this the apostle does not leave his readers in doubt, and he meets the threat not so much with a detailed explication of the false teaching as rather with a powerful and illuminating presentation of right teaching and right doctrine, which cannot but seize upon the minds and imaginations, the reason and the judgment of his readers, with great convincing force, so that after his positive affirmation of Christian truth there is nothing left of the arguments of his opponents that could be taken seriously.

It is interesting to note that also in his warnings against false teachers, brief as they are, Paul brings these warnings directly into relation with Christ. He says: "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" (2:8); and again: "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshiping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind and not holding the Head" (2:18, 19), the Head, of course, being Christ. In the same way he brings back to Christ his warnings against being misled into observing ritual and ascetic practices when he says: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink or in respect of a holy day or of the new moon or of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ"

(2:16, 17); and again, in the final warning: "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances: touch not, taste not, handle not?" (2:20, 21). All these things are harmful and dangerous. There is complete satisfaction and absolute fullness in Christ; Christ is All in all. (1:11)

These are positive warnings with definite mention of ways of conduct which are out of accord with the Christian life, but when Paul issues the warning, he takes the motivation from the fact that his readers are risen with Christ and should "seek those things which are above" (3:1). They are dead unto the things of this world, their power in their lives is broken, and even though the evil influences persist, yet the victory over them is not only possible but certain. And so Paul urges his readers to promote this process of the dying of the old man. He says: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry, for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience. . . . But now ye also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth" (3:5, 6-8). The old man with his deeds has been put off, and his power is broken, and the new man is being renewed in knowledge after the image of God. (3:10)

Again, the positive injunctions are presented to offset the negative warnings, and they also are rooted in the faith in Christ and in the new man. So Paul tells them that they "as the elect of God, holy and beloved," should put on "bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another if any man have a quarrel against any" (3:12, 13). Then again there follows the strong motivation drawn from the work and the attitude of the Savior: "Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (3:13); and then the total admonitions are summed up in an all-embracing admonition to love and to thankfulness: "And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness . . . and be ye thankful." (3:14, 15)

Early in the letter Paul had stressed the fact that faith had come to the Colossians through the "Word of the truth of the Gospel" (1:5). This Word had brought fruit in them, since they daily heard it and learned to know and accept the grace of God which

came to them in the Word of truth (1:6). And so it is inevitable that somewhere in the letter Paul would admonish his readers, not negatively to avoid pondering the teachings of the heretics, but in urging them to give rich and full attention to the words of the Gospel which he here particularly also calls the Word of Christ. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly" (3:16), he says. This Word of Christ is the source of all true wisdom, complete and perfect and without further need of supplement. It is easy for us to make the application to our life and to the work of the church in our day by simply identifying the Word of Christ with the Scriptures, and such an identification is sound and legitimate. In our Scriptures we have a record of our Savior, of His life and His work, and in the writings of the apostles we have not only records but also the interpretation of the meaning of these words and events. In all this the promise of Christ is fulfilled, who told His disciples just before His suffering and death that the Father would send the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, in the Savior's name, and that He would teach them all things and bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever the Savior had said unto them (John 14:26), the Spirit of Truth, who would guide them into all truth (John 16:13). And with this record there is the record of the Old Testament of which Jesus Himself had said: "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me." (John 5:39)

But how was it with the Colossians? What word of Christ did they have, Gentiles as they were and not direct possessors of the oracles of God in the Old Testament, as was the case with the Jews? They had the preaching of Paul and his associates, men like Epaphras and Tychicus and others. These had preached the basic Gospel, how Christ died for the sins of the world according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Let us add to this the words of Paul in Rom. 10:8, 9: "The Word of faith which we preach, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." This appears to have been the solid core and backbone of the preaching of Paul, as we also see from Paul's remark in the Letter to the Galatians (3:1), in which he says that

Jesus Christ had been "evidently set forth" crucified among them, that is to say, portrayed like a picture before their eyes. Paul had drawn for them a picture in words of Christ on the cross. When Paul admonishes the Colossians to let this Word of Christ dwell in them richly, the Word which was at their disposal cannot have been too meager. And so they are urged to let this Word "dwell in you richly" (3:16), to take it into themselves, to learn it, to ponder it, to meditate on it, to saturate their very being with it. Here lies not only the antidote, sure and unfailing, against the false teachers, but even more so the sure and reliable means for their own spiritual growth and for the fostering of one another's faith within the congregation.

