COLOSSIANS:
MORE THAN ENOUGH

LESSON SIX

COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY NOTES

COLOSSIANS 3:1–4

Douglas Moo, in the *Pillar Commentary*, expounds on what it means to be hidden in Christ:

Two parallel commands constitute the heart of this brief paragraph: "set your hearts on things above" (v. 1)/"set your minds on things above" (v. 2). Paul grounds these commands with reminders of the believer's identification with Christ in both death (v. 3) and resurrection (v. 1). And he concludes with an expression of confidence that this identification will extend to Christ's second coming, when believers will "appear with him in glory" (v. 4). The positive tone of the commands in these verses contrasts with the negative focus in 2:8–23. From what the believer is not supposed to do—allow false teachers to impress their agenda on them (cf. esp. vv. 8, 16, 18)—Paul now turns to what believers are to do—focus on the new, heavenly dimension of reality that has dawned with the coming of Christ. In this sense, 3:1–4 returns to and elaborates the key positive imperatives of 2:6–7. But the addition of the negative "not on earthly things" in v. 2 reveals that Paul has not entirely left the negative behind. The "things above" that Paul wants his readers to concentrate on stands in contrast to the "earthly things" of the false teaching. And the basis for his commands picks up the theology that Paul has already developed in chapter 2: "since … you have been raised with Christ" repeats 2:12 (cf. also "God made you alive with Christ" in 2:13); and "you died" (v. 3) repeats in abbreviated form "you died with Christ" in v. 20 (cf. vv. 11–12).

From a broader perspective, vv. 1–4 bring to a climax and summarize much of the key theology of chapters 1–2 as a whole. As he has been throughout, Christ is the focal point (the title "Christ," the only title Paul uses in these verses, appears four times). But the christological focus of these chapters has always been (despite the impression that vv. 15–20 on their own could convey) on the significance of Christ for the status and experience of believers. And this note dominates vv. 1–4, as Paul focuses on the believer's union with Christ. The past experience of dying with him and being raised with him is the basis for our present status as people whose heavenly identity is real and secure, yet hidden, an identity that will be gloriously manifested in the future. But if the paragraph looks backward, it also looks forward, laying the groundwork for the more detailed elaboration of Christian thinking and its outworking in Christian behavior in 3:5–4:6. Therefore, Colossians 3:1–4 occupies a transitional place in the argument of the letter. It applies the key theological concept of union with Christ, which Paul develops negatively in vv. 16–23 to counter the false teaching, in a positive direction, calling on believers to recognize the basic implications of their status as "dead" to the "elements of the world," "alive" with Christ in heaven, and destined for glory.

1 As we have suggested in the paragraph above, Paul now draws positive conclusions from the same theological premises that he used in 2:8–23 to warn the Colossians about the false teaching. The rules of the false teachers, having to do with the things of this world, cannot subdue the power of the sinful nature (vv. 22–23) and serve, indeed, to sever believers from their "head," the only true source of spiritual strength (v. 19). "Therefore" (TNIV, *then* [Gk. *oun*]) believers need to focus on what is "above," where Christ is himself to be found. Verse 1 is a conditional sentence of a type very common in the New Testament. The theology contained in the protasis (or "if" clause) provides the basis for the exhortation of the apodosis (the "then" clause). TNIV, along with NJB and NLT, translates the Greek ei of this apodosis with "since," reflecting the obvious fact that Paul assumes the protasis to be true. However, as we noted in our comments on 2:20, it is better for rhetorical reasons to translate "if," since this rendering forces the reader or listener to assent to the proposition.

The claim of this "if" clause is significant and controversial: *you have been raised with Christ*. The controversy arises because many interpreters allege that the claim of a past "being raised" with Christ contradicts the theology of the "authentic" Paul, who always taught that the believer would be raised with Christ only in the future. Transferring this resurrection with Christ from the future to the present, it is argued, is the most evident symptom of the "overrealized" eschatology of Colossians (and Ephesians, which shares this perspective). The author of Colossians has turned Paul's temporal orientation into a spatial one, according to which Christians no longer have to wait to be identified with Christ's resurrection in the future, but can even now join Christ "above" in the heavenly realm.

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These interpreters are certainly right to point out that the actual language of "being raised with" Christ occurs only in Colossians (here and in 2:12) and Ephesians (2:6). But, as we have argued in our comments on 2:12, the concept of "sharing with Christ in his resurrection power" is certainly present in uncontested Pauline letters such as Romans (6:4, 12) and Philippians (3:10). It is but a small step from this concept to the use of the language of "raised with Christ" to express it. Especially is this the case since v. 4 in this very paragraph continues unambiguously to affirm the temporal category of a future sharing with Christ in glory. In response to the false teachers, with their insistence on ascetic practices and rules as the means of spiritual fulfillment, this letter affirms strongly that spiritual fulfillment is found in Christ and that it is therefore "in Christ" that believers experience this fulfillment themselves (2:9–10). It would be quite natural in this context for Paul to use the category of resurrection to express the participation of the believer with Christ in the present time. And with this point we turn to our second issue, the significance of the language. Without denying the reality of a future resurrection with Christ, Paul, following his typical "already/not yet" paradigm, asserts that those who belong to Christ have already experienced a "spiritual" resurrection with Christ. Because they are "in him" and Christ has himself been raised to sit at the right hand of the Father, so believers can be said to have been "raised with" him.

The TNIV rendering of Paul's imperative, *set your hearts on things above*, attempts to bring out the sense of the Greek *zeteite*, "seek." The meaning of this verb in this context could be illustrated by means of some parallels: "But *seek* first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33a); "[you] do not seek the glory that comes from the only God" (John 5:44b); "To those who by persistence in doing good *seek* glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life" (Rom. 2:7). Nevertheless, there is an important difference in nuance between Colossians 3:1 and these parallels. For Paul is not saying so much that believers should seek to possess "the things above" as that they are to seek to orient themselves totally to these heavenly realities. We are not to strive for a "heavenly" status, since that has already been freely given us in Christ. Rather, we are to make that heavenly status the guidepost for all our thinking and acting. And, by using the present tense, Paul indicates that believers should be constantly occupied in striving for this orientation. Only here and in v. 2 does Paul use the phrase "the things above" (*ta ano*), although he uses the adverb *ano* ("upward," "above") in Galatians 4:26—"the Jerusalem that is above"—and in Philippians 3:14—"the upward call." "Above," then, is another way of referring to heaven, the abode of God and the sphere to which believers truly belong by virtue of their identification with Christ (see Phil. 3:20). Believers "seek the things above" by deliberately and daily committing ourselves to the values of the heavenly kingdom and living out of those values.

