

## Pastor Bob Fox's Personal Notes on Colossians 3 and 4

### **3:1 "If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God."**

It is instructive in understanding the writings of Paul to watch his switch from the indicative to the imperative. These two words refer to what grammar designates as the "mood" of a verb. "Mood" has to do with the relative reality of some action. The various moods can be represented along a line with reality on the far right and what has potential to be reality on the far left. The indicative mood represents the highest degree of reality.

It confirms the reality of the action from the viewpoint of the speaker. It is action conceived of as taking place, the tense capturing the time or kind of action. The imperative mood is the mood of command. It would represent action to the far left on that line. The action has the potential of taking place but it is not a fore drawn conclusion that it will. Two other moods lie in between the indicative and the imperative conveying shades of probability. Just to the left of the indicative lies the subjunctive, which indicates probable action. To the left of it we could plot on the reality line the optative mood, rarely seen in the New Testament. It expresses the wish or hope of the speaker and a lesser degree of probability than the subjunctive.

Paul's switch from the indicative to the imperative in his letters is reflective of his belief in grace. All of his language reflects the fact that God has a plan that is a fore drawn conclusion. Part of that plan has been the extension of His grace to humanity and all of the concrete blessings that go with grace that are now true and that can be experienced by every believer. This is captured by statements made in the indicative mood. Typically the first half of his letters are filled with such statements.

Our experience of God follows a certain universal pattern of behavior. That is, His processes in raising us to a higher plain of living, though individual, always includes common patterns of behavior that He reproduces in His offspring. These are captured by statements made in the imperative mood, commands by which we can clearly confirm the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives and so learn His subtleties. Typically the second half of Paul's letters contain many such statements in the imperative mood. They are often paired with re-statements in the indicative of those things that by God's grace are a fore drawn conclusion. As imperatives we know that these commands represent potential action in the hearers. Obedience is never a given, from either a linguistic or theological point of view. From a theological point of view, all the power of heaven is available to aid one's obedience, but there is still the element of free will in the matter of obedience, or it is not really obedience. There is a diligence that enters in which is supplied by the Holy Spirit but must be selected at His prodding by each person.

Our obedience is not automatic, but neither is it purely "up to us." There is the constant conviction of the Holy Spirit in our enlivened consciences, His constant drawing of us toward the things of God's heart. Our own faith is a product of His work (Eph 2:10), irrefutable evidence that we are born of God (1 John 5:1-5). This is the stuff of the indicative mood, the things which come our way because of the sovereign plan of God. They are true in us because of His grace.

The imperative mood, the commands of Scripture, describe checkpoints along the way that lead to maturity and completeness in Christ. They provide concrete confirmation of what the Holy Spirit says to every believer. They are the basis of a stewardship we have entered into. Our faithfulness in discharging our responsibility toward these concrete, universal things allows us to receive and discern more subtle individualized leadings of His.

Through the actions of God expressed in the indicative we come to faith and are energized for a journey. Through the actions we are called to by the imperatives whole new spiritual horizons are opened to us and realized by us on that journey.

In this verse we see this switch. The first statement is in the indicative mood. It reaches back and captures a reality that is true of us by God's grace. "If then you have been raised up with Christ..." restates the reality laid out in the previous chapter (vs. 12). The second statement is in the imperative mood. It reaches forward to prescribe action that is a logical, sequential step given the reality of the indicative statement. The imperative is "keep seeking the things above . . ." This phrase provides a concrete example of something the Holy Spirit is convicting every believer in every place to do. Seek those things above. As with every command of Scripture, as we are faithful to it, new things will be opened up to us. If we are not, even the spiritual ground we have gained will be lost (Matthew 13:12; 25:29; Mark 4:24-25; Luke 8:18; 19:26).

The grammar of this section of Scripture must not keep us from focusing on the meaning and message of it. It is an important thought in Paul's theology that we have been raised up with Christ. There are at least three ideas that he wants us to have in our minds through this statement.

First, there is a life and death difference in how God views us once we are born again. We were alienated from Him, enemies of His kingdom. Now we are His children. In the reality of the spiritual realm that both the agents of good and evil exist in, the old us is dead (Colossians 1:21-22).

Second, there is a life and death difference in the actual makeup of our being once we have been born again. Our human spirit becomes the dwelling of God's Spirit and so we are joined to Him. His thoughts begin to come from within us whereas before they were foreign to us (Romans 6:4).

Third, there is a life and death difference in our destiny once we are born again. We were on the wide path that leads to destruction. The end of that path is what Scripture calls second death—eternal separation from God. We have been raised from that death march to a high road that is life and leads to eternal life in the presence of God. Our destiny in terms of our activity in this life and our destiny in eternity are forever altered (Ephesians 1:18-2:10).

Using the indicative mood Paul captures in this figurative statement these three important elements of our reality. The command that follows is a general one that is based on this reality. Many more specific commands will follow in the letter, but they are founded on this one that will then be applied to many practical issues of morality and relationships. But first, Paul will take several verses to reinforce this idea expressed in the indicative and his proposal of a logical response, expressed in the imperative.

The command is for us to "keep seeking the things above where Christ is..." When we see the word "seek" used figuratively in the Scripture we are seeing a word that describes a pursuit that grows out of an ambition or desire (Matthew 6:33). Obviously such a seeking can be toward good or evil. All human beings are motivated by something in life and so are on a search.

Paul is telling us to be driven and motivated by the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. He refers to these things as being where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, a picture of the throne-room of the universe. We now have understanding of and access to things that we knew nothing of. They are things which shrink to nothing the more normal pursuits of the world. These things we are to pursue.

Now pursuing has in mind laying hold of something. It is not simply a chase. That is what we call an empty pursuit, just activity. Pursuing also has in mind the care and nurture of the thing laid hold of so that it increases even more. This can be seen in one's pursuit of worldly wealth. That pursuit is understood to involve apprehension and increase. We consider ourselves to have laid hold of it when it is reproducing for us so as to supply us. So seeking is the pursuit and apprehension of something so as to cause it to increase for our benefit.

What are some examples of the things above? The first would be the relationship itself with the King. We pursue relationships that we think will benefit us in the things of this world. Why not pursue this relationship with the King above all those (Luke 14:26)? The second would be truth, which is sourced in the King. It is the treasure that is the key to all others. To seek it out so as to know it, then pursue it so as to shape one's life by it is to seek what is above. The third would be the agenda of the King. He certainly is seeking to bring about certain things in our lives and in lives all over the earth. To be His agent in bringing about these things is certainly the wisest use of our lives.

So to summarize what we see in this verse, there is a wonderful reality that describes us. We have been raised with Christ, brand new in terms of our essential makeup and our potential. There is a logical direction our lives should now move in, the pursuit of those grand things that are now available to us. Paul is reiterating the command of Christ to pursue the Kingdom and this pursuit will open up all other things to us (Matthew 6:33). Now he will reinforce this reality and the logical nature of this pursuit.

### **3:2 "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth."**

Paul casts his command for the Colossians in a little different language in this verse but it is the same command. He has told them to engage themselves in a certain pursuit, the pursuit of things above. Now he tells them to set their minds on these things. In commanding this Paul has in mind them becoming people who live alert and aware, in tune with what heaven is seeking to bring about in each moment in front of them. It is too easy for our faith to be an appendage to that which naturally occupies the human mind. Our faith becomes an add-on module for those situations where faith is required or is in some sense "appropriate."

The command of verse 2 is really the starting point for the life pursuit commanded in verse 1. If we wish to arrive at the end of our lives having pursued things of God's kingdom, then it starts by us thinking of these things. The word rendered "set your mind" is used of an intentional mindset (Philippians 2:5). It involves increasing in the knowledge of "above" things, increasing one's passion and heart for them by contemplating their importance, and increasing one's incarnation of them. It is having a mindset that is dynamic, continually being shaped by all that is known of the mind of God as His Spirit works and stirs within us. It is also a static mindset in the sense that it does not shift back and forth to the things of this world.

The things above are “upper things,” things of eternal importance, things that effect many lives for all of eternity. They are “higher thoughts” that are occupied with what we are becoming rather than what we are doing or getting or experiencing. They are occupied with the eternal rather than what is passing. As stated earlier, they are about deepening one’s relationship to the King, about understanding more deeply the book He has given us about truth, and about doing those things He wants done in His world.

These are the things we are to think about, and when we do it is certain that our pursuits will change. Giving attention to the direction our mind is taking us will largely determine the overall outcome of our lives. There is much that passes through our minds, both good and evil. What we stop and linger on we can control and then it will shape us.

### **3:3 “For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”**

Paul’s teaching always emphasizes our participation in the death, burial, resurrection, and current life of Christ (Romans 6). His embrace and proclamation of this idea are such that we conclude that he was not just adopting a handy metaphor. There is a spiritual experience in belief that happens that gives substance to these kinds of statements. It is doubtless that if we could understand this experience more fully it would deeply impact our victory over sin and the quality of our experience of the Holy Spirit.

This experience of dying and being raised with Christ lies outside of our physical senses. This death we died we did not feel, or touch, or smell, or taste, or see. That is why it is a complex matter to us, as are all things in the spiritual realm. We are physical beings and have physical senses that allow us to analyze and understand physical things. But our spiritual being has atrophied. It was separated in the fall from our Maker and so lies in a weakened state. Our own spirit is largely a mystery to us, much less the spiritual realm.

It seems that in the spiritual realm of reality, which is the realm that God, Satan, and all angels live in, death is not an end to existence. Strictly speaking that is true of death in the human realm as well. But we tend to understand death as physical beings and therefore it is an end, a ceasing of physical existence. In the spiritual realm death is purely a matter of being separated from one to whom you are joined. So when Adam sinned he died, and that death was spiritual first. He became separated from God. That’s death in the spiritual realm. At that point the entire human stream became vulnerable to the evil one. The spirit of God no longer moved within them, though He moved among them. Their spiritual beings were deeply and continually impacted by the evil one (Ephesians 2:1-3). That meant that we were dead to God, but very much alive in terms of the evil one and evil (Romans 6:20). So the reality of every human being born since Adam is that when we were born physically, we were born into spiritual death—separation from God. Though we were alive physically, we were dead spiritually.