Paul indicates in the next words how this is to be done. He says that the Colossians are to teach one another "in all wisdom" (3:16), that is to say, with understanding and with insight and with the pedagogical skill for which the situation called. The Word of Christ is to build them up within, to strengthen the inner man, the new man who is on the way to be renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created him. Then they are also to warn one another, again in all wisdom, with skill and with tact and with fine insight into what we now are accustomed to call human relations. We think in this connection of Paul's admonition to Timothy, where he speaks of the Word of Christ as "all Scripture" and tells Timothy that all Scripture is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." (2 Tim. 3:16)

After reading this admonition we are surprised to see that Paul introduces poetry and music and ties them closely to the teaching and the warning that is connected with the Word of Christ. The teaching and the warning are to be done also by means of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. These words give us a brief glimpse also into the life of the early church, in which poetry and music had an important part in building up the spiritual life and strength of a congregation. The teaching and the warning are to be accompanied by and joined with the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and the song need not be a loud and articulate effort. It can be a song in the heart, and it should be a song of joy in the heart, even as today, when some particularly fortunate incident occurs in the life of a person, we say: "He went away with

a song in his heart." But again, Paul makes the connection with Christ, the Source of all spiritual blessings, when he says that the psalms and the hymns and the spiritual songs and the song in the heart shall be concerned with that grace of which Christ is the Cause, and which is the everlasting foundation of man's reconciliation with God, the peace which God has made through Christ.

Paul lets his readers know that the life in Christ has very definite and particular applications within the social order in which human beings live, especially the family, and always connecting up with Christ as the Guide and the Source of strength for Christian living, he gives brief directions on family life to his readers. He lays the foundation by saying: "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him" (3:17), and then he becomes specific and elaborates the particulars: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands," and the motivation is in the words "as it is fit in the Lord" (3:18). This, too, is part of the new life to which Christians have been raised in Baptism and for which the Lord Jesus Christ Himself gives strength. To the husbands he says: "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them" (3:19). Then he says to the children: "Children, obey your parents in all things," and he gives the motivation again with reference to Christ: "For this is well-pleasing unto the Lord" (3:20), even as in the beginning of the letter he had prayed that all their conduct might be worthy of the Lord "unto all pleasing" (1:10). Then he admonishes fathers not to provoke their children to anger lest they be discouraged (3:21). These admonitions appear in almost the same words in the Epistle to the Ephesians. They may have made a powerful impact on the minds of Paul's hearers who had formerly been Gentiles, but they would have had a familiar sound to any Christians who had come out of the Children of Israel and who had long been trained in just such family precepts and traditions. The new thing would be that the motivation has changed from obedience to the Law of God under threat of punishment to the free and loving service which the new man in the Christian's heart gives to the loving Savior.

There still remains an admonition directed to servants and masters, that is, the slaves and the slaveowners, defining their mutual relations. This section is of particular interest in this letter

because Onesimus, the runaway slave whom Paul is sending back, was from Colossae, and his owner, Philemon, was a member of the congregation. The essential matters governing the relationship of Christian slaves and Christian masters, a relationship that would have to be transfused with Christian love, come to us in Paul's beautiful and touching Letter to Philemon. Here only brief directions are given, but even the service which the slave must render is anchored in his Christian life, in the new man in him. The determining factor would be the fear to offend a kind and loving God and to do what would be displeasing to Him. And so Paul emphasizes not so much the service to a particular master as rather the service to God which is performed as the master is being served. Paul says to the servants: "Obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God. And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not unto men" (3:22, 23). This advice of Paul has come down through the ages and has moved every kind of service, high or menial, into a new dimension. We all have our daily work, and whether we work for ourselves or whether we work for someone else, we are yet men and women in Christ, and all that we do we do in His name and unto Him. This thought gives a dignity to labor, whatever kind it may be, that raises it far above labor theorizing and labor agitation, and can afford the workman, in whatever task he may be engaged, an inner satisfaction of duty well done "as to the Lord," and to please Him in bringing forth the fruits of faith.

