

The LETTER of PAUL to the COLOSSIANS¹

LAST GENERATION VERSION

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Chapter 1

Greeting

Paul, emissary of Jesus Christ through the decree of God, and brother Timothy, 2 To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ in Colossae, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Master Jesus Christ.²

The Genuine Hope contained in the Gospel produces Faith and Love

3 We thank the God and Father of our Master Jesus Christ, praying over you always, 4 having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love – that which is unto all the saints

¹ Colossians (along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon) was written about AD 62 from Rome during Paul's first two-year imprisonment under house arrest (Acts 28). Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis were sister cities within the region of Phrygia in Asia Minor (Col. 4:13). Paul preached the Gospel in Phrygia during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:6) and visited the region again at the beginning of his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23). However, Epaphras, who was currently imprisoned with Paul at Rome (Philemon 1:23), is credited by Paul with bringing the Gospel to Colossae (Col. 1:7), and may have been among the Phrygians who were present and converted in Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2:10). Most of the Colossian congregation had not seen Paul (Col. 2:1).

The letter was written to safeguard the Colossians against the teachings of the Jewish mystics whose influence was great in that region. About 215 BC, Antiochus III transplanted 2,000 Jewish families from Babylon to Phrygia, giving them property, exemption from taxes, and freedom to follow their own laws (Josephus, Antiquities, Bk. 12, ch. 3:4). His son, Antiochus IV Epiphanies, forced Hellenization upon the Jews which resulted in a blending of Greek philosophy and mythology with Judaism. This kind of syncretism spawned certain Jewish apocryphal works including the well-known Book of Enoch. The writings of the Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria (25 BC – AD 50), represents the apex of Jewish-Hellenistic syncretism. In Paul's day, the Essenes were such an ascetic Jewish sect which mixed a Greek Platonic philosophy, an angelology that mimicked Greek mythology, and an extreme monastic lifestyle. In Colossians, Paul contrasted the Jewish-mystics' pseudo-knowledge of the divine with the genuine Secret of the one true God, which is His Son (Col. 2:2). His exhortations to the Christians of Colossae counter very specific Enochic – Essene traditions, particularly the extreme asceticism and their elaborate mythologies concerning specific angels. During his second imprisonment in Rome (AD 66), Paul warned Titus against Jewish mysticism which had spread to the island of Crete (Titus 1:14). He called their teachings "doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). Much later, Jesus referred to the Jewish mystics of Phrygia as "the synagogue of the Adversary" (Rev. 2:9; Rev. 3:9).

² In all of Paul's letters (except Hebrews) he wished grace and peace to flow to his audience from both the Father and the Son, but never from a 'third person' of a supposed Trinity (cf. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philm. 1:3). This absence is most pronounced in Pauline passages such as 1 Cor. 8:4-6 & 1 Tim. 2:5.

5 because of the Hope,³ the one being reserved for you in the skies,⁴ which you already heard in the word of the Truth of the good message, 6 arriving unto you (just as also in the whole world⁵ and is bearing fruit) so as also in you [bearing fruit] from the day which you heard and understood the grace of God in truth 7 according as you learned [it] from Epaphras our beloved fellow-slave, who is a faithful servant of Christ over you, 8 who also reported to us your love in the Breath.

Paul's continual and effectual Prayers

9 Because of this, from the day which we heard, are also unceasingly praying and petitioning concerning you so that⁶ you may be filled with the full knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, 10 to walk worthy of the Master unto all [that is] pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing into the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened in all ability according to the vigor of His glory, unto all endurance and fortitude with joy, 12 giving thanks to the Father, the One enabling us for the portion of the inheritance⁷ of the holy ones in the light.⁸