As we noted above, Paul in this paragraph continues implicitly to interact with the false teaching. This teaching apparently offered its adherents access to the heavenly realm (2:18). As Lincoln puts it, then, Paul "by no means completely disparages his readers' concern with the heavenly realm. Instead, he attempts to redirect it. In the process it emerges that two antithetical positions about participation in the heavenly realm are in confrontation. The philosophy's advocates take the earthly situation as their starting point, from which by their own efforts and techniques they will move beyond the body, gain visionary experience, and ascend into heavenly spheres. The writer moves in the reverse direction, seeing the starting point and source of the believer's life in the resurrected Christ in heaven, from where it works itself out in earthly life."

By reminding us that the heavenly realm is *where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God*, Paul not only defines that realm but, more importantly, provides motivation for us to seek to orient ourselves to that heavenly realm. Spiritual growth, Paul has made clear, comes only from Christ, so it is naturally incumbent on us to focus on the "place" where he is. Moreover, our identification with Christ in his resurrection means, in effect, that, in some ultimate sense, heaven is where we truly are also. It is only natural that we seek to align our whole being with our true, "heavenly" identity. The attentive reader may notice that our quotation of the last part of v. 1 above differs from the TNIV in one respect: the comma after "is." This reflects the view of most translators and commentators that "is" (*estin*) should be construed as an independent verb rather than as part of a periphrastic construction. This punctuation places the emphasis where it belongs, on the simple fact of where Christ is rather than on what he is doing. The language of Christ "sitting at the right hand of God" comes originally from Psalm 110:1, although the idea becomes so common in the New Testament that it is doubtful whether

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Paul intends a conscious allusion here to that verse. The "right hand" signifies the place of honor and prominence (see, e.g., 1 Kgs. 2:19; Mark 10:37).

2 Revealing just how important this perspective is for believers, Paul repeats the essence of his command in v. 2 (the lack of explicit connection ["asyndeton"] with v. 1 fits well with the repetition). However, the verse also nuances the basic point, in two ways. First, Paul shifts from the rather colorless "seek" to the more specific "think" (*phroneo*). Paul likes this verb: twenty-three of the twenty-six New Testament occurrences are his. It refers not to a purely mental or intellectual process, but to a more fundamental orientation of the will. Thus many versions, like the TNIV, translate "set your minds on" (ESV; NRSV; RSV; HCSB; NASB). The verb suggests the basic inner attitude that lies behind and is part of the "seeking" of v. 1, and, like "seek" in v. 1, it is also in the present tense, suggesting a "habit of the mind" (cf. NET: "Keep thinking about things above"). It may also be a further polemical dig at the false teachers, who are perhaps advocating a spiritual orientation that focused on the emotions at the expense of the mind.14

But it is the second nuance added in v. 2 that is the real point of the verse: we are not to have our minds set *on earthly things*. Paul has probably repeated the initial command of v. 1, in a slightly varied form, simply to set up this additional point. Paul is almost certainly suggesting that it is the false teachers who are preoccupied with "earthly things" at the expense of "the things above"—which is quite an ironical twist. For, as 2:18 suggests, the false teachers, because of their preoccupation with their visionary experiences, would have been the ones bragging about their focus on the "things above." In reality, Paul effectively responds, by bragging about those visions and by cutting themselves off from Christ (2:19), the false teachers have their minds set on the things of this world. "Things above," Paul is making clear, are tied to Christ, enthroned above, and must reflect the values of the kingdom that he has inaugurated. Anything else, or less, is no more than "worldly" thinking. Philippians 3:12–21, with its focus on the "heavenward" (Gk. *ano*) direction of his call (v. 14), the criticism that false teachers are "thinking" (*phroneo*; cf. also v. 15) about "earthly things" (v. 19), and the reminder that our "citizenship is in heaven" (v. 20), furnishes a fuller example of the kind of Pauline focus that we find in vv. 1–2.

3 Following his typical pattern, Paul now grounds (*for*; Gk. gar) the imperatives of vv. 1 and 2 with an appeal to theology: *you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God*. His readers have *died* not physically, of course, but spiritually; specifically, this brief assertion is a reminder of what he has said in 2:20: "you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world." For the purposes of his polemic with the false teachers, Paul highlights our separation from these powers. But we can infer that Paul would also have in view our deliverance from sin and the bondage of the law, "powers" that he elsewhere claims we have "died to." As we have noted, the believer's union "with" Christ in death (v. 20), burial (v. 12a), and resurrection (v. 12b; cf. 13) provides the Colossians with the spiritual security that they were craving, including especially forgiveness and protection from evil spiritual powers (vv. 13–15). Christ's death, burial, and resurrection are the essential moments of the climactic salvation-historical drama (1 Cor. 15:3–5), and they mark the transition from the old era to the new. By believing in Christ, the Colossians have identified with Christ in these events and so experience all the benefits they confer. Paul bookends his imperatives in vv. 1 and 2 with reminders of this fundamental theology: "since … you have been raised with Christ" (v. 1a); "you died [with Christ]" (v. 3a). Setting our hearts and minds on "the things above" and not on "earthly things" is both necessary and possible. It is necessary because our union with Christ means we no longer belong to the realm of this earth but to the heavenly realm; and it is possible because our union with Christ severs us from the tyranny of the powers of this world and provides us with all the power needed to live a new life (cf. 1:10–14).

Paul takes the significance of our union with Christ two steps further here, referring both to our present status (v. 3b) and to our future transformation (v. 4). The latter, as we have suggested in our comments on v. 1, probably reflects the same basic idea that Paul refers to with the language of being "raised with Christ" in Romans 6. The former, however, is not mentioned explicitly in other passages where Paul speaks of our union with Christ. We are probably justified, then, in surmising

that he brings up this point here because of its particular relevance to the Colossian context. But just what is his point? Nowhere else in the New Testament is there reference to believers being "hidden." Of course, we have met the language of hiddenness earlier in Colossians, and in a context that parallels 3:3–4. For just as the life of the believer is now "hidden" (*kekryptai*) and will "appear" (*phanerethesesthe*), so the "mystery" had been "hidden" (*apokekrymmenon*) and has now been "revealed" (*ephane rothe*) (1:26).

