

Notes on

Paulus' Letter to the Kolossaeans

Authorship and Date

Some people dispute the Pauline authorship of the letter, finding it difficult to place the time of composition within the framework established by the Actions of the Envoys. Some believe that it was copied from Paulus' Open Letter ("Ephesians"), which may not be authentic, either. However, internal criteria do allow us to pin down a time frame for the letter:

Paulus was writing with Timotheos (1:1), placing the letter after Acts 16 and during a time when Paulus was accompanied by Timotheos. Paulus had been joined by Epafras (4:12), who had been responsible for first bringing the message to Kolossae (1:7). This has prompted many to believe that the two were in prison, as they were at the time of writing of the letter to Filemon (v. 23). Indeed, Paulus was in confinement at the time of writing (4:3, 10). The letter bears certain similarities to the letter to the Ephesians and was carried by the same messenger (4:7) as the letter to Filemon. Consequently, many place the time of writing to c. 57 or 58 CE. Considering, though, that Daemas and Lukas were with Paulus (4:14), the letter might best be dated slightly earlier, c. 57 CE, around the time of Paulus' first arrival in Jerusalem and first defense (Ac 21-2), around the time of Filemon and before his second letter to Timotheos (when Lukas was still with him, but after Daemas deserted Jesus).

Background

Although Kolossae had once been an important trade center in Asia Minor (Turkey), by the first century its importance had been overshadowed by other nearby cities (Laodikeia and Hierapolis). Paulus never visited Kolossae personally (2:1), but when he heard of the trouble being caused by the Judaizers there, he took the occasion to write this letter and one to nearby Laodikeia (4:16). His opponents there were Jewish mystics who appear to have leaned in the ascetic direction (2:18), theologically. All of the usual Pauline arguments for not returning to Priestly Judaism are found in this letter, along with a defense and uplifting of the Messiah, which is also found in his open letter in a different form.

Commentary

Paulus, an envoy of Anointed Jesus on account of what God wants, and Timotheos the brother. To those holy and trusting brothers in the Anointed One who are in Kolossae.

This was a standard greeting. By referring to himself as "an envoy," Paulus invokes whatever privilege the Anointed One had given to his envoys.

1:2 *Hello to you, and peace from God our Father.*

We always give thanks about you when we pray to God, Father of our Lord, Anointed Jesus, since we have heard of your trust in Anointed Jesus and of the love that you have for all the holy ones on account of the hope that is being laid up for you in the heavens (which you heard about before in the statement of the truth of the good message). The good message is present among you, just as also it is in all the creation. It is bearing fruit and is growing, just as it was among you from the day when you heard and recognized God's generosity in truth--just as you learned from Epafra our beloved fellow slave, who is on our behalf a trustworthy servant of the Anointed One. This one also pointed out your spiritual love to us.

The letter opens with an announcement of benediction on behalf of the readers. The motivation for the letter begins with "we have heard," although Paulus has not yet disclosed the exact reason for his writing. He lays a foundation here for what will follow. Paulus is pleased to hear about their trust and love, for these are the very center of the Christian message. The fact that the Kolossaeans live by trust and love has given rise to Paulus' confidence that they will take part in the afterlife. This is something that Paulus knows that the readers heard before from Epafra, who first spoke "the statement of the truth of the good message" to them.

"God's generosity" refers to the forgiveness and guilt-free lives that they have because they live their lives according to the principles of trust and love. Epafra was a Kolossaeen himself, and Paulus makes sure to praise his trustworthy delivery of the message to them, and it had been he who had reported to Paulus how the Kolossaeans had received Jesus.

9 *On account of this also, from the day when we heard, we do not cease to pray and ask on your behalf, so that you might be filled with the recognition of what he wants in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. He wants for you to walk in a manner that is worthy of the Lord, to please him in all things, in every good deed bearing fruit and growing in the recognition of God, being strengthened with all strength according to the might of his glory to the point of full endurance and longsuffering, and at the same time giving thanks with joy to that Father who equipped us for the inheritance of the holy ones in the light, who rescued us from the authority of the darkness and changed our standing into the kingdom of the son of his love.*

Paulus and his fellow travelers pray that the Kolossaeans will realize what God wants and do it. What does God want? Paulus indicates that God's desire is for them to live lives that please God, with their relationships with God becoming deeper as time passes. The statement at first is very broad, but the author narrows it to say that God wants the Kolossaeans to endure the persecutions of the Judaizers, and so he hints at their immediate problems. "The light" is the Messianic movement ("Christianity"), for it is the Christians who realize the true spiritual nature of the Torah, since Jesus the Anointed One explained it. "The darkness" that had authority over both Paulus and some of his readers is the practice of ritual religion. God rescued both him and them from this darkness by sending Jesus to relate the spiritual principles to them. Notice that still Paulus is being somewhat subtle; he has condemned neither them nor anything specific that they have said.