Paul then lingers on the subject, fully aware of the miserable state to which slavery in some cases had descended. It is well known that even so enlightened a pagan as Aristotle did not hesitate to say that a machine is an inanimate slave and a slave an animate machine, thus apparently being wholly unaware or oblivious of the human values inherent in the situation. So Paul endeavors to lead the slave whose lot was a hard one to find his consolation also in the Christ who "is All in all," whose power is greater than that of all created beings, and who is the Guardian of the hope laid up in heaven. So he says: "Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance" (3:24), the inheritance which he previously had called "the inheritance of the saints in light"

(1:12), and the reason for this is: "For ye serve the Lord Christ" (3:24). Christ is the true, loving, and understanding Lord, and He will render the final judgment and distribute the final reward. Then follows a warning addressed to the wrongdoers among the slaves, which would hold good also for any wrongdoing by masters. Paul says: "But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done, and there is no respect of persons" (3:25). Then there is also a brief admonition to the masters expressed in the language of ordinary human beings who endeavor to be guided by principles of justice. Paul says: "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal" (4:1), and then he reminds them that they are also under the judgment of Christ when he says, "knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven."

#### IV. CHRIST THE HEAD OF THE BODY, THE LORD OF THE CHURCH

##### CHRIST THE HEAD OF THE BODY

The Christian religion was never meant to be represented by a collection of unrelated individuals. The Savior's own words point to the joining of all believers, and He Himself spoke of the church. It is in this communion of believers in Christ bound together to one another that the Lord's precept, taken over from the ancient Law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," finds its highest fulfillment. The idea that all believers are in one way or another connected with one another, that they are brethren and as brethren must live not each for himself, but all for one another, is developed most clearly in the writings of the apostle Paul, more specifically in the letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians.

In order to convey this idea, Paul uses what may seem to our modern feeling to be a rather strange figure of speech. He parallels the church with a human body, the body which has a head which directs it and many members which receive direction from the head and are in turn dependent upon one another for their highest state of well-being. So Paul speaks to the Colossians of the church which is a body, and tells them that their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the Head of this body, the church (1:18). The Lord of all things, who is the Image of the invisible God, in whom all divine fullness dwells, who is the First-born from the dead, who

has the pre-eminence in all things, He is the almighty Head of His body, which is the church.

The relation between this Head and the body is very close. Paul describes it in almost mystical language. In the body there are joints and bands (2:19). These need to be nourished, and the nourishment goes from one to the other. The joints and bands all minister to one another and are knit together in close helpfulness and co-operation. And this body is not static. It is full of life, and it continually increases. Paul says that it increases with the increase of God. God Himself provides for the increase. From the Head of the body, Christ, who is God, there flows the stream of strengthening nourishment into all the body, the stream that makes it to increase and grow. (Cf. 1 Cor. 12:22-25)

Paul does not always speak, even in Colossians, of the church in this particular figure of speech. Early in the letter he calls it the kingdom of His dear Son (1:13). Into this kingdom God has translated those whom He delivered from the power of darkness and whom He brought to faith in the blessings secured by the redemption of the blood of His Son, namely, the forgiveness of sins (1:12). Here in this kingdom are all those who were sometime alienated and enemies in their mind by wicked works (1:21), but whom God has now reconciled in the body of Christ's flesh through Christ's death (1:22) and who have accepted this reconciliation in faith. Here are the elect of God, holy and beloved; here are all those who are dead to this evil world and its ways and who have entered into the new life that is hid with Christ in God (3:3), the life that is lived by all Christians apart from the observation of an unbelieving world. This life is a life in God. It is in Him now in this world, in the Kingdom of Grace, and it will reach its full realization and revealing only when Christ returns for judgment. Those who are in this church, those who are the members of this body, were called into it, into one body, by God Himself, and the chief characteristic of them all is that the peace of God rules in their hearts. (3:15)

There is struggle in this church, and pain and suffering. Christ the Savior suffered on the cross, and His suffering effected a full atonement for the sins of the world, but there is yet suffering also in the church. Paul speaks as if there were sufferings left over

which others must carry and which are distributed over all Christians. In speaking of this suffering, Paul gives this thought the turn that he, for the sake of the Colossians and in their stead, is carrying an even larger portion of suffering than would ordinarily have been allotted to him. He says: "I fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church." (1:24)