As we noted in our comments on 1:26, this "hidden"/"revealed" motif is fundamental to the widespread Jewish apocalyptic worldview. According to this perspective, many things relating to God and his purposes exist in the present, but because they are in heaven, they are hidden from human sight. But the apocalyptic seer is given a vision of these things, things that will one day be revealed as they come to pass and are seen by people on earth. So, Paul suggests, at the present time our heavenly identity is real, but it is hidden. We have certainly not been physically transported to heaven; nor do we, who belong to the heavenly realm, look any different from those around us who still belong to this world. Verse 4 affirms that this will one day change. In the meantime, our true status is veiled; and, though we may not look any different than those around us, Paul's point in this context is that we certainly need to behave differently.

But Paul may intend another nuance in asserting that our lives are "hidden" with God. BDAG classify *krypto* ("hide") in this verse under the meaning "hide in a safe place." This extension of meaning is quite natural, since hiding is often the way that people find safety and security when enemies are pursuing them (e.g., 1 Sam. 13:6). Several Old Testament texts suggest that "hide" can carry the connotation of safety and security. Psalm 27:5 is especially clear: "For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock" (see also, e.g., Ps. 31:20; Isa. 49:2; Matt. 13:44; 25:18).

The phrase "in God" at the end of the verse may also point in this direction. Therefore, Paul's claim that the lives of believers are now hidden with Christ may be more than simply the "setup" for the emphasis on future revelation in v. 4. It may also remind us that the time between our initial identification with Christ and the revelation of that status on the last day is a time when God is working to keep us secure in that relationship. As Paul has put it earlier: we have a "hope stored up for [us] in heaven" (1:5).

4 Verse 4 lacks a direct connection to v. 3, but the relationship between the two is clear enough. The verb *appear* (the Greek verb is *phaneroo*) is the counterpart to "hidden" in v. 3. At the same time, "your life" in v. 3 is picked up and elaborated in v. 4, as Paul identifies Christ as the one who is *your life*. This identification reflects the relentless christological focus of Colossians (see, e.g., 1:15–20, 27; 2:2, 3, 19; and the Introduction, 61–63). And it reminds us of Paul's autobiographical remark in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (cf. also Phil. 1:21). These verses reflect Paul's conviction that the life and destiny of the believer are inextricably bound up with Christ. As Christ died, so believers die with him (Col. 2:20; 3:3). When he died, believers were buried with him (2:12). As he was resurrected, so believers were raised with him (2:13; 3:1). And when he appears in glory at the time of his return, believers will appear with him.

Our identification with Christ, now real but hidden, will one day be manifest. As John puts it, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known (*ephanerethe*). But we know that when Christ appears (*phanerothe*), we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). Because Christ is now "in us," we have "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27), and it is that same union, expressed in the other direction—we "in Christ"—that will bring hope to its certain accomplishment. As the text in 1 John suggests, the believer's appearance "in glory," or "in a state of glory," will mean a final transformation into the "image" of Christ (see esp. Rom. 8:29) by means of resurrection (1 Cor. 15:43; cf. also Rom. 8:18; Phil. 3:20–21). In Christ God has restored the definitive and perfect "image of God" that was marred in the fall (Col. 1:15), and believers who are joined with him will share that image. All this is typical Pauline teaching, showing that the emphasis

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on a present "spatial" presence with Christ in heaven (3:1) firmly remains within (though, to be sure, toward one end of) the apostle's customary spectrum of the "already … not yet" tension.[1]

COLOSSIANS 3:5–17

Michael Bird's *New Covenant Commentary* explains what it means to put off and put on:

The inference that Paul draws (**Therefore**) in v. 5 is that if they have died with Messiah then they must enact this death and **put to death the members of your earthly being**. That carries the sense of killing, murdering, or destroying the earthly nature which stands as the antithesis to the Christ-saturated life which they now partake of (see Rom 6:11; 8:13). One is either dead in sin (Col 2:13) or dead to sin (Col 3:5). The teachers wish to impose partial Torah observance on the Colossians in order to restrain their fleshly desires (what the Rabbis called the *yetzer hara* or "evil impulse"). That is tantamount to putting the wild animals of lust, hatred, and greed into cages where they remain alive and continue to be a dangerous threat to their captors. Paul's solution is more radical: the animals need to be killed. The command **put to death** can be related to similar commands in v. 8, **put off/ strip off**, with a net affect of doing away with such behaviors. The phrasing in relation to **earthly** is awkward and can be interpreted differently (e.g., "mundane ordinances" [Lightfoot], "whatever in you is earthly" [NRSV], "whatever in your nature belongs to the earth" [NET], "things used for earthly purposes" [Harris], "earthly things lurking within you" [NLT]).18 But the point is to allow a heavenly perspective to determine one's being rather than allowing an earthbound perspective to shape one's behavior. What that means is underscored with the following vice list in which Paul urges them to put to death certain activities and attitudes: **sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed which is idolatry.** Vice lists are common in both Paul's letters and in Jewish and Greco-Roman literature. Its function here is to provide real content to activities and attitudes that are proscribed. Further explanation is given is v. 7: **because of which the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience.** The avoidance of such vices is not only because they adversely affect the domains of horizontal (human–human) and vertical (human–divine) relationships, but because such things occasion the **wrath of God**. Wrath (*orge*) is understood here not in the sense of God's capacity for unbridled violence, but as the righteous indignation of God's holiness towards moral evil. For Paul, God's wrath is something that comes as a result of God's character and due to the eschatological trajectory that will see all wickedness subdued and punished by the inescapable justice of God (see Rom 1:18; 2:5; 1 Thess 2:16). Because of Jesus's death, believers are delivered from God's wrath (Rom 5:9; 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9) since Jesus has propitiated God's wrath with such finality and with such perfection that none remains for them (Rom 3:25). The objects of wrath are described as **sons of disobedience**, which, though textually questionable, may be taken as a euphemism for sons of perdition (see John 17:12) and reflects the Hebrew idiom that a son's conduct reflects his paternal origins. The relevance of this description of human depravity is that **you formerly walked in them when you lived in these things,** and Paul (as he does elsewhere, e.g., Col 1:21 and 1 Cor 1:26–31; 6:9–11; 12:2; Gal 4:8–9; Eph 2:1–3) poses a sharp contrast between what the believers were before Messiah and what they are now in Messiah. Those that **walked** and **lived** in such disobedience experienced the depersonalizing effects of sin and alienation from the Creator (see Rom 1:18–32).