14 *In this son we have the washing away, the forgiveness of sins:*

*who is an image of the invisible God,
firstborn of all creation,
because in him all things were created--
in the skies and on the land--
the visible things and the invisible things--
whether thrones or lordships or governments or authorities--
all things were created through him and for him.*

And he is ahead of all things, and all the things have been made to stand together in him, and he is the head of the body (the assembly): he is the beginning, firstborn of the dead, so that he might become prominent in all things. Because it was thought to be a good thing for all the fullness to dwell in him and through him to reconcile all things to him after making peace through the blood of his cross. They are reconciled through him whether the things on land or the things in the heavens.

Since the Judaizers so strongly urged a departure from the teachings of Jesus, and indeed some were claiming that he was not really the Messiah, this high praise of the character and stature of Jesus represents Paulus' confidence in the truth of the message and of the identity of the Anointed One. Although Paulus does not mention Jesus' name, he does not need to. His confidence is that the promised Messiah has come.

It is the Anointed One who brought "the washing away." This is not to say that no one's sins were forgiven prior to Jesus. But the guilt and sin are gone together now that the Messiah has come. Instead of living in recognition of sin (by performing rituals that remind of sin), Jesus brought a consciousness that sins have been forgiven, enabling a deeper relationship with God.

Jesus is "an image of the invisible God." Aren't all people created in God's image? Yes, and Paulus does use the same term. However, we do not always reflect that divine image to one another. Jesus' relationship with God was so deep that he always did right. His behavior was completely loving and trusting, to the point of teaching us about those things -- which are God's very nature.

Jesus was not "firstborn" temporally, but it is Jesus who is God's legitimate son and heir. In the sense that the Messiah is superior to the rest of us, carrying with him God's blessing, Jesus is the firstborn. An explanation follows.

Why is he considered "firstborn," although he was not born first? Because everything that God has ever done, he did with the Messiah in mind. The sending of the Anointed One was planned prior to creation, and therefore in some sense he was here "first," for all of those things that God did before Jesus was born were done with him in mind and with him as purpose. For Paulus, then, the Anointed One was the most important feature of creation -- the culmination of everything that God has had to teach us.

He is "ahead of all things" expresses this idea that God's plan to send an Anointed One, to complete the teaching for humanity, was planned ahead of everything else. Therefore, Jesus is the source -- the metaphorical use of "head" -- of all those who would acknowledge God's true spiritual teachings. For the Christian, he is "the beginning."

Being "firstborn among the dead" does not point, as some suppose, to Jesus' being the first "Christian" to die. Instead, the term indicates again the same place of prominence. Paulus has already proposed that the Messiah is the firstborn of everything that lives; since he died and became part of the dead, he is also the firstborn among everything that has ever lived and is now dead. In other words, he is "prominent in all things."

The "fullness" refers again to Jesus' perfect reflection of God's image to us, which the author will later call "the fullness of God's nature." Jesus was the perfect human example and therefore is superior to any other human being, living or dead. In this there is a subtle reminder that the Anointed One is superior to the patriarchs, to Moses, and to the prophets -- those who were the cornerstone of Priestly Judaism (and the foundation of Rabbinic Judaism as well).

Being superior to Moses and the prophets, Jesus was able to make complete the Torah that was given through Moses. Paulus elsewhere indicates (see 2 Corinthians, Romans, and Galatians) that there had been only imperfect reconciliation through the Torah, because the way that people viewed the Torah (as a legal code) left Israel with a consciousness of guilt (see Rm 7-8) that interfered with their relationship with God. Just as that system called for blood sacrifices, Jesus made a blood sacrifice to complete it, inaugurating a new covenant with God. Paulus' description is so sweeping that everything everywhere has received the teaching of recognition -- on land, and even in the heavens! While not literally true, Paulus cannot help but magnify the greatness and superiority of Jesus act of self-sacrifice, which made it possible for Paulus himself to be free of guilt. Through Jesus, Paulus realized the true nature of the Torah, and here he acknowledges that without the Lord, he might never have seen that truth.