Paul also emphasizes that this kingdom of the Son of God's love, this body of the church of which Christ is the Head, is universal in character. All believers without exception are in it, and all natural and human barriers that separate one person from another have no meaning, no power, no significance in this kingdom. Race and language, color and culture, all are without meaning as they appear in the members of this body. Paul says this most strikingly, and the church and the world as well have never lost their sensitiveness to the impact of these mighty and trenchant words: "There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is All and in all." (3:11)

#### THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

Origin and growth of the church, like origin and growth of the faith of the individual Christian, is through the Word. In the very beginning of the letter, where Paul gives thanks for the Christian condition of his readers, for their faith, their hope, and their love, he particularly mentions that all this came to them through the Gospel, when he says: "Whereof ye heard before in the Word of the truth of the Gospel" (1:5). The Gospel is preached, and the Gospel is absolute truth, entirely different from the speculations and intellectual vagaries of his heretical opponents. This Gospel has power. It creates and sustains "saints and faithful brethren in Christ" (1:2), it produces and sustains faith and love, and it keeps alive hope, hope which is directed to the thing hoped for, the hope laid up for all saints in heaven (1:5). So Paul sets down this absolute fact, that the Christian condition of his readers is not the result of human speculation or of the observance of ascetic practices and rituals. It is the result of the preaching of the Gospel, in which the Holy Spirit is active and effective.

The events of Pentecost made it clear to the early church that the Gospel is a universal Gospel, to be preached to all mankind, to all

people in all parts of the world. Here was a striking confirmation of the Savior's command, in which He told His disciples to go out into all the world and to preach the Gospel to every creature, to make disciples everywhere, and to baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15). Of all the apostles, Paul, as far as our record goes, evidences the clearest insight into this great purpose, and he devoted his life, all his strength and ability, to the realization of this goal. And in doing this Paul never appears as a skeptical pessimist. In spite of personal difficulties and setbacks and disappointments and grievous and horrible physical suffering coming from a diseased body and from bitter and violent enemies, yet in his eyes the church is always growing, the work of the Gospel is always successful, the victory is unending and certain. And he does not hesitate to speak in large terms when he makes reference to the growth of the church. He says amazing words which interpreters have tried to soften down, apologizing for them as though he were speaking in extreme language and exaggeration, and in a zeal that was perhaps too excessive. He appears to be using such sweeping language also here in writing to the Colossians, when he says that the Gospel has come to them as it has gone into all the world (1:6), and he furthermore says that the Gospel "was preached to every creature which is under heaven" (1:23). But isn't Paul just recording what was bound to happen in God's divine plan? Didn't Jesus tell His disciples to go out into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, and did He not foreshadow the marvelous growth and the transforming influence of the church in His parables of the mustard seed and the leaven (Matt. 13:31 ff.), etc.? Paul here also again stresses the universality of this Gospel, which is meant for all men. This could not but have been a salutary statement also for the Colossians, tucked away in a mountainous region in Asia Minor and probably out of touch with the march of the Gospel in the world, and perhaps even unaware of the existence of the worldwide preaching of the Gospel and of many of the sister congregations in the Mediterranean world. These Colossians who appeared to be preoccupied with their own small local interests and problems, and who were in danger of becoming a prey to the insistence of false teachers,

needed to have their sights lifted and to realize that they were a part of the worldwide march of the kingdom of Christ, the unending growth of Christ's body in all the world.

But there is not only the outward growth which the Savior foretold in the parable of the mustard seed. There is also the inward growth, which is foretold in the parable of the leaven (Matt. 13:33), etc. Paul says that even as the Gospel is bringing fruit in Colossae in the faith and love and the hope of the Colossian Christians, so it is bringing forth fruit in all the world (1:6). The marvelous thing is that as soon as the Gospel strikes root and creates faith, this blessed process is brought under way. So Paul tells the Colossians that it has happened with them since the day they heard it (1:6), that marvelous hearing that comes only in connection with the Gospel, in that it is not just becoming aware of the content of a message of blessed fact, but that something happens in the human heart through the activity of God's Holy Spirit when this Gospel is preached. The Colossians heard it, and they knew. They knew that the content of this message came from God, and that through it and by accepting it they were reconciled with God. Paul says: "Ye knew the grace of God in truth" (1:6), and thus describes in brief words the transformation that went on in the Colossians and that takes place when in conversion faith is bestowed upon the human heart, conviction is created and strengthened and made firm, and the new man increases and grows strong.