The temporal contrast gives way to a logical contrast with **but now**, which echoes Paul's eschatological "now" that marks the coming of the new age in the Messiah (cf. Col 1:22; Eph 2:13; Rom 3:21). What the Colossians are to do in order to further the transition from their former life to their new life in Messiah is to **put off all such things**. This leads to another vice list that can be grouped into sins of aggression (**anger, wrath, malice**) and sins of the tongue (**slander, perverse talk, lie to one another**). What makes this a possibility that Paul expects to be realized is not a more stringent and concerted application of the moral will, but rather the power and glory of the new creation spilling over into their lives. This is verbalized with **have stripped off the old man with its deeds and having clothed yourselves with the new man which is being renewed according to the image of the one creating him**. The aorist participles (*apekdusamenoi*, **stripped off;** *endusamenoi*, **having clothed**) probably hark back to their baptism (Col 3:1) as the point in which they first put on Messiah and put

[1] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 243–252.

off the world (Gal 3:27; cf. Rom 13:14; 1 Pet 5:5). Paul calls on the Colossians to remember their faith, confession, baptism, and the dynamic power that operates in them because it releases them from the power of sin that once dominated them. In contrast to the teachers who advocate asceticism and Torah as the cure to ever returning to pagan revelry, for Paul the power unto a new obedience is the vitalizing grace of God as exerted through the union with the Messiah and as symbolized through the conduit of baptism. It is that faith and initiation into Messiah that has the Colossians being renewed and conformed to the image of God. While echoes of Gen 1:26–27 are quite clear, the verse harks back to what Paul said in Col 1:15, where Jesus is the "image of the invisible God," and Paul also predicates the role of creator to Jesus in Col 1:16. As Jesus Christ is the *icon* of God (Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4) so Christians, when Messiah dwells in them, become renewed after the image of God. God's recreation is according to the pattern of Jesus Christ who resembles God's absolute likeness. Jesus is both the Urmensch (original man) and *Übermensch* (overcoming man). He is all at once the new Adam, that is, the archetypal pattern of human existence, and simultaneously the triumphant Messiah who reigns as the sovereign Lord over the dominion of God. Hence, this gospel renewal looks back to creation in the pre-fall state of humankind, but also looks forward to the eschaton where believers will be fully conformed to the pattern of Jesus and transformed to reflect the glory of the Messiah (cf. Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:21). Harris offers this paraphrase: "you have stripped off the old Adamic nature, the old humanity, together with the actions that expressed it, and have put on the new nature you have in Christ, the new humanity, which is being renewed day by day in conformity with Christ."

At the mention of the new creation, Paul is unable to restrain his excitement about its implications not only for ethics, but also for identity. He writes that in this renewal there is **no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, Barbarian, Scythian, slave and free.** Similar to Gal 3:28, Paul is advocating a negation of ethnic and economic realities, in terms of their claims to separation and superiority, by the new creation. It is not that these distinctions cease to exist in some way, but they are now transcended by virtue of the believer's participation in the Messiah. It seems to me that the emphasis in Gal 3:28–29 and Col 3:11 is not the obliteration of different human identities, but the inclusion of multiple identities under a single meta-identity ("in Messiah," *en Christo*). But that can only be true if the existing identities, which are a means of distinction and status, are themselves negated in value and lessened in their ability to cause differentiation. The old self is thereby transformed and subsumed beneath a shared meta-identity that can sustain an array of diverse entities within it. So I am a male, but an in-Messiah male; I am a Gentile, but an in-Messiah Gentile. The distinctions of Greek and Jew, or Australian and New Zealander, are enveloped by and subordinated to being *en Christo*.

The subversive nature of Paul's ethics strikes against the jugular of Greco-Roman social stratification with its various tiers of power and privilege. Paul also redefines the boundaries of election in light of the advent of the Messiah. Both the Hellenistic and Jewish spheres knew superiority based on gender, race, and culture. Thales is reported to have given thanks to Fortune that he was born a human being and not a brute, a man and not a woman, a Greek and not a Barbarian. Some of the rabbis practiced a prayer attributed to Rabbi Judah ben El'ai, which said, "Blessed are thou who did not make me Gentile, blessed art thou who did not make me a woman, blessed art thou who did not make me a brute."29 But no Christian could give thanks for this, nor could they pray this rabbinic prayer. Salvation in Christ completely eliminates any such boasting (see 1 Cor 1:26–31). In the words of the second century Christian apologist Aristides, Christians are a "Third Race," alongside Greeks and Jews (*Apol*. 2). Paul's statement implies a breaking down of the covenant boundaries separating Jew and non-Jew, and, in a sense, expands the currency of Israel's election by including Gentiles in its purview. By transforming the inherent value of "Jewishness" and its chief covenant boundary marker of circumcision, Paul was implying that the ethnic and ritual distinctions marking off Jew from Gentile had been removed. Consequently the rationale for separateness from and any sense of superiority over the Gentiles has been nullified by the coming of the Messiah.

The pairing of slave and free denotes the union of persons of diverse social status in the Christian gatherings. While "brotherhood" remained a well-known Hellenistic ideal, the system of patron and client relationships and the values of honor and reciprocation could never really accommodate the

union of slave and free. Too much fraternizing with slaves was discouraged since familiarity bred contempt and was bad for discipline. Yet a poignant image of the bond between slave and free is encapsulated in the Christian martyrdom narrative of the Roman matron Perpetua, who stood hand in hand with her slave Felicitas in the arena of Carthage in 202 CE as both women faced a common death for their common faith. Barbarians were the uncultured and primitive tribes looked down upon by the Greeks. Their name is a form of onomatopoeia as their speech sounded to Greeks like they were making incomprehensible mutterings of "bar-bar-bar." Scythians were a race from the area north of the Black Sea and were known for their brutality. Josephus says of them: "Now, as to the Scythians, they take a pleasure in killing men, and differ but little from brute beasts."33 Yet Paul can include all these groups as part of the new creation (3:10–11) and under the designation "brothers" (1:2). Justin Martyr put it well: "But though a man be a Scythian or a Persian, if he has the knowledge of God and of his Christ, and keeps the everlasting righteous decrees, he is circumcised with the good and beneficial circumcision, and is a friend of God, and God rejoices in his gifts and offerings" (*Dial. Tryph*. 28).

