

Colossians - A Commentary

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My Father's House

Prelude - Jesus Finds The Church Upon Peter

In fulfillment of the covenants to Israel, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, founded a universal or Catholic covenant upon Peter. God always chose a single father figure to be the head of the covenant. He had done so with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Ezra, and David. When, at Caesarea Philippi, He said to Peter, "You are Peter (Rock) and upon this rock I will build my church" (Mt. 16:18), He was carrying out the God-ordained plan of establishing a covenanted people. Because God is one, He wanted His people to be one. Because God is holy, He would give to His people, His Church, all the means of holiness. Because God loves everyone, His people would be from every nation, that is, they would be Catholic or universal. And because God is love diffusive of Himself, He would want His people to be apostolic.

Christ Founded The Catholic Church - A Discourse of Pope Paul John II

Today we begin a new cycle of catechetical talks dedicated to the Church, about which the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed says: "I believe in one, holy catholic and apostolic Church." This creed, like its antecedent, the Apostles' Creed, straightforwardly connects the truth about the Church with the Holy Spirit: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church." To go from the Holy Spirit to the Church has its own logic, which St. Thomas explains at the beginning of his catechesis on the Church: "As we see that in man there are one body and one soul, and yet this body has various members, so too, the Catholic Church is one body and has many members. The soul which gives life to this body is the Holy Spirit. For this reason, after expressing our faith in the Holy Spirit, we are commanded to believe in the holy catholic Church" (cf. *In Symbolum Apostolorum Expositio*, art 9, *Edit. Taur.*, n. 971).

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed speaks of the Church as "one, holy, catholic and apostolic." These are the so-called "marks" of the Church, which require a certain introductory explanation, even though we will speak about their significance again in later catecheses.

Let us listen to what the last two councils said about this subject.

The First Vatican Council declared the unity of the Church in rather descriptive terms: "The eternal shepherd...decided to establish his holy Church in which the faithful would be united, as in the house of the living God, by bonds of the same faith and charity" (cf. DS 3050).

The Second Vatican Council, in turn, states: "Christ, the one Mediator, established and continually sustains here on earth his holy church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as an entity with visible delineation." It also says, "The earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things...form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and human element.... This is the one Church of Christ which in the creed is professed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic" (LG 8). The Council teaches us that this Church "...is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (LG 1).

Clearly, the unity of the Church which we profess in the creed is proper to the universal Church, and the particular (or local) churches are such insofar as they share in this unity. Unity was recognized and preached as a property of the Church from the beginning, that is, from the time of Pentecost. It is a primordial and co-essential reality for the Church, and not merely an ideal which we hope to reach at some unknown point in the future. This hope and search can be valid regarding the historical realization of reuniting believers in Christ, but one cannot nullify the truth enunciated in the Letter to the Ephesians: "...one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call (Eph 4:3-4). This is the truth of the Church's beginnings, which we profess in the creed: "I believe in *one*...Church."

From the beginning, however, the Church's history unfolded in the midst of tensions and pressures which compromised unity, even to the point of eliciting appeals and reproofs from the apostles, especially Paul. He exclaimed: "Is Christ divided?" (1 Cor 1:13). It was and is the sign of the human inclination to oppose one another. It is as if one had to -- or wanted to -- do one's own part in scattering people, was effectively depicted in the biblical account of Babel.

But the Fathers and pastors of the Church always appealed to unity, to the light of Pentecost which was contrasted with Babel. Vatican II observes; "It is the Holy Spirit, dwelling in those who believe and pervading and ruling over the Church as a whole, who brings about that wonderful communion of the faithful. He brings them into intimate union with Christ, so that he is the principle of the Church's unity" (OUR 2). It must be a source of joy, hope and prayer for the Church to recognize, especially today, that the honest efforts which aim at overcoming all divisions and reuniting Christians come from the Holy Spirit (ecumenism).

The profession of faith contained in the creed also says that the Church is holy. It must be clarified immediately that the Church is such in virtue of her origin and divine institution. The Christ who instituted her is holy and merited for her by the sacrifice of the cross the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is the inexhaustible source of the Church's holiness, as he is the principle and foundation of her unity. The Church is holy because of her purpose, which is the glory of God and the salvation of men; she is holy because of the means used to obtain this purpose, which contain in themselves the holiness of Christ and the Holy Spirit. These means are the teachings of Christ, summed up in the revelation of God's love for us and in the dual commandment of love; the seven sacraments and the entire liturgy, especially the Eucharist; the life of prayer. It is all a divine plan of life, in which the Holy Spirit works through the grace infused and nourished in believers and enriched with manifold charisms for the good of the entire Church.

