

LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

Summary and Historical Background

The Apostle Paul was a very practical man. Whenever he wrote letters to the churches, he taught them doctrines that could correct their problems. Then he would apply those doctrines to specific areas so that they would correct their problems, if they obeyed.

Paul's letter to the Colossians was written to correct the problem of an early form of Gnosticism that was threatening the spiritual lives of those Christians. Gnostics believed flesh was evil and that God communicated indirectly with man through a series of angels. Paul corrected this error by magnifying Jesus Christ as the fullness of the Godhead in the flesh (2:9). Then he declared how Christians are made complete (or full) by their union with Christ in His death and resurrection (2:10-15).

Now in chapter three Paul begins his practical application of these doctrines to the Christian's life (3:1-4). From this point the letter is filled with a series of commands that the Christian must keep to have a godly life. He can keep these commands because he died with Christ when he was saved, and the lusts of this world no longer need to control him. Furthermore, he was raised with Christ, and by His resurrection power he can conquer any problem he might face (3:1-9), and he can obey every command that God has given to him (3:10-4:6). Nothing can stop him from living a godly Christian life, if he does it by the power of Christ's life in him (cf. 1:27). This is his key to spiritual victory.

STUDY NOTES

I. Condition of Believers — 3:1-4

3:1 — "If then you were raised with Christ" - This is a first class conditional sentence in Greek and the subject matter should be understood as a fact: "Since you were raised . . ." When they accepted Christ as Savior, they most certainly died with **Him**, but they also arose with Him (2:12, 13).

"Seek those things which are above" — This is the first of two commands given as a result of being raised with Christ. It is an appeal to their will to "keep seeking" those things that pertain to heaven above, where Christ was seated. No doubt His will for their lives and a worthy walk were among the things they were to seek (1:9-14).

"Where Christ is seated on the right hand of God" — Notice Paul's refutation of Gnosticism by these words: Christ was raised from the dead to sit on the right hand of God (God and flesh were compatible).

3:2 — "Set your affection on things above" - This is the second command for believers as a result of being raised with Christ. It is more of an appeal to their minds than to their hearts; literally, it is translated, "keep on thinking." A believer's seeking is largely determined by his thinking. (Phil. 4:8, 9). Some things for a Christian to think upon and seek are found later in the chapter (3:12-17).

"Not on things on the earth" — The believer is not to think and concentrate on earthly things. He does not need to shun legitimate pleasures that earthly things bring, but he should not grasp them tightly. The wicked things of this world, he must remove from his mind immediately, i.e., those things mentioned in vv. 5-9.

3:3 — "For you are dead" - Better translation is, "For you died." It refers to a past experience, i.e., the time they were converted. This phrase gives the basis for victory over a lust for the things of the earth. Dead people do not respond to sin. This is Paul's first reason for commanding the believers to think on heavenly things, for commanding the believers to think on heavenly things: "Remember when you died."

"Your life is hid with Christ in God" — The second reason for thinking on heavenly things is expressed in the words, "hid with Christ." This means safety in Christ. The believer is permanently secure now and does not need what the Gnostics or any other cult could offer.

3:4 — "Christ, Who is our life" - The third reason for heavenly thinking is found in the "life" of the believer. His life is Christ (Phil. 1:21; Gal. 2:20). Christ not only gives the believer eternal life, but He is the purpose and goal of life. Herein is the basis for Christian living.

"When Christ . . . shall appear" — The fourth reason for thinking on heavenly things is to be alert to Christ's return. John says such thoughts will keep us pure (I Jn. 3:2, 3). It will also keep us productive (II Cor. 5:9, 10).

"Then shall you also appear with **Him** in glory" — The fifth reason is the glory the believer shall receive with Christ in heaven following the rapture.

II. Cleansing of Believers — 3:5-11

Cleansing does not come through sacraments, or some second blessing, or even a search of the Scriptures. It comes through obedience to God's Word.

3:5 — "Mortify therefore your members" - "Mortify" does not mean one is "to humiliate" himself as the word is used today. It means "to put to death, to kill." In this passage the Christian is commanded to put to death the sinful members of his body. It is a figurative way of telling the believer to stop sinning. This takes work, but Christ gives the strength to do the job.

"Fornication" — Refers to all unlawful sex including adultery.