When we believe in Christ death happens in the spiritual realm. We are separated in our spirits from the evil one and joined once again to God. This is the death Paul is referring to here. It is complex stuff to grapple with what is true in the spiritual realm. But death in that realm is just this, a matter of separation. When Paul says that we have died it is a death plainly recognized in the spiritual realm. The spirits of the evil one clearly recognize our spirits as joined to the Spirit of God. It is as actual and real as anything can be to them. It is not that we exist in some state that insulates us from their influence. But we are clearly different from their point of view.

Our lives are now “hidden with Christ in God.” The term “hidden” is in the perfect tense. That tense speaks of action that has occurred in past time, resulting in a state of being that is ongoing. The term is used of that which is deliberately concealed from view. It is used of the hiding of Moses (Hebrews 11:23), of the concealing of a treasure by burying it (Matthew 13:44), of a person hiding themselves (John 8:59; 12:36), and of truth concealed by God (Matthew 13:35). Our lives are hidden with Christ. The language is specific and to say “hidden together with Christ” would capture its sense more fully.

The phrase “in God” could be understood in several ways. It could be that this is the place where our lives and Christ’s are located, in the very presence and even in the being of God. It could be that the phrase should be understood as “by God,” that He is the one who does the hiding and concealing. It could be that the phrase should be understood as “for God,” meaning for His purpose and glory. All of these would have grammatical, theological and biblical support.

This should probably be understood as “by God,” making it a statement of personal agency. The meaning is that God has acted on us so that we are united with Christ. The Spirit of God has so enveloped our spirits, that we are absolutely one with Christ. Who that makes us is not fully understandable to us in the present state. It has not yet become clear and visible (1 John 3:2). It is hidden from our sight, just as invisible as Jesus Himself is to us on earth. The new creation has only fully happened in our spirits, not in our bodies and minds which work is still to come. However, the spiritual view is primary in the spiritual realm. It is a critical piece of the reality of who we are.

Now, it is important to remember that our bodily being, with all its senses, emotions, actions and reactions, is still a central feature of our reality in this life on earth. Though it is joined to our spirit, which has been inhabited by His Spirit, it is of a fallen world and bears the weakness and vulnerability of humanity separated from God. The evil one can impact our bodily experience, and he does. There is sickness, sorrow, and death and many experiences of suffering. Our ability to function outside of the will of God is very real. But none of this changes the reality of who we are with Christ in God. That place we are in is a place of safety and wholeness, the very concepts that are embodied in the word salvation. We have become separated by an act of God from the spiritual kingdom of Satan. He has lost ownership. We have been joined to God. The things above are accessible to us. There is no reason to occupy ourselves with the lower existence of passing instinct and pleasure. We should set our sights higher, on all that has true meaning for the world that will come to be. Our life is that which is, but is not seen. It is a whole realm that God is preparing for us which one day will be ours.

### **3:4 “When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”**

There is a day in God’s plan when he will reveal on earth His Son, Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah. On that day, whether dead or alive from a physical point of view, all who have believed in Him will also be revealed. They will be revealed as they are in Christ. They will not be fallen beings in mortal bodies but fully redeemed human beings in bodies like Jesus’ resurrected body (1 Corinthians 15:50-58).

Paul refers to this future state of being that awaits us as being “in glory” (see also 1 Corinthians 15:35-49). The primary way to understand it is to imagine all that was lost in Adam and envision it all restored. The image of God will be once again restored completely in us. The consequences

of Adam's spiritual death that spread to us will all be removed for all time (1 Corinthians 15:20-22). This is what redemption is. It is God purchasing through Christ's blood a people out from under the demands of his own judgment, to be restored to bearing His image for all of eternity. This is what it means to be "in glory," and it is the inner ache of all creation for this day to arrive (Romans 8:18-25).

The revelation of Jesus Christ is a future event. It will be an entirely different event than was His first appearance on earth. In that event His glory was veiled. He was in the likeness of sinful flesh, in a body that was subject to the weaknesses we are, though He did not sin. He came in servant's garb to die for humanity as an offering for sin (Romans 8:3; Philippians 2:5-11). There was nothing stately in that first appearance of His on this planet (Isaiah 53:1-3). So dramatic, even cataclysmic will be His second appearance that an entire book is given to describe the events surrounding it. God has scripted entirely different kinds of events for those times when Christ is revealed "in glory." He will come in full demonstration of who He is. Nothing will be held back. The fullness of His power, His authority, His justice, His love, His goodness and His wisdom will be clearly demonstrated. All of this will be unveiled and He will be seen, recognized, and acknowledged by all as Lord and King.

### **3:5 "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry."**

The actual command given by Paul is that we put to death the members of our earthly body with respect to the things he lists here. Though there is this wonderful union that has taken place with our spirits and God's Spirit, there are still the desires that reside in our earthly bodies that we can be shaped by. These must be decisively acted against. They cannot be allowed to create a life of their own that we participate in against the leadings and convictions of the Holy Spirit.

Acknowledging the presence of these desires and acting against them is the sanctification process. It is initiated and stimulated by the Holy Spirit, whose promptings our minds become aware of and process. As we process we come to a point of decision. We either think further and then act out the thought, or we deny the thought and act against it. At the same time temptation arises from within that the evil one can manipulate through our various senses. What we have called "processing" becomes a battle for us against what our natural leanings and instinctive desires are and against the forces of evil themselves.

This battle is a regular feature of the Christian life. It is not so much occurring in the unbeliever whose spirit is not joined to God. That the battle is present is the sign of at least the beginnings of spiritual life. It is this battle that Paul is calling us to win, in war-like language. We do so by putting to death the members of our body with respect to the desires that are contrary to the will of God for us. From a practical point of view this means that by any means possible we deprive them of that which they desire to engage in. It is a premeditated, calculated, decisive response by us against a specific line of thinking and action. It is passing a death sentence against it and carrying it out in the name of justice and all that is good.

In using this kind of language, Paul would not want us to embrace the idea that our bodies are THE problem. This idea that sin, or weakness, or even various mental limitations are experienced by us only because of our bodily existence has been a common idea in religious thought. No doubt the evil one has used it to lead many to destroy their own body, or to inflict pain on it as a

means of penance. Another strain of thought that has grown out of this idea is that the entire physical realm is the host for evil, As such, it will be destroyed and therefore doesn't matter. So indulge it all, this so-called logic says. Our moral weakness does not grow simply from our physical bodies.

We rightly understand revelation when we see ourselves as being marred by evil in both our material and immaterial beings. The inner being of all, even believers, has been marred and altered by evil. In the believer the Holy Spirit is renewing our inner being, but that work is not completed. Our problem is not our bodies. Evil in us cannot be eliminated by changing just our outward makeup.

It must be emphasized that our bodies are of considerable use to God. Our bodies are what produce deeds, and our deeds shape our world and the deeds of others. In the case of Christians, our deeds shape the Church and the reputation of Christ. They can either validate or invalidate the gospel. They have very real potential. God wishes to capture their potential to bring about all that represents Him. He does this through the Holy Spirit, who leads us to take action against sinful thoughts and deeds. Paul calls us to respond to this leading by exterminating such thoughts as these that arise within us in the immaterial part of our being. The result will be that our outer beings can and will bring glory to God (Romans 12:1-2).

### **3:6 “For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come,”**

Paul creates solid linkage between the behaviors he has just listed and the experience of the wrath of God. The NASB has rendered the verb as a futuristic present. This is a legitimate way of understanding it. So certain is the future outpouring of the wrath of God that a present tense is used to express it. There are other ways of understanding this present tense. One is to see God's wrath as something that is already happening (Romans 1:18). Another is to see this as a statement of a spiritual principle that the wrath of God always comes where these things are present.. The clear message is that this behavior is offensive to God and He will respond in wrath, always.

In the writings of Paul we often see him reminding readers of the fact that their old ways are contradictory to all that heaven is seeking to bring about, bless, and foster (Ephesians 5:5-7; Galatians 5:20-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). This is a common idea in the New Testament (Hebrews 6:9-11; 12:16-17). Christians are divided on how to understand such exhortations by the writers of the New Testament. Some say they are warnings that we can lose our standing with God that justification has provided. Simply put, we can lose our salvation.

Others say that they provide descriptions of who is really justified and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Their thought is that there are professors of faith, and possessors of it. By this thinking the pattern of one's deeds defines their true spiritual identity. Others say that these statements define who is living in fellowship and harmony with God, and who is not. Those who are living by the prescribed pattern are those who are listening to the Holy Spirit, being blest, who will be rewarded and who should be emulated.

The latter position I believe is the strongest from a biblical and exegetical standpoint. The first of the three positions is the second strongest. The second position has appeal at times to spiritual leaders, but relies heavily on a theological system that elevates the sovereignty of God and views our sanctification as predestined. This is a widely held view which gained great influence in

Protestantism through the writings of John Calvin. It seems to me that the alarm that has been sounded that urges restraint against this way of thinking is appropriate for four reasons.

First, this alarm is appropriate because of the presence of so many imperatives, or commands, in the New Testament. The mere fact that the New Testament exists, with its teaching and commands indicate that human reason and decision enter into the matter of our sanctification in the view of the various writers. Sanctification moves forward when there is adequate understanding of truth, diligence regarding truth, and willingness to put to death instinctive behaviors.

Second, this alarm is appropriate because there is clearly the issue of stewardship taught in Scripture with judgment's reward and blessing attached. A view that sanctification is predestined makes stewardship and reward or loss also predestined. How could we be regarded as stewards and be actually accountable for our faithfulness (1 Corinthians 4:1-2), if our response to truth is all predestined?