³ The 'Hope' is not heaven, but the Hope contained in the Good News of the Kingdom, the resurrection to immortality in order to partake of the Land inheritance promised by God to His own Son which is the whole earth (Psalm 2:6-9). The Son's inheritance will be shared with the faithful (Psalm 37; Rom. 8:16-25; Rev. 2:27). This Hope of the eternal Land inheritance was promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their 'Seed' who Paul identified as Christ and those baptized into Him (Gal. 3:16-18,26-29). It is the same Hope which the faithful of Israel hoped to attain (Acts 23:6; Acts 24:15; Acts 26:6-7; Acts 28:20). This 'Hope' was tangibly demonstrated by the resurrection of Christ as Peter quoted from Psalm 16:8-10 in Acts 2:26-27, "Therefore my heart was gladdened and my tongue praises. Yet my flesh also shall still rest in hope because you will not abandon my soul into the grave, nor will You allow your consecrated one to see decay." Paul wrote that "we were saved in this hope" (Rom. 8:24).

⁴ The Hope of the resurrection to immortality and sharing in the Son's inheritance was being reserved "in the skies" in the risen body of Jesus Christ Himself, having been taken up to be seated at the Father's right hand until His enemies are made His footstool (Psalm 110:1; Acts 2:33-35; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1). God will raise the dead from their graves when the Son calls them forth (John 5:25-29; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

⁵ The Gospel was presently expanding throughout the Roman Empire and had arrived in Colossee.

⁶ The Greek word ἵνα (so that) implies cause or intended result, showing here that Paul believed that the growth in maturity of this congregation depended on his continued prayers and petitions (Eph. 1:15-18).

⁷ The Greek word κλήρου literally means "lot" – referring to the casting of 'lots' – the manner in which Joshua was commanded to portion and distribute the land inheritance to Israel (Josh. 13:6; Josh. 14:2). Consequently, its use by Paul does not refer to a generic or unspecified 'inheritance,' but specifically to the Land inheritance promised to Abraham and his 'Seed' (Gal. 3:16-18, 26-29). This 'lot' (permanent land inheritance) of the "holy ones" is to be realized in the resurrection (Dan. 12:2,13 & Acts 26:18).

⁸ Isa. 60:1-2,19-21; Rom. 13:12; Rev. 21:24; Rev. 22:5

The Origin, Status, & Authority of the Son of God

13 He rescued us out of the authority of the darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of the Son⁹ of His love, 14 in whom we have the release through His blood – the pardon of sins, 15 who is the image¹⁰ of the God who is unseen,¹¹ first-produced¹² of¹³ all creation,¹⁴ 16 because in Him everything was created,¹⁵ what is in the skies and what is on the land, the seen and the unseen (including thrones, dominions, principalities, and authorities).¹⁶ Everything has been created through¹⁷ Him and for¹⁸ Him, 17 and He is before everyone,¹⁹ and everything has been established²⁰ together in

⁹ This is an allusion to Psalm 2:7-9 where the Kingdom was promised to the Son who was begotten.

¹⁰ This language was derived from the way that “the Messenger of the LORD” was portrayed throughout the Old Testament. He was called “the Messenger of His Face” (Isa. 63:9). Similarly, the Jewish apocryphal work, Wisdom of Solomon, well-known and often used by the early Christians, portrayed the one called “Wisdom” as “the Breath and Power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty” and “a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness” (Wis. 7:26 NRS). Borrowing from these sources, Hebrews also refers to the Son as “being the radiance of the glory and exact image of His Being” (Heb. 1:3, cf. 2 Cor. 4:4). When the disciples asked Jesus to “show us the Father,” Jesus replied, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9).

¹¹ God is invisible, and has never been seen by mortal man (John 1:18; John 5:37; John 6:46; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 Tim. 6:13-16; Heb. 11:27; 1 John 4:12,20).