21 *And you were at one time foreigners and enemies in the mind with your evil deeds. But now you have been reconciled with the body of his flesh through the death, to present you as holy and blameless and irreproachable in his presence if indeed you continue on in trust to be grounded and made steadfast and if you are not moved away from the hope of the good message that you heard, which was heralded in every created place under heaven, and of which I Paulus became a servant.*

"You were foreigners...enemies." Many commentators believe that the author is now addressing gentiles only, but this is not necessarily the case. The Jewish people believed themselves to be God's nation, God's tribe. But Paulus has just come from saying that without the truth behind the Torah, the ritual religion that they had formed for themselves made them "foreigners" -- just like gentiles -- and even "enemies." The latter is a term that Paulus applies to himself, for though he was as pious as he could be in Judaism, his practices opposed the true teaching from God.

Therefore, Jesus' crucifixion brings the "reconciliation" that he has been talking about. Freed of their guilt, the Kolossaeans can now approach God in a way that had been impossible. As long as they don't leave behind the message of trust and love, the readers should continue recognizing that they can enter "God's presence," knowing that they are viewed by God as "blameless and irreproachable." These two terms referred to one's state in Judaism as long as the sacrifices had been made, but Jesus' sacrifice completes the system and applies the "blameless" tag to everyone who will realize that God generously forgives. The thought in the non-Pauline passages, Heb 10:19-22 and 1J 3:19-23, parallel this well, although the terminology is different.

This good message of justification by trust is the one of which Paulus himself (a former "enemy") was made into an official spokesman, a "herald," and "a servant." The message is now everywhere, meaning that the envoys have done their job in spreading the word throughout the Roman Empire (although the Twelve did confine their work to Palestine). This does not mean that everyone on earth embraced the message, nor even that they had all personally heard it. Paulus' statement does indicate, though, that wherever Jewish people were found, the message that the Messiah had come was also there.

24 *I am now rejoicing in those sufferings on your behalf, and I am filling up what afflictions the Anointed One lacked in my own flesh on behalf of his body, which is the assembly. I became a servant of the assembly according to the stewardship of God which was given to me for you--to fill up God's message, the secret that was hidden away from the ages and from the generations but which is now made apparent to his holy ones. God wanted to make known to them what is the richness [of the glory] of this secret among the nations. The Anointed One is in you, the hope of the glory, whom we are announcing, admonishing everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we might present everyone as complete in the Anointed One. I am also laboring for this and agonizing according to the working of the one who is working in me with power.*

Paulus is most pleased about the coming of the promised Anointed One and about the freeing power of the good message, and so he is even happy to rejoice in what suffering he has had to undergo in order to spread the message. Although he did not personally take the message to Kolossae, Paulus considers his suffering to have been just as much on their behalf as on behalf of every other Christian, for every follower of Jesus belongs to the same (metaphorical) "body," of which Jesus is the "head."

The fact that the author relates to Kolossae the things that he has suffered allow him to speak to the readers about their problem although he has never met them. Thus, Paulus serves not just part of Christendom but "the assembly" of all Christians. The sending that he received, a "stewardship" of the message, was not only for those whom he knew but was "for you" as well. Here as in Paulus' other letters, that secret is the coming of the Anointed One, together with the teachings about trust and love, and it is a secret that God opened up to reveal to everyone.

"We are announcing" -- the envoys sent by the Anointed One are proclaiming his teachings, hoping that "everyone" might embrace those teachings. Ultimately, though, Paulus' authority comes from God, whom he asserts is "working in me with power."

2:1 *For I want you to know the great agony that I have on your behalf and on behalf of those in Laodikeia, and as many as have not physically seen my face, so that their hearts might be comforted and might be knit together in love and into all the richness of the full assurance of understanding, and into a recognition of God's secret: the Anointed One. In this are hidden away all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

The statement "I want you to know" begins the formal disclosure of the letter's content. Why has Paulus written? First of all, he wants the Christians in Kolossae to know something -- that he has suffered on behalf of the message (that includes them), so that even those who have never seen Paulus personally are united together with him. Therefore, he wants the readers to "be

comforted" by the words of this loving stranger. More importantly, he does not want them to give up the teachings of the Anointed One, for the Anointed One and his teachings are the secret that God has been progressively revealing since time began. His Jewish kinsmen might have viewed the Torah as the source of wisdom and knowledge, but Paulus states flatly that it is "the secret" of spiritual religion that is the source of these "treasures."

4 I am telling you this so that no one would rationalize to you with persuasive speech. For if I am also absent physically, nevertheless I am with you spiritually, rejoicing and seeing your order and the solidity of your trust in the Anointed One.