This, too, is a fundamental truth, professed in the creed and already stated in Ephesians, where the reason for this holiness is explained: "Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her" (Eph 5:25-26). He had made her holy by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as Vatican II says: "The Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the Church" (LG 4). This is the ontological basis for our faith in the Church's holiness. The numerous ways in which this holiness is manifested in the lives of Christians and in the course of the religious and social facts of history are a continual confirmation of the truth contained in the creed. History is an empirical way to discover that truth, an *in* some way to ascertain a presence in which we believe. Indeed, we can observe that many members of the Church are saints. Many at least possess that ordinary holiness which comes from the state of sanctifying grace in which they live. But there is an increasing number of people who show signs of heroic sanctity. The Church is very happy to be able to recognize and extol this sanctity of so many servants of God who remained faithful until death. It is like a sociological counterbalance to the presence of unfortunate sinners and an invitation to them -- and to all of us -- to start out on the path of the saints.

But it is nevertheless true that holiness belongs to the Church through her divine institution and by the continual outpouring of gifts which the Holy Spirit accomplishes in the faithful and in the whole "body of Christ" since Pentecost. This does not exclude the fact, according to the Council, that each one must achieve this holiness by following Christ (cf. *LG* 40).

Catholicity is another mark of the Church we profess our faith in. The Church is "catholic" by divine institution, that is, "universal" (the Greek *kath'holon* means "regarding the whole"). The term was used for the first time by St. Ignatius of Antioch when he wrote to the faithful of Smyrna: "Where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church" (*Ad Smyrn.*, 8). The entire Tradition of the Fathers and doctors of the Church continues to repeat that definition, which derives from the Gospel, all the way to Vatican II, which teaches; "This characteristic of universality which adorns the people of God is a gift from the Lord himself. By reason of it, the Catholic Church strives constantly and with due effect to bring all humanity and all its possessions back to its source in Christ, with him as its head and united in his Spirit" (*LG* 13).

This catholicity has a great depth based on the universal power of the risen Christ (cf. Mt 28:18) and on the universal extent of the Holy Spirit's action (cf. Wis 1:7). It is communicated to the Church by divine institution. In fact, the Church was already catholic on the first day of her historical existence on Pentecost morning. Universality for her means being open to all humanity, to all human beings and to all cultures, far beyond the strict spatial, cultural and religious limits to which some of her members could be tied (those called Judaizers). Jesus conferred on the apostles that supreme mandate: "Go...and make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28:19). He said and promised: "You are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Here too, we face a constitutive element of the Church's mission, and not the simple empirical fact of the Church's spread among the peoples belonging to "every nation," and so, to everyone. Universality is another property which the Church possesses in virtue of her divine institution. It is a constitutive dimension, which she possesses from the beginning as one, holy Church. This property cannot be conceived as the result of a "summation" of all the particular churches. Because of this dimension of her divine origin, she is an object of the faith we profess in the creed.

By the same faith we also profess that the Church of Christ is apostolic, that is, built upon the apostles, from whom she received the divine truth revealed by and in Christ. The Church is apostolic because she preserved the apostolic tradition and guards it as her sacred deposit.

The authoritative guardians appointed to preserve this deposit are the successors of the apostles, assisted by the Holy Spirit. But without a doubt, all believers, in union with their legitimate pastors, and thus, the whole Church, share in the Church's apostolicity. That is, they share in her bond with the apostles and, through them, with Christ. For this reason the Church cannot be merely reduced to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The latter is, without a doubt, its institutional foundation. But all the members of the Church -- pastors and faithful -- belong to her and are called to play an active role in the one People of God, who receive from him the gift of being bound to the apostles and to Christ, in the Holy Spirit. As we read in Ephesians: "You form a building which rises on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone.... You are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place for God in the Spirit" (Eph 2:20-22). (*Pope John Paul II's General audience of July 10, 1991*)

The City

Colossae was one of three cities located about 100 miles inland from Ephesus. The other two cities were Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4:13, 16). This area was a meeting point of East and West because an important trade route passed through there. At one time, all three cities were growing

and prosperous, but gradually Colossae slipped into a second-rate position. It became what we would call a small town. Yet the church there was important enough to merit the attention of the Apostle Paul.

All kinds of philosophies mingled in this cosmopolitan area, and religious hucksters abounded. There was a large Jewish colony in Colossae, and there was also a constant influx of new ideas and doctrines from the East. It was fertile ground for religious speculations and heresies!