The new creation does not completely negate ethnicity, economics, and gender (Christians continue to be male and female) but those differences are transcended by the glory of the new creation that ebbs into the lives of believers. Thus, the Judaic character of the teachers' instruction is met by Paul's appeal to the unity of Greek and Jew in the Messiah. The esoteric nature of the teachers' instruction is matched by Paul's incorporation of Barbarian and Scythian into the Christian fold. That again cuts at the view that the Colossians should seek either the prestige or protection associated with taking on certain Jewish customs. The new creation fosters a unique bond with Jesus Christ and, by consequence, a unique bond with other Christians (see 2 Cor 5:17; 1 Cor 12:13). Christians are the renewed human race and the new eschatological humanity that model before the world what God had always intended for humans to be: a loving community unified in worship of their Creator. This is followed with a short parenthetical remark that **Messiah is for all and in all**. The grammar is quite awkward, and Paul has expressed similar thoughts elsewhere, though mainly with God as the subject (Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 15:28; Eph 1:23; 4:6). In the Greek text there is no verb "is" between "Messiah" and "all" (lit. "all and in all Messiah"). In light of the preceding text it would seem peculiar to think that Paul is saying that Messiah is Jew and Gentile, circumcision and uncircumcised, etc. The Messiah possesses a relation to the categories of persons just named, but not in the sense of mystically being what they all are at once; more likely, the relation that Messiah has to all races and classes resides in the benefits that his faithfulness, passion, and exaltation confers on each of them. Jesus's death is "for us" (e.g., 1 Thess 5:10; Rom 5:8; and esp. 2 Cor 5:14) and Jesus intercedes "for us" from the heavenly throne room (Rom 8:31–34). Hence, Jesus is *for all* whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. Unlike Caesar, Messiah is not *kurios* ("Lord") for the benefit of his own self-aggrandizement, but Lord *for the benefit of others*. In fact, we can also detect in 3:11 some additional counter-imperial whispers. Augustus's *Res gestae* ("things accomplished," cited on his funeral inscription) listed among his exploits a triumphal Roman cosmopolitanism that fulfilled Alexander the Great's incomplete program of bringing the world into trans-ethnic unity based on military conquest, political incorporation, and cultural assimilation. Rather, the basis for a shared unity emerges from a common savior who brings salvation not by shedding the blood of his subjects, but instead by shedding his own blood as an atonement for their transgressions (1:14, 20, 22; 2:13; 3:13). In many ways, the whole context of 1:15–4:6 seems set on establishing an alternative set of principles for moral order, self-identity, and future security than that provided by the Roman imperial edifice.

Paul steadily moves the train of thought further in v. 12 with **therefore** and identifies the Colossians as **God's elect, holy and beloved**, which are common enough designations for Christians elsewhere in his letters (see Rom 8:33; Titus 1:1). The designation was also a common one for Israel (e.g., Deut 7:6–7; 33:3) and Paul conceives of the church as the representatives of Israel in the messianic age (see Gal 6:16; Phil 3:3). Through faith in Jesus the Colossians are assured of their membership in the people of God, and no addition of distinctive Jewish laws or mystical piety can supplement that. The imperatives of the new creation are reaffirmed, not in the sense of vice lists or proscribed behaviors, but now in a list of virtuous actions and attitudes to be cultivated in the community. They are commanded to **clothe yourselves** or put on qualities including **hearts of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience** as well as **bearing with one another** and **forgiving each other.**

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These virtues can be said to represent the *imitatio Christi* ("imitation of Christ") that is coupled with a call to *mutual* understanding and *mutual* forgiveness. Mutuality or reciprocal treatment is emphasized by the pronouns **one another** and **each other,** which are anchored in the example of Jesus Christ, hence the clause **just as the Lord graciously forgave you**. Paul calls on them not only to remember this forgiveness, but to replicate it among themselves. There are undoubtedly some echoes of the Jesus tradition here, where Jesus commanded his followers to forgive each other in an almost scandalous way (e.g., Luke 11:4/Matt 6:12, 14–15; Luke 17:4/Matt 18:21–22; Matt 18:23–35; Luke 23:34; John 20:23). For Jesus as for Paul, to be part of the new Israel entails that the Colossians show their family likeness by imparting what they have already received themselves: forgiveness. The realization that each person in their midst is still in the process of renewal means that forgiveness is essential for the functioning of the new humanity that the new Israel is called to be. The language of forgiveness is drawn from the world of human relationships: the journey from anguish to restoration. Forgiveness does not mean that one ceases to feel the hurt and pain associated with someone's failing, but it means that one forfeits their right to express their anger, to parade their hurt, and to demand reparation. Forgiveness, as initiated by the wounded party, remains an expression of the divine character and becomes a trait that makes the new covenant community stand out among the cycle of resentment and revenge that typifies human relationships.