¹² πρωτότοκος, from πρώτος (first) and τοκος (to produce), lit. first in sequence of production from the male, both of humans and animals (LXX Gen. 4:4; Ex. 12:12,29; 13:2,13; 34:19). This term is rarely used figuratively as in Ps. 89:27 where God takes David, as the youngest of Jesse’s sons and makes him “first-produced” by anointing him king of Israel in place of Jesse’s actual “first-produced.” Israel is also called God’s “Son, My first-produced,” because collectively Israel was joined with God’s only-begotten, first-produced, Son by the Mt. Sinai Covenant, thus viewed as one with Him (cf. 1 Cor. 10:4). The same is true of those joined with Him through the New Covenant (Heb. 2:9), as “the Body of Christ.” The same sense is found in Heb. 12:23, “the assembly of the first-produced ones.”

¹³ The NKJV adds “over” in an apparent attempt to avoid an origin for the Son. This assumes that “all creation” is a “genitive of subordination.” However, this category requires a head noun which itself necessarily implies subordinates (such as “king” or “ruler”), but the noun “first-produced” does not (see: Wallace, GGBB, pp. 103-104). A “first-produced” child does not rule over his siblings, as both remain under the authority of the father.

¹⁴ In verse 13 Paul referred to “the Kingdom of the Son of His love,” referencing Psalm 2:7-9 in which God says to Him, “Today I have begotten You,” which Paul interpreted as His being “the first-produced of all creation.” Prov. 8:22-31 LXX speaks of the begetting of the Son as “Wisdom,” having been begotten (brought forth) from the Father as His first work. Jesus Himself referred to this passage in John 8:42 when He said “If God were your Father you would love me, **for I issued forth out of God ...**” (ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον). At the end of the book of Proverbs a riddle is posed concerning the identity of the One who was ‘begotten’ from the Father as ‘Wisdom.’ “Who has ascended into the sky, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son’s name, If you know?” (Prov. 30:4). This riddle is answered in John 3:13.

¹⁵ Some Unitarians attempt to apply this to the renewed creation in order to avoid the active participation of the Son in the original creation. However, note that ἐκτίσθη (“was created”) is an aorist indicative verb which points to an historical event. Likewise in the same verse everything ἐκτίσται (“has been created”)

Him. 18 He is also the head of the Body (the assembly), who is The Beginning,²¹ first-produced²² out from among the dead, so that in all things He should become the prototype,²³ 19 because it pleased [God] for all the fullness²⁴ to reside in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile everything to Himself (having made peace through the blood of the cross), through Him whether what is on the land or in the skies.²⁵

The Necessity to Persevere in the true Hope

21 And you having been alienated, and formerly being enemies in the mind in wicked deeds, yet now He reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you

is a perfect indicative verb which indicates that everything has already been created (renewed).

¹⁶ All things that presently exist, both the seen and unseen, including thrones, dominions, principalities, even the whole angelic realm, was (past tense) created through the Son conclusive proof of the Son's pre-human existence. In no sense can this language be limited to the renewed creation simply because it is all placed in the past according to Paul. If that were true, the renewed heavens and earth and renewed Jerusalem would already be present.

¹⁷ δι' αὐτοῦ "through Him" as God's Agent, in the same manner God did all of Jesus' miracles δι' αὐτοῦ "through Him" (Acts 2:22). Exactly the same clause is found in John 1:1-3,10 (cf. Heb. 1:2). Compare this statement with verse 20 & 1 Cor. 8:6.

¹⁸ The Son is the heir of the creation (Psalm 2; Heb. 1:1-2; Heb. 2:10).

¹⁹ πάντων (all) is an adjective that can be either neuter or masculine. It is neuter when modifying a neuter noun and masculine when modifying a masculine noun. However, when it stands alone as a substantive, without modifying a noun, being the direct object of a preposition, it should be understood as masculine (everyone), here referring to all rational beings – men and angels (cf. Matt. 10:22; Matt. 24:9; Mk. 13:13; Lk. 4:15; Lk. 21:17).

²⁰ συνέστηκεν (perfect active indicative) referring to the past action of God establishing all things together through the Son at the time of creation. The perfect tense indicates a past completed action, but the results of that past action continue to the present. The action does not continue to the present. Most English translations incorrectly place this in the present tense as though the Son is still actively holding the creation together. That translation is incorrect and driven by Trinitarian biases.

