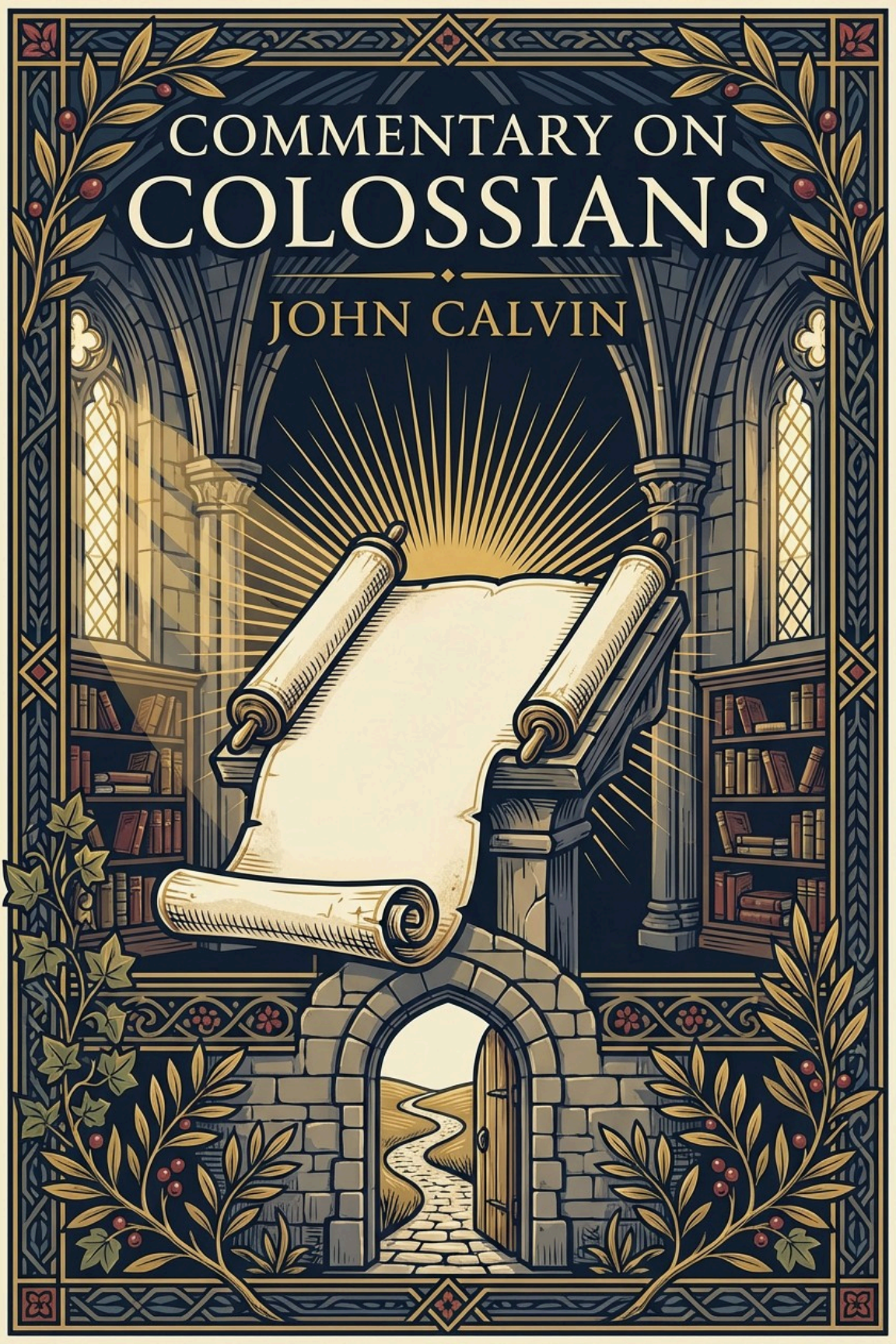


COMMENTARY ON COLOSSIANS

JOHN CALVIN



COMMENTARY ON COLOSSIANS

COMMENTARY ON COLOSSIANS

John Calvin



A free edition from

CHRISTIAN READER

A reading & audiobook app for classic Christian literature

ABOUT THIS BOOK



Commentary on Colossians by John Calvin offers a clear, methodical exposition of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Colossian church. Written during the Reformation, it emphasizes the supremacy of Christ, the sufficiency of His work for salvation, and the dangers of false teachings that diminish His authority. Calvin combines careful attention to the biblical text with theological insight, pastoral concern, and practical application. The commentary reflects Calvin's commitment to Scripture as the final authority and remains a valuable resource for readers seeking a historically grounded, theologically rich understanding of Colossians.



ABOUT CHRISTIAN READER



Christian Reader is a free reading and audiobook app for classic Christian literature, with high-quality narration available as a premium upgrade.

Available on iOS and Android.

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/christian-reader/id6755921023>

https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.samfrisch.christian_reader

CONTENTS



Title Page	5
To the Worshipful and Reverend Fathers Master Noel... ..	6
The Argument Upon the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colo... ..	8
Chapter 1	12
Chapter 2	44
Chapter 3	74
Chapter 4	90
Sent from Rome, by Tichicus and Onesimus	98

TITLE PAGE



A Commentary of Master John Calvin upon the Epistle to the Colossians.

Translated into English by R. V.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, they shall prosper that love you. Psalm 122:6.

At London, printed by Thomas Purfoote, and sold at his shop over against Saint Sepulcher's Church.

TO THE WORSHIPFUL AND
REVEREND FATHERS MASTER NOEL,
DEAN OF PAUL'S, M. MULLINS
ARCHDEACON OF LONDON, MASTER
D. WALKER, ARCHDEACON OF
ESSEX, & MASTER TOWERS
PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY, HIS
SINGULAR GOOD FRIENDS AND
PATRONS, R. V. WISHETH ALL
HEALTH



Many authors, when dedicating their work, customarily praise the people to whom they dedicate it. I think this is not wrong, as long as flattery is absent. For who does not know that praised virtue grows stronger? I say this not, right worshipful and reverend fathers, because I intend to do the same to you — though anyone who knows you would say you fully deserve such praise. If I were to praise your learning and diligence in your calling, which is widely known, or your godly conduct, which your closest friends have seen proven, or your generosity, which all who

are in need — and especially the godly poor — have found and continue to find daily, who could rightly fault me? But setting those things aside for upright judges to consider, I intend to explain briefly what has moved me to dedicate this present book to you. You know that I received from your hands — that worthy man Master Doctor Watts being then alive, whom I remember with reverence — the living I now have. Although you do not sell your benefices as many do today, reason demands that I should not remain ungrateful, even if the benefit were far less than it is. Since my lack of means prevented me from repaying your goodwill in any other way, I chose this little commentary by that worthy father Master Calvin rather than continue without showing my gratitude. I wish my heart lay open for you to see — then you would regard not the work itself, though it is certainly worthy of acceptance, as much as the goodwill of the one who presents it. Farewell. At High Easter, the first of November.

Yours to command, R. V.

THE ARGUMENT UPON THE EPISTLE
OF ST. PAUL TO THE COLOSSIANS BY
MASTER CALVIN



There were three cities near one another in Phrygia that Paul mentions in this Epistle: Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossae. Orosius testifies that Colossae was destroyed by an earthquake during the reign of Nero. So not long after this Epistle was written, three famous churches were wiped out by a terrible and frightening disaster. This was a striking display of God's judgment — if only we had eyes to see it. The Colossians were first taught the Gospel not by Paul, but faithfully and purely by Epaphras and other ministers. Soon after, Satan followed his usual pattern and crept in with his weeds, trying to overthrow their true faith. Some scholars believe two different groups were working to draw the Colossians away from the purity of the Gospel. On one side, they say, philosophers promoted fatalism based on the stars; on the other side, Jews pressed their ceremonies — both groups spreading confusion to undermine Christ. But this view rests on a very flimsy guess. It is based on Paul's mention of thrones, powers, and heavenly creatures. And when they also bring in the word 'ele-

ments,' that is more than absurd. Since I do not intend to refute others' opinions here, I will simply state my own view and what I can draw from sound reasoning.

First, Paul's own words make it sufficiently clear that these troublemakers were trying to mix Christ with Moses — to keep the shadows of the Law alongside the Gospel. This makes it very likely that they were Jews. Because they dressed up their deception in attractive arguments, Paul calls it empty philosophy. In my judgment, he also had in mind the clever reasoning they used, which seemed sharp but was in fact empty and worldly. They imagined that access to God came through angels, and they introduced many such revelations like those found in the books of Dionysius on the heavenly hierarchy — ideas drawn from the school of Platonic philosophers. Paul's main goal is to teach that all things find their foundation in Christ, and that Christ alone is sufficient for the Colossians. He follows this order. After his usual greeting, he praises them in order to make them more receptive. Then, to close the door against all new and strange teachings, he endorses the doctrine they had already received through Epaphras. Next, when he prays for their growth in faith from the Lord, he implies there is still something lacking — opening the way for him to instruct them more firmly. On the other hand, he describes the grace of God toward them in the highest terms, so they will not take it lightly. Then follows his teaching, in which he shows that all the parts of our salvation are rooted in Christ alone, so they should seek nothing elsewhere. He points out what they have already received in Christ, so they will be all the more careful to hold on to Him to the end. Truly, this one chapter alone is enough to make us treasure this Epistle — short as it is — as an incomparable gift.

What is greater in all of heavenly teaching than to have Christ skillfully portrayed, so we can see His power, His office, and all the blessings He brings to us? In this very point we chiefly differ from the papists. Though we are both called Christians and claim to believe in Christ, they have fashioned for themselves a Christ who is torn, disfigured, stripped of His strength and power, and robbed of His office — a Christ who is more like a ghost or a shadow than the real Christ. But we embrace Him as Paul describes Him here: a living and effective Christ. In short, this Epistle reveals the difference between the true Christ and a counterfeit one. Nothing could be more valuable or excellent than that. Near the end of the first chapter, Paul seeks to reclaim his authority through his calling and personal position, and he honors the dignity of the Gospel. In the second chapter, he states more plainly the reason he wrote — to guard against the danger he saw threatening them. Along the way, he speaks of his love for them so they will recognize that he genuinely cares for their wellbeing. From there he moves to exhortation, applying his earlier teaching to practical use. He urges them to settle themselves in Christ alone and calls everything outside of Christ worthless. He specifically addresses circumcision, abstaining from certain foods, and other outward practices to which they wrongly tied the worship of God. He also addresses the misguided veneration of angels, whom they had placed in Christ's role. Prompted by the discussion of circumcision, he also briefly explains the purpose and nature of the old ceremonies. He concludes that they were abolished by Christ. With all of this he fills the rest of the second chapter. In the third chapter, he sets forth the true duties of godliness — what God actually requires of us — in contrast to the empty rules that the false teacher was pressing on the

faithful. He begins at the very source: the putting to death of the flesh and the newness of life. From that spring he draws out particular exhortations — some that apply to all Christians equally, and others that apply specifically to certain people based on their calling. At the beginning of the fourth chapter he continues the same argument, then commends himself to their prayers and, through many expressions, shows how deeply he loves them and how earnestly he desires to care for their salvation.

CHAPTER 1



A COMMENTARY OF MASTER JOHN CALVIN UPON THE
EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE COLOSSIANS, TRANSLATED
INTO ENGLISH BY R. V.

1 Paul an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy a brother. 2 To the Saints who are at Colossae, and to the faithful brothers in Christ: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, always praying for you. 4 Having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love toward all the Saints. 5 For the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of truth, that is, the Gospel. 6 Which has come to you just as it is also bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, as it has also in you since the day you heard it and knew the grace of God in truth. 7 Just as you learned from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf. 8 He has also told us about your love in the Spirit.

Paul an Apostle.) The purpose of these opening greetings has already been explained many times. Because the Colossians had never met Paul, his name alone was not enough to establish his

authority among them. So at the start he tells them he was appointed an Apostle of Christ by the will of God. This meant he was not overstepping by writing to people he did not know personally, since he was carrying out a commission given to him by God. He was not appointed to one church only — his apostleship extended to all. The title 'Saints,' which he gives them, is the more honorable designation, but by calling them 'faithful brothers,' he draws them to him more gently. For the rest, see the earlier Epistles.

3 We give thanks.) He commends the faith and love of the Colossians, both to encourage them to press forward and to be steadfast. By showing that he holds this good opinion of them, he also wins their hearts and makes them more open and ready to receive his teaching. Note always that instead of simply expressing joy, he gives thanks. This teaches us that in all joy we should immediately remember God's goodness, since every happy and blessed thing that comes to us is His gift. Furthermore, his example reminds us that we should give thanks not only for what the Lord gives us, but also for what He gives to others. So what does he thank God for? For the faith and love of the Colossians. He thus acknowledges that both are gifts from God — otherwise his thanksgiving would be empty. And what do we have that does not come from His generosity? If even the smallest things we possess come from Him, how much more must we say the same of these two gifts, which hold the sum of all our excellence? To God and the Father: take this to mean, to God who is the Father of Christ. We are not permitted to acknowledge any other God than the One who has revealed Himself to us in His Son. This is the way that alone opens the door to the true God. He is our Father because He has embraced us in His only begotten Son and, through Him, has

shown us His fatherly love. Always for you: some read this as, 'We give thanks to God always for you,' meaning continually; others read it with what follows, 'praying for you always.' It may also mean: 'As often as we pray for you, we give thanks to God.' But the simpler and more natural reading is: 'We give thanks to God and also pray.' This shows that the condition of the faithful in this world is never so complete that there is not always something more needed. Even someone who has made an excellent beginning may fall a hundred times in a single day, and we must keep pressing forward as long as we are on our journey. So we must hold both things together: rejoicing over the grace already received and thanking God for it, while also asking Him for perseverance and growth.

4 Having heard of your faith.) The fact that the Colossians excelled in faith and love stirred in Paul both affection toward them and concern for their well-being. The excellent gifts of God ought to have exactly this effect on us — wherever they appear, they should move us to love them. He calls it faith in Christ so we will always remember that Christ is the proper target at which faith aims. He mentions love toward the Saints not to exclude others, but because the closer someone is bound to us in God, the more warmly we should embrace them with a special love. True love therefore extends to all people universally, since all share our common humanity and are made in the image of God. But when it comes to degrees of love, it begins with those who belong to the household of faith.

5 For the hope laid up for you in the heavens.) Hope for eternal life is never idle in us — it always produces love. The person who is truly convinced that the treasure of life is stored up for him in

heaven will naturally set aside the world and long for what is above. Meditating on the heavenly life shapes our affections both to serve God and to pursue love. The scholastic theologians misuse this passage to exalt the merits of works, as though the hope of salvation depended on works. But their argument falls apart. It does not follow that hope is therefore grounded on works simply because it stirs us to live well. Nothing is more effective at motivating us to live well than the free goodness of God, which puts all confidence in works to shame. There is a figure of speech in the word 'hope' here — it is used to refer to the thing hoped for. The hope we hold in our hearts is the glory we hope for in heaven. When Paul says our hope is 'laid up in heaven,' he means the faithful should be as certain of the promise of eternal happiness as if they already had a treasure stored in a safe and secure place. Of which you have heard before: because eternal salvation surpasses the capacity of our understanding, he adds that the certainty of it came to the Colossians through the Gospel. He also signals that he will bring them nothing new — his aim is simply to confirm them in the doctrine they have already received. Erasmus translated this phrase as 'the true word of the Gospel.' I am well aware that, following Hebrew usage, Paul often uses a genitive phrase in place of an adjective. But here Paul's words carry a stronger emphasis. He calls the Gospel 'the word of truth' as its highest title, so that they may hold all the more firmly to the revelation they received from it. The word 'Gospel' is joined here in apposition.