A formative conclusion to the moral discourse is contained in the phrase, **And to all these virtues add love, which is the bond of perfect unity.** The preeminence of love in the Christian ethic goes back to Jesus in his combination of the Shema of Deut 6:4–5 with the love command in Lev 19:18 (Matt 22:37–40/Mark 12:30–31/Luke 10:27). According to Paul, love is the surest measure of authentic spirituality (1 Cor 13:1–13). The only thing that counts is faith working through love (Gal 5:6). The love command sums up the whole law (Rom 13:9–10; Gal 5:14). This appeal to love is an important qualification to Paul's rigorous defense of believing integrity (doctrine) and his call for believing uprightness (ethics). Paul is not imparting right doctrine for doctrine's sake, nor is he advocating righteous living for righteousness sake. Instead, he seeks to warn them of the teachers, to conform them to the character of his gospel, and to see them transformed by the power of the Spirit. He seeks to preserve their integrity as Messiah-believing Gentiles and see them in unity with other Gentile Christians, which could be jeopardized if the philosophers win them over. In this sense, warning of potential intruders and admonition against any behavioral lapses are the most loving things one can sometimes do. Love seeks to protect the mind from corruption and keep the soul from perversion by outside forces. Love wants the other in the relationship to live to its fullest potential and to be true to its own identity. Love means seeking to live in wholesome communion within a family of faith, and that is why **love** is the **bond of perfect unity.**

Under a single connective (*kai*, "and") Paul groups two further commands for transformed behavior located around two genitival phrases, the **peace of Messiah** and the **word of Messiah**. Following up the call for love-driven unity is the reference to the **peace of Messiah**, which is a genitive of origin, or the peace that *comes from* Christ, which is to arbitrate in the heart (see John 14:27, "peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you"). Peace seems to have three basic meanings or uses in Paul and all of these are present in Colossians: as a general greeting and blessing along with "grace" (Col 1:2; cf. e.g., Rom 1:7; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2); as signifying the end of hostilities between God and the believer due to Jesus's death and resurrection (Col 1:20; cf. e.g., Rom 5:1; Eph 2:14–17); and as part of ethical instruction towards good relations and ecclesial unity (Col 3:15; cf. e.g., Rom 12:18; 14:17–19; Gal 5:22; Eph 4:3). The command to let peace arbitrate in the **heart** or permeate one's inner self is made because it is a corollary of being **called** to be part of **one body**. By this Paul probably means to live at peace with other Christians (something he knew much of after painful debates in Antioch, Galatia, and Corinth). Hence there is some justification for adopting the translation **let the peace of Messiah arbitrate in your hearts** in the sense that the peace of Messiah acts as an arbiter when differences between fellow believers arise. The same word (*brabeuo*) occurs in 2:18: "let no one disqualify you" ("be in control of your heart" [net]; "be umpire" [Lightfoot]). The peace of Messiah acts as an umpire, referee, or arbiter in the community of the new age. By living at peace with fellow Christians, one expresses thankfulness to God for his work in Jesus Christ. To that is added **the word of Messiah**, and the genitive is ambiguous for the reason that it could be an objective genitive (the word *about*

Messiah) or else a subjective genitive (the word that *comes from* Messiah). There is no reason to have to choose here, and the word (*logos*) probably denotes all Christian instruction that either derives from the Messiah or has the Messiah as its content and integrating point—what Calvin called "the doctrine of the gospel." The word is meant to **dwell** among them or inhabit their persons. As Wisdom found a dwelling place in Israel (Sir 24:8) and the Spirit of God dwells in believers (1 Cor 3:16; Rom 8:9), so must the word of Messiah reside within the community in rich abundance and produce its accompanying effects. Importantly, the mechanism by which this word of Messiah is communicated is through instruction (**teaching and admonishing each other**) and in worship (**singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs**), and all of this is to occur in the context of **thanksgiving**. If we regard the impartation of the word of Messiah as the goal of teaching, admonishing, and singing, then we are led to the conclusion that teaching is meant to take on a worshipful character while musical praise is to take on a didactic role in order to comprehensively impart the word. Christian teaching is not meant to be dry, but soaked in thankful praise. Similarly, singing is not purposed to be doctrinally benign but should comprise a pointer to the truth of Jesus Christ. In the background to all of this is the notion that whatever Christians do in worship, teaching, work, leisure, or life, they do **in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him**. That is indicative of the binitarian nature of early Christian worship in making the Father and Son the objects of religious devotion. Jesus, the true image of God, who reconciled the believers to God, remains the fountain from which all thanksgiving overflows and is the one in whom all worship of the Father takes place. What is given to Jesus becomes the Father's, and what is given to the Father is Jesus's since he is the fullness of God (Col 1:19–20; 2:9–10). A fitting summary is given by Theodoret of Cyr: "It is because the Colossians were being directed to worship angels that Paul felt compelled to teach what we read here. This is that they should adorn their words and deeds with the remembrance of Christ the Lord, that is, they should offer to God the Father the activity of grace through Christ, not through angels."[2]

N. T. Wright, in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* shows how the gospel impacts ordinary life:

Putting the life of the new age into practice begins at home. If a sense of anti-climax is felt on moving from the sublime picture of the worshipping church in 3:15–17 to the almost mundane instructions of 3:18–4:1, that is perhaps a sign that we have not fully integrated belief and practice. It is clear from the numerous parallels to this section in other early Christian literature that the early church took seriously the necessity of living Christianly in the place where, for better or for worse, one is truly oneself. And these terse sentences focus on just that: how to be truly oneself, in the Lord, as a member of the new humanity—and how to set the other members of one's family free to be truly themselves. 'If the home is to be a means of grace it must be a place of *rules* … the alternative to rule is not freedom but the unconstitutional (and often unconscious) tyranny of the most selfish member.' As in improvised music, spontaneity and freedom do not mean playing out of tune.

But should Paul's tunes, so to speak, be our tunes? We meet here, not for the first time, the question of the applicability of what he says to twentieth-century life. This question sometimes surfaces in another guise, namely, how specifically Christian are these instructions?

It is true that pagans and Jews at this period compiled household rules which are in some respects parallel to what we find here. But this does not mean that Paul is simply telling his converts to conform to prevailing contemporary standards. Christian ethics and secular standards are, of course, not altogether different: since all people are created in God's image, with an innate sense of God's standards (see Rom. 1:32; 2:1–16), the rule of life which will restore that image to its proper glory (3:10) need not scrap all non-Christian values and begin over again, but will be able to build on, and bring to full maturity, what is best in the world outside the church. In addition, it is clear from (e.g.) Romans 12:9 and 13:1–7 that Paul expected Christians to recognize the ordinary standards of 'good' and 'bad', to avoid giving needless offence to non-Christian society. But the differences between Paul and his pagan contemporaries are as clear as the parallels. Paul has thoroughly Christianized the code, not just by adding 'in the Lord' at certain points, but by balancing carefully the duties and responsibilities of the various family members so that the stronger parties have duties as well as rights, and those

[2]Michael F. Bird, *Colossians and Philemon*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 99–110.

who are in a position of submission are treated as responsible human beings, with rights as well as duties. He thus sharpens up, in one area of practical life, the standards set out in 3:5–14.