"Uncleanness" — Can refer to any kind of impurity, but here it refers to sexual uncleanness, possibly perversion (cf. Rom. 1:24).

"Inordinate affection" — Literally it means "passion," but in this context it refers to sinful, sexual passions that are out of control.

"Evil concupiscence" — Simply means evil lusts.

"Covetousness, which is idolatry" — In this context it refers to sexual greed (cf. I Thes. 4:6; Ex. 20:17). All covetousness is idolatry, because the thing that is coveted is more important than God.

3:6 — "Wrath of God" - It is always against the unbeliever because he has offended God's holiness by his sins and has not received Jesus Christ for the removal of those sins.

"Children of disobedience" — Reference to unbelievers.

3:7 — "You also walked" - Before the Colossian believers became Christians, some walked in these sensual sins; but now they were to put them to death, because they died with Christ when they were saved.

3:8 — "Also put off all these" - The figure of speech has changed from v. 5, where the believer was "to put to death" his sexual sins (these sins were permitted by certain Gnostics because they claimed the sins of the flesh had no effect upon the soul). Here the figure for the cessation of sinning is that of putting off a vile garment.

"Anger" — Represents an outburst of hostility.

"Wrath" — Represents a settled attitude. It can be good as in the case of God (v. 6), but wrath is often bad in men. It does not work the righteousness of God (James 1:20). Therefore, be slow to wrath (James 1:19).

"Malice" — Represents a general term for badness or animosity.

"Blasphemy" — Refers to injurious speech against God or men (James 3:9-10).

"Filthy communication" — Refers to obscene, dirty talk that is shameful.

3:9 — "Lie not one to another" - The believer is told to stop lying; he is to put it away (Eph. 4:25). It is inconsistent with his testimony for Christ, Who is the Truth (Jn. 14:6).

"Seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds" — The "old man" refers to the believer's sinful nature, his "flesh." It was put off at the time of his conversion. The "old man" along with "his deeds" was put off. A believer cannot hold on to his sins when he is saved. They also must be put off by the power of Christ.

3:10 — "Have put on the new man" - The "new man" refers to the new nature which the believer received at the time of his conversion. It is new because the believer has a new relationship with God. He is now His child.

"Which is renewed in knowledge" — The Christian is being renewed in the full knowledge of Christ through sanctification. The goal of the Christian should be a deeper and more perfect knowledge of Christ throughout his life on earth (Phil. 3:10).

"After the image of Him that created him" — Man was created by Christ "in righteousness and true holiness (Eph 4:24). This moral image was lost in the fall of man. However, it can be restored in part through the process of sanctification after a person has been converted. Since Christ is the image of God (1:15), the Christian should pattern his life after Him.

3:11 — "Neither Greek nor Jew" - In Christ there is no race distinction. All can be renewed in the knowledge of Christ and be like Him.

"Circumcision nor uncircumcision" — In Christ there is no religious distinction by rites or rituals.

"Barbarian, Sythian" — In Christ there is no cultural distinction. A "Barbarian" was simply a foreigner to Greek culture, but a "Sythian" was of a savage culture. There was room for both in Christ.

"Bond nor free" — In Christ there is no social distinction. Slaves and their masters needed to be renewed in the image of God.

"Christ is all" — Christ is all a man needs to be born again and to grow in grace.

"And in all" — Christ is in all persons who receive Him as their Savior. He graciously enters the life of any person who will invite Him to come in.

III. Conduct of Believers — 3:12-4:6

A. Toward Other Believers — 3:12-17

3:12 — "Put on therefore" - Here the Christian is commanded to put on the garments of the believer. It is an aorist imperative verb - an urgent command. Positionally, he put on the new man at salvation. Practically, he must now put on the garments that befit this new man.

"Elect of God, holy and beloved" — The believer is reminded of his noble position with God. It served as an incentive for him to act quickly and "dress" the part of one who had such an important position.

"Bowels of mercies" — It refers to the inner feelings of a person toward the needs of others. It is his Compassion.

"Kindness" — It denotes graciousness, a sweet disposition.

"Humbleness of mind" — A lowly attitude of oneself was foreign to Greek culture, but it was the attitude of Christ (Mt. 11:29) and most certainly ought to be the attitude of a Christian.

"Meekness" — It is the opposite of arrogance. It is not weakness, but power under control. It is courtesy and submissiveness. It is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23).