The church grows in numbers through the preaching of the Gospel, and it gains and maintains its inner strength through the preaching of the Gospel. Paul begs the Colossians not to be moved away from the hope of the Gospel which they had heard. To neglect the Gospel means to lose faith, and to continue in the Gospel means to continue in a faith which, as Paul says, is "grounded and settled" (1:23). Paul emphasizes that he is a minister, a servant of this Gospel (1:23), and his whole life is given to its proclamation, but there were many others, and not least of all the lay people themselves, who (in this colorful and exciting world of the first century, which incidentally seems to have been very alert religiously and open to new religious teaching) by word of mouth spread this glorious Gospel, so that it traveled from person to person in an unending and ever-expanding chain.

Paul joyously tells the Colossians that the mystery regarding Jews and Gentiles has been solved. Here was a mystery, and it was "hid from ages and from generations" (1:26). Men might ask questions but did not know the answer, and the Jews of the dispersion might undertake, in a somewhat uncertain and halfhearted way, a campaign to proselyte among the heathen and to bring them into the Jewish faith. Even so, the consciousness of the wall remained. But now all this is dead. Here is Christ, "Christ in you," in the Colossians, and Christ in the hearts of all Christians, Christ held out to all men, Christ in His most appealing aspect as the basis of hope, not just a weak and temporary hope for the alleviation of the ills of this life, but Christ as the Hope of all men, Christ who would lead those who believe on Him into everlasting glory. This has now been made manifest to the saints of God everywhere, Jew and Gentile alike. God through the prophetic office of His beloved Son and through the preachers of the Gospel who carry on His prophetic office has lifted the curtain from the mystery. All human beings are acceptable unto God and invited to share in His reconciliation, and God wants this to be made known to men everywhere. This revelation and manifestation of God is glorious, and it is rich. It makes God appear glorious in His marvelous love and grace, and in this love and grace lie all the riches of the salvation that is in Christ. And so the solution of this mystery also strengthens and reinforces and fills in the marvelous picture of the universality of the Gospel, which Paul repeatedly brings to the attention of his Colossian readers. In this growing church the Word of Christ dwells richly, as Christians in all wisdom teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (3:16). Here songs rise to the Lord in celebration and praise, echoing the song that is in the heart. In this church innumerable prayers are sent to the throne of God, and these prayers have great significance also in the growth of the church. It was Paul's duty to speak the mystery of Christ (2:2), the mystery of God's love and grace, the mystery of which Paul said (1 Cor. 2:9): "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." And even as Paul spoke this mystery, so thousands of servants of Christ have told of this mystery after him. That his preaching has been effectual is largely

due also to the fact that Christians everywhere have prayed that the Lord's kingdom might come. Even so Paul asked the Colossians not only that the Lord would bless his preaching, but, more than that, as a man would do who has a worldwide vision and who wants the Word preached in all parts of the world, Paul asked them to pray that God would open up to him a door of utterance, that is to say, a continual opening of door after door. (4:3)

The growth of the church is affected by the impression which the life and conduct of Christians make on those who are outside the church, those who "are without" (4:5). These persons who "are without," as Paul says, are in his eyes prospects for the Lord's kingdom, and his readers should see them in this light. Therefore it is important to make a good impression, to foster good will, to win favor and approbation. So Paul tells the Colossians to "walk in wisdom," that is to say, with judgment and with tactfulness, over against those that are not yet in the Christian fold (4:5). He makes this matter important, something that cannot be left just to drift along. He speaks of "redeeming the time" (4:5), of not letting time slip away without a record of accomplishment. There is here no doubt an echo of the Savior's words, who said that He must "work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work" (John 9:4). But it is not enough that Christians assume the role of performers merely, whose conduct will be under observation and win either approval or rejection. Christians are not to isolate themselves in this way. They live in the midst of the world, in constant contact with men of every kind and of every station, and they must associate with them and speak and converse with them. So Paul gives gentle and pleasant advice. Probably echoing some proverbial saying, he tells the Colossians that their speech "should always be with grace, seasoned with salt" (4:6). When Paul here speaks of grace, he probably means graciousness, that is to say, conversation that has a winsome and ingratiating quality. The other phrase, "seasoned with salt," brings to mind the two chief uses of salt, the first of which is to give spice and savor to food and to remove its flatness of taste, and the other, which makes salt preservative, a guard against decay and rotteness. It would seem that Paul here has the first of these meanings in mind, of gracious and welcome speech,