It is, in fact, extremely unlikely that Paul, having warned the young Christians against conforming their lives to the present world, would now require just that of them after all. Nor does he. The Stoics (who provide some of the closest pagan parallels to these household lists) based their teaching on the law of nature: this is the way the world is, so this is how you must live in harmony with it. Paul bases his on the law of the new nature: Christ releases you to be truly human, and you must now learn to express your true self according to the divine pattern, not in self-assertion but in self-giving.

The problem, of course, is that Paul is often suspected of saying something else: of entrenching, in particular, the dominance of husbands over wives. It is perhaps verse 18 which has caused many writers to argue that what Paul writes here is relative, not absolute, and that the proper application of the passage is that we in our turn must think out quite different ways of expressing Christian love in the modern world. But it would be a bold person who would argue, in the face of modern society, that the contemporary non-Christian world offers a better model for marriage and family life than that provided by the ancient world, still less than that suggested by Paul. The solution is to be found, rather, in seeing just what it is that Paul does, and does not, say.

18–19. He offers a careful balance. Neither party is to be arrogant or domineering: *Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.* The 'submission' here is not that of the slave, or the doormat. The equality of women and men before the Lord, of which Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28, has not been retracted: but neither does it mean identity of role or function. The wife must forgo the temptation to rule her husband's life, using perhaps one of the many varieties of domestic blackmail; the husband must ensure that his love for his wife, like Christ's for his people, always puts her interests first (see the fuller statement in Eph. 5:21–33). In particular, he must scrupulously avoid the temptation to resent her being the person she is, to become bitter or angry when she turns out to be, like him, a real human being, and not merely the projection of his own hopes or fantasies. It is when husbands and wives understand these guidelines and live by them that they are truly free: free to mature and develop, within the creative context of mutual love and respect.

20–21. In addressing children as members of the church in their own right, and in giving them both responsibilities and rights, Paul is again allowing the gospel to break new ground. *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.* In a couple of crisp sentences Paul has said, in essence, what thousands of books on the upbringing of children have struggled to express. Sometimes verse 20 has been over-emphasized, and verse 21 forgotten, in the zeal of parents not to spare the rod lest they spoil the child. Sometimes verse 21 has been over-stressed, and the rights of the individual child allowed to range free, trampling the rights of family, friends, neighbours and anyone else in the way, for fear lest young life be crushed or twisted. Both sides are clearly necessary. Children need discipline; so do parents. The word 'fathers' can refer to parents of both sexes, though it may well have an eye to the importance of the father's role, within God's created order, in the upbringing of children.

'Embitter' is literally 'arouse', usually in the bad sense of 'provoke'. Paul refers to the constant nagging or belittling of a child (a sure sign of insecurity (see 3:8), this time on the part of the parent), the refusal to allow children to be people in their own right instead of carbon copies of their parents or their parents' fantasies. Children treated like this became 'discouraged' or 'dispirited': hearing continually, both verbally and non-verbally, that they are of little value, they come to believe it, and either sink down in obedient self-hatred or over-react with boastful but anxious self-assertion. The parents' duty is, in effect, to live out the gospel to the child: that is, to assure their children that they are loved and accepted and valued for who they are, not for who they ought to be, should have been, or might (if only they would try a little harder) become. Obedience must never be made the condition of parental 'love'; a 'love' so conditioned would not deserve the name. When the parent is obedient to the vocation of genuine love, the child's obedience may become, like that of the Christian to God,

a glad and loving response. Such obedience is 'pleasing to the Lord' (as the Greek expresses it), not merely because he desires order but because he wants all his people to follow the often paradoxical, self-denying, Christlike road to true and mature selfhood.

22. Paul has made it clear that the duties of members of families are 'in the Lord': and, in the extended section addressed to slaves (vv. 22–25: it is sometimes suggested that this section has something to do with Onesimus' being sent with the letter, but it is hard to see why), he makes this point in no fewer than five different ways.

First, they are told to *obey your earthly masters in everything*: they are to be thoroughgoing in their obedience; *and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord* (many mss read 'God', perhaps to avoid confusion between the Lord (Jesus) and the 'lord', i.e. master, of the slave: the same word, *kyrios*, could indicate either). Here the point, equally applicable at all levels of human labour, is that the Christian at work must be a whole person, totally given to the task in hand, not merely doing the minimum required to avoid rebuke, with a show of effort when one is being observed. That attitude shows no reverence for the Lord who has called all his people to full, single-hearted human living. Even if they are treated like animals or worse, slaves are still to regard themselves as fully human beings.

23–24. Second, *whatever you do, work at it with all your heart*, *as working for the Lord*, *not for men*. The task may appear unimportant or trivial, but the person doing it is never that, and he or she has the opportunity to turn the job into an act of worship. This attitude cannot be motivated by earthly reward, and so cannot be distracted if such prospects seem remote: *since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward*. One should properly read '*the* inheritance'; the reference is clearly to the life of the age to come. This is ironic, since in earthly terms slaves could not inherit property. Here, then, is the third point: the 'master' in heaven will reward you. The fourth one is perhaps not to be taken (with NIV) as a statement (*It is the Lord Christ that you are serving*) but, as is equally possible in the Greek, as a command: 'Serve the Lord Christ!' The force of this unusual phrase (Paul nowhere else allows the titles 'Lord' and 'Christ' to stand together without the name 'Jesus' as well) could be brought out by a paraphrase: 'so work for the true Master—Christ!'

25. The final reason for the slave's obedience functions, in the parallel in Ephesians 6:5–9, as a warning to masters. The point, however, is equally relevant in its context here. If one is serving Christ, one need not fear, as with earthly masters, that those who cover up shoddy work by putting on a good show in the boss's presence will get away with it, or that the master's own favourites will be rewarded however hard others may work. No: *anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favouritism.* This last idea, repeated by Paul in other contexts (e.g. Rom. 2:11), is a commonplace of Jewish and Christian views of God's justice. The slave has thus both encouragement and warning: he need not imagine that being a Christian will excuse poor or half-hearted work.