6 As also in the whole world it bears fruit.) It gives both confirmation and comfort to the godly when they see the effect of the Gospel spreading far and wide in gathering people to Christ. Faith does not depend on the Gospel's success, so that we would only be-

lieve because many others believe. Even if the whole world were to collapse, even if heaven itself were to fall, the conscience of a godly person ought not to waver — because God, in whom the conscience is grounded, remains true. But this does not prevent our faith from being strengthened whenever it sees the power of God. The greater the number of people won to Christ, the more mightily God displays that power. Add to this that in the multitude of believers at that time people could see the fulfillment of so many prophecies that stretch the kingdom of God from east to west. Is it a small or ordinary help to faith to see with one's own eyes the fulfillment of what the prophets long foretold — that Christ's kingdom would extend throughout all nations? Every faithful person knows this by experience. Paul therefore uses this point to encourage the Colossians further: seeing the fruit and growth of the Gospel in every place, they should embrace it with all the more joyful zeal. The word I have translated 'is increased' is not found in some manuscripts, but because it seemed fitting to the text I did not leave it out. The ancient commentators show that this reading was more widely used. From the day that you heard and knew the grace: this is praise for their readiness in immediately embracing sound doctrine, and praise for their steadfastness in continuing in it. Faith in the Gospel is rightly called the knowledge of the grace of God, because no one has ever truly tasted the Gospel without knowing himself to be reconciled to God and grasping the salvation offered in Christ. In the truth means truly and sincerely. Just as Paul earlier testified that the Gospel is undoubted truth, he now adds that it was delivered to them purely — and by Epaphras. Since everyone claims the Gospel but many are unfaithful workers whose ignorance, ambition, or greed corrupts its purity, it is vital

to distinguish between faithful ministers and those who are corrupt. Holding the name 'Gospel' is not enough — we must know that this is the true Gospel, the one preached by Paul and Epaphras. Paul therefore endorses the teaching of Epaphras so he can hold the Colossians in it and draw them back from those who were trying to introduce foreign doctrines. He also honors Epaphras with a notable title so that Epaphras will carry greater authority. Finally, Paul endears Epaphras to the Colossians by saying that Epaphras had reported to him their love. Paul makes it a point wherever he goes to commend those he knows to be faithfully serving Christ, so that they may be warmly received by the congregations. The ministers of Satan, by contrast, are wholly occupied in alienating by their harmful words the hearts of the simple from their faithful pastors. Love in the Spirit: I take this to mean spiritual love, as Chrysostom does — though I do not agree with Chrysostom on what came before. Spiritual love is love that has no regard for the world but is devoted to the direction and purposes of godliness, with its root within. Fleshly friendship, by contrast, depends on outward circumstances.

9 We therefore also, since the day we heard of it, have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. 10 So that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God. 11 Strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience, joyously.

9 We therefore also.) Just as Paul earlier expressed his love for them through his thankfulness, he now does the same through his earnest prayer for them. The more clearly God's grace appears in someone, the more we should embrace them warmly and care for their salvation. What does he pray for? That they may know God more fully. By this he signals that something is still lacking in them, opening the way for him to instruct them and drawing them to hear his fuller teaching. Those who think they already know everything worth knowing despise and dismiss whatever else is brought to them. Paul therefore removes that assumption from the Colossians, so that it does not hinder them from pressing forward and being perfected in what God began in them. What kind of knowledge does he pray for? The knowledge of the will of God. With this he overthrows all human inventions and speculations that run contrary to God's Word. God's will is not to be sought anywhere but in His Word. He adds 'in all wisdom,' making clear that the will of God is the only rule for being truly wise. The person who sincerely desires to know only what God has been pleased to reveal is the one who knows what it means to be rightly wise. To seek beyond that is simply to be foolish — unsatisfied with what is sufficient. The word I have translated 'prudence' refers to the discernment and judgment that springs from understanding. Paul calls both of them spiritual, because we attain them only through the leading of the Spirit. The natural person does not accept what comes from the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). As long as people are guided by their own fleshly instincts, they have a wisdom of their own — but it is mere vanity, however much they flatter themselves with it. We can see what passes for theology in the papacy, what the books of the philosophers contain, and what kind of wis-

dom godless people prize. But let us remember: the only wisdom Paul commends and sets forth is wisdom bounded by the will of God.

10 That you walk worthily in God. First he teaches what the goal of spiritual understanding is and what growth in God's school should look like — namely, that we live in a way worthy of God, so that it is evident in our lives that we have not been taught by God in vain. Anyone who does not aim at this target may labor and work hard, but will only wander down side paths and waste the effort. He also makes clear what walking worthy of God chiefly requires: that we direct the whole course of our life after the will of God, setting aside our own reasoning and putting all the desires of the flesh behind us. He confirms this again when he adds 'in all obedience,' or as it is commonly put, 'in pleasing Him.' Therefore, when asked what a life worthy of God looks like, Paul's definition must always be our guide: it is a life that, setting aside the rules and judgments of men and the dispositions of the flesh, is ordered by obedience to God alone. From that obedience come good works, which are the fruit God requires of us. Increasing in the knowledge of God: he repeats again that they have not yet come so far that they do not need further growth. With this reminder he prepares them and, as it were, leads them by the hand toward a desire to press forward, showing themselves ready to hear and willing to be taught. And what is said here to the Colossians applies to all the faithful: we must always grow in the teaching of godliness, right up to our dying day.

11 Strengthened with all strength. Just as he earlier prayed for sound understanding and its right use, he now also prays for courage and steadfastness. By this he reminds them of their weak-

ness, since he says they cannot be strong except through the Lord's help. He goes even further: to make this grace all the more striking, he adds 'according to His glorious power,' as if to say — so far is any person from being able to stand by his own strength that the power of God must wonderfully show itself by helping our weakness. He then explains how the strength of the faithful is to be shown: in all patience and steadfastness. They are continually exercised under the cross in this world, a thousand temptations press in daily to crush them, and they see none of the things God has promised. They must therefore arm themselves with extraordinary patience. This is the fulfillment of the saying in Isaiah 30:15: 'Your strength shall be in hope and silence.' It is better to connect 'with joy' to this sentence. Though the opposite reading is more common in the Latin versions, the Greek manuscripts support this reading, and rightly so — patience is not sustained without joy, and no one stands with a strong heart who does not find joyful contentment in his own condition.

12 Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son. 14 In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. 17 All things have been created through Him and for Him, and He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

12 Giving thanks.) He returns to giving thanks so that, in doing so, he can describe the blessings the Colossians have received through Christ, and from there move into a full description of Christ Himself. This was the only remedy for the Colossians against all the deceit of the false apostles — to understand fully what Christ is. Why are we tossed about by so many kinds of teaching? Simply because we do not know the power of Christ. Christ alone causes everything else to vanish. Therefore, nothing occupies Satan more than casting a fog over Christ, because he knows that once Christ is obscured, the door is open to every lie. The one and only way to retain and restore pure doctrine is to set Christ before our eyes as He truly is, with all His goodness and grace, so that His power is truly felt and known. I do not speak here of the bare name. The papists commonly confess with us that there is one Christ — but how great is the difference between us? They confess Christ to be the Son of God, yet by distributing His power to others and dividing it in every direction, they leave Him almost naked and empty. At the very least they rob Him of a great part of His glory, so that while He is called the Son of God, He is not what the Father would have Him be toward us. If the papists would receive with their hearts the things contained in this chapter, we and they would at once be united. But the whole papacy would fall, since it cannot stand where Christ is truly known. Anyone who carefully examines the content of this first chapter will surely acknowledge this. Nothing else is dealt with here but this: that we should know Christ to be the beginning, the middle, and the end — that all things are to be sought from Him, and that apart from Him nothing is or can be found. Readers must therefore carefully and closely observe with what colors Paul portrays

Christ for us. Who has made us fit: he is still speaking of the Father, since the Father is the beginning and efficient cause of our salvation. The name 'God' expresses His majesty, while the name 'Father' expresses His kindness and goodwill. We should see both in God: His majesty to produce reverence and awe in us, and His fatherly love to produce confidence and boldness in us. Paul has joined these two together not without purpose — as certain very old Greek manuscripts confirm the reading the translator used. Though there would be nothing wrong with reading 'Father' alone. Just as His incomparable grace must be expressed under the name 'Father,' it is also necessary that the name 'God' should lead us into wonder and reverent amazement at such great goodness — that He who is God has humbled Himself so far. What does Paul thank God for? That He has made Paul and others fit to share in the inheritance of the saints. We are born as children of wrath, exiles banished from the kingdom of God — only God's adoption makes us fit. Adoption rests on free election, and the Spirit of regeneration is the seal of that adoption. He adds 'in light' to create a contrast with the darkness of Satan's kingdom.

13 Who has taken us away. Here is the beginning of our salvation: God lifts us out of the deep pit of destruction in which we are drowning. Where His grace is absent, there is darkness, as we read in Isaiah 60:2: 'Darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples, but the Lord will rise upon you, and His glory will appear upon you.' First we ourselves are called darkness, then the whole world. And Satan is the prince of darkness, under whose tyranny we are held captive until we are set free by the hand of Christ. From this we understand that the whole world, with all its impressive wisdom and righteousness, is regarded by God as noth-

ing but darkness — because there is no light outside the kingdom of Christ. Has transferred us into the kingdom: this is the beginning of our happiness, when we are transferred into the kingdom of Christ, passing from death into life. Paul also ascribes this to the grace of God, lest anyone think they could attain such a good thing by their own power. Just as our deliverance from the bondage of sin and death is God's work, so is our transfer into the kingdom of Christ. He calls Christ the Son of His love, or the beloved of God the Father, because He alone is the one in whom the Father delights (Matthew 17:5), and through whom all others are beloved. We must understand that we are not accepted by God except through Christ. Paul no doubt also intended to suggest the hostility and division between God and men that exists until the love shown in the Mediator shines out.

14 In whom, etc. He now proceeds in order to show that all the parts of salvation are found in Christ, and that He alone — as the beginning and end of all things — should stand above all creatures. First he says we have redemption in Him, and immediately interprets this as the forgiveness of sins. These two go together in apposition. When God forgives our sins, He delivers us from guilt and the danger of eternal death. This is our liberty, this is our triumph over death — that our sins are not charged against us. He says this redemption is purchased by the blood of Christ, for by the sacrifice of His death all the sins of the world are purged. We must remember then that this is the only price of reconciliation, and therefore everything the papists teach concerning satisfactions is blasphemy.

15 Which is the image, etc. He moves higher and speaks of the glory of Christ. He calls Him the image of the invisible God, meaning that Christ alone is the one through whom God — who is otherwise invisible — is made known to us. As John 1:18 says: 'No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.' I know how the ancient writers typically expound this passage. Engaged in controversy with the Arians, they pressed the equality of the Son with the Father, the co-essence and consubstantiality. Yet they said nothing about what is most important: how the Father reveals Himself in the Son to be known by us. Chrysostom took his whole stand on the word 'image,' arguing that a creature cannot be called the image of the Creator. But this is too weak an argument. In fact, Paul himself refutes it with the words: 'the man is the image and glory of God' (1 Corinthians 11:7). To stand on firm ground, we must note that the word 'image' does not refer to essence but has reference to us. Christ is the image of God because through Him God is in some manner made visible to us — though from that we also rightly conclude the co-essence and consubstantiality. Christ could not truly represent God unless He were the essential Word of God. Paul is not speaking here of things that, in some shared manner, also belong to creatures, but of the perfect wisdom, goodness, righteousness, and power of God — things no creature has the capacity to represent. This word will be a powerful weapon against the Arians, but we must begin from the relational point I mentioned, and not stop at essence alone. The sum is this: God in Himself — that is, in His bare majesty — is invisible, not only to bodily eyes but even to human minds. He has revealed Himself to us in Christ alone, so that we behold Him as in a mirror. In Christ

He displays His righteousness, goodness, wisdom, strength, and power — in short, His whole self. We must therefore seek it nowhere else, for whatever presents itself under the name of God apart from Christ is an idol. The firstborn of all creation: the reason He is called this follows immediately — 'because in Him all things are created' — just as in verse 18 He is called the firstborn of the dead because we all rise again through Him. He is firstborn not only because He came before all creatures in time, but because He was begotten of the Father for the purpose of bringing them all into being, and is the foundation and ground of all. The Arians foolishly argued from this that He was therefore a creature. But Paul is not speaking here of what Christ is in Himself, but of what He accomplishes in and for others.

16 Visible and invisible. The earlier division between heavenly and earthly things includes both categories. But because Paul wanted to establish this point particularly about angels, he now mentions invisible things — not only the heavenly creatures visible to the eye, but also those that are spirits, are created by the Son of God. What follows immediately — 'Whether thrones, etc.' — means, by whatever name they may be called. Some understand 'thrones' to refer to angels, but I think the word refers rather to the heavenly palace of God's majesty — not the kind our minds could comprehend, but the kind befitting God Himself. We see the sun and moon and the whole expanse of the sky, but the glory of God's kingdom is hidden from our senses and understanding because it is spiritual and above the heavens. In short, by 'thrones' we should understand that seat of blessed immortality, which is beyond all change and alteration. By the other names Paul doubtless means the angels. He calls them powers, principalities, dominions, or

lordships — not because they exercise any authority of their own or possess strength that properly belongs to them, but because they are servants who carry out God's power and dominion. It is common in Scripture that as far as God extends and exercises His strength through His creatures, He also applies His names to them. So He alone is Lord and Father, yet those to whom He grants this honor are also called fathers and lords. That is why both angels and judges are called gods. So in this passage angels are given impressive titles that express not what they are by themselves, or apart from God, but what God accomplishes through them and what functions He has entrusted to them. These things must be understood in a way that takes nothing away from the glory of the one God. He does not share His power with the angels in a way that diminishes Himself. He does not work through them in a way that gives up His own power. He does not allow His glory to shine in them in a way that it is obscured in Himself. Paul deliberately exalts the dignity of the angels in such honorable terms to prevent anyone from thinking that their greatness would hinder Christ's exaltation above them. He uses these titles by way of concession, as if to say: all their excellence takes nothing from Christ, however splendid their titles may be. Those who philosophically pick apart these words to extract a hierarchy of angelic orders may enjoy that exercise, but they stray far from Paul's meaning.

17 All things are created by Him and for Him.) By four arguments Paul makes the angels subject to Christ, so that they cannot diminish His glory. First, they were created by Him. Second, their creation must be referred to Him as its proper end. Third, He existed before they were created. Fourth, He sustains them by His power and preserves them in their state. And he affirms this not of

angels alone, but of the whole world as well. So he places the Son of God in the highest seat of honor, ruling over both angels and men, and bringing all creatures in heaven and earth into proper order under Him.

18 And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him. 20 And through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross — through Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

18 The head of the body. After speaking generally about the excellence of Christ and His supreme authority over all creatures, Paul now returns to what specifically belongs to the church. Some scholars read many layers of meaning into the word 'head.' And indeed, a little later Paul will use the same metaphor in a different sense — that as the head in the human body serves as the root from which vital power flows to all the members, so the life of the church comes from Christ. But in this passage, I believe Paul is speaking chiefly of governance. He teaches that Christ alone has authority to govern the church, that the faithful must look to Him alone, and that the unity of the body depends on Him. The papists, seeking to justify the tyranny of their idol, claim the church is headless unless the Pope holds authority over it. But Paul does not grant this honor even to the angels — and yet he does not leave the church without a head, because Christ, who claims this title for Himself, truly and effectively exercises it. I am well aware of their evasion — that the Pope is the ministerial head. But 'head' is too great and noble a title to be applied to any mortal man under any

pretense, especially without Christ's command. Gregory himself was more modest, writing that Peter was indeed a principal member of the church, but that he and the rest of the apostles were members under our one head (Book 4, Epistle 92). He is the beginning: since this Greek word sometimes means the goal to which all things are referred, we might take Christ to be the end in that sense — but I prefer to expound Paul's words by connecting 'the beginning' to 'the firstborn of the dead.' In the resurrection He is the renewal and rebuilding of all things — the beginning of the second and new creation, because the first was utterly ruined by the fall of the first man. Because Christ in rising again inaugurated the kingdom of God, He is rightly called the beginning. We truly begin to stand before God only when we are renewed as new creatures. Firstborn of the dead: He is called this not only because He was the first to rise, but because He also restored others to life. As 1 Corinthians 15:20 calls Him the firstfruits of those who rise. That He may have first place in everything: from this Paul concludes that the primacy in all things belongs rightly to Him. If He is the origin and restorer of all things, it is clear that this honor is His by right. The phrase 'in all things' could be taken either as 'over all creatures' or 'in every respect.' But this matters little, since all things are simply brought under His dominion.