The Church

Colossae probably would never have been mentioned in the New Testament had it not been for the church there. The city is never named in the Book of Acts because Paul did not start the Colossian church, nor did he ever visit it. Paul had *heard* of their faith (Col. 1:4, 9); but he had never seen these believers personally (Col. 2:1). Here was a church of unknown people in a small town, receiving an inspired letter from the great Apostle Paul!

How did the Colossian church begin? It was the outgrowth of Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19; 20:17-38). So effective was the witness of the church at Ephesus that "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). This would include people in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis.

When we examine the persons involved in the prison correspondence of Paul (see Eph., Phil., Col., Phile., and 2 Tim.), we can just about put the story together of how the Colossian church was founded. During Paul's ministry in Ephesus, at least two men from Colossae were brought to faith in Jesus Christ - Epaphras and Philemon (see Phile. 19). Epaphras apparently was one of the key founders of the church in Colossae, for he shared the Gospel with his friends there (Col. 1:7). He also had a ministry in the cities of Hierapolis and Laodicea (Col. 4:12-13).

Philemon had a church meeting in his home (Phile. 2). It is likely that Apphia and Archippus, mentioned in this verse, were respectively the wife and son of Philemon, and that Archippus was the pastor of the church (Col. 4:17).

There is a good lesson for us here: God does not always need an apostle, or a "full-time Christian worker" to get a ministry established. Nor does he need elaborate buildings and extensive organizations. Here were two laymen who were used of God to start ministries in at least three cities. It is God's plan that the Christians in the large urban areas like Ephesus reach out into the smaller towns and share the Gospel.

The Colossian assembly was predominately Gentile in its membership. The sins that Paul named (Col. 3:5-9) were commonly associated with the Gentiles, and his statement about the mystery applied more to the Gentiles than to the Jews (Col. 1:25-29). The church was probably about five years old when Paul wrote this letter.

The People of Jesus Christ 1:1-14

Greetings Extended to Them 1:1-2

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father."

Colossae is the most insignificant city mentioned in the New Testament at which we find a church. Many cities visited by Paul were in full bloom during the birth and growth of the church. Colossae, on the other hand, was in the sunset of her history. The city was located in the Lycus River valley. Hierapolis and Laodicea, both mentioned in the New Testament, were located nearby on opposite sides of the river.

The church at Colossae was unknown by face to the apostle Paul. Paul had never been to this city, but he had heard of believers who resided there (Col 1:3-4, 2:1). The church apparently met in the home of Philemon. This conclusion is made by comparing Philemon 1-2, where we are told there was a church in his house, with Philemon 10-12, where we find that the name of his missing slave was Onesimus. We then learn from Colossians 4:8-9 that Onesimus was from Colossae, and the picture is complete.

Focusing on Paul 1:1

His Position

The word *apostle* refers to the divinely chosen men who were the spokesmen for God. The apostle of the New Testament was equivalent to the prophet of the Old Testament.

His Authority

Paul's apostolic authority was *by the will of God*, which indicates that Paul did not volunteer his services but was chosen by God for this unique office.

His Companion

Timothy is a *brother* of Paul because God is the Father of every believer, creating the family of God.

Focusing on the Church 1:2

Their Spiritual Position

The expression *in Christ* is the most descriptive phrase in the New Testament telling what a Christian is. The fundamental difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is relationship to Jesus Christ.

Four things may be said about the word *saints*. First, being a saint is the result of being *in Christ*. Take out the words *in Christ*, and the word *saints* must also be removed. Second, the word *saint* means to be set apart. Third, *saint* is the most common designation of a Christian in the New Testament. Fourth, the word *saints* refers to the spiritual position, not their spiritual condition or their conduct (cf. I Corinthians 1:2 and 3:1-3)

Their Earthly Position

This is indicated by the word *in Colossae*. The city is described under the greetings section above.

Prayer Made For Them 1:3-14 As Expressed in Thanksgiving 1:3-8

Paul's Favorite Trilogy of Words 1:3-5

"We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel..."

First, we have reference to their faith. The fact that faith is mentioned first is significant. It is the life that starts with faith in Christ on earth that ends up with hope in heaven. Faith points to their past. Second, we have reference to their love, which points to their present. That they have love for all saints shows it is possible to love another believer without knowing them personally. Third, we have reference to their hope, which lies in the future. In English, hope implies doubt; in the New Testament, hope indicates certainty. Heaven is our hope, not because it is in doubt, but because it is future. Hope is the part of our salvation that has been promised but has not been dispensed yet.