Now the readers have a full disclosure of Paulus' rationale for writing. He does not want certain Jewish people to convince them with nice-sounding words that the Messiah's way is wrong. Words of human opinion should not be permitted to sway them from the spiritual teachings that they know are right. Although Paulus is not physically present, he rejoices to know that they are following the spiritual Torah, and the implication is that he wants to continue in that joyful expression on their behalf.

Therefore, as you received Jesus the Anointed Lord, walk in him. Be rooted and constructed in him and be established in trust, just as you were taught, and be abundant in thanksgiving. See to it that no one be preying on you through speculation and empty deceit, which is according to human tradition and according to the elements of creation and not according to the Anointed One. Because all of the fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in him, and in him you are filled.

Here, Paulus is careful not to engage in the same sort of persuasion that the Judaizers are employing. He wants only that they do what they were taught from the beginning, and it had not been he who had taught them about Jesus. The foundation laid by Epafras was enough for them, and Paulus was not going to alter it even slightly, for the Kolossaeans had been told all that was necessary.

"See to it..." -- Don't allow the Judaizers to use unfounded notions, Jewish traditions, and outright trickery in order to fool you! The author regards all arguments against Jesus to be unfounded, and since Jesus' and the envoys' teachings were accompanied by signs from God, surely his opponents were merely speaking speculative human opinions. They had already heard every argument from tradition about what the Messiah was supposed to be like, but the ones who rejected Jesus were doing so not because he did not meet the requirements in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, but because the Jewish people had certain expectations that they regarded as equal to the Bible itself. They were elevating their own opinions to the status of the Bible.

Paulus refers to their rationalizations as conforming to "the elements of creation." This is an expression that he normally uses to signify rudimentary religious teachings, such as are found in ritual, physical religions. Paulus' Judaizing opponents were advocating that the Kolossaeans return to such a ritualistic system, but the Anointed One, who expressed God's nature to us completely, taught otherwise. He had taught a spiritual way of life, including justification by trust. Just as Jesus had been filled with God's nature, so also God filled the Kolossaeans with it, through sending Jesus with "the secret," that is, the spiritual explanation of the Torah. So, the

fact that Jesus had shown them the way empowered them to experience a relationship with God such as he had.

10 *He is the head of every government and authority. In him also you were circumcised, with a circumcision that was not done by hand in the putting off of the body made of flesh, in the Anointed One's circumcision: You were buried together with him in baptism, in which also you were raised up with him through the trust in the working of God who raised him up from among dead people. And when you were dead in your wanderings and in the foreskinned nature of your flesh, he made us alive together with him. He freely forgave us of all of our wanderings and blotted out what was handwritten against us in the rules. He has also removed this from our midst, having nailed it to the cross. He also stripped away the governments and authorities and made them public spectacles with his freedom of speech, triumphing over them with it.*

God, who fills the Kolossaeans and who filled Jesus, is the source of "every government and authority." That is, God is supreme over both civil (or secular) powers and over the Torah and prophets, because he is the ultimate source of authority. Therefore, although the Torah taught of a literal, physical circumcision, God also said that the true circumcision was spiritual. The true means of covenanting with God was not through a physical act but was something that happened within. This contrasts with the physical circumcision that the Judaizers strongly advocated. The spiritual circumcision, though, was the one promoted by the Anointed One and is rightly called his because it was revealed most recently in opening up the new covenant.

Paulus wants to separate his readers from the Judaizers, so as to illustrate that whether they are Jews by birth or not, they do not belong with those who advocate a physical religion. After mentioning that Jesus and the Judaizers promoted different kinds of circumcision, he reminds his readers that when they were baptized, they made a conscious effort to separate themselves from the non-Christian Jewish world.

"You were buried" does not refer to the mode of baptism -- to what it looks like -- but to the significance of separating themselves out as part of a separate covenant, the covenant inaugurated with Jesus' blood sacrifice. When they were baptized, they had been making a public statement that they knew that justification came not from adherence to various rituals but through trust. If baptism symbolizes entry into a covenant involving Jesus' death, then aren't they "resurrected" because of their trust? Isn't it indeed trust that is the basis for salvation?

"And when you were dead" refers to the situation that they had known in Priestly Judaism when they had been slaves to what Paulus calls elsewhere (Rom 7-8) the "code of sin and death." The "flesh" is physical religion, and just as the author has called the true circumcision spiritual (not literal), so also the physical religion is "foreskinned," that is, those who pursue justification that way are not "circumcised" to God, but the Messiah came, and when we realized that, he "made us alive" through his teachings.