19 Because it pleased Him. To strengthen what he has said about Christ, Paul now adds that it was established by God's providence. If we are to reverently honor this mystery, we must trace it back to that source. He says this was brought about by God's counsel: that all fullness would dwell in Christ. By fullness he means the fullness of righteousness, wisdom, power, and all goodness. Whatever God has, He has bestowed upon His Son, that He might

be glorified in Him, as is written in John 5:20. He also reminds us that whatever goodness we need for salvation must be drawn from the fullness of Christ — because God has determined that He will share Himself and His gifts with people only through His Son. It is as if he said: Christ is everything to us, and without Him we have nothing. From this it follows that anyone who diminishes Christ or robs Him of His offices, or steals even a drop of His fullness, is effectively attacking and overturning the eternal counsel of God.

20 And by Him to reconcile all things to Himself. This is also an honorable title of Christ: we cannot be united with God except through Him. First let us consider that our happiness consists in clinging to God, and that nothing is more miserable than to be estranged from Him. Paul declares that we are happy through Christ alone, because He is the bond that joins God and us together. Apart from Him we are completely miserable, shut out from God. This reconciliation belongs to Christ alone — no part of this honor may be assigned to anyone else. We must understand the contrast Paul is making: if this is Christ's prerogative, it cannot belong to others. He is plainly arguing against those who devised angels as peacemakers through whom people could gain access to God. By the blood of His cross: he is speaking of the Father being made merciful and favorable to His creatures through the blood of Christ. He calls it the blood of the cross because Christ's blood was the payment and price of our peace with God, shed upon the cross. The Son of God had to be a purifying sacrifice and bear the guilt of sin so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. The blood of the cross therefore means the blood of the sacrifice offered on the cross to satisfy the wrath of God. When Paul adds 'through Him,' he is not saying something new but reinforcing

what he has already said, pressing it more deeply into our hearts: Christ is so completely the only author of reconciliation that He excludes every other means. No one else was crucified for us. He alone is the one through whose grace God is merciful to us. Whether things on earth or in heaven: if you take this as referring only to rational creatures, those would be men and angels. Though extending it to all without exception would also not be absurd. Rather than argue too philosophically, I prefer to understand this as referring to men and angels. Regarding men, it is not difficult to show they need a peacemaker with God. Regarding the angels, the question is not easy to resolve. For what purpose is reconciliation where there was no breach of love? Many scholars, pressed by this question, have explained this passage to mean that the angels were brought into harmony with men — that heavenly creatures were made friends with earthly ones. But Paul's words clearly say 'God reconciled all things to Himself,' so that is a forced reading. We must therefore consider what kind of reconciliation the angels have with God. For men, reconciliation means being restored to God after having been alienated by sin and facing Him as a condemning judge — but the Mediator's grace came in to satisfy His wrath, and God who was Judge became Father. For the angels, the situation is quite different: there was no falling among them, no sin, and therefore no separation. Yet there are two reasons why even the angels needed to be reconciled to God. First, as creatures they were not without danger of falling unless they were confirmed by the grace of Christ. To be established forever in peace with God — to have a fixed and secure footing in righteousness so as to have no fear of falling — is no small thing. Second, even the obedience the angels render to God is not so absolutely perfect that it satis-

fies God in every respect without any pardon. This is doubtless the point of the saying in Job: 'He finds iniquity in His angels.' If this is read as referring only to the devil, it would say nothing remarkable. But the Holy Spirit there declares that even the highest purity and cleanness is corrupt and filthy when measured against the righteousness of God. We must therefore conclude that there is not enough righteousness in the angels to bind them fully and perfectly to God, and so they too need a Mediator through whose grace they may forever cleave to God. Paul is therefore right to say that the grace of Christ does not reside in men only but is extended to the angels as well. No wrong is done to the angels by being directed to the Mediator, so that through His grace they may have perfect and firm peace with God. If anyone, pointing to the word 'all,' raises the question of whether Christ is also the peacemaker of devils, I answer that He is not the peacemaker of wicked men either. I admit there is a difference, since the benefit of redemption is offered to wicked men but not to devils. But this has nothing to do with Paul's words, which simply say that Christ alone is the one through whom all creatures that have any connection to God are joined to Him.

21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds. 22 Yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach. 23 If indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the Gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

21 And you, when sometime. Now Paul applies the general doctrine to them personally, so they may see how much more guilty of ingratitude they would be if they allowed themselves to be led away from Christ to new inventions. This step must be carefully noted: applying doctrine to particular people touches them more closely. He then calls them back to their own experience, so they may recognize the benefit of the redemption he has described in their own lives. As if he said: you yourselves are an example of the grace I preach as given to men through Christ. You were estranged — from God. You were enemies — now you have been received into favor. How did this happen? Because God, appeased by the death of Christ, is reconciled to you. There is a shift in person here: what he has been teaching about the Father, he now applies to Christ, since he says 'in the body of His flesh.' I take the Greek word translated 'cogitation' or 'mind' as an intensifier, as if Paul said they were estranged from God with their whole mind and every intention — not partially, as the papist theologians limit it to the lower desires. No, says Paul, this estrangement occupied the entire mind and made people hateful to God. His point is to portray man as he is in totality: completely at odds with God and an enemy to Him. Furthermore, the word 'enemies' has both active and passive meanings, and both apply to us apart from Christ. We are born children of wrath, and all the thoughts of the flesh are hostility against God. In evil works: he proves by outward actions the inner hatred hidden in the heart. While men try to clear themselves of blame until they are openly convicted, God reveals their godlessness through their outward deeds, as is treated more fully in Romans 1:19. And what is said here of the Colossians applies to us all, since we differ nothing by nature. The only difference is that

some are called from their mother's womb, with God preventing their wickedness from breaking out into open sin, while others are brought back to the fold after wandering much of their lives. Yet we all need Christ as our peacemaker, because we are servants of sin — and where sin is, there is enmity between God and men.

22 In the body of His flesh. This is an unusual expression, but 'the body of flesh' means simply the human body that the Son of God shares in common with us. Paul's point is that the Son of God took on the same nature as we have — a body that was humble, lowly, earthly, and exposed to many hardships — so that He might be our Mediator. When he adds 'by death,' he calls us back to consider the sacrifice. The Son of God had to become man and take on our flesh to be our brother, and by dying He had to become a sacrifice to reconcile the Father to us. That He might make you stand holy: this is the second essential part of our salvation, the renewal of life. In these two things the whole power of redemption chiefly consists: forgiveness of sins, and spiritual regeneration (Jeremiah 31:33). What he said earlier was already great — that righteousness was purchased for us by the death of Christ, so that sin being removed, we might be acceptable to God. But now he teaches that something equally remarkable comes with it: the giving of the Holy Spirit, by whom we are remade after the image of God. It is a passage worth noting that free righteousness is not given to us in Christ without our also being born again by the Spirit into the obedience of righteousness. As he teaches in 1 Corinthians 1:30, Christ is made for us both righteousness and sanctification. We obtain righteousness by being freely accepted; we obtain sanctification by the gift of the Holy Spirit, as we become new people. These two graces are inseparably bound together. Yet we must note that this

holiness is only begun in us and grows daily, and will not be made perfect until Christ appears to restore all things. The Celestines and Pelagians in former times wickedly abused this passage to exclude the grace of the forgiveness of sins, claiming a perfection in this world that could satisfy God's judgment and make mercy unnecessary. But Paul is not describing what is completed in this world; he is describing the goal of our calling and the blessings brought to us by Christ.

23 If you abide. This is a call to persevere, warning them that all the grace poured out on them will be for nothing unless they hold fast to the purity of the Gospel. He signals that they are still running the race and have not yet reached the finish line. Their faith was already in danger at that time because of the subtle scheming of the false apostles. He vividly pictures the certainty of faith when he urges the Colossians to be 'grounded and firm.' Faith is not like mere opinion, which shifts with every new argument. Faith has a firm steadfastness and constancy that resists and repels all the devil's attacks. That is why all the popish teaching will never give even a small taste of true faith, since it holds as a firm rule that one must always doubt both one's present state of grace and one's perseverance to the end. He then notes the connection between faith and the Gospel, saying the Colossians will be firm in faith only if they are not moved away from the hope the Gospel brings. Where the Gospel is, there is hope of eternal salvation. But we must remember that the sum of everything is contained in Christ. Paul therefore commands them to flee all doctrines that draw them away from Christ, so that the mind might not be occupied with anything else. Which you have heard: because false apostles also commonly boast the name of the Gospel while tear-

ing Christ to pieces — and this is a trick Satan often uses, pretending to preach the Gospel while troubling consciences and obscuring the truth — Paul by name declares that the Gospel the Colossians heard from Epaphras is the genuine, true, and certain Gospel. He does not want them opening their ears to any competing doctrine. He also adds the confirmation that this is the same Gospel preached throughout the whole world. This is no minor confirmation: to hear that the whole universal church agrees with them, and that they follow no different doctrine than what the apostles taught and what is received everywhere. The boasting of the papists is laughable, when they attack our doctrine on the grounds that it is not authorized to be preached everywhere and has few adherents. Whatever they may say, they will never take from us the fact that we today deliver nothing other than what was proclaimed by the Prophets and Apostles and obediently received by all the company of saints. Paul did not mean that the Gospel requires the consent of all ages for its authority to stand. Rather, he had in mind the command of Christ in Mark 16:15: 'Go, preach the Gospel to every creature' — a command rooted in so many prophetic promises that the kingdom of Christ would spread throughout the whole world. What else did Paul mean by his words than that the Colossians had also been watered by those living waters that, springing from Jerusalem, flow over all the world? We too, rightly and with great fruit and comfort, boast that we hold the same Gospel that was preached by the Lord's command among all peoples, received by all churches, and professed by all godly people throughout the ages. The agreement of the church — truly worthy of that noble title — is no trivial weapon to defend us against so many attacks. We gladly agree with Augustine, who

used this argument to refute the Donatists, pointing out that they brought a Gospel unknown and unheard of by any church. And rightly so, for if the Gospel that is brought forward is a true one, and yet endorsed by no church, then all the promises foretelling that the Gospel would spread throughout the world are empty and false — as are all the promises that the sons of God would be gathered from every people and nation. But what do the papists do? They set aside both the Prophets and Apostles, skip over the early church, and want their own falling away from the Gospel to be taken as the consensus of the Catholic Church. What could be more absurd? When we reason about the consent of the church, then, we must return to the Apostles and their preaching, as Paul does here. And lest anyone press the universal word 'all' too strictly, Paul simply means that the Gospel was preached far and wide in many places. Of which I am made: he also speaks of his own person, which was very necessary. We must always be careful not to push ourselves into the office of teaching without authorization. Paul therefore testifies that this office was given to him, in order to establish his right and authority. He so closely binds his apostleship to their faith that they cannot reject his teaching without at the same time abandoning the Gospel they have embraced.

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. 25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God. 26 That is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints. 27 To whom God willed to make known

what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

24 Now rejoice.) Earlier Paul claimed authority through his calling; now he guards against any thought that the imprisonments and persecutions he suffered for the Gospel might diminish his apostolic honor. Satan exploits such circumstances to make God's servants seem less worthy. Paul also uses his example to encourage them not to fear persecution, and by displaying his zeal he strengthens his authority. He further shows his love for them in a remarkable way by declaring that he willingly endures for their sake the sufferings he bears. Someone might ask: where does this joy come from? From the fruit he saw coming from it. As if he said: the suffering for your sake is sweet to me, because I do not suffer it in vain. Similarly in 1 Thessalonians 3:6-7 he says he rejoices in all necessity and affliction because of the faith he heard they had. I fill up what is lacking: I take the connecting word here as causal. He is giving the reason he rejoices while he suffers — because he shares in it with Christ, and nothing could be more blessed than that fellowship. He sets before all the godly this common comfort: that in all sorrows and troubles, and especially in suffering for the Gospel, they share in the cross of Christ, and so will share in the fellowship of the blessed resurrection. He also says that in this way the things lacking in the afflictions of Christ are being filled up. As he says in Romans 8:29: those God has elected, He has also predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ, so that He might be the first-

born among many brothers. We also know that the unity between the head and members is so close that the name 'Christ' sometimes encompasses the whole body. As he shows in 1 Corinthians 12:12 — speaking there of the church, he concludes by saying the whole is in Christ just as a human body is. So just as Christ once suffered in His own person, He daily suffers in His members. In this way the sufferings that the Father has by His decree allotted for His body are filled up. The second comfort that should uphold our hearts in afflictions is that God's providence has determined we should bear the likeness of Christ in bearing the cross, and that our fellowship with Him extends even to this. He also gives a third reason: that his sufferings are fruitful, not just for a few but for the whole church. He said earlier he suffered for the Colossians; now he says the benefit reaches the whole church, as stated in Philippians 1:12. What is plainer or less forced than this explanation? Paul rejoices in persecution because, as he writes elsewhere, the dying of Christ must be carried about in our body so that His life may be made manifest in us. Also he writes to Timothy: 'If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him; if we die with Him, we shall also live with Him.' Our end will therefore be happy and glorious. The second reason: we must not refuse the condition God has ordained for His church, that the members of Christ should be like their head. The third: afflictions are to be willingly borne, since they benefit all the godly and advance the salvation of the church by setting forth the doctrine of the Gospel. Disregarding all these things, the papists have invented a new device to support their indulgences. They call indulgences the forgiveness of sins obtained through the merits of martyrs. They deny that forgiveness of sins is free, pretending instead that it is ransomed by satisfac-

tory works. Since there are not enough satisfactions to go around, they call on the blood of the martyrs to serve alongside Christ's blood in purging sins before God. This mixture they call the Treasury of the Church, the keys of which they hand over to whomever they please. They are not ashamed to twist this passage to maintain such a cursed blasphemy, as though Paul were here claiming that his sufferings are effective for purging men's sins. They press the word 'afflictions,' as though Paul were saying that Christ's sufferings were insufficient for man's redemption. But any reader can see that Paul speaks as he does because through the sufferings of the godly the body of the church must be brought to its perfection, as the members are conformed to their head. I would be afraid of appearing to slander them if their own books were not witnesses confirming every charge. They also press the fact that Paul says he suffers for the churches, marveling that none of the ancient fathers ever thought of this sharp interpretation. All the Fathers expound it as we do: that the saints suffer for the church by confirming the church's faith. But the papists conclude from this that the saints are redeemers who shed their blood to wash away sins. So that readers may see their shamelessness, I grant that the martyrs suffered for the church just as Christ did — but in a very different way. I would rather express this in Augustine's words than my own. He writes in his 84th treatise on John: 'Although we die for our brothers, no martyr's blood is shed for the remission of sins, as Christ did for us — nor has He set forth an example for us to imitate, but a reason for us to rejoice.' Also in his fourth book to Boniface: 'Just as the only Son of God was made the son of man so that He might make us sons of God, so He alone bore punishment without fault for us, so that through

Him we might receive, without deserving it, a grace we had not earned.' Like this is the saying of Leo, bishop of Rome: 'The just received crowns but did not give any; from the courage of the faithful sprang examples of patience, not gifts of righteousness.' Why? Because their deaths belonged to them alone, and no one pays another's debt by his own end. That this is Paul's meaning is evident from the text itself, for he immediately adds that he suffers according to the dispensation committed to him. We know that what was committed to him was the ministry of edifying the church, not of redeeming it, and he plainly confesses this himself. As he writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:10: that he endures all things for the sake of the elect, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus. And in 2 Corinthians 1:4: that he willingly suffers all things for their comfort and salvation. Let godly readers therefore learn to hate and detest these corrupt teachers, who so notoriously twist and falsify the Scriptures to paint a veneer over their invented devices.