The Source of the Believer's Hope 1:6-8

"...which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, and he also informed us of your love in the spirit."

As found in the last of verse 5, the source of our hope lies in the *word of truth*, which is the *gospel*. The word *truth* looks at the dependability of the message, and the word *gospel* looks at the content of the message. Truth concerning the gospel is the subject through verse 8.

The Arrival of the Gospel 1:6A

The words *has come to you* are a reminder that the gospel was not the product of their own thought or ingenuity. The gospel is a revelation coming from God to man via the written word of God.

The Distribution of the Gospel 1:6B

The words *just as* show that the gospel is not the product of human thought anywhere in the world. The word *world* is a hyperbole expressing the rapid spread of the message that was taking place.

The Power of the Gospel 1:6C

Why is the figure of *fruit* appropriate? Because, unlike a hammer or a chisel, it has reproductive power. Statements concerning this power are also found in James 1:18, 1 Peter 1:23, 1 Corinthians 4:15. Presenting the gospel is not like selling a product; it is like planting a garden. The word *increasing* shows that the gospel never exhausts itself.

The Bearer of the Gospel 1:7-8

First, Epaphras was accurate in the communication of the truth, as is shown by the words *just as*. Second, that they had *learned* shows that Epaphras was a teacher. Third, Epaphras was personally committed to truth, shown by his close association with Paul. Verse 8 shows the positive attitude that Epaphras had toward those he taught.

As Expressed in Petition 1:9-14

The Root of the Petition: Knowledge of God's Will 1:9

"For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding."

Paul's prayer extends through verse 14, but verse 9 contains the only petition. Everything that follows verse 9 flows from this prayer. Knowing God's plan is the root of all right conduct. The word for *knowledge* is *epignosis*, which carries the two ideas of full knowledge and accurate knowledge. The word *filled* shows that Paul desires nothing less than the full limit. This is the extent of his petition for them; if there were other needs in Colossae, we do not know what they were. The knowledge the Paul desires for them is to have two qualities. First, it is to contain

wisdom, which refers to the ability to perform what one knows; it denotes skill of application. Second, it is to involve *understanding*, which is a synonym of wisdom and also denotes ability to apply knowledge.

The Trunk of the Petition: a Worthy Walk 1:10a

"...so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects..."

Paul speaks of a worthy walk in four places. The first is in Ephesians 4:1, where the emphasis is on a walk that is consistent with our position in Christ. The second is found in Philippians 1:27, where the stress lies on a walk that is in harmony with the doctrine that we believe. Third, in 1 Thessalonians 2:12 our walk is related to bringing honor to God Himself. Finally, Colossians 1:10 relates to our walk to the pleasure of the Lord.

The Branches of the Petition: Good Works 1:10b-14

Knowledge of God's Will Is to Reveal Itself In Our Character 1:10b

"...bearing fruit in every good work..."

This is expressed by the participle *bearing fruit* and is followed by the words *in every good work*, showing the uniqueness of this tree. Most trees bear after their kind, but this one bears all kinds of fruit.

Knowledge of God's Will Is to Reveal Itself in Our Witness 1:10c

"...and increasing in the knowledge of God..."

The word *increasing* is used for the dissemination of something; thus, the idea is that of witness. The knowledge we have of God is to be continually passed on to others everywhere.

Knowledge of God's Will Is to Reveal Itself in Our Shared Power 1:11

"...strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience."

The term *according to* is used to introduce a norm or a standard. It teaches that the power supply is not based on our need, but on God's resources. This is not to deny that God meets our needs, but it does mean that the resources are far greater than anything we could ever need.

Knowledge of God's Will Is to Reveal Itself in Our Mental Attitude 1:12-14

"...joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in our inheritance of the saints in light. For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

Thanksgiving is a response attitude. Its existence depends upon appreciation of certain facts. What these facts are is explained in verses 12 through 14.

He has qualified us for an inheritance (1:12). The word *qualified* is an aorist tense, indicating a decisive event that happens at the moment we are saved. The nature of our inheritance is described in 1 Peter 1:4 as one that knows no termination (imperishable), no imperfection (*undefiled*), no alteration (*will not fade away*), and no uncertainty (*reserved in heaven for you*).

He has delivered us from darkness (1:13a). The tense of *delivered* is once again an aorist, pointing to a definite event, not a process. This delivery is from darkness to light, showing that we need never again be dominated by error and confusion.