Third, this alarm is appropriate for philosophical reasons. If God sovereignly acts in our lives irrespective of our wills to create righteous vessels for His own glory, why would He stop short of perfection? It leaves us with the dilemma of the Perfect One sovereignly imposing His will on us and the result being varying degrees of imperfection! Would it not be a greater glory to Him to establish holiness in His children by drawing them to points of legitimate choice? Though the result is mixed and falls short of His perfection, the reason is clearly our fallenness. It would seem that a series of meager victories for holiness in the lives of fallen beings, who can still be legitimately drawn to evil, attests rather loudly to His grace and power.

Fourth, this alarm is appropriate in that this thinking inevitably tends toward a narrow view of sin. Interestingly it often is accompanied by an appropriate view of the depravity of man. Yet it tends to point to victories in visible sins such as carousing, drunkenness, adultery, fornication and the like as proof of the presence of the Spirit. Not living in a pattern of these things is seen as the sign of genuine faith. Where they are "habitually" present, the person's true spiritual identity is called into question. Such a person is seen to be "continuing in sin."

But from a biblical point of view continuing in sin must be seen as persisting in acts of self-promotion. Things like manipulation, positioning oneself to gain advantage, the drive to prevail, the hunger for affirmation are the things that the flesh orchestrates in us. Who can say that they do not continue in these things? Our depravity is rooted in our fleshliness, and this fleshly person in us must be crucified continually. It is relatively easy to abstain from certain visible things. Millions are doing so without believing in the gospel. It is another matter to hold in check and put to death the things that are a part of our very essence.

Throughout Paul's writings salvation is presented as more than justification. There is this past aspect to this work of God's grace in us, but there is a present aspect as well. God is saving us through the leading of the Holy Spirit from our fleshly patterns of thought and behavior. This present process of salvation can be compromised and lost by us if we neglect the truth at points of conviction by the Holy Spirit. Paul's reasoning is this; why would anyone want to intentionally lose out on this salvation, this ongoing work of grace in their lives. Why would they take up courses of action that will alienate them from the workings of God all over again?

### **3:7 “and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them.”**

There is emphasis in the Greek text on the fact that they themselves walked in the very things Paul is calling them to die to. This emphasis is made likely so that they will remember well their proclivity to such things. This will equip them to approach their sanctification humbly and persistently. It will keep them from arrogance toward those who still are enslaved to sin.

It is a natural thing to walk in such things when one is living in them. The language is definitive on the Colossians past and could be understood as saying that they lived immersed in the sphere of these things. This is the condition that Paul describes elsewhere as slavery (Romans 6:16-23) and as blindness (2 Corinthians 4:4), and darkened understanding (Ephesians 4:17-19). It is the natural state of all humanity apart from the indwelling Spirit. Paul’s writings all agree that such living should be a thing of the past. Yet they all call Christians to set such things aside and to continue to do so (Ephesians 4:20-24; Romans 6:12-23; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Galatians 6:14). These persistent instructions and commands can only mean that there is still real danger that we will slip back into such things if we do not remain alert. They are the things of the past and are the things that account for the wrath of God.

### **3:8 “But now you also put them all aside; anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.”**

In the grammar of the previous verse Paul emphasized the personal pronoun “you.” The force of his statement was “You yourselves use to live this way.” In this verse he does much the same. The force of this statement is “You yourselves must put all this off.” There is always unfinished business when it comes to our sanctification. We must stay engaged in the process, and take personal responsibility for it.

The command itself is an aorist imperative. The present imperative would indicate that they were already doing this and were to continue doing so. The aorist imperative often expresses action that must be initiated or started. So without reading too much into this, Paul is assuming that there are at least some in Colosseae who had not realized that they needed to deal with those things. So Paul makes it very pointed, saying in effect, “This is for you!” He commands them to start out in this new direction.

The word Paul uses to command this action is used six other times in the New Testament. It is a compound word composed of the word meaning to put or place, and the preposition meaning away from. Only one time is this word used in a way other than it is used here of putting aside certain sinful behavior. That occasion is at the stoning of Stephen when those involved took off their coats and are said so have placed them at the young man Paul’s feet (Acts 7:58). They disrobed in this way so as to throw rocks well!

This provides a good mental image of what Paul is commanding here. It is a laying aside of that which can encumber and impede other action that is to be taken. That other action is key. Except for this reference in Acts the word is used throughout Paul’s writings and those of the other New Testament writers exclusively for this moral self-judgment that is to occur within believers (Romans 13:123; Ephesians 4:22,25; Hebrews 12:1; James 1:21; 1 Peter 2:1). It is an apt illustration of our role in the sanctification process.

To the list given in verse 5 Paul add these five things. They are elements of behavior that are primarily emotional and particularly destructive to relationships. The first two, anger and wrath, are closely related. There is overlap in their meaning. Wrath can be seen to be a little more intense and usually is directly associated with acts of anger. We know that anger in itself is not sinful (Ephesians 4:26). It is a legitimate emotion. But it very often leads to sin, inspired only for fleshly reasons. It is the most challenging of human emotions to place under the Spirit's control. In this list it can be seen as that which the rest of the sins listed grow out of.

Malice is ill will that we harbor toward someone. Anger often gives birth to it. It is the desire to see harm or difficulty come to them. It is rejoicing in or in some way feeling satisfied in another's hardship and pain.

Slander is speaking about someone in such a way that others think less of them. It may involve truth or untruth, but the intention is to detract from their reputation. Often the intent is to make oneself look better, or at least to advance one's own interests. Here the word Paul uses is blasphemy.

It refers specifically to the activity of vilifying God. For whatever reason this is the frequent pastime of the unregenerate. They freely pontificate on who God is, what He is like, and what He has done. They do so in ignorance and arrogance. This type of rhetoric is to cease among believers.

We must not allow our legitimate questioning and search for answers to degenerate into blasphemy. We must not allow our little bit of understanding to answer a matter too quickly and so cast doubt on this character of God. Satan is the great slanderer of God and His children and we must not follow his lead. It is very instructive that God's own family is cautioned here about this sin.

Abusive speech is literally disgraceful or shameful words. It is speech that is intended to produce shame in others for selfish reasons. There is legitimate shame that people need to be guided into and through when they have sinned. But there is much shame produced in people only for the profit of those speaking the words. Such words are usually a symptom of the speaker's pain, but they are not to be excused or dismissed because of this.

All of these things are to be put off, as one would a garment that impeded certain activity. They are related to the old life and served a sordid purpose there. God's power is bent on helping us turn from these destructive things to those things that produce life and forward progress in ourselves and others.

### **3:9 "Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices."**

This is an important verse for two reasons. The first, is the obvious fact that Christianity and salvation is a truth journey. The truth sets us free and so we must protect it at all costs in doctrinal matters but also in practical matters. There really must be great care taken to free ourselves from this well-ingrained human tendency to speak lies.

The second reason this verse is important is a broader issue than the verse's primary subject. It is what it illustrates about the sanctification process. If it is true that the Colossians had "laid aside the old self with its practices," then why did Paul have to give them this command not to lie? If

the old self has really been taken off and discarded like a garment, why would there be any deceit practiced? Paul viewed the holiness and purity of the Church through an “already-not-yet” lens. The barrier between God and man that prohibited godliness had already been removed through Christ. The reproduction of the life of Christ in individual believers was not yet completed.

The reproduction of the life of Christ in us begins with belief in Him. That requires us changing our minds about Him. So the essence of belief in Christ is a laying aside of an old way of thinking. Yet these ways of thinking, being instinctive and having become second nature to us, are not totally laid aside. That laying aside is an ongoing battle. To use the imagery of Paul, we keep finding ourselves with these old clothes on! Paul clearly concedes this with this statement. This laying aside is the secondary subject in this verse, but the main thought of the next verse and Paul will linger on it there.

The subject of dealing truthfully with one another cannot be overstated. Fallen humanity takes naturally to sin, and then engages in deceit to cover it up. As the Holy Spirit’s work progresses in Christians there are sinful habits that are long standing that must be broken, but the practice of lying is an exceptional stronghold. The lie becomes a means to us of advancing all our self-interests. Through it we can bring about everything from material wealth to the affirmation of friends. It becomes the preferred shortcut to save us from work, from punishment, from rejection, from financial cost, and from confession of sin and guilt. It keeps us from transparency and true friendship and from spiritual power. We adopt at an early age this shortcut, then are stuck with its realities and the difficulty of escaping its clutches. Managing its mess becomes impossible and the sooner we allow its fantasies to collapse the more freedom we allow the Spirit to bring true transformation to our lives.

The power of lies is deceptive. All the power of heaven is aimed against it. It is short-lived in terms of its intended result (Proverbs 12:19; 21:6). It is long-lived in the work it does within the liar (Proverbs 20:12). Lying makes us overly concerned about the words of others because we are in the habit of over-estimating the power of our own lies (Proverbs 17:4). It is a habit that becomes a terrible scourge in terms of one’s reputation (Proverbs 19:22).

When Paul tells us not to lie he gives us advise that will add greatly to the power of our lives, greatly reduce the stress and complexity of them, add considerably to the durability of our relationships, and lead to a more thorough understanding of truth. We are set free by distancing ourselves from all that is a lie.

### **3:10 “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.”**

There are a number of big ideas woven together in this verse. There is the concept of the new self, the renewal or sanctification of the believer. There is something called “true knowledge.” Then there is the image of God. Each of those ideas deserve their own treatise, and each has elements that lie just a little beyond our understanding. This compressed statement of the complexities of our new birth was especially appropriate to readers who were being seduced by those who claimed higher powers of intellect and deep understanding of hidden mysteries. There is no deeper mystery than the mystery of Christ stirring within us and being formed in us (Colossians 1:27). There is nothing which is more difficult to grasp with one’s intellect yet is so plainly true in God’s revelation of His workings in humanity (John 3:8).