Next, Paulus contrasts grace with justification through a legal code. The legalistic view of the Torah and the ritualized religion that accompanied it did not bring salvation, but in their way of thinking it brought a consciousness of sin. Thus, under the Torah, they were always made aware of what was "handwritten" against them "in the rules." The mentality of the Judaizers had

brought them no peace, but because of Jesus they were free of guilt and lived knowing that God "freely forgave." They had become conscious of forgiveness!

"He has removed this" -- The act of the cross symbolically completed the whole sacrificial system, including the way of thinking that surrounded it. God removed that attitude for those who embraced the deeper understanding sent through Jesus. And so, in the act of initiating a new covenant with humanity, God made those "authorities" (secular and religious) that might interfere with our relationships with him as though they were nothing. In particular, he robbed the Jewish positional leadership structure of any authority that they might have over the Messianic Jew. The cross made public spectacles of these "authorities," and God triumphed over physical religion by revealing it to have been only a teaching tool.

16 *Therefore, no one should judge you in food and in drink or with respect to a feast or new moons or sabbaths. These things are shadows of what is about to come, but the body is the Anointed One's. Don't let anyone arbitrate for you. Whoever wants to is wanting this in low self-esteem and in worship of the messengers, intruding in matters he has seen, being puffed up without cause by his fleshly mind. And he does not cling to the head, from which all of the body grows God's growth as it is supplied and held together through the joints and ligaments.*

Since God's intent was to remove ritual religion from among his people, "no one should judge" about the various religious rituals in the Torah. After all, they were temporary learning devices, and now the true teaching is here. And so, they were but "shadows" of the truth.

"The body is the Anointed One's" indicates that Jesus established the new "body" concept. Jesus united everyone together as his body; he wasn't clinging to the traditions of the past.

"Low self-esteem" possibly refers to extreme asceticism, and this is the majority opinion, although it is quite natural to assert that the ritual fasts of the Jewish people are intended here. Who would want to submit to the Judaizers except for someone who wanted to debase himself? Similarly, who would join them except for someone who would worship the messenger rather than the creator? The term "worship" here is probably intended in the strongest sense, although "messengers" may not signify divine messengers ("angels") but human ones (such as the patriarchs and prophets).

The Judaizers are "intruding in" or "scrutinizing" things that are visible -- in other words, their religion is based on the attention to detail regarding physical things; it is not spiritual. Consequently, Paulus describes their attitude as one that is "puffed up" (arrogant) toward the attitude of things physical (i.e., the "fleshly mind").

In clinging to what is physical, the Judaizer rejects what is spiritual, namely, the teachings of the Anointed One. The body, Christianity, grows spiritually only because it follows the spiritual teachings of the Messiah (and is thereby connected to the head of the body).

20 *If with the Anointed One you died from the elements of creation, why are you subjecting yourselves to rules, as though you were living in creation? "You should not touch. You should not taste. You should not handle." These things are all lead to decay in the using, being precepts*

and teachings of human beings. Indeed, these things are holding to a message of wisdom, in self-made religious practice and low self esteem by neglecting the body--not with any honor, but for a filling up of the flesh.

In continuing his comparison of the Judaizers' religion and the relationship concept brought by Jesus, Paulus introduces the analogies of death and resurrection. When they accepted the Messiah's teachings, the Kolossaeans "died" to such rudimentary teachings as ritual religion. He asks them rhetorically why they would want to go back again, knowing that the very idea does not make sense. Referring to the Judaizers' "rules" -- a human set of physical guidelines, or "creed" -- the author remarks that they should not be living "in creation." That is, they should not be dwelling on physical things (as far as their devotion to God goes). Citing examples of Rabbinic "rules," the author pulls no punches: ritualized religion leads to (moral) decay, since the very concept is not from God. Instead, it consists entirely of "precepts and teachings of human beings." Remember that the Torah itself is now seen as a device for explaining the deeper concepts of love and trust, so that dwelling on the rituals of Judaism is to completely miss the point of the Torah.

The Judaizing message appears wise because it promotes something religious and self-sacrificial (asceticism), but in reality the religious practices are but "self-made" substitutes for a relationship with God, and the ascetic debasement is just a "neglect" for the body. For Paulus, this serves no purpose other than to "fill up the flesh" -- it makes someone **look** spiritual to others. Jesus spoke of this also when referring to those Jewish leaders who looked downcast or sad when they were fasting, so that everyone would know what they were doing; Paulus appears to mean something similar.