He has transferred us into the kingdom of His Son (13b). The word translated *transferred* is used for the literal removal of large groups of people to another land. The kingdom looks forward to the time when Christ will reign on earth, of which we are already citizens. The verb *we have* is present tense and points to the ongoing blessing of forgiveness that we enjoy.

The Person of Jesus Christ 1:15-18

Jesus Christ in Relationship to God the Father 1:15A

“And He is the image of the invisible God...”

The noun *image* means *a likeness derived from an original*. Two eggs might look alike, but the word used here would not apply to them because one is not derived from the other. A photographic copy of a document would better illustrate the word. Two basic ideas are inherent in the word. First, we have the idea of representation. Jesus is a perfect representation of deity because He is deity. Second, we have the idea of manifestation. Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. Who is God? God is Christ!

Jesus Christ in Relationship to the Creation 1:15B-17

The Relationship State 1:15b

“...the firstborn of all creation...”

The word *first* has two distinct senses, both in Greek and English. It may mean first in time; it may mean first in rank, as in, “She is the first lady of the land,” referring to the wife of the President. The word *firstborn* as applied to Christ means *first in rank*. Psalm 89:27 makes clear that the idea of sovereignty and priority is contained in the word.

The Relationship Amplified 1:16-17

“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”

Christ is the Originator of All Things

His relationship to creation is expressed in these verses by the prepositions *by*, *for*, *before*, and *in*. The opening words of verse 16 use the word *by* to show that the plans for creation were born and formulated in His mind.

Christ Is the Builder of All Things

This is expressed by the words *by Him*, which picture Christ as producing that which He conceived.

Christ Is the Owner of All Things

The preposition *for* carries this idea. It is for His pleasure and honor and glory that all things exist. Though stained by sin, the ultimate aim of all will be His glory.

Christ Is the Predecessor of All Things

This is conveyed by the preposition *before*, which shows Him to be above and before all creation.

Christ Is the Sustainer of All Things

The words *hold together* show Christ to be the cohesive power of the universe. Man would explain cohesiveness in scientific terms. The truth of the matter is that every heartbeat is a gift of His grace, sustained and maintained by Him alone.

Jesus Christ in Relationship to the Church 1:18

"He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything."

The Statement of His Position 1:18a

The concept of head and body sets forth the basic relationship of Christ to the Church. The noun *head* has a definite article with it stressing His exclusive position. He is not *a* head; He is *the* head. The metaphor conveys at least three ideas--authority, intelligence, and direction.

The Reason for His Position 1:18b

Christ Is Head Because He Is "the Beginning"

Being the eternal God, He is the beginning of all things.

Christ Is Head Because He Is "the First-born"

The reference to being *first-born from the dead* is a reference to the resurrection. The word *dead* is plural in the Greek text, showing that He is the only one who has ever broken the power of death.

The Aim of His Position 1:18c

A practical question lies behind these words. Will His new creation (the Church) respond to His headship as the physical creation does? He spoke, and the angry waves subsided; do we respond as obediently? The word *come* is a word that *means to move from one condition to another*. It refers to recognizing His Lordship in daily life.

The Work of Christ 1:19-2:3

Its Description 1:19-20

"For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven."

His Work in the Origin of Salvation 1:19

It Centers in the Pleasure of the Father 1:19a

The good pleasure of the Father is expressed with three infinitives. Two are found in verses 19 and 20, and the third is found in verse 22. They are *to dwell* and *to reconcile* in verses 19 and 20 and *to present* in verse 22. The first points to a perfect Savior, the second to a perfect work, and the third to a perfect result. Verse 19 opens with the connective *for*. It ties verse 19 to verse 18 in introducing the reason why the Son is supreme in the Church. The Son is supreme because of His work of reconciliation.

It Centers in the Perfection of the Son 1:19b

This is expressed by the term *all the fulness* that occurs here and also in 2:9 with slightly different ideas connected with it. In 1:19 the emphasis is on the fullness of His saving power; in 2:9 the emphasis is on the fullness of His divine nature.

Its Application 1:21-23

"And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach -- if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister."

Viewing Their Past 1:21

This verse shows that a sinful past filled with hostility toward God is no barrier to the possibility of reconciliation. Sin represents the need for salvation, but it is not a barrier to salvation. Christ did not withhold His saving work because men did not deserve it.

Viewing Their Present 1:22a

The expressions *through the blood* in verse 20 and *through death* in verse 22 both show the means whereby reconciliation is accomplished; they are also synonymous in the sense that they explain one another.