25 Whereof I am made a minister. See in what sense he suffers for the church: as a minister — not to pay the price of redemption (as Augustine aptly puts it) but to preach. He now calls himself a minister of the church in a different sense than he called himself the minister of God in 1 Corinthians 2:4 or the minister of the Gospel just above. The Apostles serve God and Christ to advance their glory; they serve the church for its salvation; and they serve the Gospel itself. The nature of the ministry differs in these expressions, yet one cannot stand without the others. He says 'toward you' so they know this responsibility belongs to him as well. To fulfill the word: he gives the final purpose of his ministry — that the word of God may be effective, which happens when it is obediently

received. This is the power of the Gospel: to be the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). God therefore gives His word force and effect through His Apostles. Though the preaching itself, whatever the outcome, is the fulfilling of the word, the fruit in the end shows that the seed was not sown in vain.

26 A mystery hidden. This is a commendation of the Gospel as a wonderful secret of God. Paul extols the Gospel with the highest terms he can find, and not without reason. He knew it was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks (1 Corinthians 1:23). Even today we see how much it is hated by hypocrites and scorned by the world. To counter these distorted judgments, he honors the dignity of the Gospel whenever occasion allows, using different arguments suited to each context. Here he calls it a lofty secret hidden since the beginning of the world through all the turning of the ages. That he speaks of the Gospel is clear from Romans 16:25, Ephesians 3:9, and similar passages. But why is it called a mystery? Some think it is because Paul specifically touches on the calling of the Gentiles, and that this alone is the reason. God poured out His grace on the Gentiles as if unexpectedly — a people who seemed permanently shut out from the fellowship of eternal life. But to someone who examines everything carefully, this will appear as a third reason, not the only one, in this passage and in Romans. The first reason is that while God governed His church before Christ's coming under the obscure coverings of words and ceremonies, He now shines out with great clarity through the teaching of the Gospel. The second is that while before there were only outward figures, Christ came bringing the full reality that was hidden beneath them. The third, as I said, is

that the whole world — previously estranged from God — was called into the hope of salvation, and the same inheritance of eternal life was offered to all. Careful attention to these things will compel us to honor and reverence the mystery Paul preaches, even though the world treats it with contempt or laughter. Which is now revealed: lest anyone take the word 'mystery' to still mean something hidden in a corner or unknown, he adds that it has been published for people to know. What was by nature a secret has been made open and manifest by God's will. There is no reason for its former hiddenness to discourage us, since God has now revealed it. He adds 'to the saints,' because the arm of the Lord is not revealed to all, so that all would understand His counsel.

27 To whom God willed. Here he holds back human presumption, so that people will not try to be wiser than they ought, but learn to be content with this one answer: it pleased God. The will of God ought to be sufficient reason for us. But this is said chiefly to commend the grace of God, since Paul means that people gave God no reason to make them partakers of this secret. Rather, God was moved on His own and because He chose to. It is Paul's common practice to set God's good pleasure directly against all human merit and outward causes. What the riches are: notice how emphatically he speaks to exalt the dignity of the Gospel. He knew human ingratitude to be such that even this priceless treasure and surpassing grace would be treated carelessly or lightly. Not content with the word 'mystery,' he adds 'glory,' and not a small or ordinary glory. What was more remarkable than that the Gentiles, who had been sunk in death for so many ages and seemed past hope, would suddenly be counted among the children of God and receive the inheritance of salvation? Which is Christ in you: what he said

generally of the Gentiles he now applies to the Colossians, that they may see the grace of God at work in their own lives and embrace it with deep reverence. He says 'which is Christ,' meaning all that secret is contained in Christ — all the riches of heavenly wisdom are obtained when we have Christ, as he will plainly affirm shortly. He adds 'in you' because they now possess Christ, from whom they were once as estranged as anyone could be. Finally he calls Christ 'the hope of glory,' so they may know that having Christ, they lack nothing toward full and perfect blessedness. It is a wonderful work of God that in earthen and fragile vessels the hope of heavenly glory should dwell.

28 Whom we preach.) Here he applies to his preaching everything he has said about the wonderful and honored secret of God, thereby explaining what he had briefly touched on about the ministry committed to him. His aim is to adorn and honor his apostleship and to establish authority for his doctrine. Having just highly exalted the Gospel, he now adds that what he preaches is a divine secret. And it was no accident that he earlier placed Christ at the center of that secret — so they would know that nothing could be taught more fully and perfectly than Christ. The words that follow also carry great weight. He makes himself a teacher of all men, meaning that no one is so highly advanced in wisdom as to be exempt from taking him as their master. It is as if he said: The Lord has placed me in a high position as a public herald of His secret, so that all the world without exception might learn from me.

In all wisdom means that he presents his doctrine as sufficient to bring a person to firm and perfect wisdom, lacking nothing. That is what he immediately adds: all who show themselves true disciples will be made perfect. See 1 Corinthians chapter 2. What

more could we ask than to receive the highest perfection? He repeats 'in Christ' again, so they would have no desire to know anything except Christ alone. From this passage we can also draw a definition of true wisdom: it is that by which we are made to stand perfect before God — and that in Christ, nowhere else.

29 To which thing.) With two points he magnifies the glory of his apostleship and his doctrine. First he speaks of his intense effort — a sign of difficulty, since the most excellent things are usually the hardest to achieve. The second is stronger: he credits the power of God as shining forth through his ministry. He speaks not only of the results of his preaching — though God's blessing is evident there too — but of the efficacy of the Holy Spirit, in which God clearly showed Himself. He rightly attributes to the power of God those labors and efforts that surpassed human capacity, affirming that this power was seen working mightily through him.

End.

CHAPTER 2



1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face. **2** That their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth of the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself. **3** In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. **4** I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument. **5** For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.

And I will have you know.) He testifies his love toward them in order to have greater credibility and authority with them. We readily believe those whom we know to care for our salvation. And it is no ordinary sign of love that he cared for them even when facing death — that is, when his own life was at risk. To emphasize the intensity of his care, he calls it a struggle or striving. I do not fault Erasmus for translating it 'care' or 'carefulness,' yet the force of the Greek verb is worth noting, since the word carries the sense of contention and resistance. For the same reason he confirms that his ministry belongs to them. Where else would such earnest con-

cern for their salvation come from, except that the Apostle of the Gentiles was bound by love to embrace even those he had never met? And because love among strangers is uncommon, he sets aside the kind of knowledge that comes by sight, saying 'whosoever have not seen my face in the flesh.' Among the servants of God there is another kind of sight than that of the flesh — one that wins love. Since it is commonly held that the first Epistle to Timothy was written from Laodicea, some assign this Laodicea to Galatia, where that city was the chief city of Phrygia Paratiana. But to me it seems more likely that the inscription is a corrupt and faulty reading, as I will note in its proper place.

2 That their hearts may receive comfort. He now declares what he wishes for them and shows a truly apostolic heart. He says nothing is more precious to him than that they should be united in faith and love. He makes clear that his great care for the Colossians and others was not driven by a misguided desire — as happens with some — but by the very nature of his office. Comfort here means true quietness and tranquility, in which they rest. He says they will obtain this when they are knit together in love and faith. This shows us where the highest good lies and what it consists of: that agreeing together in one faith, we are also joined in mutual love. This, he says, is the perfect joy of a godly heart — that is the blessed life. Just as love is here commended for its effect — that it pours true joy into the hearts of the godly — so the cause is shown by what follows. Into all fullness of understanding: this is the bond of holy unity, the truth of God, when we all embrace it with one consent. From that fountain flow peace and harmony with others. The riches of the certainty of understanding: because most people are satisfied with a small taste and have nothing more

than a vague and fleeting knowledge, he specifically names the riches of understanding, meaning by this a full and substantial grasp. He also implies that we must grow in love and charity in proportion to our understanding. By the word 'certainty' he shows the difference between faith and mere opinion. The one who truly knows God is not one who wavers with doubting, but one who rests in a firm and steady persuasion. Paul frequently calls this steadfastness by a Greek term which he uses here too, linking it constantly to faith — just as heat and light cannot be separated from the sun. The teaching of the scholastic theologians is therefore diabolical, since by taking away certainty they put in its place a moral conjecture — as they call it. Into the knowledge of the mystery: this phrase should be read in apposition — it explains what knowledge he means, namely nothing other than the knowledge of the Gospel. The false apostles also dressed up their deceptions with the title of wisdom. But Paul keeps the children of God within the boundaries of the Gospel alone, so they desire to know nothing else. Why he uses the word 'mystery' for the Gospel has already been explained. Let us learn from this that the Gospel can only be received by faith, not by reason or the full penetration of the human mind — because otherwise it remains hidden from us. I read 'mystery of God' with a passive sense, as the mystery in which God has revealed Himself. Right after, he adds 'and of the Father and of Christ,' meaning that God cannot be known except in Christ, and likewise the Father must be known wherever Christ is known. John affirms both: 'He who has the Son has the Father also; he who does not have the Son does not have the Father' (1 John 2:23). Therefore, anyone who thinks he knows something of God without Christ fashions an idol in place of God. Equally, no

one knows Christ who has not been brought to Him by the Father, and so he embraces the whole of God in Christ. This passage is well worth noting for establishing the deity of Christ and His being of one essence with God. For after speaking of the knowledge of God, Paul immediately applies it to the Son as well as the Father — from which it follows that the Son is God, equal with the Father.

3 In whom are, or, In which are. The phrase 'in whom' — or 'in which' — may refer either to everything contained in the knowledge of the mystery, or specifically to Christ, mentioned just before. There is little difference between the two readings, but the latter pleases me more and is more commonly accepted. The meaning is then that in Christ lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. This declares that we are perfectly wise when we truly know Christ — so that to desire to know anything beyond Him is madness. Since the Father has revealed Himself fully in Christ, anyone not satisfied with Christ alone is trying to be wise without God. If you prefer to read it as referring to the mystery, the meaning is that all the wisdom of the godly is included in the Gospel, through which God has revealed Himself in His Son. He says the treasures are 'hidden' because they do not appear in glittering outward display, but lie hidden, as it were, beneath the humility and lowliness of the cross, and beneath the simplicity that the world despises. As we read in Corinthians, the preaching of the cross is always foolishness to the world. I make no great distinction between wisdom and knowledge in this passage, since doubling a word serves to amplify the point — as if he said: not even a trace of knowledge, instruction, learning, or wisdom can be found anywhere else.

4 This I say, lest any. Because human inventions — as we shall see — have a certain appearance of wisdom, the minds of the godly must be fortified with this persuasion: the knowledge of Christ alone is entirely sufficient. This is the key that can lock the gate against all wicked errors. What has caused people to wrap themselves in so many ungodly opinions, so many idolatries, so many foolish speculations? Simply this: they despised the simplicity of the Gospel and dared to reach higher. Whatever errors exist in the papacy are the fruit of this ingratitude — not being content with Christ alone, they gave themselves to foreign doctrines. The writer of Hebrews is right when, intending to exhort the faithful not to be swept away by strange and new doctrines, he first lays this foundation: 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.' By this he signals that those who abide in Christ are safe, while those who think Christ is not enough are exposed to every deception and subtlety. So Paul here insists that whoever refuses to be deceived must be armed with this principle: it is not lawful for a Christian to embrace anything except Christ. However beautiful a veneer anything else may have, it will accomplish nothing. In short, no persuasive argument will bend by even a hair the hearts of those who have devoted their minds to Christ. This is a passage truly worth commending. For the one who has taught men to know nothing but Christ has already pre-emptively blocked all wicked opinions and doctrines. And this is likewise the way we can today demolish the whole papacy, which evidently consists of nothing but ignorance of Christ.

5 For although in body I am absent, yet in spirit am I with you. Lest anyone object that warnings from such a great distance are hardly appropriate, Paul says his love for them means he is

present with them in spirit, seeing their situation as if he were there and judging what is best for them. By praising the condition they are currently in, he warns them not to slip or turn from it. Rejoicing, he says, and seeing — meaning, because I see. The connecting word carries a causal force, which is common in both Greek and Latin. It is as if he said: Keep going as you have begun, for I know that up to now you have held a right course — the distance does not prevent me from seeing you with the eyes of my mind. Your order and steadfastness: he names two things in which the perfection of the church consists — order among themselves and faith in Christ. By order he means both agreement and well-ordered conduct and the whole discipline. He praises their faith through their constancy and steadfastness, indicating that where the mind wavers between different opinions, there is only a hollow shadow of faith.

6 Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him. 7 Having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.

6 As.) He joins exhortation to praise, teaching that it does no good to have once received Christ unless one continues in Him. Because the false apostles also claimed the name of Christ to deceive, he heads off this danger twice by urging them to go forward as they were taught and as they received Christ. By these words he warns them to hold so steadfastly to the doctrine that Epaphras delivered and they embraced, that they guard themselves against any other doctrine or faith. As Isaiah says in Isaiah 30:21: 'This is the way, walk in it.' The truth of the Gospel, once it has been made known to us, must be like a wall of bronze that wards off all decep-

tion. With three metaphors he sets out what kind of steadfastness of faith he requires of them. The first is in the word 'walk.' He compares the pure Gospel doctrine as they received it to a clear and certain path — whoever keeps to it will be safe from error and going astray. He therefore urges them not to turn from the course they have begun. The second metaphor is drawn from trees. Just as a tree with deep roots has enough support to withstand the force of winds and storms, so anyone who is deeply and firmly rooted in Christ, as in a strong root, cannot be toppled by all of Satan's subtle schemes. But if a person does not plant his roots in Christ, he will easily be blown about by every wind of doctrine, just like a tree with no roots that is uprooted by the very first blast. The third metaphor is from building. A house without a foundation will quickly fall. The same happens to those who lean on anything other than Christ, or who are not solidly founded in Him — their faith is left as though uncertain and unstable through weakness and fickleness. Two things are to be noted in the Apostle's words: first, that those who rest on Christ must have an immovable steadfastness; second, that their progress must never be uncertain or in danger of going astray. This is an excellent commendation of faith by its effect. Second, we must keep growing in Christ until we have taken deep root in Him. From this we may readily gather that those who do not hold to Christ are merely wandering off the path and being tossed in every direction.

7 And confirmed in faith. He now restates without metaphor what he had said through figures: that to walk steadily on the path, to be defended by deep roots, and to be supported by a strong foundation is simply the firmness and constancy of faith. Note also that because they had been well taught, he gives them this founda-

tion: they can safely and confidently anchor their faith in what they have already proven. Abounding: he does not want them merely to stand firm — he wants them to increase more and more every day. By adding 'with thanksgiving,' he always wants them to remember the source from which faith comes, lest they become arrogant but instead rest with humble fear in the gift of God. And indeed, ingratitude is very often the reason why the light of the Gospel, along with God's other graces, is taken from us.