One of the complexities of the new birth is captured by Paul's presentation here of this new self, which we have both put on and not put on. As stated earlier, this work is seen by the New Testament writers as an "already, not yet" proposition. It is done in the sense of its organic reality. Our spirits are joined to God's, and that is unchangeable. It is not done in terms of all the effects and results God wishes to bring about. So it is true that through belief in the gospel we are new people. There has been a mysterious miraculous shift in our essential makeup. It is also true that we do not have the entire package that God intends to deliver to us. So we have put on this new identity, we must put it on, and we will put it on. All of those statements are true.

Because of this it is proper to view our new self as a work in progress. Paul's words reflect that and describe it. This new self is being renewed. Paul is presenting this as ongoing, continuing action in which we are being acted upon. We can view this as reclamation, as one might take desert land and through sound agricultural practices make it produce crops. People who once were slaves to sin are being made into those who increasingly serve the purposes of God (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Paul then describes the end towards which this mysterious work is taking us. He uses two terms to set forth our destination. The first we see in the words "to a true knowledge." This is what is referred to as a result clause in Greek grammar, prefaced by the preposition εἰς. It describes the destination towards which an action is working. In this case that destination is called "true knowledge." This is significant in the context of the church of Colosse. It is important to remind ourselves that these readers were being enticed by false teachers claiming to have true and secret knowledge of all things spiritual. Paul assures the readers that they themselves, through new birth are on the pathway to such true knowledge. They need search nowhere else. They were organically linked to the source of every reality--spiritual, physical, and beyond.

Throughout Paul's writings he speaks of a certain "knowledge" God desires to bring His people to (Romans 10:20; Ephesians 1:17; 4:13; Philippians 1:9; 1 Timothy 2:4). It is clearly not just arrived at through normal search and reason (2 Timothy 3:17). Neither is it devoid of these or grasped and comprehended apart from the exercise of normal thought processes. It can be deduced from the above references that *Επιγνωσις* is the term Paul uses when he wishes to refer to the understanding that is sourced in and harmonizes with truth as God's Spirit reveals it. It is knowledge that can only be obtained through the work of the Holy Spirit, yet still comes through things like instruction and the study of written words. This is because it refers to both mental comprehension and belief or faith. Many knew Christ died. Few understood God's purpose in that event and believed. Few believed the empty tomb proved that a number of ideas could now be embraced as factual data. Such a transition from the mere absorption of information to the perception that it is to be believed and embraced is the work of the Holy Spirit of God.

The arrival at this point of both mental and spiritual perception and the ensuing growth in it is what Paul calls true knowledge. Elsewhere it is called wisdom. It can be understood as the result of the leading of the Holy Spirit in the mind of a willing participant. The result is knowledge that continually harmonizes itself with what can be known of God. It is dynamic due to the presence of the Holy Spirit and the progressive nature of mental processes. So it is ever-expanding and increasingly complex, just as all fields of intellectual pursuit are. It is moving us toward a realm of knowledge that transcends our present capacities (1 Corinthians 13:9-12). This true knowledge is the first expression used by Paul in this verse to describe the end toward which our renewal is taking us.

The second expression Paul uses to describe the end toward which this mysterious work of God is taking us is found in the words “according to the image of the One who created him.” This expression clearly names God as the Creator of our new self and His image, or likeness, as that which we are being conformed to. We were created originally in God’s image, for the purpose of ruling over Yahweh’s creation. As his image-bearers we were perfectly related to God, to creation, and to each other. When Adam chose evil that image of God was marred in us. The glory of it was diminished. We still bore God’s image in a kind of structural sense. We were sentient beings, capable of more complex emotional relationships, cognizant of good and evil, with capacity for many intellectual and practical pursuits. But His image was lost in us in the functional sense. We no longer functioned in concert with Him. We began to use our God-given abilities to our own purpose and advantage. This had deep negative impact on all of creation. We retained much of our power to rule, but our goodness was lost and our rule became twisted and tyrannical, hopelessly manipulated by the evil one.

It is this that God has set about to reclaim. That is the goal of redemption. He will restore in all who believe His image and convey to them the right to rule over His creation with His Anointed One (Hebrews. 12:28; James 2:5; 2 Peter 1:11; Revelations. 1:6; 5:10; 20:4-6). The new self that we are as a result of the indwelling Spirit is the beginning or first stage of this work of redemption. This is the first installment in His plan to take back His creation (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Compressed into this single verse are all of these watershed ideas and concepts. It is a reminder from Paul of the all-encompassing movement of which we are a part. It is a reminder not to squander this truth that is so grand, to embrace what are only the imaginings of fallen humanity in the religious, pseudo-spirituality of passing eras.

### **3:11 “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.”**

God’s salvation, with its eventuality of the full restoration of the image of God to man, knows no ethnic or cultural boundary. In all who believe it moves forward and it does so contingent only on their faithfulness to Christ. There is no greater or lesser experience of Christ that comes about for any other reason. Paul’s words are very clear. Though the NASB has added the words “no distinction between,” they clearly capture the force of Paul’s words. So in the main body of this verse Paul names quite a number of differences that we observe in members of God’s family. None of these warrant distinction. Advantages or disadvantages assigned by culture have no bearing on the creative work God is bringing about. Having given this list of some of the classic labels, and likely even stereotypes of the day, Paul adds a powerful statement of the common experience of the person of Christ that cuts across all such lines. This person Jesus, whom Paul has presented as the Creator and Sustainer of all that is, for whose pleasure all things exist, this one who IS all, is IN all who are believers. All of who He is, is within the being of all who believe. There has been on His part no holding back of Himself to anyone. To all who come, the whole of Him He gives. The full experience of the renewal of the inner being is made freely available to all. The justice of God allows Him to do it no other way.

Now none of this means that all diversity within the body of Christ will disappear. There is great diversity in terms of function, which the metaphor of the body clearly teaches. There are teachers, and there are students. There are leaders, and there are those who are to submit to them. There are those whose speech provides the words of God and there are those whose deeds provide the acts of God (1 Peter 4:10-11). In this diversity there is no inequality. We must embrace that. There

must be no arrogance on the part of those who from a fleshly point of view are “gifted,” and there must be no covetousness or clamoring for attention on the part of those who are called to quietly serve. There is no distinction in value and worth and no distinction in the degree to which each experiences Christ and reveals Christ to others. All such distinction we feel or impose is a result of our fallenness.

This equality with distinct difference in function is modeled within the persons of the Godhead. There is the sovereign authority of the Father and the submission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. There is the invisibility of the Father and the Spirit and the visible glory and charisma of the Son. All are equally God, but there is a constant deferring to the roles of each other, specific boundaries that govern their ability, and even the degree of worship they receive.

Though there is the absolute equality that this verse teaches in the love and presence of Christ that is undeniable, what do we make of the difference we observe in the experience of Christ? How is it that some become quite mature and seasoned in Christ while others make very little progress? Some within Christianity seek to explain this as the result of God’s sovereign acts. Their thought is that God wills it thus, and extends different measures of grace to all based on His own plan and desire. While this is certainly within His power and right, it is not taught in the Scripture. Such discrepancies in experience are always explained in Scripture by disobedience, and a lapse in stewardship (2 Peter 1:3-11; 1 Timothy 4:15-16; 2 Timothy 2:20-21; Titus 3:8). As stated earlier, differences in the experience of Christ can only be explained by the differences in faithfulness to the truth which comes about by the free choice of individuals.

### **3:12 “And so, as those who have been chosen by God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;”**

The new self involves the character of Christ and the character of Christ includes a number of inner qualities that shape one’s relationships with others. This new self or new identity that we who believe have is a creation of God. Our former self was shaped by the mixture of evil and good in both ourselves and others. There were forces that shaped us that were cruel and heartless. The result of that pain is that a number of our capacities and functions we have switched off in the interest of self-preservation.

Those who believe have been chosen by God to be lifted out of this entropy and living death. They are holy, meaning set apart for a special use, no longer ordinary. God wishes to demonstrate in their beings His love and goodness. And so He joins Himself to their innermost being, their spirit, and begins to initiate within them actions that are starkly different from what they have been caught up in.

It is important for believers to respond to the impulses of God’s Spirit from within them. And so we often see lists in Scripture like this one in this verse that describe impulses that are of the Spirit. We also see in other places list of impulses that are not of the Spirit. We are use to following inner impulses. The key now is to discern these that are of God and deny those that are of the old self.

This is what Paul is referring to when he commands us to put on a “heart” of certain things. The verb he actually uses is “to clothe.” The word that the NASB renders “heart” is actually the word for one’s internal organs or entrails, the source in the ancient’s mind of our emotions. Our colloquial expression would be “heart” as in many English versions. Where we have had the

inclination to live “heartlessly” with regard to others, thinking only of ourselves, we are now being led of God to be tender-hearted. The words that describe this new inner self capture this.

Where we have been indifferent, we are being called to be compassionate. The word means pity or mercy. It is used both of legal mercy and of this kind of relational mercy. Rather than a “they got what they deserved” mentality we are to be people who feel mercy even as we have experienced it from God. Ours should be a heightened awareness of God’s mercy and we should pray for it in behalf of others and dispense it where we have capacity.

We are to have a heart of kindness. This word comes from a word that means employed or useful, as opposed to that which was useless or someone that was idle. It came to be used of those who did deeds that were of practical use to others, which met a specific need. We are to foster those leadings in us that urge us to be engaged with others to the point of acting to meet real needs.

The word often used in Scripture for humility is depressed. It is to be understood not in its common present day sense of being depressed emotionally, but in its socio-economic sense. It is a figurative expression for that mentality that is devoid of arrogance, loftiness, and any sense of status or entitlement. Now in our era these do not necessarily come with poverty, and I suspect that has always been true. But the word took on this meaning of what we call humility by way of its more literal use as a term for the under-privileged. The Spirit gives us impulses that relate to our poverty of character apart from Christ. Our eyes are opened through His work in us to the depth of our need. The longer we walk in the Spirit the more pronounced our self-awareness and less our self-centeredness. This is the humility God desires us to be clothed with and we clothe ourselves with it as we look at the truth about us through the conviction of the Holy Spirit. It draws us to a deeper mode of servant-hood.