pleasant to listen to and inspiring in its effect. Here Paul is not speaking to ministers of the Gospel; he is speaking to the rank and file, the lay people in the congregation, on whom he depended to speak of the mystery which is Christ, and to bring the message of the Gospel to people with whom they would be in constant and daily contact. There is no trace here in Paul of truculence or of an inclination to reject instinctively all those who are not Christians. On the contrary, he expects that contact shall be made and that these contacts shall be pleasant and that the word that is spoken shall be winsome, as he says, "that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (4:6). Here Paul himself is the great example, who aimed to be all things to all men and was most skillful and possessed to a high degree the wisdom of which he speaks here, of gaining access to those who are without, and using all possible means of persuasion to make them sympathetic to the message of the Gospel. Paul indeed knew how one ought to answer every man according to his need and his individual nature.

The church lives by the Word. For Paul that included also the Word of God as he transmitted it in his epistles. So he recommends that when the Colossians have read this letter, it should be sent on to the congregation in Laodicea, and it should be read there, and the Colossians in turn are encouraged to read the letter that was to come to them from Laodicea, presumably a letter which Paul himself had written to the congregation in Laodicea.

#### THE LABORS OF PAUL

The Paul of this letter is the same Paul whom we meet in the other letters, the Paul who says: "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). This is the Paul who, confronted with the possibility of death by execution and martyrdom, wrote to the Philippians: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (1:21). Paul is God's chosen instrument to bring the Gospel to the heathen world. This he emphasizes with particular force in the beginning of this letter, which is addressed to a congregation that had not seen him face to face (2:1): "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God" (1:1). It is unusual for Paul to emphasize his apostleship as strongly as here. He does it because, in the face of the false teaching which is

threatening the congregation, he must emphasize his authority as an apostle of God who speaks with a God-approved finality. As we read through the letter, we receive indications of all the various aspects of the work of Paul.

First of all, he emphasizes that he is a minister of the Gospel (1:23). He is not the only minister of this Gospel. This Gospel has spread far and wide. Paul says that it was preached to every creature which is under heaven (1:23), and it is of this universal Gospel that he has been made a minister. On another occasion (1:25) he says that he has been made a minister of the church according to a stewardship in which God has placed him, and in this stewardship it is his particular duty "to fulfill the Word of God" (1:25), that is, to preach it in all its richness and fullness. And so Paul says that he preaches, warning and teaching, with the goal of presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus (1:28), and this warning and teaching is done "in all wisdom," with consummate skill and with great adaptability to all kinds of men in all kinds of circumstances.

But Paul does not only preach. His congregations are always on his mind, and so he is always praying for them. To the Colossians he says that since he heard about the believing reception which the Gospel had found in Colossae, "for this cause we also do not cease to pray for you" (1:9). It is especially noteworthy that Paul's prayer is first of all a prayer of thanksgiving. Paul thanks God for the faith and love and hope of the Colossians, of which Epaphras had made such a glowing report. But even if reports had not been so glowing, even if the impact of false doctrine had been much stronger, as it had been in the Galatian congregations, yet Paul would have found cause for heartfelt thanks. He is a man of generous heart and of keen insight, quick to detect even the least indication of the work of God's Holy Spirit in the hearts of men, and we find him gratefully recognizing and giving thanks to God for every indication of spiritual life in others, particularly in his congregations.