²¹ ἀρχὴ (fem., abstract) usually "beginning," occasionally "rulership." It does not mean "ruler," which is the masculine concrete noun ἄρχων (cf. Rev. 1:5). In Rev. 1:5 Jesus is called "the Beginning (ἀρχὴ) of the creation of God. Here the intent is a further amplification of the statement in vs. 15, "first-produced of all creation" both terms refer to "Wisdom" in Prov. 8:22-31 whom God "begat" v. 24-25 and made "the Beginning" v. 22. The begetting of God's Son was the beginning of Day one of creation (Ps. 2:7). That the Son is "The Beginning of God's creation" does not mean He was Himself a creation. Rather, He was "begotten" as "the only-begotten Son of God" (John 3:18) who was "from the beginning" (1 John 2:14). His production marks the Beginning of measured time, Day one of creation week (cf. John 1:1, John 8:25). Justin Martyr explained the earliest Christian view of the Son as follows: "God begat before all creatures a 'Beginning,' a certain rational power from Himself who is called by the holy Breath, 'the Glory of the Lord,' and 'the Son,' again 'Wisdom,' again 'Angel,' then 'God,' and then 'Lord' and 'Word.' And on another occasion He calls Himself 'Captain' when He appeared in human form to Joshua the son of Nun. For He can be called by all those names since He ministers to the Father's will, and since He was begotten of the Father by an act of will." ... "But this Offspring, which was truly brought forth from the Father, was with the Father before all the creatures, and the Father communed with Him; even as the Scripture by Solomon has made clear, that He whom Solomon calls 'Wisdom,' was begotten as a 'Beginning' before all His creatures and as 'Offspring' by God" (Dialogue with

holy and unblemished and unindictable before Him, 23 if indeed you remain in the Faith,²⁶ having been grounded and established, and not be turned aside from the Hope²⁷ of the Good Message of which you heard, the one being heralded in the whole creation under the sky, of which I Paul became a servant.

Paul's Unique Ministry to the Assemblies

24 I now rejoice in my sufferings over you and supplement in my flesh what is lacking in the tribulations of Christ²⁸ concerning His Body (which is the assembly) 25 of which I became a servant according to the stewardship of God – which was given to me for you

Trypho, lxi-lxii).

²² See note on the same word in verse 15. The Greek word πρωτότοκος is from πρωτό (proto) meaning “first” and τοκος meaning “produced.” While the usual translation, “firstborn from among the dead,” would require a metaphorical sense for “firstborn” in this clause, the literal reading of “first-produced” can accommodate either procreation or a first creation taken literally. It is this latter sense in which Paul uses the term “first-produced out from among the dead,” since the resurrection of Jesus was the very first new creation to immortality as the prototype for our resurrection. Here, “first-produced from among the dead” likely refers to Jesus’ statement in John 12:24 and Paul’s amplification of it in 1 Cor. 15:35-38,42-44. Jesus used the same expression in Rev. 1:5. Some attempt to diminish the clause “first-produced of all creation” in v. 15 as metaphor, claiming that since “firstborn” in v. 18 refers to resurrection, it must also in v. 15. However, note that in this passage Paul was listing several different things in which the Son was first, “so that in all things He should become the prototype.” Thus “first-produced of all creation” and “first-produced out from among the dead” are two distinct things. Each term “first-produced” must be interpreted by the prepositional phrase which follows it, not because the same word is used in a different statement. Also, Rom. 8:29 states that the Son is “first-produced among many brothers,” necessarily making Him anterior to all of the saints (unless one wishes to exclude Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from the Abrahamic Faith), and Heb. 1:6 states, “whenever He should bring the first-produced into the world He says, ‘And give worship to Him all the messengers of God’.” Thus the Son of God was already “first-produced” before any of the saints existed and before He came into the world as a babe, the Son of Man.