There are several different Greek words that are rendered by the English word “gentle” in New Testament translations. This particular word means mild. It refers to the ancient concept of meekness—that ability to function in the golden mean. It is having the right emotion and just the right amount of it. It is to have overcome our more natural tendency to be reactionary or to suppress emotion entirely. The Spirit of God is not making us less emotional. But He is seeking to impart to us the capability to act with the emotion of a particular situation, and not import to it other emotion. He builds in us skill at expressing emotion so that it has spiritual impact. This is the journey involved in clothing ourselves with what is called in the NASB “gentleness.”

The spirit is also leading us in the way of patience. The word means long-suffering. It refers to one who is able to endure pain and discomfort for a long time. Patient people can delay for a long while their own gratification. They don’t need immediate, tangible results. They can endure a process and can live with uncertainty. To be truly used of God one must be able to endure misunderstanding, criticism, periods of little movement, even times of backward movement. It is a shallow understanding of Scripture, of Christian history, of the spiritual realm, and of God that expects otherwise. But to expect all to go well and to equate blessing with forward movement is instinctive in us. We must clothe ourselves with patience and this comes through the more precise understanding imparted by the Holy Spirit and actual Christian experience. It is a fleshly man who must have progress to continue in the life and work of God.

These things we are to wear like clothes. We are to put them on as intentionally as we clothe ourselves each morning. We are to check their condition as we do that of our clothes. We are to consult the mirror of Scripture and the opinion of others rather than just assuming their presence and condition.

**3:13 “bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”**

This verse describes behavior that grows out of the attitudes that we are to clothe ourselves with. Paul gives this example of how the inner work of the Holy Spirit, if we are fostering it in our lives, demonstrates itself in the Church. That he feels the need to prescribe this clothing of ourselves and the accompanying actions show that we have a role and responsibility in this matter. We cannot expect this transformation to happen against our will or apart from some practical choices on our part.

To bear with someone is to have a realistic expectation of them, and then to allow extra margin. It is to remember that they are fallen human beings. It is to remember that they are in process in their personal journey toward completeness. In the close relationships that characterize the Church, we will see each other's incompleteness. Paul gives instruction as to how we are to respond when we do see it. It is Paul's expectation that legitimate complaints will arise.

The word for “bearing with” is composed of the word “to have” combined with the word for again. It suggests repetition. Relationships are not suppose to be terminated on the basis of a single failure. There are other passages that deal with how failures are to be addressed. But here the idea is that we should not allow such things to destroy our fellowship by leading us to withdraw, to become bitter or disillusioned. Reconciliation should trump separation. There should be in the right sense an expectation of shortfall—a multiple chance mentality. Such extension of grace toward each other is captured in the word Paul uses that is rendered “forgive.” It is formed from the word for grace and we could understand it simply as an exhortation to extend grace. It means to deal generously with, to release, to cancel a debt (Luke 7:42-43). So the extension of grace toward each other is to mark our fellowship.

As always, God's forgiveness of us should inspire forgiveness on our part toward others. No matter what the offense, we will be able to find in ourselves the germ that leads to such behavior if we are honest. The germ of vileness is in each of us. Such things in us motivated God to extend grace not withhold it. Forgiveness was the way He chose to address our fallenness, and addressing it He is through the blood of Christ and the ensuing union of our spirits with His. The one who does not extend forgiveness is either not forgiven or has not really come to an understanding of the scope of God's forgiveness of them. Forgiveness is the unmistakable mark of those who are experiencing the forgiveness of God (Matthew 18:35; Matthew 6:14; Mark 11:26; James 2:13). So in Christian fellowship we will find numerous opportunities to justly be hurt, to be offended, and to withdraw. There is no ideal laid down in Scripture that warrants any other expectation. When we experience that which gives rise to complaint, we should be thankful that God's love drives Him to satisfy out of his own resources the demands of His justice. We should walk in His steps.

**3:14 “And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.”**

Paul continues to use the metaphor introduced in verse 12 of putting on clothes. Believers are represented as embracing certain behaviors just as one puts on certain clothes. These “clothes” become who they are and like a uniform identify them as being a part of God's new creation. In that imagery love is represented here as the outer garment, the thing which goes on over everything else which then binds them all together. The word “beyond” could be rendered “over,”

which fits the metaphor of the context more precisely. Love becomes like the outer garment, the thing seen that makes the first impression. It remains the thing seen and impresses itself on the memory and appears in the mental image others carry of us when we are not present. It is the consistent message of the New Testament is that we should be known for love (John. 13:34; 1 Corinthians 13; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 John 3:18-20; 4:7-8, 20-21).

Love is said to be the “bond of completeness” here. The word rendered bond is formed from the preposition “together with” and the word for wrap. Again, in the imagery of the outer garment it is what finishes the process of getting dressed. Apart from this one is not completely clothed. Until others see us love, we have not completely shown them Christ and our faith.

To twenty first century Americans, we wait to display love and the other qualities mentioned in this context until we feel them. They tend to come and go, ebb and flow in us. The language of Paul conveys something we initiate very intentionally. It is not a feeling but a course of actions and behavior that we deliberately engage ourselves in.

### **3:15 “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.”**

The Shalom of Yahweh can be understood as a principle by which we are to govern and judge our lives. It is a product first of belief. We are called to believe that His covenant with us demonstrates His unwavering, unconditional love for us. It demonstrates that He is continually and forever watching over us for good (Genesis 15; Exodus 2:23-25). We can rest and know for certain that our ultimate good is assured. Faith is this activity of assuring and composing our inner beings against the feeling that all they have is what they have (2 Kings 6:15-19). So the shalom of Yahweh is second of all a product of this intentional recalling/worshipping of who He is, and in particular how He has chosen to relate Himself in covenant to us (1 Samuel 17:26). It is taking what faith has led us to believe and viewing the present moment in light of it. Third it is taking appropriate action in that situation. It is seizing that moment and shaping it as God wants it shaped (1 Samuel 17:45-49). The shalom of Yahweh does not lead to inactivity a kind of resignation that simply watches to see IF He does something. It leads to action that He blesses and multiplies.

The activity of ruling our hearts in this way is very important in the mind and heart of God. The cause of Israel’s wanderings and a generation’s loss of the experience of entering the promised land was the failure to let the peace of God as described above, rule their hearts (Exodus 14:10-15; 15:22-26; 16:1-12, 17-21, 25-28; 17:1-7; 32:1-14; Numbers 11:1-15; 12:1-15; 14:1-12, 22). Their judgment was clearly pronounced and specified as springing from this repeated offense in Numbers 14:20-35. The writer to the Hebrews would articulate this failure to view wilderness situations through the lens of revelation and so to respond in faith action (Hebrews 3:14-4:2). It is a failure of faith to follow in their steps and doubt God’s watching over us for good.

For us to say that the peace of Christ rules our hearts, we must be able to see that real life situations are being transformed for us. The paralysis of emotions like anxiety, intimidation, or just discomfort must be over-ruled by a belief in God’s unwavering goodness that sees the thing differently and motivates action that is aligned with His purpose. That is evidence that we are letting Yahweh’s shalom rule our hearts.

There is something that either comes about in one's life or is entirely missed based on obedience to this idea. It is illustrated in the history of Israel at the giving of the Law. In the initial phases of this revelation at Mt. Sinai, the people were kept from the presence of Yahweh (Exodus 19:1-25). This was done no doubt to impress upon them his holiness, Moses' privileged status, and that of the Levites as well. It also showed that there was a prescribed way sinful humanity could relate to God, but it had to be known and followed precisely. It appears however, that this latter understanding never was embraced by the masses of Israel, ever. The thunder and lightning thoroughly frightened them, but they never embraced the entire context of the occasion, that Yahweh wanted to meet with them and embrace them as His own. And so they actually did not want to personally speak with God, but wanted Moses to handle that and report to them (Exodus 10:18-20; Deuteronomy 5:5). Some suggest this may be THE transgression that brought about the giving of the Law with its intermediary nature (Galatians 3:19). They suggest that in this act Israel demonstrated the great depravity of humanity—a lack of ability, aptitude, willingness and faith to accept the love of God and to desire to relate to such a One.

This may be an accurate assessment and interpretation of the testimony of Scripture. This much is certain from Israel's example. We must arrive at a point where we absolutely trust God's goodness. This is the distinguishing mark of all the great people of faith in the Scripture (2 Samuel 12:15-23; 24:10-17). We are told to be thankful. That is great advice in light of all that is being commanded in the first part of the verse. Grumbling and complaining is the symptom that tells us the peace of God is not ruling our hearts. When we feel complaint arising thanksgiving is the anecdote, as it is for anxiety (Philippians 4:6-7). It is the practical activity we can engage in that will help us rule over our inner being and keep ourselves from falling away from God's will in the moment. If we find ourselves not experiencing God's peace, we will be able to trace it to a moment or season we did not give thanks.

### **3:16 “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 thanksgiving in your hearts to God.”**

Christ was the Word of God incarnate in human flesh. His words, actions, and attitudes were at all times the perfect manifestation of God, because He was God (John 14:9-11). The word of Christ here means the message as the apostles were delivering it about Christ, including His teachings, the message of the Scriptures about Him and His work in behalf of the salvation of humanity.

We are to make a home within ourselves for this message of Christ. The word dwell is formed from the preposition “in,” and the noun “house.” All the thought that would be given to making a house suitable and serviceable for one's family should be given to making a place within us for the message of truth to reside. That figure allows much for contemplation. An adverb is added that gives it even more profound meaning, the adverb “richly.” The provision we make for the truth in us is not to be marginalized. To put it on colloquial terms, truth is not to be made to live in a cardboard box when other things reside in affluence and luxury. It is to be given the most desirable of conditions, marked by power and influence. To not give truth a home in us is to live like fools. When enough individuals marginalize this place of truth, the Church is no longer a place of wisdom.