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. 9 For in Him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form. 10 And in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority. 11 And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ. 12 Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

8 Take heed lest any. He now shows against what poison the protection he has given them must be applied. Although firm faith is a general remedy against all the devil's deceits, as I have said, it had a specific application for the Colossians at that moment. Take heed, he says, lest any rob you. He uses a very fitting term. He alludes to thieves, who when they cannot steal the whole flock by force, use stealth to drive off some of the cattle. So he makes the church into Christ's sheepfold, and its enclosure is the pure doctrine of the Gospel. We who are Christ's sheep, he says, rest safely as long as we hold to the unity of faith, and the false apostles are

like thieves who carry us off from the fold. Do you want to be counted in the flock of Christ? Do you want to remain in His fold? Do not bend by a nail's breadth from the purity of doctrine. Christ will certainly fulfill the duty of a good shepherd in protecting us, if we will hear His voice alone and refuse the voices of others. In short, John chapter 10 is an exposition of this entire passage. By philosophy: many have concluded that Paul here condemns philosophy as such, so we must define what he means. In my judgment he means whatever people invent from their own minds while indulging their own way of thinking, and that not without some fair appearance of reason, so that it seems plausible. For there is not much difficulty in rejecting human inventions when they have nothing to commend them. The real danger is in those that deceive minds with a false impression of wisdom. Or if someone prefers a shorter definition: philosophy is nothing other than a persuasive manner of speaking that insinuates itself into people's minds by fair and plausible reasoning. All such clever arguments of philosophers are of this kind, when they add anything of their own to the pure word of God. Philosophy then is nothing but a corrupting of pure doctrine when it is mixed in with Christ. But let us keep in mind that by the word 'philosophy' Paul has condemned only those fabricated doctrines that arise from man's own mind, whatever appearance of reason they may have. The phrase that follows, 'vain deceit,' I read this way: Beware of philosophy, which is nothing other than a vain deceit. After the tradition of men: he states more precisely what kind of philosophy he is criticizing, and he refutes it on two counts: it is not according to Christ, and it is based on human rules and placed in the elements of the world. Note that he sets Christ against both the elements of the world and

the traditions of men. By this he means that whatever is fabricated in the human mind does not agree with Christ, who has been appointed our only teacher by the Father, to keep us in the simplicity of the Gospel. And that simplicity is corrupted even by a small dose of human traditions. He also means that all doctrines that place the worship of God in the elements of the world are contrary to Christ — since we know by Christ's rule that worship is spiritual. These doctrines entangle people's minds in such trifles, whereas Christ draws us straight to Himself. But what does he call 'elements of the world'? Without doubt he means ceremonies. He immediately gives circumcision as an example of one kind. Two reasons are commonly given for why he calls them 'elements.' Some think it is a metaphor: the elements are rudiments fit for children that do not bring a person to maturity in doctrine. Others take the word in its literal sense, for outward things subject to decay, which have no value in the kingdom of God. The former interpretation pleases me more, as also in Galatians 4:3.

9 Because in Him dwells. Here is the reason why the elements of the world, which are the traditions of men, are incompatible with Christ. They are additions meant to fill a perceived deficiency. But in Christ is perfection, to which nothing can be added. Therefore, whatever people mix in from their own minds is at war with the nature of Christ, because it charges Him with imperfection and insufficiency. This argument alone is enough to refute all the invented devices of the papists. What purpose do they serve but to complete and perfect what was begun in Christ? But such a charge against Christ cannot be tolerated. They say of course that they are adding nothing to Christ, since their additions are a piece of Christianity that they have attached to the Gospel. But they do

not escape with that evasion. Paul is not speaking of an imagined Christ but of the Christ revealed through specific and certain teaching. Furthermore, when he says that 'the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ,' he means simply that God is found wholly in Christ — so that anyone not satisfied with Christ alone is longing for something better and more excellent than God. The sum is that God has given Himself fully and completely to us in Christ. The translators interpret the adverb 'bodily' in different ways. I have no doubt it is used loosely to mean 'substantially.' He is contrasting this manifestation we have in Christ with all previous manifestations. God has often revealed Himself to people, but only in part. In Christ He gives Himself to us wholly. In other places He has revealed Himself in figures, or in power and grace. But in Christ He has appeared to us in His very being. So is fulfilled what is written in 1 John 2:23: 'He who has the Son has the Father also.' For those who have Christ in profession have God truly present and possess the full enjoyment of Him.

10 And you are fulfilled in Him. He adds that the perfect essence of the Godhead which dwells in Christ serves this purpose for us: that we too should be made perfect in Him. As if he said: since God dwells fully in Christ, it is so arranged that in obtaining Christ, we possess in Him a full and sure possession. Those who are not content with Christ alone therefore do double injury to God. They detract from His glory by seeking something above His perfection, and they are ungrateful by seeking elsewhere what they already have in Christ. Yet Paul does not mean that Christ's perfection is poured into us, but that it is in Him for us to be filled, so that nothing will be lacking to us. Which is the head: he inserts this again because of the angels, meaning that the angels will also

be ours if we have Christ. But more on this later. In the meantime, let us keep in mind that we are completely enclosed, as though by bars, lest our faith wander even slightly from Christ.

11 In whom also you are circumcised. From this it is clear that he had a dispute with the false apostles who were mixing the law with the Gospel and thereby giving Christ a double face, as it were. He names one example of this. He proves that Mosaic circumcision is not only unnecessary but actually contrary to Christ, because it destroys the spiritual circumcision of Christ. Circumcision was given to the fathers to be a figure of something still to come. Those who maintain the figure now that Christ has come are denying that what the figure pointed to has been fulfilled. We must remember that outward circumcision is being compared here with spiritual circumcision just as a figure is compared with the reality. A figure belongs to what is absent. It therefore implies the absence of the thing itself. This is Paul's argument: in Christ has been fulfilled what circumcision made with hands was shadowing, and therefore that outward circumcision is now of no use or value. He therefore declares the circumcision of Christ to be the one made in the heart, and that the outward circumcision is therefore no longer required in any way — because when the reality is present, the shadowing sign disappears, having no place except where the reality is still absent. By putting off the body: by a fine metaphor he calls the whole mass of vices a 'body.' Just as our bodies enclose us on every side, so we are wrapped on every side by a pile of vices. And just as the body is made up of diverse members, each with their own actions and functions, so out of that mass of corruption all sins pour forth as members and parts of the whole. There is a similar manner of speaking in Romans 6:13. He uses 'flesh' in his

usual way to mean corrupted nature. The 'body of the sins of the flesh' is therefore the old man with his works. The difference is only in the manner of speaking: in this passage he specifically highlights the mass of vices that springs from corrupted nature. He says we obtain this by Christ — that regeneration is entirely His gift. It is He who circumcises the foreskin of our heart — that is, who mortifies all the desires of the flesh, not with His hand but by His Spirit. In Him therefore the reality and substance of the figure is found and made manifest.

12 Being buried with Him by baptism. He explains even more plainly the nature of spiritual circumcision: we are buried with Christ and share in His death. He specifically says we obtain this through baptism, to make it even clearer that circumcision has no use in the kingdom of Christ. Someone might otherwise object: Why do you dismiss circumcision on the grounds that its effect is found in Christ? Was not Abraham also circumcised spiritually? And did that prevent him from also receiving the outward sign? Outward circumcision is therefore not superfluous, even though inward circumcision is given by Christ. Paul anticipates this kind of objection by mentioning baptism. Christ, he says, works spiritual circumcision in us, but not with the old sign that was in use under Moses — instead with baptism. Baptism is the sign of the reality already exhibited and clearly set forth, which circumcision was only figuring while it was still to come. This is an argument from the order God has established. Those who hold onto circumcision are devising a way of ordering things that is directly contrary to what God has appointed. When Paul says we are buried with Christ, he is saying more than that we are crucified with Him. Burial expresses a perpetual continuance of mortification. When

he teaches that this happens through baptism — as he also does in Romans 6:4 — he speaks in his usual way, attributing efficacy to the sacrament, lest it signify something that is not really there. Through baptism, then, we are buried with Christ, because Christ effectively performs in baptism the mortification He signifies through it — so that the reality is joined to the sign. In whom you have also risen: he amplifies the grace we obtain in Christ, which far surpasses circumcision. We are not only grafted into the death of Christ, he says, but we also rise again in newness of life. Those who try to bring us back to circumcision therefore act all the more outrageously against Christ. He adds 'by faith,' because it is by faith that we take hold of what is offered to us in baptism. But what faith? Faith in His power and working. By this he means that faith is grounded here in the power of God. But because faith does not roam in a vague and indefinite contemplation of God's power, he specifies what power we should look to — the power by which God raised Christ from the dead. And he takes it as given that it is impossible for the faithful to be separated from their head — that the power which showed itself in Christ will likewise be shown in all of them.

13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions. 14 Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

13 And you when you were dead. What he has discussed in general terms, Paul now urges the Colossians to consider in their own lives — which is a very effective way of teaching. Furthermore, since they were Gentiles when they came to Christ, he reminds them how strange it would be to turn from Christ to the ceremonies of Moses. You were, he says, dead in uncircumcision. This word can be taken either literally or metaphorically. In the literal sense, uncircumcision is a symbol and mark of estrangement from God — where there is no covenant of grace, there is uncleanness, and from that comes the curse and condemnation. But God called you from uncircumcision to Himself, and so from death. In this reading, uncircumcision is not the cause of death but a testimony and witness that they were strangers to God. We know that people have life only while they cling to God, who alone is their life. From this it follows that all the ungodly, though they seem to themselves to be very lively and vigorous, are spiritually dead. This reading agrees with Ephesians 2:11-12, where it says: 'Remember that formerly, when you were Gentiles in the flesh, called uncircumcision by the so-called circumcision which is made in the flesh by human hands — you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise.' The metaphorical reading would be an allusion to natural uncircumcision, with Paul speaking of the stubbornness of the human heart against God and of a nature stained with wicked desires. I prefer the first interpretation, since it fits the text better. Paul mentions that their uncircumcision was no hindrance to their becoming partakers of the life of Christ. It follows from this that circumcision would only detract from the grace of God they had already received. When he attributes death to uncircumcision, he

does not mean it as the cause, but as the badge or mark, just as in the Ephesians passage I cited. It is common in Scripture to indicate the absence of the thing by the absence of its sign — as in Genesis 3:22: 'Lest perhaps Adam eat of the fruit of life and live' — for the tree did not give life, but its removal was the sign of death. Paul here briefly sets out both aspects: he says they were dead through sins — that is the cause, for sins separate us from God. He adds 'in the uncircumcision of the flesh' — this was the outward uncleanness, a testimony of spiritual death. By forgiving you: God does not bring us to life by forgiveness of sins alone, but Paul specifically mentions it here because free reconciliation with God — which overthrows righteousness based on works — is especially relevant to the present argument, where he is speaking of the abolishing of ceremonies, as he treated more fully in the Epistle to the Galatians. The false apostles, by establishing ceremonies, were binding consciences with a snare from which Christ has set them free.

14 Having put out the handwriting. Now he directly confronts the false apostles. The question at issue was whether observing ceremonies was required in the kingdom of Christ. Paul contends that ceremonies were abolished, and to prove it he compares them to a written bond by which God held us, as it were, in debt — so that we could not deny our guilt. He says we have been delivered from that guilt so completely that the written bond itself has been canceled, leaving no trace. We know that as long as a written bond remains, the obligation it contains is in force — but once the bond is erased or torn up, the debtor is free and acquitted. From this it follows that all who still press ceremonies diminish the benefit of Christ, as though we were not fully acquitted and set free by Him.

They restore the bond's binding force in order to keep us in debt. Here, then, is a sound theological argument for the abolishing of ceremonies: if Christ has fully and completely redeemed us from guilt and danger, He must also remove the record of the obligation, so that consciences may be at peace and rest before God. These two things are bound together. The various interpretations of this passage do not fully satisfy me. Some think Paul is speaking of the moral law, but that is wrong. Paul customarily uses the word 'decrees' for the portion of the law consisting of ceremonies — as in Ephesians and a little later here. The passage in Ephesians 2:15 especially makes it plain that Paul is speaking of ceremonies. Better are those who restrict it to ceremonies — but even they err by not giving the correct reason why ceremonies are called a 'handwriting,' or rather by assigning the wrong reason and failing to apply the analogy properly to the text. The true reason is that all the ceremonies of Moses carried with them a confession of guilt, which bound those who followed them more tightly before the judgment of God. Consider, for example: what else were the washings but a testimony of filth and uncleanness? As often as a sacrifice was offered, did not the watching people see in it a picture of their own death? When people put an innocent animal in their place, they were confessing that they themselves deserved that death. In short, every rite and ceremony was a display of human guilt and a written bond of obligation. If someone objects that they were sacraments of God's grace, just as baptism and the Lord's Supper are for us today, the answer is straightforward. Two things must be considered in the old ceremonies: what applied to that time, and what pointed toward the kingdom of Christ. Everything done under those ceremonies displayed nothing but obligation and

debt. Grace was in a sense suspended and deferred until the coming of Christ — not that the fathers were excluded from it, but they had no immediate display of it in their ceremonies. In the sacrifices they saw nothing but the blood of animals; in the washings they saw nothing but water. As far as the present view was concerned, guilt remained — indeed the ceremonies themselves sealed and confirmed that guilt. This is also how the writer of Hebrews speaks throughout his letter, setting Christ directly against the ceremonies. But now? The Son of God by His death has not only delivered us from the condemnation of death — He has also abolished those ceremonies, to remove every memorial of the bond of obligation, so that consciences may have no monument of their guilt before God. This is full and perfect liberty: Christ by His blood has wiped out not only our sins, but every handwriting that could testify that we were guilty and liable before God. Erasmus in his translation disordered and confused the text Paul set down, placing it this way: 'Which was contrary to us by decrees.' Hold fast therefore to this reading, which is true and natural, as I have set it down. He has taken it out of the way, having fastened it to the cross: he shows the way in which Christ canceled the bond. Just as He nailed to His cross our curse and condemnation, our sins and the penalties due to us, so He did the same with the slavery of the Law and everything that bound our consciences. By being nailed to the cross He took all of it upon Himself, and so He bound it so that it would have no further right or power over us.

15 Spoiling principalities. He means without doubt the devils, to whom Scripture assigns the role of accusing us before God. But Paul says they are disarmed, so that they can bring nothing against us now that the written testimony of our guilt has been destroyed.

He adds this specifically to show that the victory Christ won for Himself and for us over Satan is being undone by the false apostles, and that we are being robbed of its benefit whenever they try to restore the old ceremonies. If our freedom is the spoil that Christ stripped from the devil, what do those who would bring us back into bondage accomplish but restore to Satan the spoils from which he was completely stripped? Triumphant over them in it: the Greek text allows us to read 'in Himself,' and most manuscripts have the word with an aspirate. But the context of the passage clearly calls for a different reading. What would be said coldly of Christ is aptly and freely applied to the cross. Just as Paul earlier compared the cross to a great monument of victory or the procession of a triumph in which Christ led His enemies, so now he likens it to a triumphal chariot on which He was seen over all the assembly. For although there was nothing in the cross but a curse, it was so swallowed up by the power of the Son of God that it took on, as it were, a new quality and nature. No judgment seat was so honored, no royal throne so majestic, no triumph so renowned, no chariot so exalted as that gibbet on which Christ subdued death and the devil the prince of death, and utterly trampled them underfoot.

16 Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day. 17 Things which are a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his

fleshly mind. 19 And not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

16 Therefore let no man. What he said earlier about circumcision he now extends to the distinction of foods and days. For circumcision was the first step toward observing the law, and all the other ordinances followed. To judge, in this passage, means to charge someone with a fault, or to lay on them a religious obligation, so that they are no longer free. He says it is not within human authority to subject us to the observance of rites and ceremonies that Christ by His death has taken away and freed our necks from — we must not allow ourselves to be ensnared by laws that men make up. He quietly sets Christ against all men, so that no one should be so bold and presumptuous as to try to take away what Christ has given. In a piece of a holiday: some take the Greek word as meaning 'participation.' Chrysostom supposes that Paul said 'a piece' because they did not observe all the festival days, nor did they keep them exactly according to the prescription of the law, which had been abolished. Consider whether this may not be taken to mean 'segregating' or 'separating.' Those who make a distinction between days do in effect divide one day from another. Such division was fitting for the Jews — they were to set apart the commanded days by separating them from others. Among Christians such divisions are finished. But someone will say: we still observe some days. I answer: we do not keep days as though there were any religion attached to holidays, or as though it were unlawful to work on them. Rather, we have regard to order and good governance, not to the days themselves. And that is what he goes on to say immediately after.