3:1 *Therefore, since you were raised up with the Anointed One, seek the things that are above, where the Anointed One is sitting at God's right hand. Have your attitude focused on the things above, not on the things which are on the earth. For you died, and your life has been hidden in God together with the Anointed One. When the Anointed One appears, the one who is your life, then also you will appear together with him in glory.*

Just as Jesus died and was raised, so also the Kolossaeans had (metaphorically) "died," leaving behind the trappings of ritual religion. In keeping the metaphor, Paulus refers to them as having been "raised up with the Anointed One," since the teachings of the Messiah had brought them life. His urging them to "seek the things that are above" is his way of informing them that it is necessary for them to continue in the Messianic teachings of love and trust. Consequently, they are to focus their attitudes on "the things above" (Jesus' teachings), and not those aspects of religious life that are limited to this earth. Why? "You died," says Paul. Those things no longer exist for you.

The fact that it was they (and not the Priestly Jews) who had "the life" was "hidden," but the temple was soon to be destroyed (at the coming of the Anointed One), revealing the glory of God's plan, in which the Kolossaeans would be publically revealed as having been right to remain with Jesus, just as Jesus would be revealed as having been right.

5 *Therefore, put to death those members which are on the earth: sexual sin, uncleanness, strong emotion, strong bad desire, and greed (which is idolatry). For on account of these things God's anger is coming. You too once walked in these things when you lived among them, but now put all of these out of your mouth too: anger, rage, badness, evil speaking, shameful speech. Do not lie to one another, since your former person and his practices have been stripped away, and since you have been clothed with the new one, who is being renewed to the point of recognition, as an image of the one who created him. In him there is no Greek and Jew, circumcised and foreskinned, barbarian, Skuthian, slave, free person. But all things are the Anointed One, who is also in all things.*

"Therefore" continues the thought above, in which Paulus has just reminded his readers that God was about to come and judge those members of the Jewish nation who rejected his Anointed One. The things that the Kolossaeans had left behind are all subtle attacks at the Judaizers, whose sins he relates to the sins typically mentioned in the Old Testament as being causes for judgment. Sexual sin is often a metaphor there for unfaithfulness toward God, and Paulus bluntly refers to materialism (greed) as a form of idolatry. Their focus on physical, ritual purity is simply mentioned as "uncleanliness" -- in reality it is not clean at all, and the Judaizers' apparent fervent devotion toward God is misguided. "You too once walked in these" reminds the readers again that they have "died" to Priestly Judaism and have left its regulations and rituals behind.

Since these things are the cause for God's coming anger (in which he would destroy the temple), and since the readers have already pledged to leave these things, he reminds them then to avoid those things that might interfere with living trusting lives of love (as Jesus instructed). Such characteristics as open rage and anger are contradictory to what Jesus taught. Those Kolossaeans who did not return to Judaism might be tempted to strike back at the Judaizers or to deceive them in order to avoid persecution. Paulus points out that Jesus did not teach such things. God has given them the power to see beyond the physical to the spiritual, and so they must appeal to that power and live spiritually. They once lived as though God were regulating human actions, but now they must keep on realizing that he is looking at their hearts. Finally, they must continue to grow in the knowledge that God is impartial. Social, economic, racial, and gender differences mean nothing to God, and these things should be unimportant to God's people -- even though certain Jewish people (and certain Greeks) were interested in propagating the notion that their people were superior to others. Such bigotry is not to be found among God's people.

12 *Therefore, beloved holy ones, be clothed as God's chosen people, with deep feelings of compassion, gentleness, a humble attitude, meekness, longsuffering. Bear with one another, and forgive one another if someone has something to complain about. Just as also the Lord forgave you, you also do likewise.*

Typically, after directing his readers to avoid certain things (as being unloving or untrusting), he points them to those things which do indicate a loving and trusting lifestyle. God's chosen people should be characterized by compassion; they should readily show mercy even to those who oppress. They should be gentle, not repaying one bad thing for another. They should be humble rather than self-centered or bigoted. They should be meek, submissive toward one another and toward God. They should endure the opposition that faces them. In their relationships with their fellow Christians, it is necessary indeed to stick together no matter what, and so they must bear

with one another and continue to practice the same kind of forgiveness that they themselves receive from God.

Now on top of all of these things is love, which is a bond of completeness. And let the peace of the Anointed One arbitrate in your hearts. You were also called for this in the body. Also become thankful. The message of the Anointed One should dwell in you richly. You should be teaching and admonishing yourselves in all wisdom and performing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs for God with generosity in your hearts. And all that you ever do, in word or in deed, do it all in the name of Lord Jesus, giving thanks to Father God on account of him.