"Longsuffering" — It is the fruit of the Spirit which enables a believer to endure insult and injury without hasty retaliation.

3:13 — "Forbearing one another" - This is the ability of a person to put up with the manners and weaknesses of others who irritate him. God's goal in using forbearance is redemptive (Rom. 2:4; 3:25). Such should be the goal of Christians, even with fellow believers.

"Forgiving one another" — Not only is a believer to be passive toward those who offend him, but he is also to be active in forgiving them. Forgiveness in this context was to be given to the brethren - it is a mutual grace as expressed in the words, "one another."

"Quarrel against any" — No church is perfect. Quarreling is not right, but when it happens, confession and forgiveness are the only cure and must be done immediately. Waiting only makes the sin worse.

"Even as Christ forgave you, so also do you" — Christ's example of forgiveness is for all believers to follow. Forgiveness cannot be completed until it is received by the offending party, but, even so, the one offended must have a forgiving spirit. He is not to wait until he is asked for his forgiveness to show it.

3:14 — "Above all these things put on charity" - The highest of all graces for the Christian to put on is love ("charity"). It makes all the rest of the graces able to function (I Cor. 13:1-3).

"Bond of perfectness" — Love binds together all the rest of the graces and holds them to a person like a belt. It brings about completeness ("perfectness").

3:15 — "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts" - The "peace of God" is to umpire ("rule") in the hearts of believers so that quarrels and fightings cease. Note: "peace of Christ" is found in many manuscripts (cf. Jn. 14:27; 16:33).

"To the which also you are called in one body" — The peace of God (or Christ) will restore unity in the body of believers.

"Be thankful" — The believer is to practice thankfulness. This practice will cure hostile problems within himself and also within the church as a whole. Thanksgiving is a "watermark" found throughout the epistle (1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:15, 17; 4:2). It is the mark of spiritual health.

3:16 — "Let the Word of Christ" - This is the only time the expression is used in the New Testament. It refers to the teaching of Christ in the Gospels, but also it extends to all Scripture to which He gave His authority.

"Dwell in you richly" — The Word of Christ was to be at home in the heart of a believer so that it could influence every plan and every choice that he makes.

"Teaching and admonishing one another" — These are the positive and negative aspects of instruction. They were to be done through various kinds of music. Music is an effective means of instruction and must not be neglected in the church or in the home.

"Singing . . . to the Lord" — Christianity has been a singing faith. Music is not only for teaching and admonishing believers, but it is also a means of worshipping the Lord. It is to be done with grace in the heart of the believer to be proper and acceptable to the Lord.

3:17 — "Whatsoever you do" - Everything a Christian does is involved in this command.

"Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" — This involved the approval and the authority of Jesus Christ. The name of the Lord stands for all that He is.

"Giving thanks to God" — Everything is to be done with thanksgiving. This is the only ministry that is acceptable to God. The believer is to do nothing with murmuring or complaining, not even when his plans and programs fail through no fault of his own.

B. Toward Family Members — 3:18-21

This is an exhortation to Christian families. The context is important.

3:18 — "Wives, submit . . . to your own husbands" - Paul begins to deal with some basic social issues in this verse. He deals with three couplets (wives/husbands; children/parents; slaves/masters). He begins in each case with the one of lesser authority. Wives are exhorted to submit to their own Christian husbands, not to all men. This exhortation is based upon the woman being created second, and then being deceived in the Garden of Eden (I Tim. 2:13, 14).

"As it is fit in the Lord" — A wife's submission is a fitting thing for her. A departure from this plan is contrary to the Lord's plan.

3:19 — "Husbands, love your wives" - A husband must actively love his wife by his deeds. In the Ephesian letter Paul says he is to love her by carefully leading her (5:23), and by ministering and cherishing her (5:28, 29). Love is more than a feeling. It is an act of sacrificial giving. Since Christians are to love their enemies (Mt. 5:44), Christian husbands most assuredly can love their wives.

"Be not bitter against them" — Unresolved problems turn into bitterness. Therefore, a couple should never retire at the end of a day without resolving their problems (Eph. 4:26).

3:20 — "Children, obey your parents in all things" - As a general rule children must obey their parents in all things. Of course, a child is not expected to disobey God in order to obey his parents. God's authority is higher than the parents (Acts 5:29). However, the context of this passage is a Christian family, and that should pose no problem for the child.