Christ is so complete that to grasp Him is to have all wisdom. That wisdom then becomes the basis for all that happens between members of the local church. Those relationships become the source by which spiritual growth is leveraged and compounded. Paul describes such an environment in the last half of this verse.

With all the wisdom gained through the presence of Christ in us we are to teach and admonish each other. Every Christian needs to be taught. Truth assumes information, cognitive facts that we need to know and understand. Perspectives shared with each other on truth open the door of our minds to more truth. There is formal teaching that occurs from “upfront” in a church, then there is the practical instructions we gain from reciting truth with each other. The latter is what Paul is addressing here, as we will see from the media he speaks of.

Every Christian needs to be admonished as well. The word admonish is formed by combining the word for “mind” with the word for “to put” or “to place.” In the process of living life it is easy to forget the message of Christ or to fail to see its application in some practical situation, or to ignore it. And so we must be admonished. We must have an openness to truth as we speak of it together with the implications of the truth in our lives. By speaking the truth of Christ together with open hearts decisions are forced upon us, and that is good. We are kept from deceiving ourselves or being deceived. Many Christians prefer the formal classroom, or the electronic church, where they observe. Less participation means admonishment is not specific to them. Accountability is the last things to be part of an environment where we are being taught and admonished in all wisdom.

The media Paul mentions here are surprising. They are Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. We might expect small groups and discussion or one-on-one conversations. The early Church embraced the value of corporate activity, of listening to the single voice and message of the congregation as they spoke of truth. It is a powerful media if attended to with an open heart. It can become meaningless routine, done on “automatic pilot.” It can be done with individual fulfillment and pleasure in mind. To approach worship as God speaking to us corporately through the voices of one another is a whole different experience.

Psalms were, we believe, songs recorded in the Old Testament that relate to common life experiences the truth about Yahweh. Hymns, we believe, were songs of a more contemporary nature that were shared by churches of the day. We believe there are some examples of these quoted in the New Testament (1 Timothy 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; Ephesians 5:14). The term “spiritual songs” is a little more difficult to explain. It could be a reference to special songs that tended to spring up inside individual churches. It could be that the term “spiritual” means that there were non-musical expressions that were songs to the Lord as He heard them. There is no end to the speculation that this term can drive. Its precise meaning, clear to the readers, is lost to us. All of these media were to be characterized by a singing to one another. It was not a singing to oneself whereby one receives pleasure and enjoyment. There was ministry through the corporate voice.

Yet at the same time there is the individual activity mentioned here and going on simultaneously. There is this singing in your hearts with thanksgiving, or with grace to the Lord. The word order of the phrase in the Greek text is this, “with grace singing in your hearts to the Lord.” So Paul’s wants our hearts engaged during our singing. So often corporate worship becomes about the singing. Paul wants us to be singing out of hearts that feel what we sing. A heart of gratitude gives our worship meaning to those who watch from heaven. There may also be in these words the idea of a constant singing within to God through the course of any day. Since Paul clearly spoke of addressing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to one another earlier in the verse, that is

the primary way in which we should see these verses. But the activity he calls for flows from hearts in which there is this lifestyle of inner praise. Our songs to each other flow out of lives filled with songs.

### **3:17 “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”**

Too often the Christian life becomes a series of things we do that occupy a slot in our schedule. It is almost like we keep them in a silo where we enter and practice them and then leave until our next scheduled time in the silo. There is little felt by us or seen by others outside that silo. It is not Christianity we are practicing as we do this. Christianity is life lived according to the moment by moment leadings and urgings of the Holy Spirit. To confine it to certain compartments of our lives smothers it. Our faith is meant to be absolutely invasive. And so Paul says “Whatever you do in word or deed.” He is saying that this faith is to shape us at all times. In all the various activities imposed on us or chosen by us there is to be this grander purpose that is fulfilled in them and we are to see to that.

This grander purpose will be seen to be the same as the grand purpose of all that God has planned. It is the end to which all He has made and orchestrated points and will arrive. To embrace it is to be in absolute harmony with His movement. It is stated here as doing all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. Now, what does it mean to do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus? It must be more than a formal pronouncement before, after, or during the activity. How does one go about obeying and implementing this?

We know that to God names were very important. They stated something about His plan for a person (Matt. 1:21), for a situation or era (Hosea 1:2-9), for the person’s nature or character (Genesis 32:28). When He chose a name for Himself He chose one that would state His uniqueness (Exodus 3:13-14). This practice of God was embraced by parents who chose names that made statements about the times (1 Samuel 4:21), about circumstances in the birth (1 Samuel 1:20), and about what they thought they might know about the nature of the child (Genesis 25:25-26). Doing something in the name of the Lord Jesus then likely includes doing it in a way that is consistent with His character and His heart. It is doing it in a way that is representative of who He is. Doing something in the name of someone also carries with it the idea of representing their will and mind. It is consistent with the idea that we are the body of Christ, the visible entity in this world that speaks to the world about who He is. So to do something in His name is to do it in His way rather than ours. It is to view ourselves as on a mission of representation and diplomacy in which we have no personal voice, but must represent accurately and clearly the intent and will of the One we represent.

In some cases, including this one, doing something in someone’s name means carrying out their authority. There is a spiritual authority that we are to exercise in behalf of Christ. It is exercised in behalf of His children and against the evil one and those that serve his purposes. This idea is conveyed to Peter in the well-known statement of Jesus that the gates of Hell would not prevail against the community of those who embraced Peter’s confession of Christ (Matthew 16:18).

So this statement to do everything in the name of Christ means to do it in a Christ-like manner, to represent His will and heart in doing it, and to see it through against all authority that opposes it. As we look at this we see it is the equivalent of doing all things for God's glory, the ultimate end toward which He is taking all that is (Psalm 46:10; Isaiah 45:4-5, 20-25; Habakkuk 2:13-14; 1 Corinthians 15:28; Ephesians 3:10). It is the grand theme of the ages (See commentary on Philippians 4:20).

We are to give thanks through Christ to God as we do all things. Thankfulness is to pervade all that we do. Grateful people are healthy people and people of impact. There is no higher motivation for thanksgiving imaginable than an understanding of the blessings of Yahweh that come to His covenant people. We must approach thanksgiving as a discipline, and if we do we will easily be caught up in it. It will very quickly become the more emotional, spontaneous offering we think it should be. The act of giving thanks has enormous power to change one's outlook and emotional deportment. It not only changes moods, it strengthens faith and so transforms life goals and ambitions.

### **3:18 "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."**

Having commanded us to represent Christ in all that we do, Paul gives some practical examples of how this is realized in the normal relationships of life. When one thinks of the character of Christ a dominant element of it was and is submission. And so what follows this call to Christ-likeness is a string of commands that involve submission. One's ability to voluntarily submit will largely determine the degree to which they are a fragrance of Christ to God (2 Corinthians 2:15).

The phrase "as is fitting in the Lord" in this command to wives is congruent with the idea of doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. Etymologically, the word fitting means to be present again. It is easy to see how it came to speak of what is repeatedly done. It conveys the expectation, the norm, what is both proper or appropriate. The idea is that in wives who are united in spirit to Christ, this attitude of submission is the thing expected to be seen. Submission to one's husband is a byproduct of union with Christ.

This command is repeated throughout the New Testament (Ephesians 5:22; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1). In Paul's thought the headship of the husband was rooted in creation and was a matter of God's design not a consequence of the fall (1 Timothy 2:13). There is diverse thought on this subject within the body of Christ. There are those who believe that this was a consequence of the fall and that all such boundaries are removed in Christ. Galatians 3:28 does speak to the fact that in Christ there is no male or female. But such a radical interpretation of that verse doesn't harmonize with the simple statement here that such submission is appropriate, or fitting "in the Lord."

This command to wives for submissiveness must always be viewed in the context of the overall marriage model being commanded. Strictly speaking, that model allows no potential for abuse, or indignity, because of what husbands are commanded to do. The command to wives cannot be taken in isolation. It must be seen as part of the delicate balance that two Spirit-filled people pursue. Apart from the element of Spirit inspired holiness it will, without question, degenerate into an unholy mess. There is no way to successfully impose holiness on unholy people. The problem that has emerged in nearly every culture has been that physically stronger men thinking independent of God's Spirit, have imposed this portion of God's directive on their wives, while ignoring the portion of the model that is directed at them. Women have understandably resisted and fought this injustice. This degeneration in God's order was predicted by God in His words to

Eve after the fall (Genesis 3:16). To preach submission of the wife alone is to provide fertile ground for injustice, though it must be added that submission is advised to wives in Scripture as a means of bringing their husbands to faith (1 Peter 3:1-2).

This command is addressed to wives who are to submit themselves to their husbands. There is never the idea taught in Scripture that husbands are to subject their wives. It is not going to accomplish what it is suppose to unless it is a voluntary submission, and this is why the command is given to the wives.

The expression of this submission has varied always from culture to culture and in different eras of history. In some cultures it has been radical, so that women are denied education and legal rights. It has likely never really been right. Again, it should be a free voluntary mindset, as it is within the Godhead. It should not involve what infers inferiority or marginalizes worth. It should not involve whimsical, arbitrary action to gratify male ego. Here is why. Christ should cleanse us as people from all the abusive and relationally destructive things that sin produces. This fragrance of Christ should be evident first and foremost in the marriage relationship.

There should be evidence of the beauty of the new creation demonstrated by Christian marriage, and this beauty will be most evident if there is a safe trust between husband and wife. Their affection and respect toward each other should remove the arbitrary and abrupt tone a relationship involving headship and submission can take on. Again, the kind of submission being called for is practiced within the Trinity (John 5:19; 13:49; Philippians 2:5-11).

The fact that the precise outworking of this command is seldom present does not make the command irrelevant. We have clear responsibility to God in this matter. Within Christianity in every era is the responsibility for us to strengthen one another so that orderly homes and healthy marriages are the rule.