In concluding his application of the good message to the lives of every Kolossaeans, Paulus mentions the single concept that underlies every application he has made: love. It is the love taught by Jesus that will bind them together, and if they continue in love, they will have the same peace that Jesus himself had -- for the Anointed One had been content to carry out God's desires for him, even though others did not believe him and opposed him. Love is the purpose and calling of every Christian, and in particular it is the calling of the Kolossaeans, who should thank God for sending them life through the Messiah.

"The message of the Anointed One" will "dwell" in them if they continue in love and trust, not returning to the ritual religion that was the cause for God's coming anger. If they live in love, they would relate to one another by helping each other, treating one another "with generosity." Their admonition for one another will be "in wisdom" if it conforms to Jesus' teachings. Paulus' advice to play music seems out of place, but it is an expression that their lives will be full of cheer and thankfulness toward God if they live by the spiritual Torah. Finally, whatever they do, the Kolossaeans are reminded to do it all in full recognition of the fact that they represent Jesus; this is what it means to do something "in his name." As Christians, they (we) represent Jesus wherever they go, and their (our) whole lives need to reflect that fact. The Kolossaeans needed to thank God for the Messiah rather than returning to Judaism; we today can take the same saying to heart, thanking God for the spiritual Torah rather than involving ourselves in ritual religion.

18 *You wives submit yourselves to your husbands, as it is appropriate in the Lord.*

You husbands love your wives and do not become bitter toward them.

You children listen to your parents regarding everything. For in the Lord this is well pleasing.

You fathers do not stir up your children, so that they would not lose desire.

You slaves listen to your lords according to the flesh, not with eye-service as people-pleasers, but with simplicity of the heart as people who fear God. Work whatever you do from the soul, as if it were for the Lord, not people, knowing that from the Lord you will obtain the payment of the inheritance. You are slaves to the Anointed Lord. For the one who does wrong will be repaid for what wrong he did, and there is no personal bias.

4:1 *You lords promote what is just and equal for your slaves, knowing that you too have a lord in heaven.*

These specific, situational pieces of advice may have come because Paulus had heard something of specific situations in which some Kolossaeans were not treating one another lovingly. All Christian relationships are intended to be ones of equality. No Christian wife should feel so liberated by the message that she tries to control her relationship with her husband. All Christians

are intended instead to be submissive, and the Kolossaeans wives were reminded of that. On the other side, husbands should love their wives even more as equals than they did in a society that did not treat them as equals. Love is self-sacrificing and always puts the other person's needs first, and the husbands appear to have needed this reminder.

The adult children were advised to remember the wisdom of their parents and look toward their godly examples. It pleases God for children to seek the wise advice of their parents, treating them with respect in so doing. On the other hand, the fathers (parents) were reminded to treat their children as equals also. Failing to do this would stir up their emotions against not only their families but also God, causing them to lose their desire to follow Jesus and his teachings.

People who were slaves by earthly profession needed to realize that their occupation was separate from their spiritual situation. Although they were equal to their Christian lords, human society had put them into a position where someone was literally the boss of their physical lives. Paulus urged them to be conscientious in their work, realizing that their dedication was a service to God. We might consider the same thing for our various bosses. As slaves, they served a household without the hope of inheriting anything, but God would reward them with a different kind of inheritance. The same is true for the worker who is not a slave, for money and property are only temporary. Who is their real master? The Anointed One is their master if they apply his teachings. If their masters mistreat them, the Kolossaeans slaves need to realize that God sees those lords as abusing their equals; he will repay them for their unkindness. Similarly, the Christian lords are advised to treat their slaves with fairness and equality, knowing that spiritually all people are equals. If they begin to think of themselves as superiors because they are lords, they should remember that they too have a lord.

4:2 *Attend to prayer. Stay alert in it with thankfulness, at the same time praying also for us, so that God would open a door to us for the message, so that we might speak the secret of the Anointed One, on account of which also I was bound. Pray that I may make the secret apparent, as it is necessary for me to speak.*

In preparing to close the body of the letter, Paulus relates his reason for writing to his own personal situation. The readers are asked to pray for their own welfare and for the inspired envoys and prophets. Paulus wants them to remember the message even as they pray for him, and so he asks them to pray for him to "speak the secret of the Anointed One." That is, he wants to spread the spiritual message of trust and love even as his Jewish opposition has caused him to be "bound." For Paulus, it is "necessary" to tell the message to others, for God called him to such a task, and he prays for the strength to be able to display the message verbally and through his actions, even as he is persecuted. And so, Paulus' determination to remain with the message rather than to return to Judaism is an example to the Kolossaeans Christians.