Paul was a tireless worker. If he had not been a man of tremendous vision and great planning and organizing ability and at the same time a man who spared efforts neither of mind nor of body to carry out his plan, there would have been a different

outcome and a less glorious story to tell. We think of his quick departure for Philippi after the vision of the man of Macedonia. Luke says: "After he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the Gospel unto them" (Acts 16:10). We also think of his tremendous energy and reassuring self-possession in the dangerous and in part disastrous journey to Rome, and this story could be carried on with much inspiring detail. Here Paul makes only brief reference to the hard labor in his apostleship, when he says: "Whereunto [that is, unto the preaching of the Gospel] I also labor, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily." (1:29)

Paul then mentions another aspect of his apostleship. He suffers for his congregations and his fellow believers. He has "great conflict" for them, he says (2:1), for the Christians in Colossae and for those in Laodicea, and for any other Christians with whom he is not personally acquainted, "as many as have not seen my face in the flesh" (2:1). This might refer to his physical suffering and martyrdom, and we must always be aware that he writes this letter as a prisoner, deprived of the freedom of movement which he would find so necessary and essential for the free exercise of his apostleship. But in this particular passage we are probably more likely to find a reference to inner conflict, to worry and concern lest the false teachings current in Colossae should overwhelm the young Christians there. This would explain also the mention of the Christians in Laodicea and the other unknown Christians. Paul's life appears from the record as a life of unbelievable agony of mind and heart and spirit. We recall the list of his physical sufferings, as he records them in 2 Corinthians 11. At the end of the long list he says: "In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness, beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." (Vv. 27, 28)

The care of Paul for his congregations appears also when he reassures his readers by telling them that he is always with them in spirit (2:5), that they are always in his thoughts, and that the thoughts which he thinks about them are not thoughts of disapproval and censure, though there may have been cause for it,

nor are they only thoughts of worry and care and deep anxiety. They are always thoughts of kindness and of approbation. Paul tells the Colossians that as he is always with them in spirit, he is full of joy as he beholds their order and the steadfastness of their faith in Christ. (2:5)

While Paul is prisoner, his congregations remain on his mind and are mentioned in his prayers, and he asks also them that they might continue to pray for him, not so much that the sufferings of his imprisonment might be lifted, but that he might have greater freedom to speak the "mystery of Christ," the Gospel of Christ's salvation, for which he is in bonds as a prisoner. He needs doors of utterance that he might make his Gospel manifest as he ought to speak (4:3, 4). That is his chief concern in his imprisonment, and out of this concern he asks his congregations to pray for him that God would open to him a door of utterance.

#### THE FELLOW WORKERS OF PAUL

It is a special characteristic of the Letter to the Colossians that Paul mentions so many fellow Christians and fellow workers. He does this only in one other letter, in the letter to the Romans, in the last chapter. In the Colossian letter nine names are mentioned, and seven of these are persons with whom Paul is in contact in his place of imprisonment. Of them Paul says: "These only [here in the imprisonment] are my fellow workers unto the kingdom of God" (4:11). It is not a matter of personal friendship, although the bonds between Paul and some of these men appear to have been very strong; it is a matter of working together for the growth of what Paul now calls the "kingdom of God," and which he previously had called the kingdom of the Son of God's love and, more particularly also, the body of Christ. Paul says that they are his fellow workers unto the kingdom of God, and then he adds a very significant statement: "They have been a comfort unto me" (4:11). These words have also had their echo down the ages. Servants of Christ, ministers of the Gospel, joined together in the great common task of spreading the Word of God, find comfort in their associations with one another, and so we today also endeavor to open the channels of such comfort and to keep them open by frequent conferences, at which the servants of God in the building of His church may receive encouragement and strength and com-

fort, even as Paul received it and prized it so very highly, he who of all men and of all ministers of Christ would have had the greatest possibility of self-sufficiency in the great power which Christ the Savior continually furnished him, a self-sufficiency of which he was extremely proud in all matters concerning this life. Riches and poverty, abundance and meager resources, he can bear them all, he has been initiated into them all, and he tells the Philippians that he can do all things through Christ, who strengthens him (4:13). But here, in his great spiritual enterprise, in the spreading of the kingdom of God, he is grateful for the comfort which he receives from his fellow workers and fellow Christians.