17 Which are a shadow of things to come.) He therefore sets Christians free from observing them, because they were shadows at a time when Christ was still, in a sense, absent. He sets shadows against revealing, and absence against exhibition. Those who still follow the shadows are like someone who studies the shape of a man by his shadow when the man himself is standing right in front of him. Christ has already appeared to us, and we enjoy His presence. The body, he says, is of Christ — that is, it is in Christ. The substance of what the ceremonies once figured is now set before our eyes in Christ, for He contains in Himself everything they signified as yet to come. Therefore, whoever calls the ceremonies back into use either destroys the clear manifestation of Christ or robs Christ of His power and virtue, leaving Him as though empty. If any man in the world therefore usurps the role of judge in this matter, we must not obey him. Christ, the lawful judge, has acquitted and freed us. When he says 'Let no man judge you,' he is not addressing the false apostles but forbidding the Colossians from putting their necks under an unjust yoke. In itself, abstaining from pork hurts nothing at all — but being bound to it is harmful, because it nullifies the grace of Christ. If someone asks, What then shall we think of our sacraments? I answer that they differ greatly from the old ceremonies. Just as painters do not complete their image in full color at the first draft but begin with rough undefined lines sketched in charcoal, so under the law the representation of Christ was rough and as if at a first draft. But in our sacraments He is seen as vividly portrayed. Yet Paul goes further back: he sets the bare sight of the shadow against the firmness of the body, and warns that it is the mark of a deluded or frantic person to grasp at empty shadows when he could hold in his hands the firm and solid

reality. Furthermore, our sacraments figure Christ as absent from us in terms of bodily sight and physical distance, but they at the same time testify that He was once exhibited, and even now offer Him to be enjoyed. They are therefore not bare shadows, but rather marks and tokens of the presence of Christ. For they contain that Yes and Amen of all God's promises, made manifest in Christ.

18 Lest any take from you.) He alludes to the rules of wrestling, in which the victory is awarded on the condition that a contestant does not give up in the middle of the match or once he has begun. He reminds them that the false apostles are doing nothing else but trying to rob them of the victory by leading them off their proper course. It follows that these false teachers must be avoided like highly contagious plagues. And the passage is worth noting carefully: all who lead us away from the simplicity of Christ craftily rob us of the prize of the heavenly calling. Meaning in humility: something must be supplied, which is why I have inserted 'to do it' in the text. He is describing a type of danger they should guard against, as if he said: Those who commend to you the worship of angels under the guise of humility — they mean to cheat you of the victory. Their purpose is that you, leaving your true goal, should wander completely off the way. I read 'lowliness and the worship of angels' together, since the second follows from the first. Today's papists do the same thing when they devote philosophical energy to the worship of saints, using the same pretext. They build their case on the lowliness of man — we must, they say, seek mediators to help us. But Christ humbled Himself precisely so that we, though wretched sinners, can come directly to Him. I know that 'worship of angels' is explained differently by many scholars —

namely as worship delivered to men by angels. For the devil always uses this kind of title to dress up his tricks and deceptions. The Pope today boasts that all the trifles by which he counterfeits the true worship of God are divine revelations. Similarly, in earlier times the clergy claimed that whatever superstitions they taught had been handed down to them by angels. So some think that Paul here is rebuking all fabricated and invented worships that are falsely commended under the authority of angels. But in my judgment he is rebuking rather the practice of worshipping the angels themselves. This is why he pressed his argument so diligently from the beginning of the Epistle — to bring the angels into subjection, so that they might not obscure the brightness of Christ. In short, just as in the first chapter he made the way clear to remove ceremonies, so here he makes the way clear to remove everything that draws us away from Christ alone. The worship of angels is one such thing. From the beginning, superstitious people have worshipped and served angels, hoping through their help to gain access to God. The Platonic philosophers infected the Christian church with this error. Though Augustine sharply attacks them in the tenth book of his *City of God* and strongly condemns their arguments for the worship of angels, we see what has happened since. Anyone who compares the writings of Plato with papist theology will find that the papists drew entirely from Plato their teaching about the worship of angels. The sum of it in Plato is: honor the angels, whom he calls demons — because of their favorable intercession. He states this in the *Epinomis* and confirms it in the *Cratylus* and many other places. In what way do the papists differ from this? But they do not deny the Son of God is a Mediator, you say. Neither did those with whom Paul contends.

But when they imagined that through the help and assistance of angels they came to God, and that therefore some worship must be rendered to them — in doing so they placed the angels in the seat of Christ and clothed them with Christ's office. Let us therefore know that Paul here condemns all fabricated and devised worship given either to angels or to the dead, as though they were helping mediators alongside Christ or after Christ. For we withdraw from Christ exactly as much as we transfer even the smallest portion of what belongs to Him alone to any other, whether angel or man. Thrusting in himself into these things which he has not seen: the Greek verb which Paul uses here has several meanings. Erasmus, following Jerome, translated it as 'going loftily or proudly,' and that would not be an inappropriate fit, if any authorized author showed that usage. We do see daily with what boldness, what majesty and pride rash people pronounce on things they do not know. And certainly in the present matter there is a striking doctrine. When the Sorbonne theologians speculate about the intercession of saints or angels, they pronounce from the oracle, as it were, that the dead know and see our needs — because they see all things, as the saying goes, by a reflected light from God. And yet what is less certain? What is more obscure, doubtful, and tangled? But such is their presumptuous license that they confidently assert what even they themselves do not know — indeed, what cannot be known by any man. The meaning would fit well if that use of the word were common, but in Greek it simply means 'to go' or 'to proceed,' and sometimes 'to inquire or seek after.' If you prefer that reading here, Paul is rebuking foolish curiosity in searching after obscure and hidden things far above our understanding. But I believe I have captured Paul's meaning most accurately and faithfully

by translating it: 'Thrusting himself into those things which he has not seen.' The common meaning of the Greek verb is to enter solemnly into an inheritance, to usurp a possession, or to make entry into a place. Budeus translated this passage as 'setting foot on' or 'entering the possession of things he has not seen,' and I followed his authority while choosing a more fitting word. In truth, such people force their way into secrets and hidden things that God has not yet willed to reveal to us. This is a passage worth noting to rebuke the rashness of those who inquire after more than they should. In vain puffed up by the mind of the flesh: by 'the mind of the flesh' he means human understanding, however great it may be. He sets it against spiritual wisdom revealed to us from heaven, according to Matthew 16:17: 'Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you.' Whoever therefore relies on his own reason — however forceful his natural cleverness — Paul declares is puffed up in vain. And indeed it is nothing but hot air, whatever wit men have from themselves. Nothing is firm but in the word of God and by the illumination of the Spirit. Note also that those who thrust themselves forward under a show of humility are called 'puffed up.' For it happens, as Augustine elegantly writes to Paulinus, by a remarkable working in the human soul, that it is more puffed up and swollen by false and pretended humility than it would be by open and manifest pride.

19 Not holding the head.) In one word he condemns everything that is not referred to Christ. He confirms this view on the grounds that all things flow and depend from Christ. Therefore, if anyone draws us anywhere except to Christ — however great he may be in the eyes of heaven and earth — he is a vain and empty person, and we may boldly bid him farewell. Note who he is speaking of: not

those who openly refused and denied Christ, but those who, without properly understanding His office and power, sought other helps for salvation and other 'means' — as people commonly call them — and were not firmly rooted in Him. Whereof the whole body: he simply means that the church stands and endures only while everything is supplied to it by Christ the head, and therefore all its safety is contained in Him. The body does have its sinews, beams, and joints, but all of these have no strength or force apart from the head — all their connection and binding together comes from it. What then must be done? The right ordering of the body will be found when the head alone — who supplies to each member everything it has — holds the highest place without any hindrance. Paul calls this the growth of God, meaning that not every kind of growth is approved by God, but only that which is directed toward the head. We see that the kingdom of the Pope is not only large but swells with monstrous growth. But since what Paul here requires in the church is nowhere to be seen in it, what else can we say of it but that it is a lumpy and crooked body, a disordered and ill-formed heap that will fall in upon itself?

20 If therefore you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as: 21 Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch! 22 Which all refer to things destined to perish with use — in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men. 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

20 If you be dead. Earlier he said that the decrees or ordinances were nailed to the cross of Christ; now he uses another manner of speaking — that we are dead to them. As he teaches in Galatians 2:19, we are dead to the law and the law is likewise dead to us. The word 'dead' signifies abolishing and doing away, but 'dead' is more vivid and forceful language. He says then that the Colossians have nothing to do with decrees. Why? Because they have died with Christ to the decrees — that is, after dying with Christ through regeneration, they are by His benefit delivered from the decrees, which therefore no longer have any claim on them. From this he concludes that they are not bound by the decrees the false apostles were trying to impose on them.

21 Eat not, taste not.) Until now this has been translated 'touch not.' But since another word with the same meaning follows immediately after, any reader can see how cold and redundant a repetition that would make. Furthermore, the Greek verb among other meanings signifies 'to eat' or 'to taste,' as I have translated it. Plutarch uses it in the life of Caesar when showing that his soldiers in extreme scarcity ate things they would not normally eat. This order is natural and also very fitting to the context. Paul, using and imitating their own language, depicts how far the waywardness of those who bind consciences with their laws usually goes. From the start they are harsher than necessary. So they begin by forbidding not only eating but even eating a little. Once they have gained that, they go further: it becomes a great offense even to taste what they have forbidden to eat. And for a man even to touch it — they declare that deserving of purgatory. In short, when men have set themselves up as tyrants over others' souls, there is no end to it — new laws are added to old ones daily, and new decrees constantly

appear. The papacy provides a plain and vivid example of this. Paul is right to warn that human traditions are a labyrinth in which consciences become more and more ensnared — or rather, snares that tighten at first and in the end will strangle.

22 Which all are into corruption. With a double argument he refutes the decrees he has been discussing. First, they place religion in outward and perishable things that have nothing to do with the spiritual kingdom of God. Second, they are from men and not from God. He presses the first argument also in Romans 14:17: 'The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking.' Also in 1 Corinthians 6:13: 'Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them.' And Christ says in Matthew 15:11: 'Whatever enters the mouth does not defile a man,' because it enters the stomach and is eliminated. The sum is this: the worship of God, true godliness, and the holiness of Christians do not consist in food, drink, and clothing — things that pass away, fall under corruption, and perish through use. Decrees about such perishable things that are meant to lay religious obligations on consciences are therefore worthless. In the papacy you will scarcely find any holiness except in trivial observances of corruptible things. The second refutation follows: that these decrees come from men and do not have God as their author. With this thunderbolt he hurls down and destroys all human traditions. Why? This is Paul's line of reasoning: those who bring consciences back into bondage do injury to Christ and make His death worthless. For whatever is of human invention does not bind the conscience.

23 Which in deed have a show.) This is a concession in which Paul grants to his opponents what they might allege, while at the same time counting it for nothing. It is as if he said he cares nothing that their practices have a show of wisdom. But show is the opposite of truth. It is an appearance — as the common saying goes — that deceives because of its resemblance to the real thing. Note the three colors of which this show consists, according to Paul's account: a chosen form of worship, humility, and the neglecting of the body. The Greek word for 'superstition' that Paul uses here is literally 'voluntary service' — a worship that people choose for themselves without God's command. Human traditions please us because they suit our disposition — everyone can devise his own forms and figures in his own mind. This is the first color. The second is humility, because obedience to both God and man is pretended — so that men may not refuse even unjust burdens. And most often these kinds of traditions appear to be admirable exercises in humility. They are also appealing in the third color, because they seem to do much toward mortifying the flesh, while the body is disregarded. But Paul bids farewell to all these shows and colors. For what is highly esteemed before men is often an abomination before God. Furthermore, that is a disobedient obedience and a perverse, sacrilegious humility which transfers authority from God to men. And the neglecting of the body is not worth enough to be presented as a service to God. But someone might wonder why Paul did not work harder to tear off these masks. I answer first that he was content with the single word 'show,' and that was enough. For the principles he had established from the other side stand firm: the substance is in Christ, and therefore those who set before people only shadows were doing nothing but mocking

them. Furthermore, the spiritual kingdom of Christ is not concerned with frail and corruptible elements. Third, through the death of Christ such observances have died and have no further claim on us. Fourth, God alone is our lawgiver. Whatever is brought on the other side, however fair its appearance or brightness, is a vanishing and hollow show. Second, he thought it sufficient to warn the Colossians not to be deceived by the appearance of vain and empty things — there was no need to dwell further on refuting them. It ought to be as well known among all godly people as a proverb that the worship of God must not be measured by our own thinking or choosing, and that no worship is legitimate simply because it pleases us. It should be equally well known that true humility toward God is simply to obey what He commands and not to lean on our own wisdom. And that the proper measure of humility toward men is that through love each person submits to others. As for the claim that abstaining from certain foods keeps the desires of the flesh in check, the answer is easy: we should not abstain from any particular food as though it were unclean, but we should eat moderately whatever we do eat — both to use God's gifts responsibly and to avoid being entangled in excess eating and drinking that causes us to neglect the things of God. It was therefore enough for Paul to call these things shows and appearances, so that the Colossians, forewarned, might arm themselves against a false and decorated pretense. Today the papists are not lacking in fine appearances with which to commend their laws — partly ungodly and tyrannical, partly vain and trivial. But however much we grant them: Paul's refutation still stands, and it alone is more than enough to expose all their vanities. I will not speak of how far their practices fall short even of the honest-seeming show that Paul here

describes. The chief holiness of the papacy today is in monkery, but what that is, I am ashamed and grieved to speak of, lest I stir up so foul a stench. Furthermore it is worth considering here how readily — indeed, how hastily and recklessly — human nature is carried into fabricated and invented worship. For in this passage the Apostle vividly and skillfully portrays the state of early monasticism, which within a hundred years of his death had become so prevalent, as though he had never spoken a word against it. The madness of people for superstition was therefore extraordinary, that it could not be restrained by so plain a lesson from God but broke out anyway, as the histories testify. Not in any honor: the word 'honor' here means regard or care, after the Hebrew usage — as in 'Honor widows,' meaning 'have regard for them.' Paul is objecting to the teaching that the body should be disregarded. For just as God forbids us to pamper the body excessively, so He commands us to give it what is necessary. Therefore Paul in Romans 13:14 does not simply condemn care for the flesh, but only the kind of care that serves lusts. He says: 'Make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.' What then does Paul fault in these traditions? That they give the body no honor sufficient for the necessary sustaining of life — that is, according to the measure of what is needed. For 'fulfilling' in this place means a moderate and temperate use that restricts itself to what nature requires, and so it stands as the opposite of pleasure and all superfluous indulgence. Nature is content with few things. Therefore to deny the body what nature requires to sustain life is no less contrary to true religion than it is contrary to common humanity.

CHAPTER 3



1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **2** Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. **3** For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. **4** When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

He now sets over against the vain exercises the false apostles pressed upon the Colossians — as though perfection lay in them — the true exercise God actually calls Christians to. This goes a long way toward settling the matter. When we see what God requires of us, we easily set aside human inventions. When we see that what God calls us to is far higher and nobler than what men press on us, we turn from men and grow all the more willing to follow God. Paul here calls the Colossians to the contemplation and practice of a heavenly life. But what do his opponents do? They would detain them in childish rudiments. This doctrine therefore makes ceremonies seem all the more trivial. From this it is clear that Paul's exhortation here confirms his earlier teaching. For in describing genuine godliness and holiness of life, he directs his argument toward exposing the hollow shows of human traditions and making them fade away. He also pre-empts an objection the false apostles

might raise: 'What then — would you have people be idle rather than give themselves to these exercises, whatever they may be?' By urging Christians to devote themselves to far more excellent pursuits, he closes the door on that accusation. Indeed, he charges the false apostles with no small spite, since with worthless things they divert and hinder people from the true course of godliness.