Now, if we return in our minds to the beginning of it all, what exactly is it that God has asked men to “head up?” It would appear that the grand task God envisioned enabling men to do was to rule over His creation on the earth (Genesis 1:26). The actual creation of humanity was to create a partnership between the Creator and this species which was distinct from the rest of the creatures He had created. The detailed account of the creation of humanity in Genesis 2 reveals that the man was created first, and his first task was the cultivation and care of the gigantic garden God had planted. We don’t know what exactly that task involved, either its literal implication or the metaphorical implication that may be involved in it. The sheer immensity of the task of ruling creation necessitated reproduction of humanity. There had to be more humans to bring about what God wanted on this earth. The second major task we see Adam undertake before Eve is created is the task of naming all the animals. God, the account says, formed these creatures and brought them to Adam for naming. God delegated this job to Adam, and whatever Adam called them, that became their name (Genesis 2:19). It is in doing this simple job that it became apparent that each animal had its uniqueness, and each had its mate, but none of these creatures could assist Adam in this task of ruling creation. While there could be a level of companionship in the company of many animals, and likely even the possibility of harnessing their power, among them all there was not a being that could help the actual leadership and rule that was Adams’s role. And no reproduction could happen, something the envisioned role God had given man necessitated. It was at this point that God made woman.

Genetically she was the same, yet different. She was the same species, so that there was great similarity. But she was different at the same time in every way. Adam recognized the similarity when God brought her before him as He had the rest of the creatures He had created. She was like him, yet complimented him. She was, by God's design "suitable." That word means that she "corresponded" to Him, meaning she was similar but different in a complimentary way. She was like a missing piece of the whole. Together they bore the image of God.

It is together they were seen by God as humanity, who would rule over His creation. This is the purpose of humanity that every male was to be occupied with. It is not that women are observers in this. They are essential to the process. The role of helper does not mean that their task is non-essential. It is not that man could do it, it would just take a little more of his time and effort. And it is not just a matter of reproduction, though that is a factor in the will of God for the planet and obviously cannot be ignored. Woman would contribute a perspective, an equally essential and valuable one, to that of the male so that balance could be achieved in the rule as God inspired them together.

The image of God would be visible in couples all over the world, each a little different. There was likely not intended to be a stereotypical male and female. Each would be different and so each couple would be different and the headship and submission roles would be worked out a little different. But the headship role was shouldered by man who reflected the role of God the Father in the relationships of the Godhead. The woman was to become the helper, reflecting the role of the Holy Spirit in the Godhead. So together they bore the image of God, in that there was this headship and submission among persons of like essence.

At this point, before evil, it was likely not an "authority" issue anymore than it is within the relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It just was. It all happened very naturally and it all happened very safely in the beginning. Obviously there never came to be other couples who experienced marriage like this or relationship with God like Adam and Eve. Evil entered the human stream and the marriage relationship must now be lived with an entirely different set of circumstances and challenges. The concept of submission in general raises many fear and goes against many instincts. Like virtually all of what God desires us to do and be, this has become problematic.

At the practical level of the actual marriage relationship, what does God have in mind when He speaks of the headship of a husband and the submission of the wife? It seems that first and foremost He desires men to know and understand His grand vision and destination for their lives. By know we are not suggesting a perfect knowledge, but a direction to head in, a path. God desires to impart to husbands a sense of calling and purpose regarding their niche in the plan of God So Adam existed for a time before Eve and exercised God's rule over creation without her, and likely learned his need for her in that relatively short period of time. After the fall of humanity men like Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Isaiah all developed with God a sense of calling and purpose that they had to set out and pursue. In joining herself to a husband this is the first thing a wife is to submit to.

She is to embrace his understanding of the call of God in his life. God will use her to help him know and refine that mission. But in the end submission involves the all out embrace of the mission God has put in the heart of the husband.

A second thing involved in submission would be for a wife to dedicate her own abilities to advance that particular mission. This is where the submission of wives can take on very diverse looks. The activity or tasks of the wife are irrelevant to submission. It can mean everything from being a CEO of the family business to running errands. What she does relates to who she is by temperament and by giftedness. Submission is the dedication of none's strengths, whatever they are, to the advance of the mission God has called the husband to. Too often we have seen submission as certain kinds of activity. And so at times it has been thought that women should not manage the family's financial affairs or make the decisions on the house they should buy. The reality is that a wife may be more anointed and empowered of God in all of these areas and may have been put in the husband's life because his gifting gave him no capacity for these things. The key thing in the actual activity engaged in by both husband and wife is how God has made them. Infinite combinations are possible.

We must understand that the role of the wife is not to be defined as submission. It is to be defined as being a suitable or appropriate and complimentary helper to the husband in the task of ruling the creation of God. They carry out that rule together. Submission is commanded by Paul because it facilitates this mission, not because it IS the mission. It is "fitting in the Lord." It jells with what He is doing. That is true of virtually every command given in Scripture. The end that is in view in each case is the grand purpose of God.

We are seeing a number of cases where the Spirit seems to be energizing wives for a more public and visible role than their husbands. There need not be any contradiction in this with the concept of male headship in the home. It is certain that there can be. But that is true of any model or situation. It takes a special man and a special woman, but it is a road that can be traveled without contradiction. Headship and submission should be worked out in each individual marriage, and they will look a little different in each, depending on how God has designed both people.

### **3:19 "Husbands love your wives, and do not be embittered against them."**

The headship of the husband in the home is to be founded on love, ruled by love, evaluated by the standard of love, and is authenticated when it produces an atmosphere of love. That is not an overstatement of the testimony of Scripture. Paul makes that clear by his statement in Ephesians 5:25 where he writes that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the Church. In theory, this removes all the practical pitfalls of male headship, because it removes any excuse or basis for self-centeredness on the part of husbands. But this also brings into focus the problem historically in male headship and explains why it has resulted in widespread abuse and injustice. Apart from Christ-likeness in the husband, submission will degenerate into servitude for wives.

In virtually every passage in the New Testament that speaks to a man's role as a husband, there is the charge to love. Headship and love are inseparably linked. Love is a verb. It calls husbands to actions of a certain kind. It demands more than expressions of love on certain occasions, more than cards, gifts, and more than normal provision of necessities and niceties.

Love means dying to self. If a man wishes to succeed at the command to love his wife he must constantly work at needing less for himself of affirmation, of status, of comfort, of things. Jesus modeled this death to self in Gethsemane before His physical death. Once He died to Himself in that garden and won the final internal battle so as to pursue God's will not His own, He ran toward the cross without a word. In that He modeled the journey that every husband is to take.

Gethsemanes, many of them, are what makes a man the head of his home, what makes a home Christian in the true sense, and what makes a home strong, good, healthy, and all of the things we tend to envy. It is this simple in terms of formula, and this complex in terms of its outworking.

Pursuing love in this way, in dying to one's own self as Christ did, is what makes a person safe as a leader. It makes husbands safe as heads of households. It requires diligence in all spiritual matters, from learning to discern the leading of the Spirit to simple Church attendance. It involves more than leading prayers or Bible readings in one's home. These are religious activities. They require nothing more from us than scheduling. They are good, but are not the essence of the matter.

Spiritual headship involves being Spirit-led in the moment—in touch with what God's heart is in a matter. It is not a matter of rhetoric and procedure as much as it is hard-core training in the off-moments so as to be able to operate instinctively in the more critical moments. A man who is spiritual in this sense demonstrates a wide range of emotions all expressed in a moderate way, and stimulates activity in others around him. That is why it is not terribly important who prays, or who reads, or who initiates a matter, or who pays the bills or cuts the lawn. All these things will be done a little differently depending on how God has designed the particular husband and wife. But an order will emerge that is harmonious and that brings order to the home. It all starts and proceeds on the basis of a very private, intimate journey a husband goes on with the Lord.

Paul states that husbands are not to be embittered against their wives. This relates directly to the matter of dying to self that Paul captures with the command to love. Whenever we love in a selfless way we become very vulnerable. We can be taken advantage of and abused when we no longer defend ourselves. In demanding less from others we will find that they may well give us less. It is in fact quite likely that this will occur. It is at this point that we can slip back into self-centeredness and become bitter toward the person we placed ahead of ourselves. Becoming bitter happens when we reflect on how we were treated and begin to allow emotion to build about what should have been. It is a reaction to hurt. We can stop it by identifying how we have done the same thing to Christ, and how we have been forgiven. It is always possible to establish such a relationship between behavior of others toward us and our behavior toward God, if we face the truth. But it is a conversation with ourselves that demands that we die to ourselves. There can be no desire to justify oneself or to gain vindication once such a conversation has ended, or we can be certain it has not really occurred. In moments when our death to self does not elicit from our wives a selfless response we cannot become bitter. If we do we will become self-centered, then self-absorbed and we will be disobedient to God. We will quench the Spirit and no longer be exercising headship in our homes as Christ does the Church. At that point all can be lost.

If our wives response to our selflessness is self-serving, we must dwell with them “as with a weaker vessel” (1 Peter 3:7). The idea in that passage is likely that of being weaker from a point of view of physical strength.

But the central principle would be that of deferring to the needs of such a one and that has wider application particularly in the matter of initiating love and setting one's expectations. A husband must not quit loving because of a moment when that love is not returned. If a man only loves in hope of returned love, he has not really loved at all. He must remember how desperate would be his own straights if God's love were extended to him in that way.

### **3:20 “Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.”**

The charge to children in the Bible is always this, to honor their fathers and mothers. Part of honoring them is to obey them, as Paul states here. Elsewhere Paul speaks of this being the first commandment with a promise attached (Ephesians 6:1-3; Exodus 20:12). The promise is that “it will go well with them.” The design of God in homes is that Godly parents pass their wisdom along to their children who are then wise themselves. They are saved the pain of having to learn life the hard way and the consequences of not learning at all.