4:1. The balance between the pairs of exhortations is again striking, in keeping with a letter emphasizing the dignity of all human beings. *Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven*. Paul does not protest against the institution of slavery. That would be about as useful, for him, as a modern preacher fulminating against the internal combustion engine. His approach is subtler. He has found a fixed point on which to stand, from which to move the world: slaves too are human beings with rights. To talk of 'justice' and 'fairness' (properly the word means 'equality') in relation to slaves would sound extraordinary to most slave-owners of the ancient world. Masters, however, are themselves slaves of the one Master.

In whatever role, then, a Christian finds himself or herself, at home or at work, life can and must be lived 'for the Lord', and in harmony with one's fellow human beings. The rules which facilitate this state create true freedom. The section therefore provides the necessary grounding for the wide-ranging instructions of 3:1–17.[3]

[3] N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 12, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 150–157.

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This short section (4:2-6) has two important functions within the letter as a whole. First, the life of the new humanity 'in the Lord' is not something merely to be enjoyed for its own sake. The Colossian church has new responsibilities as well as privileges. Secondly, and in consequence, Paul is drawing the letter towards its appropriate close; having begun with thanksgiving for God's world-wide work through the gospel (1:3–8), his thoughts turn again to that work and his part in it. But he does not thereby turn away from the Colossians. He claims them as partners, setting before them in general terms the tasks appropriate to them as a new community, in Christ and in Colosse (1:2). This section thus echoes 1:24–2:5, suggesting that Paul intended the latter as a bridge between his introduction of himself and the letter's main central section.

2. As one would expect from 1:3ff., these instructions focus on fundamentals: *Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful*. It is possible that 'watchful' refers obliquely to the church's 'watching' for the Lord's return; more likely that, as in Matthew 26:41, it means 'stay awake', 'keep alert'. The connection here with thanksgiving (see on 1:3–8, 12b, etc.) may suggest the threefold rhythm: intercession, 'watching' for answers to prayer, and thanksgiving when answers appear. As children of the day (see 1 Thess. 5:4–11), Christians are to keep awake, looking out on the sleeping world which, as the object of God's love, is also to be the object of his people's 'devoted', i.e. regular, steady and thorough prayer.

3. These prayers will include specific intercessions, such as the reciprocation of Paul's prayer (1:9ff.) for them: *and pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message*. The 'door' could be that which admits Gentiles to the people of God, or possibly the prison door that will open to let Paul and his message out into the world; it is more likely, however, that Paul refers to the 'door' that allows the word of God (the phrase literally means 'a door for the word') into the hearts, minds and lives of individuals and communities (cf. Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12). The 'word' is here personified, like the gospel (more fully, 'the word of the truth of the gospel') in 1:5–6. Here, as there, God is at work through the apostolic preaching, and this work of God must be supported and reinforced by the appropriate weapons, the intercessions of his people. The content of this 'word', in keeping with earlier references in the letter (1:26–27; 2:2), is further defined when Paul says *so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ*. This phrase is to be understood in the light of earlier passages in the letter; it is the secret plan of God for the salvation of the whole world as this has now been made known in and through Jesus Christ. It is the mystery which consists in Christ—not merely in him as an individual, but in the wide implications of who he is and what he has achieved. A message, however, which challenges the power structures of the present age is always dangerous to proclaim: *hence for which I am in chains*. Paul's sufferings and present imprisonment were therefore, as he indicated in 1:24, part and parcel of his apostolic vocation, which itself was bound up with the mystery of Christ, and of the ushering in of the new age.

4. The niv has not quite brought out the full force of the next sentence: *pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should*. The verb translated 'proclaim it clearly' literally means 'reveal' or 'make manifest', and belongs closely with 'mystery'. Paul must not simply explain everything with clarity. He must announce, and so 'reveal', the mystery of Christ. He is under obligation to do so in such a way as to bring true knowledge and understanding to his hearers (see on 1:24–2:5).

5. The Colossians are to ensure that their lives and speech reflect that same mystery, the hidden wisdom of God. *Be wise in the way you act* is literally 'walk in wisdom', that is, follow Christ as God's pattern for full and authentic human living. Their lives are to reflect this wisdom *towards outsiders*. Paul knew only too well (1 Cor. 10:32) the importance of giving the world no reason to criticize or gossip about the behaviour of Christians. Blameless life lays the foundation for gracious witness, as Christians *make the most of every opportunity*. The verb literally means 'buying up' or 'buying out': it does not necessarily have the sense (as Eph. 5:16 appears to do) that the time is somehow evil and must be redeemed, but simply that every opportunity is to be snapped up (see O'Brien) like a bargain. The word 'opportunity' may have simply the sense of 'time': the clause is probably an instruction to regard time as opportunity for witness, and to use it eagerly as such.

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6. This eagerness for witness must not be the excuse for brash arrogance or boring complacency (imagining one's own formulae to contain all the answers). On the contrary: *let your conversation be always full of grace* (the word 'grace' has, in Greek as in English, the possible double meaning of God's grace and human graciousness), *seasoned with salt*. The metaphor of 'salty' speech was a common one in the ancient world. Paul knows that a tedious monologue is worse than useless in evangelism. Christians are to work at making their witness interesting, lively and colourful; and, at the same time, to ensure that they have thoroughly mastered the rudiments of their faith *so that you may know how to answer everyone*. 'Answer' implies that outsiders will ask Christians about their new life, as indeed they will if verse 5 is being obeyed. Many such questions are predictable; but each questioner is an individual and must be respected and loved as such. If the 'answer' is heard or felt as an oracular pronouncement or a rebuke for ignorance, the argument may be won but the person lost.

Paul's thought has come full circle. Beginning with a report of his thankful prayer for the Colossians (1:3ff.), and of his work for the gospel (1:24–2:5), he has ended with the request that they should pray as he prays, and work as he works. Their prayer and life, like his, are to be expressions of the loving wisdom of God, reaching out in Christ to save the world.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

David E. Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, NIVAC
Michael Bird, *Colossians and Philemon*, New Covenant Commentary
David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT
Robert Bratcher and Eugene Nida, *A Handbook of Paul's Letter to the Colossians*, UBSH
Robert W. Wall, *Colossians and Philemon*, IVP New Testament Commentary
Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Application Commentary
James D. G. Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, NIGTC
Dick Lucas, *The Message of Colossians and Philemon*, The Bible Speaks Today
Clinton Arnold, *Colossians*, Word Biblical Commentary