1 If you are risen. Ascending follows resurrection. If we are members of Christ, we must ascend into heaven, since He who was raised from the dead was taken up into heaven to draw us with Him. We seek the things above when in our minds we are truly pilgrims in this world and are not bound to it. The word 'set your mind on' expresses a greater energy and intensity — as if he said: Meditate on this completely, apply your thoughts to this, fix your mind on this. But if we ought to set our minds on nothing but what is heavenly, because Christ is in heaven, how much less would it be fitting to seek Christ Himself on earth? Let us remember then that true and holy contemplation of Christ is that which carries us up into heaven, where we worship Him and where our minds dwell with Him. As for the right hand of God — that is not confined to heaven but fills the whole world. Paul mentions it here to show that Christ embraces us by His power, lest we think the distance between us creates a separation. And at the same time, His majesty should fill us entirely with reverence.

2 Not which are upon earth. He does not yet mean, as he will later, the vicious desires that reign in worldly people, nor wealth, fields, houses, or whatever else belongs to this present life which we must use as though not using. He is still continuing his argument about ceremonies, which he compares to trivial obstacles that keep us crawling on the ground. Christ, he says, calls us up to

Himself — but these things pull you downward. For this is a conclusion and explanation of what he recently said about ceremonies dying through the death of Christ. As if he said: Ceremonies are dead to you through the death of Christ and you to them, so that being lifted up into heaven with Christ, you should think only on heavenly things. Therefore let go of earthly things. I will not dispute with those who think differently, but it seems to me the Apostle proceeds step by step in order — first setting human traditions about trivial matters against the meditation of a heavenly life, then proceeding further, as we shall see.

3 For you be dead. No one can rise again with Christ who has not first died with Him. Paul therefore moves his argument from resurrection back to death — from the consequence to the prior condition — signifying that we must be dead to the world in order to live to Christ. Why has he said we must seek the things above? Because the life and conduct of the godly is above. Why does he say that earthly things must now be set aside? Because they have died to the world. As if he said: Death comes before the resurrection I have spoken of. Both must therefore be seen in you. It is worth noting that our life is hidden, so that we do not complain if our life, lying under the shame of the cross and buried under many sorrows, looks no different from death. We must wait patiently for the day of revelation. And so that our waiting is not burdensome, let us mark the phrases 'in God' and 'with Christ,' which declare that our life is safe, even though it does not appear. God is faithful and will not deny what has been deposited with Him, nor will He fail in what He undertook to keep. The fellowship of Christ adds even greater security. What could be more desirable than for our life to remain with the very source of life? There is therefore no

reason for us to be terrified, even when we look in every direction and see no sign of life. For by hope we are safe, and what is already seen is not hoped for. Nor does he merely say our life is hidden in the eyes of the world — it is hidden even in our own understanding, for it is the true and necessary proof of hope that we, surrounded by death on every side, seek life somewhere other than in the world.

4 But when Christ shall appear.) This is a comforting and godly thought: that the coming of Christ will be the revelation and appearance of our life. At the same time Paul warns how perverse it is to desire the life to come while refusing to patiently endure until that day. For if our life is hidden in Christ until He appears, it must necessarily remain hidden until then.

5 Therefore put to death what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 It is because of these things that the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience. 7 And in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you must also put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

5 Mortify therefore.) Up to now he has spoken of contempt for the world; now he goes further and addresses a higher kind of teaching — the mortification of the flesh. To make this clearer, let us note that mortification is of two kinds. The first concerns external things, which he has dealt with so far. The other is inward — the disposition and will, and our whole nature, corrupted and infected. He enumerates certain vices which he calls, somewhat improperly but elegantly, 'members.' For he pictures our nature as a mass cast from many vices. These are our members, sticking to us

as closely as burrs. He also calls them 'earthly,' alluding to what he said in verse 2 — 'not on things that are on earth' — yet in a different sense. This manner of speaking is as if he said: I have warned you not to be caught up in earthly things; yet you must also labor to put to death the vices that keep you tied to the earth. He means that as long as the vices of the flesh flourish in us, we are earthly; but we are made heavenly by the renewing of the Spirit. After 'sexual immorality' he puts 'impurity,' by which he means all kinds of wantonness by which lecherous people defile themselves. To these is added the Greek word rendered 'passion,' which in Latin is *molities* — meaning excessive softness or self-indulgence, which includes all the allurements of sensuality. Although this word also means disturbances of the mind and uncontrolled impulses contrary to reason, in this context 'passion' fits well. As for why covetousness is called the worship of idols, see the Epistle to the Ephesians — I will not repeat what I have already said there.

6 For which comes. I do not fault Erasmus for translating this 'is accustomed to come.' Yet because the present tense in Scripture is often used in place of the future, following the manner of the Hebrew tongue, I chose to keep a reading that could fit either sense. He therefore warns the Colossians either of God's customary judgments, which are visible every day, or of the vengeance He has pronounced against the ungodly, which hangs over their heads and yet will not be fully revealed until the last day. Though I readily accept the first reading, that God who is the perpetual judge of the world is accustomed to punish the wickedness he describes. He says specifically that God's wrath comes, or is accustomed to come, upon unbelievers and disobedient people — rather than just threatening them with it. For God would rather we see His wrath

in the reprobate than feel it in ourselves. When the promises of grace are openly announced, every godly person ought to embrace them as personally intended for themselves. And let us fear the warnings of wrath and destruction in such a way that what is appointed for the reprobate becomes a lesson for us. Indeed God is sometimes said to be angry even with His children, and at times He sharply chastens their sins. But in this passage Paul is dealing with eternal destruction, which is seen only in the reprobate. In short, whenever God threatens, He is setting before us, as it were indirectly, the punishment — so that by beholding it in the reprobate, we may be kept from sinning.

7 In which you did walk.) Erasmus was wrong to refer this to people, translating it 'amongst whom.' Paul without doubt meant it of vices, in which he says the Colossians were living at the time they were walking in them. Living and walking differ as ability and action — living comes first, walking follows. As Galatians 5:25 says: 'If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.' With these words Paul shows how shameful it would be if, being dead to vices through Christ, they were still given over to them. See Romans chapter 6. This is an argument from the removal of the cause to the removal of its effect.

8 But now, etc. That is, since you have ceased to live in the flesh. For this is the nature and power of mortification: that all corrupt affections are quenched in us, so that sin no longer produces its usual fruit. Where I have translated it 'wrath,' the Greek has a word that denotes a more sudden and passionate heat than the other word for 'anger.' And here he lists types of vices that are the opposite of those named earlier, as the reader can easily see.

9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices. 10 And have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him. 11 A renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

9 Lie not. When he forbids lying, he is condemning all forms of deception, craftiness, and false dealing. I take this not as referring only to slander, but broadly as the opposite of sincerity and straightforward conduct. So perhaps more concisely, and I think better: Do not lie to one another. He continues his argument about the fellowship the faithful have with the death and resurrection of Christ, but now uses different language. The old man means everything we bring from our mother's womb — whatever we are by nature. Those renewed by Christ have put off the old man. The new man, by contrast, is one who has been reformed and fashioned by the Spirit of Christ into the obedience of righteousness, or nature restored to its true soundness and integrity by that same Spirit. The old man comes first in order, because we are first born of Adam and afterward born again by Christ. What we have from Adam grows old and tends toward ruin and decay; what we obtain through Christ endures permanently, is not fragile or mortal, but moves toward immortality. This passage deserves careful attention because from it we can draw a definition of regeneration. It en-

compasses two parts: putting off the old man and building up the new — both of which Paul mentions here. Also worth noting is that the old man is known by his works, just as a tree is known by its fruit. It follows from this that what is meant by the old man is the wickedness bred in us.

10 Which is renewed into knowledge. First he shows that newness of life consists in knowledge — not because bare and simple knowledge is enough, but he is speaking of the illumination of the Holy Spirit, which is living and effective. This illumination not only enlightens the mind by kindling it with the light of truth, but also transforms and newly fashions the whole person. This is what he immediately adds: that we are renewed after the image of God. The image of God resides in the whole soul — not in reason alone but also in the will being right. From this we learn both the goal of our regeneration — to be made like God, that His glory may shine out in us — and what the image of God is, of which Moses speaks in Genesis 9:6: the rightness and integrity of the whole soul, so that a person reflects the wisdom, righteousness, and goodness of God as in a mirror. He speaks somewhat differently to the Ephesians but in the same sense — see Ephesians 4:24. Paul also reminds us that there is nothing more excellent for the Colossians to aspire to, since our highest perfection and blessedness is to bear the image of God.

11 Where there is no Jew. He added this deliberately to draw the Colossians away from ceremonies once more. The words mean this: Christian perfection has no need whatsoever of these outward observances — indeed they are utterly contrary to it. Under the distinction between uncircumcision and circumcision, between Jew and Greek, he encompasses all outward distinctions by the

figure of synecdoche. The words that follow — 'barbarian, Scythian, slave, free' — are added to amplify the point. Christ is all, and in all, means Christ alone holds both beginning and end. By Christ he understands the spiritual righteousness of Christ, which abolishes ceremonies, as has already been shown. In true perfection they are therefore superfluous; they ought to have no place, for their presence would be an injury to Christ, as though it were necessary to call in these supplements to make up for what He lacks.

12 Put on therefore. Just as he listed some parts of the old man, he now lists some parts of the new. Then, he says, it will be evident that you are renewed by Christ when you are merciful and gentle, etc. For these are the effects and evidences of being made new. The exhortation therefore hangs on the second part, and he retains the metaphor in the words 'put on.' First he names 'a heart of compassion,' meaning by this a deep and genuine feeling of mercy. Second, 'kindness' — which is how I prefer to translate the Greek word that makes us gentle and approachable. Next to this he joins humility, since no one will be kind and easy to get along with unless he has set aside pride and arrogance and submitted to a modest estimation of himself, claiming nothing for himself. Gentleness, which follows, extends wider than kindness. Kindness shows chiefly in the face and speech; gentleness also touches the inner feelings. But since it often happens that we encounter wicked and ungrateful people, patience is also necessary to sustain gentleness within us. He then explains what he meant by 'patience' — that through mercy we embrace one another and even forgive when something has been done wrong. Because this is hard and difficult, he confirms his teaching with the example of Christ and

shows that the same is required of us: since we, who fail so often and so greatly, are nonetheless received by Christ into favor, we should show the same kindness to our neighbors, forgiving whatever they have done against us. He therefore says 'if any have a complaint against another,' meaning that not even a just grievance, in the world's eyes, is to be pursued. As those who are chosen of God: I take 'chosen' here to mean those who are set apart. As if he said: God has chosen you for Himself on this very condition, and sanctified you, and taken you into His favor, that you should be merciful, etc. The one who lacks these virtues boasts in vain that he is holy and beloved of God, and counts himself in vain among the number of the faithful.

14 And above all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

14 For all those things' sake. Some have translated this 'besides all those things,' but in my judgment that is a weak rendering. It would be better to say 'before all these things.' But I have followed the common meaning of the Greek word. Since all the things he has listed up to now flow out of love, he now rightly urges the Colossians to maintain love among themselves for those very things' sake — that they may be merciful, kind, and ready to forgive. As if to say: they will be all these things if they have love. Where love is absent, all the rest is called for in vain. To make love

stand out further, he calls it 'the bond of perfection,' meaning that the whole company of all virtues is gathered under it. For love is the very rule of the whole life and all its actions, and whatever is not ordered by it is faulty and worthless, however fine its appearance otherwise. It is therefore called the bond of perfection here because nothing in our life is well-ordered unless it is directed toward love — whatever we undertake apart from it is mere scattering. The papists are to be laughed at for abusing this passage to support justification by works. Charity, they say, is the bond of perfection, and perfection is righteousness — therefore we are justified by charity. The answer is twofold. First, Paul is not reasoning here about how people are made perfect before God but about how they may live perfectly with one another. For this is the natural and true reading of the passage: the other things in our life will go well if love flourishes among us. But even if we grant that love is righteousness, their argument is still childish — for where is perfect love to be found? We do not say that men are justified by faith alone because keeping the law is not righteousness. Rather, since we are all transgressors of the law and have no righteousness of our own, we are compelled to borrow righteousness from Christ. Therefore justification by faith alone remains, because love is in no way perfect.

15 And the peace of God. He means the peace God has ordained and established among us, as will appear from what follows, and he wants it to reign in our hearts. He uses a very fitting metaphor. Just as in wrestling the one who has overcome all opponents carries away the victory, so he wants the peace of God to be superior over the passions of the flesh, which so often carry us away into contentions, disagreements, quarrels, and secret

grudges. He therefore forbids giving the reins to such harmful passions. And because holding them in check is difficult, he also points to a remedy: let the peace of God have the victory, because it must serve as a bridle to hold back all the passions of the flesh. He therefore says 'in your hearts,' because it is there that we so often feel fierce battles while the flesh wars against the Spirit. The phrase 'to which you are called' makes clear what kind of peace this is — namely a unity that Christ has consecrated and established among us by His authority. For God has so reconciled us to Himself in Christ that we are to live among ourselves with one mind and one accord. He adds 'in one body,' meaning that we cannot be at peace with God unless we also agree with one another as members of one body. When he says 'be thankful,' I do not refer this mainly to remembering past favors but to gentleness of manner — and to remove ambiguity I would rather translate it: 'Be loving' or 'Show yourselves loving.' Yet I admit that if thankfulness possesses our hearts, we cannot help being very ready to nurture love toward one another.

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you.) He wants the doctrine of the Gospel to be thoroughly known to them. From this we can gather what spirit those are led by in our day who bitterly forbid the people access to it, creating a great uproar and claiming there is no worse plague than letting the common people read Scripture. For Paul here speaks to men and women of every kind. He does not want them only to have a light taste of the word of Christ — he urges it to dwell in them, that is, to have a sure seat in them, and that abundantly, so that they may desire to grow more and more each day. But because many have a misdirected desire in learning — abusing the word of God to serve their own ambition, or vain

curiosity, or corrupting it in some other way — he adds 'in all wisdom.' So that being taught by it, we may taste and discern what we ought. He also briefly defines what this wisdom or discernment is: that the Colossians teach themselves. Teaching here means profitable instruction that builds up, as in Romans 12:7: 'He who teaches, let him do it in teaching.' Also 2 Timothy 3:16: 'All Scripture is profitable for teaching.' This is the true use of the word of Christ. But since teaching alone can sometimes be cold — as the saying goes, virtue is praised and left to freeze — he also adds admonition, which confirms and reinforces teaching by pushing people forward. Nor does he mean that the word of Christ should benefit each person privately alone — he requires them to teach and admonish one another.

In psalms and hymns. He does not restrict the word of Christ to these forms alone, but rather means that all our speech should be so oriented toward building up others that even what serves for cheerfulness and refreshment should contain nothing empty. As if to say: Leave to unbelievers the foolish delight they take in vain and trivial jests and entertainments. As for your own speech — not only what is serious, but even what is joyful and lighthearted — let it contain something profitable. Instead of bawdy or at least immodest and frivolous songs, hymns and songs that sound out the praise of God are what befit you. Under these three names he has included every kind of song. As is commonly distinguished: a psalm may be a song accompanied by a musical instrument alongside the voice; a hymn is properly a song of praise, whether sung aloud or otherwise; and a song contains not only praise but also admonitions and other matters. But Paul would have the spiritual songs of Christians not be composed of trivial and worthless sub-

jects — for that has relevance to the argument. The phrase 'in grace' is expounded variously by Chrysostom, but I take it simply, as also in chapter 4 verse 6, where he says 'let your speech be seasoned with salt, in grace' — that is, seasoned with a dexterity that is gracious and fitting, profitable and pleasing to hearers, and contrary to scoffing, crudeness, and similar follies. Singing in your hearts: this concerns the affection. Just as we ought to stir up others, so also must we sing from the heart, so that it is not merely an outward sound of the mouth. But this should not be taken to mean he is telling everyone to sing silently to themselves — he wants both joined together, so that the heart goes before the tongue.