This linkage between parental training and a good life was clearly propounded in the Old Covenant (Deuteronomy 6:7-14). Their prosperity in the promised land is explicitly tied to the spiritual education of children by the parents. Just as blessing is tied to the act of giving under the New Covenant (Philippians 4:17), in like manner honoring one’s parents is presented as that which Yahweh continues to bless under the New Covenant. It is a timeless principle. Here Paul states simply that it is well-pleasing to the Lord. That is reason enough to engage in it. There is always the tendency in adolescence for children to seek to please many other than their parents. During this time period, when they need to begin to develop healthy independence, they are wise to moderate their impulses and continue to subject themselves to their parents. It is the path of wisdom.

Now we all know that there are situations where children must not follow the example of their parents, but these must be approached very cautiously. Stable people of faith must rally around such children and guide them on such a perilous path. They are at great risk. They are coached well when they are still urged to bestow honor on their fathers and mothers in some way, even on the most undeserving of them. The wilderness generation of children had to be guided skillfully in this by Moses and Joshua, and there is much to be learned from that situation that is applicable to the more modern era.

### **3:21 “Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart.”**

The word for exasperate means to stir up. It is used only one other time in the New Testament, and there it is used in the good sense of motivating another to a good deed (2 Corinthians 9:2). There are numerous ways in which a father can stir up his children. He should be the kind of leader who brings them a sense of peace and tranquility. He should be a settling and calming influence. He should be seen as one who is safe. Instead, fathers can stir their children up by being sharp tongued, controlling, demeaning, but also by being passive, or absent. A father must rise to being a living, affirming, voice of authority in the lives of his children. He must work hard at his own character in order to obey this verse. Unaddressed liabilities such as insecurity, stubbornness, moodiness, impatience with others, shape the emotional atmosphere of a home. It is a wise man who holds his weaknesses before the Lord in prayer and who is transparent about them in the home.

A father must choose battles well. He and his spouse must reach agreement on what is really important in the day to day shaping of their children’s lives. There is much that can and must be let go, or the home will be a war zone, and anger will become the primary emotion of the children. There are some things that cannot be let go or passed over. Knowing the difference is what takes conscious effort from fathers. No one should think of themselves as being a naturally good father. It requires intentionality and much death to self.

The penalty that is experienced by fathers who provoke their children is severe. The children lose heart. The word could be rendered passionless. They become unmotivated and uninspired. Ironically, this may be the polar opposite of the father. In fact, it usually is. By desiring to build drive and ambition into his children he can take it from them. He then goes through the vexation and pain of watching the listlessness, restlessness, and sloth of his children. He tears his hair and fumes about how such people could be his descendants. Our tone as fathers goes a long way in shaping the psyche of our children. It speaks so loud that what we say cannot be heard.

**3:22 “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.”**

Paul continues to give practical examples of behavior that is done “in the name of the Lord” (verse 17). Having spoken of living out this command in the home, he now turns to its application in the workplace. He spends more time addressing this relationship likely because it had to have been a very thorny issue in the early church.

There was a great deal of variation in the experience of slavery in the Roman world. Being a slave could mean being chained to others and forced to do hard labor. It could also mean being the manager of the property of the wealthy. It could be a position of great dignity and recognition, or a position of unparalleled misery. Slavery was in a position of flux. The principles Paul laid down would tend to push slavery in the direction of the present relationship between employer and employee, though that transition would be very gradual.

Paul has already said that in Christ the boundaries between slaves and free men do not exist (verse 11). This could certainly have created a contradiction in the minds of many and could have led to great resentment on the part of slaves toward their masters. Christians have always lived with this kind of tension in a number of areas because they must live in an evil, fallen world. The result is that they know certain things are true in Christ, but must live by different constraints in the world. Elsewhere, Paul handled the issue of obedience and subjection to civil authority. Though we answer to God and Christ is our King, we must be subject to earthly government (Romans 13). Though we are citizens of heaven we must pay taxes to earthly regimes (Mark 12:14-17). In the matter of slavery, though it is an evil institution that biblical principles would eventually undo in the western world, that was not the mind of the Spirit for the first century church. And so in the next four verses instructions are given to slaves to guide them in fulfilling their responsibilities in a way that honors the Lord and brings Him glory. The words have considerable application to the Christian in the workplace.

Paul calls slaves first to obedience. And so the idea of submitting oneself to the desires of another is once again the essence of the matter. It is a worthless employee who cannot be counted on to listen to orders and carry them out. Conversely, it is a valued one who can be counted on to follow through as directed. There is no dishonor in submission. There is no career advancement to one who has not learned to work under the authority and accountability of another. Such people will not even succeed in the faith. So Paul’s command here is astute for a number of reasons.

Paul then clarifies that this submission is to be genuine, not merely an act. It is to be done from the heart out of reverence for the Lord. Going through the motions of loyalty and obedience is easily and quickly recognizable to anyone in leadership and authority. People who just go through the motions of obedience will be quickly culled from an organization. On the other hand, those

who are loyal, genuinely embracing the interests of those over them, become most valuable assets, and are viewed as critical to the mission. The chances are more than good that they will be well taken care of. More importantly, they will be blessed by the Lord.

### **3:23 “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than men;**

Paul wants to make sure that the spirit that is to mark one who works for another is well understood and envisioned. With these words he links it very directly to the umbrella statement of verse 17 that is addressed to all Christians, instructing them to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. The idea is that regardless of what we are doing, our performance should reflect the character of God and enhance it in the minds of others.

Here we are told to do our work heartily. The term in Greek is literally “out of soul.” The idea is that we are to throw our entire being into it. It is not to be done mindlessly, nor is it to be considered done when we intend to do it. It is to be completed and is to reflect our best effort.

To this idea of working “heartily” Paul adds the phrase “as for the Lord rather than men.” This is a very important idea that consistently appears as the defining characteristic of authentic spirituality. Authentic Spirituality grows from the Spirit of God within. He seeks to invade every compartment of our lives, and in a sense remove the walls between them by His presence. Then we will be shaped in all of the roles we function in by the same thing, His voice and influence. All contradiction is removed once this spirituality is brought to completion in us. The Lord is the prime mover, motivator, and inspector in all that we do. If this state of things exists in us, all slothfulness, sloppiness, dishonesty, irresponsibility, all that makes one a liability to an employee, will disappear. We should never allow our work to degenerate into what is acceptable merely in the eyes of our peers. When we do, it is a sure sign we are not listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Our spirituality has degenerated into legalism at that point.

Our work should be a reflection of this idea: all that it involves, we do with all of our being, at all times fully engaged with the Holy Spirit. That means when an employer employs us, he is in a real sense getting the Lord’s wisdom, innovation, and energy. Ideally, there should be no better find among potential employees, than those indwelt by the Spirit of God.

### **3:24 “knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”**

We must be careful always to discern our own hearts so that we are aware of whom we are really serving in the moment. Whose interests are we really seeking to advance? Whose welfare are we really thinking of? The best of us can quickly and dramatically, in an instant, switch over to a self-serving mode ((Matthew 16:13-28). The ceiling in each of us that hinders our rise to true spirituality is the degree to which we are willing to die to ourselves. As we rule ourselves, serving the Lord’s interests instead of our own, we will find ourselves experiencing His power and His blessing.

Paul wanted this life for all people, slaves included. The two names Paul uses for God here are appropriate. He uses the term Lord, a term of respect for one with authority and the equivalent of the proper name of God, Yahweh, in the Septuagint. He uses the term Christ, the equivalent of the term Messiah, the anointed One, God's designated ruler over creation. These terms describe the essence, character, and the authority of the one we represent and serve.

To a large degree, what made someone a slave was the lack of an inheritance. Particularly in the ancient world, to inherit nothing was to have no power. To such people the hope of an inheritance was a potent idea. This is a reminder to those who are slaves that their eternal status is quite different. They will receive just payment for the services they have rendered from the Lord, the righteous judge. In reality He is the one they serve and in reality their masters serve Him as well.

### **3:25 “For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong he has done, and that without partiality.”**

The verb rendered “receive” originally meant to take care of, or provide for. Then it came to mean to receive hospitably or to entertain. Then it was used of carrying away as a prize or as spoil. Paul uses it of receiving the awards of judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10; Ephesians 6:8). The idea is that of an expected, fair and just compensation. Paul says this will be the experience of the one who does wrong. Both slave and master will fall under the absolute standard of the justice of Yahweh. The words apply to all who do wrong, and they apply to all the matters of life.

This principle of judgment and personal responsibility applies to believers as well as unbelievers, with some important differences. It is spoken here to those who have been called to do all things in the name of the Lord. Paul is not suggesting that they will lose their citizenship in heaven if they behave wrongly as slaves or masters. He is saying that there are eternal consequences for their actions as believers. This accountability will be experienced by them when they give account of their actions as managers of God's kingdom at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10-17; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

### **4:1 “Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.”**

It is statements like these in Scripture that led Christians to ponder the question of what is just and right in the matter of slavery. The word rendered justice is the word used for righteousness in the Scripture. God is summoning us to righteousness in all things, and this relationship of masters to slaves was no different. It is true today in the matter of the relationship between employer and employee. The word rendered fairness means equality, and refers to what is equal in condition or proportion (2 Corinthians 8:14). This is a powerful word when brought to bear on the matter of slavery and provided the first stage in undoing the institution. If masters began to think in terms of justice and fairness, the relationship would have to move eventually toward employer and employee. The two words appear in the original before the verb rendered grant, so that there is emphasis on them. Providing justice and fairness to those who were slaves in the western world led to abolishing of slavery.

The word “grant” does not speak of tokenism. It is used of God giving us richly all things (1 Timothy 6:17), and of the fact that in all things we are to show ourselves as models of Christ (Titus 2:7). Paul was calling masters to a view slaves different from property that they could simply use and discard. Slaves were people God Himself loved. He would hold the masters accountable for the way in which they compensated their slaves.