"Well pleasing unto the Lord" — Obedience to parents trains a child to be obedient to the Lord. Obedience is very important to the Lord and it pleases Him when children are trained in this skill.

3:21 — "Fathers, provoke not your children" - Fathers provoke their children by excessive punishments, by no compliments for good work, by inconsistent discipline, or by living a life that is contrary to his demands for them. No Christian father should live this way.

"Lest they be discouraged" — Such behavior as described above will discourage children from being a Christian or from living for God.

C. Toward Work Personnel — 3:22-4:1

3:22 — "Servants, obey in all things your masters" - Onesimus, a runaway slave who was converted in Rome by Paul, was the messenger that carried this letter to Colosse (as well as the ones to Ephesus and to Philemon). As a result of Onesimus' conversion and return to Philemon's household, it was necessary that Paul deal with the subject of slavery in greater detail. Christian slaves were to obey Christian masters in all things. In fact, they were expected to obey unsaved masters too, except where they were commanded to do something sinful. Paul never taught Christian slaves to run away or to rebel against their masters. However, he taught principles that eventually did away with slavery when the spirit of those principles was caught. Today, the principles are applied to employee/employer relationships.

"Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers" — Christians are not to work only when their master or employer is watching them. Such Christians are mere menpleasers.

"In singleness of heart" — Refers to a sincere, honest heart.

3:23 — "Do it heartily" - Christians are to work with enthusiasm in whatever job they are assigned. They are to do it to the Lord and not to men. This lifts the value of doing the most menial task to the level of the most important job on earth.

3:24 — "Reward of the inheritance" - This refers to the believer's inheritance as his reward (cf. 1:12). It will be given by the Lord in heaven to all who are saved. An inheritance was unknown to a

common slave, but a Christian slave had one in heaven. Having such, he was to serve the Lord by being a faithful worker. This is also true of an employee today.

3:25 — "He that does wrong" - Refers primarily to slaves, but the principle also applies to masters (also to employees and employers).

"No respect of persons" — God will judge both slave and master by the principles of honesty, justice and fairness in work ethics.

4:1 — "Masters, give unto your servants" - Masters were always receiving from their slaves, but Christian masters were exhorted to give something to their slaves.

"Just and equal" — They were to be just and fair in their dealings with them. This also applies to employers today.

"You also have a Master in heaven" — Masters and employers must treat their slaves and employees well if they want good treatment from the Lord. They will reap as they have sown.

D. Toward Unsaved People — 4:2-6

4:2 — "Continue in prayer" - Christians are urged to be faithful in prayer.

"Watch in the same" — They are also to be watchful and not let sleepiness and carelessness rob them of the blessings that can be theirs through prayer.

"With thanksgiving" — They are to be thankful in prayer, making their requests sweet by a grateful spirit.

4:3 — "praying also for us" - Christians are to be purposeful in prayer. The Colossian Christians were to pray for Paul and his associates in Rome.

"God would open unto us a door of utterance" — Paul requested that they pray specifically for an open door of witness to be given them even though he was imprisoned behind a locked door.

"To speak the mystery of Christ" — Paul wanted to speak about the mystery of the Gospel of Christ which gave Gentiles the same spiritual benefits as Jews (cf. 1:27). Even though he was imprisoned for preaching this message, he felt compelled to continue.

4:4 — "That I may make it manifest" - Paul knew that he could not make the Gospel plain by his power. He needed the power and wisdom of God.

4:5 — "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without" - Believers were exhorted to live their lives as a good testimony before the unsaved.

"Redeeming the time" — The believers were told to buy up the opportunities to witness to the unsaved like a smart shopper buys up good sale items.

4:6 — "Speech be always with grace" - The speech of a believer should bless those who hear him: This is especially necessary for those who are unsaved. Words of grace will attract, whereas words of bitterness, complaint, unkindness and gossip will drive the unsaved far away.

"Seasoned with salt" — Salt seasons food so it is tasty and it also preserves food so it lasts. Words seasoned with salt are words that present God's message as good news, and they are words that preserve the hearer with the message of eternal life.

"Know how . . . to answer every man" — A believer should be skilled in knowing how to answer an unsaved man with words that will lead him to the Savior for eternal life (cf. I Peter 3:15).