17 And whatsoever you do.) These words, and what precedes them, I have already expounded in the Epistle to the Ephesians, where the same is found almost word for word. Since he had begun to treat the parts of a Christian life and had touched only a few specific instructions — and since going through the rest one by one would take too long — he sums up everything broadly: our whole life is to be so ordered that whatever we say or do is governed by Christ's guidance and aimed at His glory as the final mark. Both points are well captured in this: that all our endeavors begin with calling on Christ and are directed toward His glory. From prayer comes the blessing of God, which in turn gives us occasion and matter for thanksgiving. It is also worth noting that he teaches that thanks must be given to the Father through Christ, since it is through Christ that we obtain whatever good God bestows on us.

18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children,

so that they will not lose heart. 22 Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men. 24 Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. 25 For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

18 Wives, etc.) Now follow the particular duties, as they are called, that belong to each person's calling. Since I have already said nearly everything needed on this in the Epistle to the Ephesians, I will here add only what is specifically suited to opening the present passage. He commands wives to be subject. That is plain. What follows is less certain: 'as is fitting in the Lord.' Some read it as: 'Be subject in the Lord as is fitting.' But I prefer: 'as is fitting in the Lord,' meaning according to the Lord's institution — so that he is confirming the subjection of wives by the Lord's authority. Of husbands he requires love and commands that they not be harsh, because there is real danger that they will abuse their authority and become tyrants.

20 Children, obey your fathers and mothers.) He commands children to obey their parents without exception. But what if parents command something unlawful — must children obey in that case too? Surely it would be worse than outrageous if human authority were to prevail over God. I answer that here too must be understood what is expressed in Ephesians 6:1: 'in the Lord.' But why the universal phrase 'in all things'? Because Paul means to show that children must obey not only commands that are right and just, but also those that are harsh and difficult. Many people

show themselves obedient to their parents only when it is convenient and brings them no trouble. But children ought to remember one thing: whatever parents they have, those parents came to them by God's providence, who by His ordinance has placed children under their parents. 'In all things' means they refuse nothing even if it is hard or grievous; they yield to their parents' persons even in matters that are indifferent; and in seeking their own interests or in disputes, they do not insist on their rights — yet all of this only as far as religion permits. He forbids parents to be excessively harsh, lest children be frightened away from bearing godly and appropriate correction. For daily experience shows how much gentle and kind upbringing accomplishes.

22 Servants, obey. What is written here about servants needs no further explanation, since it has already been opened in Ephesians 6:1, except for these two points: 'for you serve the Lord Christ,' and 'he who does wrong will receive the consequences of his wrongdoing.' By the first statement Paul means that servants must serve their earthly masters in such a way that Christ nevertheless holds the supreme lordship — He is the chief master. This is a truly excellent comfort for all who are in subjection: that in willingly serving their masters, they hear their obedience accepted by Christ as though it were done to Him, and from this Paul gathers that they will receive a reward from Him — the reward of inheritance. By this he means that what is repaid for works is, in fact, freely given by God, since the inheritance comes through adoption. By the latter statement he comforts servants again: if they are oppressed by the unjust cruelty of their masters, God Himself will avenge it and will not pass over injuries done to them simply because they are servants, since with Him there is no par-

tiality. For this thought might crush their spirits — if they believed they were of little account in God's sight or that their sufferings went unnoticed. Moreover, servants themselves are sometimes tempted to take revenge for harsh or ungracious treatment. Paul therefore guards against this by reminding them to wait for God's judgment with patience.

CHAPTER 4



1 Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven. **2** Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving. **3** Praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned. **4** That I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.

Masters, give to your, etc. He puts 'that which is just' first, meaning the fair treatment he commanded in Ephesians 6:8. But since masters tend to look down on the state of servants from above and think themselves bound by no law, Paul brings them into proper order: both alike are under the empire and command of God, and from this comes the fairness and equity he speaks of. And mutual or like equability, or fairness: some interpret this differently, but I have no doubt that Paul here used the Greek word to mean the right that answers from one party to another — what one party owes to the other. This is similar to his use of a related word in Ephesians. For masters do not have such complete ownership of their servants that they owe them nothing — appropriate and proportionate justice and fair dealing ought to govern all kinds of relationships.

2 Be instant in prayer. He returns to general exhortations, and we should not look for a strict order in them — if we did, prayer should come first, but Paul was not greatly concerned about that. In this passage he sets out two things about prayer: first, its continuance and frequent practice; second, alertness and earnest intent. When he says 'be instant,' he calls for perseverance. He sets 'watching' against coldness and carelessness. He adds 'thanksgiving' because God must be prayed to for our present needs in such a way that we do not forget the benefits we have already received. Moreover, we must not be so insistent that we become resentful if God does not immediately fulfill our desires, but receive with patient minds whatever He gives. So there are two kinds of thanksgiving required here. Something has also been said about this in Philippians 4:6.

3 Pray you in like manner for us. He is not pretending here — knowing his own need, he earnestly wished to be helped by their prayers, and he was persuaded that they would do him good. Who then would dare to treat lightly the intercessions of the brethren, when Paul himself confesses his need of them? Certainly the Lord has not in vain ordained this exercise of love among us — that we should pray for one another. Therefore each person ought not only to pray for the brethren, but also to earnestly ask for the prayers of others whenever the situation calls for it. The argument the papists draw from this — that the dead should be called upon to pray for us — is childish. What resemblance is there? Paul commends himself to the prayers of the brethren, with whom he knew by God's command he had mutual communication. But who would deny that this mutual communication ceases with the dead? Setting aside such follies, let us return to Paul. We have in Paul a

notable example of humility, in that he calls on others to help and assist him. We are also reminded that it is a matter of great difficulty to stand firm in the defense of the Gospel, especially when danger presses. It is not without reason that he asks the churches to aid him in this. Consider also his extraordinary zeal. He is not anxious for his own safety — he does not ask the churches to pour out prayers for his deliverance from the danger of death. He is content with one thing: to remain unbroken and fearless in his profession of the Gospel. With such disregard for his own life, he places the glory of Christ and the spreading of the Gospel before everything. By 'the gate of speech' he plainly means what he calls in Ephesians 6:19 'the opening of his mouth,' and what Christ calls 'a mouth and wisdom.' These two expressions differ only in form, not in meaning. With an elegant metaphor he makes plain that speaking boldly about the Gospel is no easier than breaking through a barred and bolted gate. For this is truly the work of God, as Christ said: 'It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you' (Matthew 10:10 — actually 10:20). Having therefore set forth the difficulty, he moves the Colossians all the more to pray, testifying that he cannot speak rightly without the Lord directing his tongue. He draws his second argument from the worthiness of the subject matter, calling the Gospel 'the mystery of Christ.' In so great a matter, one must not labor only lightly. Third, he also mentions his own danger.

4 As I ought. This phrase underscores the difficulty, since he means it is no ordinary or common thing. To the Ephesians he adds 'that I may boldly make it known,' from which it appears he desired a fearless boldness and confidence such as befits the majesty of the Gospel. Furthermore, since all Paul does here is

pray for grace to be given him to fulfill his office, let us remember that this is equally a rule for us — not to give ground to the fury of adversaries, but to labor and strive even to death to advance the Gospel. And because this is beyond our own strength, we must be constant in prayer, that the Lord does not leave us without the Spirit of boldness.

5 Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. 6 Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. 7 As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. 8 For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. 9 And faithful and beloved brother Onesimus, who is one of your number, is with him; they will inform you about the whole situation here.

5 Walk wisely. He sets 'those who are without' — outsiders — against those who belong to the household of faith. The church is like a city whose inhabitants are all the faithful, bound together by mutual kinship; and outsiders are unbelievers. But why does Paul want the faithful to be especially careful in their conduct toward these outsiders? There are three reasons. First, that no stumbling block be laid before the blind — for nothing is more likely than that through our carelessness unbelievers are made worse and become even more hostile to religion. Second, that no occasion be given for them to slander the Gospel, bringing the name of Christ into mockery, causing further harm and stirring up troubles and persecutions. Third, that in spending time with them at meals and in other ordinary affairs, we not be stained by their habits and

gradually become worldly and unholy. To this belongs what follows: 'making the most of the opportunity.' Because the company of such people is dangerous, he gives the reason in Ephesians 5:16 — 'because the days are evil' — as if to say: in such great corruption of the world, every occasion for doing good must be seized, and we must contend against the things that hinder us. Therefore, the more our way is surrounded by obstacles, the more carefully we must watch that our feet do not stumble, or that we do not sit down idly through laziness.

6 Let your speech. He requires a pleasantness of speech that draws hearers by its benefit to them. For he condemns not only speech that is openly wicked or godless, but also speech that is hollow and useless. He therefore says it must be seasoned with salt. Profane people have their witty sayings and clever remarks, but he is not speaking of those — rather, because pleasant and witty expressions are appealing and generally win favor, he as it were separates the faithful from that habit. He counts as unsavory whatever does not build up. The word 'grace' is used in the same sense: to stand as the opposite of mockery and all kinds of idle stories and frivolous talk that either harm or are worthless. That you may know how: someone who has trained himself to speak with care will not fall into the many blunders and awkward situations that babblers so often do, but will by long practice learn how to answer well and directly. Conversely, a chatterbox will inevitably expose himself to mockery whenever he is asked a question on any serious matter — and that is just punishment for his foolish babbling. Paul specifies not only what to say, but how to say it, and not uniformly to everyone, but to each person individually. For this is no small part of wisdom and skill — to consider each person.

9 Mine affairs. To assure the Colossians of how greatly he cares for them, he provides them with a pledge of it. Though he was in prison and in danger of his life, he puts aside his own concerns and looks after them by sending Tychicus. This shows both the remarkable zeal of the holy Apostle and his wisdom. For it is no small thing that, while held in prison and in extreme peril for the Gospel, he never stops but gives his energy to promoting the Gospel and caring for all the churches. His body is locked in prison, but his caring heart spreads itself far and wide. His wisdom is seen in sending a suitable and discreet person who can confirm and strengthen them as needed, and who can resist the cunning of the false apostles. He also wisely keeps Epaphras with him so that they may see the full agreement in doctrine among all the true teachers, and so that what Tychicus tells them will confirm what they had earlier learned from Epaphras. Let us carefully take note of these examples, so that they may stir us to pursue the same kind of diligence and zeal. He includes Onesimus as well, to give the mission more weight, though it is uncertain who this Onesimus was. It is hardly plausible that this is the servant of Philemon, since the reputation of a thief and runaway would have brought reproach. He honors both men with fitting titles so they will be well received among the Colossians — Tychicus especially, who was to exercise the function of teaching.

10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark — about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him. 11 And also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of your number, a

bond-servant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

10 My prison fellow. This shows that others came to Paul after he was brought to Rome. It is credible that his enemies at first worked hard to frighten away all the godly from helping him by making an example of him — and that this succeeded for a time. But afterward some took courage and refused to be deterred by any threat laid before them. That you receive him: some manuscripts have this in the imperative mood, but wrongly — Paul is describing what kind of instruction the Colossians had already received, namely a commendation of either Barnabas or Mark, the latter being more probable. In the Greek it is the infinitive, but it must be resolved as I have done. Let us also note how diligent they were in providing testimonials, in order to distinguish good men from false brothers, from freeloaders, from deceivers, and from the many wanderers and vagabonds who were about. This kind of care and diligence is more necessary today than ever — either because faithful teachers receive a cold reception, or because foolish and gullible people are too easily disposed toward being taken in by deceivers.

11 These alone were workers. That is, of those who were circumcised — he names others afterward, but those were uncircumcised. He means there were few Jews at Rome who showed themselves helpers to the Gospel. Instead, the nation as a whole was hostile to Christ. By 'workers' he means only those who excelled in the gifts necessary to advance the Gospel. But where was Peter at

the time? He was either shamefully and unjustly passed over here, or those who claim he was at Rome at that time are mistaken. Paul also calls the Gospel 'the kingdom of God' — for it is the scepter by which God reigns over us, and through it we receive the adoption into eternal life. But more on this is said in another place.

12 Always striving.) An example of a good pastor who, despite the distance, does not forget his church but carries its care with him wherever he goes. Note the force of prayer, which is expressed in the word 'striving.' Though Paul intended here to indicate the intensity of Epaphras's feeling, he also reminds the Colossians not to count their pastor's prayers as worthless — rather to reckon them as no small help to themselves. Finally let us gather from Paul's words that the perfection of Christians consists in standing filled and firm in the will of God, so that they do not build the purpose of their lives on anything else.

14 Luke the beloved physician sends you greetings, and also Demas. 15 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nymphas and the church that is in his house. 16 When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea. 17 Tell Archippus, 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.' 18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.

SENT FROM ROME, BY TICHICUS AND ONESIMUS



1⁴ Luke salutes you.) I do not agree with those who think this is Luke the Evangelist. I believe Luke the Evangelist was well enough known that there would be no need for such a bare introduction, and he would have been presented with a more honorable title. Paul would certainly have called him either a fellow worker or at least a faithful and trusted companion and partner in his struggles. I rather think that Luke the Evangelist was away at the time, and that this person is a different man distinguished from him by the name 'physician.' Though I do not press this as certain — these are only conjectures. This Demas Paul mentions here is without doubt the same man he later complains forsook him (2 Timothy 4:10). When he speaks of the church in the household of Nymphas, let us remember that in one household is described the pattern for all Christian households — each is to be a small church. Therefore let every man know this charge rests on him: to instruct his house in the fear of the Lord, to keep it under holy discipline, and in short to make it an image and representation of the church.

16 Let it be read in the church of the Laodiceans. This Epistle, though addressed to the Colossians, was meant to benefit others as well. The same must be said of all the Epistles. They were indeed written once to specific churches by name, but because they contain teaching that is permanent and common to every age, the address on the envelope matters little. For the content and argument belongs to us. The other Epistle he mentions here, which some have thought was also written by Paul, was wrongly attributed to him. Those who think Paul wrote an epistle to the Laodiceans are doubly mistaken. I have no doubt it was a letter sent to Paul, the reading of which would have been profitable to the Colossians, as nearby cities commonly have many things in common with each other. And it was far too clumsy a fraud for some unknown scoundrel to take that as a pretext and dare to forge such a tasteless epistle — one that could not be more contrary to the spirit of Paul.

17 Say you to Archippus. As best I can judge, Archippus was filling the role of pastor while Epaphras was away. It may be that he was not the kind of man who was strong enough on his own without being urged forward. Paul therefore wants him to be encouraged to do better through the prompting of the whole church. He could have warned him in his own name, but he charges the Colossians to do it — so that they may know it is their duty to spur on their pastor too, if they see him growing cold, and so that the pastor himself may not refuse to be admonished by the church. For the ministers of the Word hold high authority — but an authority that is not exempt from accountability. It is therefore necessary that they show themselves willing to learn, if they wish to teach others well. In mentioning his chains again, Paul shows he is

not lightly or mildly troubled. He was mindful of human frailty, and without doubt he felt certain pangs of it himself, since he so earnestly desired all the godly to remember his hardship. But this is no sign of distrust — he is simply calling on all sides for the aids and helps the Lord has appointed him. The addition of his hand-written signature shows — as is seen elsewhere — that even then forged letters were circulating, and there was genuine need to guard against such fraudulent dealing.

THANKS FOR READING



If you spotted a typo or have feedback, the email is **sam@goodsoilapps.com** — or use the in-app feedback form in *Christian Reader*.