Paul mentions some of these men by name with special commendation, and in the case of others there is the mere mention of the name. This list of names gives us a small glimpse into the circle of the men who were around the apostle Paul. Timothy, who was with Paul throughout his imprisonment and who received a glowing commendation in the Letter to the Philippians, is just mentioned in the heading of the letter, where Paul says, "Timothy, our brother" (1:1). Epaphras, the minister of the congregation, who had brought the report on the congregation to Paul, is mentioned twice, with warmest commendation. Some commentators have suspected that his position was not very strong in the congregation, that the difficulties which the congregation was encountering were too much for him, and that Paul spoke of him in such warm terms of commendation in order to strengthen his position in the congregation. Paul calls him his dear fellow slave or fellow servant; he says that he is for the Colossians a faithful minister of Christ, wholly devoted to the Lord's service and faithful to his obligations in all details. Paul then acknowledges that Epaphras has brought the report to him (1:8). There was both light and shadow in the report, but Paul acknowledges only one thing directly, namely, that Epaphras has declared to Paul the love of the Colossians in the Spirit, love both to the apostle Paul and to all the brethren. In the conclusion of the letter, Epaphras is mentioned again. Paul specifically says that he is one of them, that is, of the Colossians. If there is any rift developing, Paul does not acknowledge it. Epaphras and the Colossians belong together in the eyes of Paul. Then he gives him the high designation of which Paul is proud when it is applied to himself, and which he uses of

himself in the salutation of various letters, namely, "a servant of Christ," that is to say, one whose will and whose actions are wholly dedicated to and under the control of the will of his Master, namely, Christ.

Paul transmits the greeting of Epaphras and impresses on the readers that Epaphras is totally devoted to their spiritual welfare. He labors for the Colossians and he prays for them, and both labor and prayer are marked by fervency. The Colossians are reassured that their minister Epaphras is wholly devoted to his ministry, namely, to bring all the members of the congregation to the condition in which they will stand "perfect and complete in all the will of God" (4:12), and then Paul bears him special record that he has great zeal for them, as well as for the congregations in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Among the others Tychicus is mentioned first. He will carry the letter back and will declare, as Paul says, "all my state" unto them, and he calls Tychicus "a beloved brother and a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord," whom Paul has sent to see how they were getting along and to bring comfort to their hearts. Onesimus, the runaway slave, in whose behalf Paul at the same time is writing a letter to his owner Philemon, is also mentioned. Paul says that the two together, Tychicus and Onesimus, the latter now "a faithful and beloved brother" and "one of you," will make known to the Colossians all the things which are happening in the place where Paul is a prisoner. Then there is a greeting from Aristarchus, who is also a prisoner, from Marcus, who is a nephew of Barnabas, who apparently has been reconciled with Paul and is specially recommended by him to the Colossians, and Jesus, called Justus. These latter three, Paul says, are of Jewish origin, and they have been his fellow workers and have been a comfort to Paul. There is also mention of Nymphas in Laodicea, to whom Paul sends greetings, together with the Laodicean congregation, "which is in his house" (4:15). There are greetings also from Luke, "the beloved physician," and from Demas, and a brief note to Archippus, who is the minister of a congregation not known to us, and to whom Paul says: "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received from the Lord, that thou fulfill it." (4:17)

With a prayer to all his readers to "remember my bonds" (4:18), Paul closes the letter. He has mentioned by name a group of fellow

workers who, like him, are devoting their lives to the glory of Christ, their Savior, whom they also worship and adore as the everlasting Son of the Father, as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and the Redeemer of the world, as the Source and Strength of the new life, and as the Head of the body, the church, which grows and is sustained by the preaching of the Word of God by Paul and all his faithful fellow servants of Christ.

#### CONCLUSION

We have in these sessions made a study of a section of the Word of Christ, and we have attempted to set forth what could only be a small part of the riches of the Word of Christ that is contained in this short letter. If we ask ourselves how we might be led to a deeper appreciation of our exalted Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whom Paul glorifies so magnificently in this letter and whom he presents as our Creator and Redeemer, our unfailing Source of Strength, and as the Head of the body with whom we are closely united in our common and mutual membership, we must follow the admonition of the apostle, which has also been the motto of our convention this year, namely, to "let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly" (3:16). Here we are led to a greater knowledge of God, as Paul says; here we may look ever more deeply into the great love which He has bestowed and continues to bestow on all of us; here we develop the wisdom and understanding that leads us to an ever more fruitful insight into the will of God and that helps us to make the right Christian decisions in all situations and circumstances of life. And so, as we come to the end of this study of God's Word, let us do so with the prayer which Paul prayed for the Colossians and ask our heavenly Father to fill us, through His holy Word, with a knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that we might walk worthy of the Lord to please Him in every way, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, unto all patience and suffering with joyfulness, giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light (1:9-12). May God, our heavenly Father, in His abundant grace grant this to all of us. Amen.