Why does Paul refer to Jesus' *fleshy body*? This is because the gnostics tried to deal with what they considered a basis problem. They believed evil is present in the world, and God cannot create evil. They held that matter was evil, God is good, and the two cannot touch. To solve the problem, they devised what they call aeons and emanations coming from God, with each possessing less and less divine quality until contact with evil becomes possible. Out of this error, other doctrinal errors emerged. First, the gnostics worshipped angels (Col 2:18). They did not believe that Christ was Creator (Col 1:15-17), nor did they believe Christ came in the flesh (Col 1:22, 2:9). Fourth, they perverted Christianity by turning it into asceticism (Col 2:20-23).

Viewing Their Future 1:22b-23

The words *to present* point to glorification. Since this is God's ultimate goal for the believer, it is interesting to note that Paul makes that his goal also. Paul was not satisfied merely to see men saved. Paul taught with an aim to glorification. Verse 23 shows the evidence that one has received Christ's reconciling work is continuance in the faith. The true test of genuine faith is continuity. Faith that is set aside is never genuine faith. 1 John 2:19 makes this clear. John says, "They (the deserters) went out from use, but they were not really of us (genuine believers); for if they had been of us (genuine believers), they would have remained with us; but they went out (deserted), in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us."

Its Propagation 1:24-2:3

Paul's Ministry and the Church 1:24

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the Church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions."

This verse begins with an important principle: Learning to handle personal pressures and suffering qualifies us to help other believers (2 Cor 1:3-7). In this sense, Paul's suffering is to the benefit of the Colossian church.

What does Paul mean when he speaks of "filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions"? First, we must reject any idea that there is some insufficiency in the work of Christ performed on the cross. Nothing is made clearer by Paul than the total adequacy of the cross. The word translated *afflictions* is never used in the New Testament for the atoning suffering of Christ. Second, we must reject the fanciful idea of a *treasury of merit* wherein the merits of Christ plus the suffering of the saints may be dispensed as indulgences. The sufferings of the believer are seen as a continuation of this world's quarrel with Jesus Christ (Jn 15:18-21). Persecution of the Lord's people is always viewed as persecution of Him. Paul persecuted the Church; yet when faced by Christ on the Damascus road, Jesus said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

Paul's Ministry and the Word 1:25-27

"Of this Church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

The words *fully carry out* translate a verb that means *to fulfill*. Two ideas are involved in fulfilling the word of God. First, it refers to making a complete presentation of its content. Second, it refers to the geographical spread of the message. The word *mystery* as used in the New Testament never means *mysterious* in the sense of inability to understand. It refers to the truth about the Church that was unrevealed in the Old Testament but has now been revealed, with Paul being its primary vehicle of explanation.

Paul's Ministry and the Individual 1:28-29

"And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me."

Paul's Methodology

The focus is now on the individual believer. The word *admonishing* is a compound of the word for *mind* and a verb meaning *to put or place*. The word *teaching* most frequently refers to public instruction. The word shows that the teaching was related to real-life situations. Paul showed believers how doctrine related to their lives.

Paul's Goal

Notice Paul's goal, as stated here in verse 28, is identical to God's goal for the believer, as stated in verse 22. The goal of the ministry is not merely men's salvation, but is a much more inclusive thing. See Colossian 2:1 for comment on Colossians 1:29.

Paul's Ministry and the Local Church 2:1-3

"For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

The Statement of the Struggle 2:1

The word *for* that begins the chapter ties these verses to the last words of chapter 1. It is an exposition of the noun *labor* and the word *striving* in 1:29. Paul's sense of the oneness of the body of Christ is manifested by his labor for believers he had never as much as seen face to face.

The Purpose of the Struggle 2:2-3

The word *understanding* shows where full assurance comes from. The mention of knowledge and love together in the same sentence shows the close relationship of true doctrine and genuine love. Love is always spoken of in the context of truth and knowledge. Love is a mental attitude, not merely an emotion or burst of sentimentality.

Applications for Living

The primary subject matter of our prayers should be for spiritual growth (1:9). This is not to eliminate other matters, but it is always the basic feature of all of Paul's prayers.

Prayer is simple communication with the Lord (1:9-14). Notice that it is difficult to tell at what point Paul moves from prayer to the teaching of doctrine. Verse 12 is clearly speaking of prayer, and verse 13 moves into teaching.

There should be no doubt in our minds about the exalted position of deity of Jesus Christ (1:15-18). There is no passage in the New Testament that gives the details of His highest exaltation as the sovereign of the universe as does this one.