5 *Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, making the season profitable for yourselves. Your message should always be with generosity, seasoned with salt, knowing how it is necessary for you to respond to everyone.*

The segment of advice concludes here, with Paulus spurring the Kolossaeans on to treat others well. If they treat people well, they will see that the current season is "profitable," and possibly

their persecution will be less harsh. If they act kindly and carefully, they may not escape persecution altogether, but their kindness will result in less adversity. In this manner "it is necessary" to behave, for Jesus emphasized love.

7 All of my matters Tychikos will make known to you--that beloved brother and trustworthy servant and slave together with me in the Lord. I sent him to you for this reason: that he could know the matters concerning you and would give comforting advice to your hearts together with Onesimus the trustworthy and beloved brother, who comes from among you. They will make known to you all matters going on here.

The personal note begins the conclusion to the letter, which has quite briefly detailed their reasons to remain with Jesus. Tychikos had been the one who had reported the Kolossaeans progress and tribulations to Paulus, and as he returns to them carrying this letter, he will inform them of Paulus' personal exploits. His mention of Onesimus (apparently the slave of Filemon) raises their awareness that although he is a stranger he is concerned for them personally. As these two return to Kolossae, they will tell of Paulus' personal details.

Aristarchus, my fellow-prisoner, greets you; also, Markus the nephew of Bar-Nabas (You received instructions about him to receive him if he should come to you), and Yeshua who is called Just. These people who are of the circumcision, these alone are my coworkers for God's kingdom. They have become a comfort to me.

Paulus mentions certain Jewish men who were working with him, a further indication that he is not an enemy to the Jewish people but a foe of the religious leaders and their refusal to accept the Messianic teachings. These companions of Paulus, including Bar-Nabas' nephew (whose name they knew), greet the Kolossaeans readers along with Paulus.

Ephraim, a slave of the Anointed One who is from among you, greets you. He is always agonizing on your behalf in his prayers, so that you would be established as complete and full in all of what God wants. For I testify for him that he has a lot of anguish on your behalf, and for those in Laodikeia, and for those in Hierapolis.

The man who first brought the news of the coming of the Anointed One to them was Ephraim, who was a citizen of Kolossae. He and Paulus are still in partnership, for he greets his friends through Paulus' letter, hoping that they will continue to grow in the complete teachings of the Messiah. Paulus then testifies that not only does Ephraim worry about them but also about certain other Christians whom he also loves.

Lukas the beloved doctor greets you; also Demas.

Paulus' final greetings come from his other companions, Lukas (who wrote two lengthy pieces which are part of the New Testament) and Demas (who had not yet decided to return to Judaism -- see 2T 4:10). Next, he turns traditionally to ask his readers to greet those among them on his behalf.

Greet those brothers in Laodikeia, and Nymphas and the assembly at her house. And when this letter is read among you, make it so that it may also be read in the assembly in Laodikeia and that you would also read the one from Laodikeia.

Since Laodikeia and Kolossae are often spoken of in the same breath, and since the cities were nearby, he asks the readers to greet the Christians there and to read the letter that he sent to them, exchanging this letter for it, which appears to have contained different details. Many commentators have suggested that the "open letter" (Ephesians) was sent to Laodikeia among other places, and this may have been the case, but there is no evidence for this. The theory is possible, but there might also be another Pauline letter that is no longer extant. Paulus asks the readers also to greet a certain notable woman (and those Christians who meet with her); in doing so he conveys his personal affection for individuals there.

And say to Archippus, "See to it that you fulfill the service which you received in the Lord."

Again this is a personal touch. Paulus shows that he is familiar with the fact that God has gifted Archippus to perform a particular task. Perhaps he oversaw the feeding of the poor at Kolossae. At any rate, Paulus provides a personal greeting that shows the readers that he is eager to be familiar with their affairs.

This greeting of Paulus is with my hand. Remember my chains. Favor be with you.

Having written the letter personally, Paulus signs it and makes the traditional closing salutation, adding the final reminder that his current state is on account of the same group of people who are oppressing and trying to charm the readers. In places, the letter has been subtle, but often Paulus has bluntly and matter-of-factly addressed the dangerous situation at hand. Hoping that his readers, Epafra's friends, will remain with Jesus, Paulus commits them to God and returns to the matters of his own work.