²³ The Son was begotten from the Father as “The Beginning” of His creative works during creation week. Thus, “the beginning” (of measured time – the six days of creation) is marked by the begetting of the Son out of the Father’s own substance. Through the first-produced Son everything else was created (John 1:1-2) in six days (Ex. 20:11). On the sixth day man was created by the Father through the Son, in the image of the Son who is the image (v. 15) of the Father (Gen. 1:26-27). The Son was the prototype for humanity. Yet, the Son also became the prototype for immortal man by His being “first” in the resurrection. The whole creation was designed to be the inheritance for the Son, and redeemed mankind to be his brothers. “[and] that those whom He knew previously He predefi ned [to be] fashioned from the image of His Son, for Him to be the first-begotten among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29).

²⁴ Compare Col. 2:9. The divine presence and the full authority of God resided within the Son. This is clearly apparent in Moses’ writings where the ‘Messenger of the Lord’ spoke for YHVH in His name in the first person (cf. Gen. 22:11-18; Ex. 3:1-22). John acknowledged the divine presence and full authority in Jesus, something that Jesus also passed on in part to His Apostles (John 1:16; Matt. 28:18-20). With Christ being at the Father’s side now as the head, and His ‘Body’ being present on earth (each local assembly), the ‘fullness’ dwelling in Christ extends to the local congregation (Eph. 1:23). This is the “Breath” of God dwelling within the congregation. Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian congregation was that “you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19), which is possible only when the local ‘Body’ is in

to fulfill the word of God – 26 the Secret²⁹ having been hidden from the ages and from the generations, yet now was made apparent to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this Secret among the nations, which is Christ in you, the Hope of the glory, 28 whom we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ Jesus,³⁰ 29 for which I also toil, struggling according to His energy, the energizing power in me.

Chapter 2

Warning concerning the Pseudo-Piety & Philosophy of the Jewish Mystics

For I wish you to have observed the great struggle I have concerning you, and those in Laodicea,³¹ and as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, 2 so that their hearts may be called near, being united in love and unto all riches of the complete assurance of comprehension unto full knowledge of God's Secret, which is Christ, 3 in whom all the

unity within itself and is in full communion and submission to the head – Christ our Master.

²⁵ The whole creation will be reconciled to God and be in subjection to God. This will take place at the end of the Millennium of Christ's reign on earth, when all rebellion has been put down by Christ, and the last enemy destroyed (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

²⁶ 'The Faith' refers to the whole body of Christian teaching as delivered through the Apostles of Jesus and entrusted to the local assemblies.

²⁷ See: Col. 1:5. "The Hope" was the resurrection of the flesh to immortality and the promised Land inheritance. This hope stood in stark contrast to the hope of the Jewish mystics who had borrowed "immortality of the soul" from Greek Platonic philosophy, who expected to escape the physical body, ascending as pure spirit through the alleged "seven heavens" (seven spheres allegedly ruled by angels) to reach the 7th heaven.

²⁸ What was lacking in Jesus' sufferings for the assemblies was a real and consistent demonstration that they could observe. In this way Paul modeled for them patient endurance in sufferings. This was not limited only to persecution, but also tragedy such as shipwreck and being robbed, as well as being in want (2 Cor. 10:25-27). Striving for the Kingdom first involves suffering, tragedy, loss of relationships (Matt. 10:34-39), and sickness (2 Cor. 12:7-10; Phil. 2:25-27). When we handle all such difficulties and sufferings in pursuit of the Kingdom in the same manner that Jesus Himself handled His own sufferings in His own pursuit of the prize (Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 12:1-3), we become a demonstration of Jesus' own perseverance (Phil. 1:29-30). This is what Paul did consistently (2 Cor. 4:13-18; Phil. 3:7-17).

²⁹ Jesus began to reveal the 'Secret' on the day of His resurrection (Lk. 24:25-27, 32, 44-48), but its full revelation was given first through Paul (Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7-13). The 'Secret' is the Anointed one Himself (Col. 2:2; Col. 4:3; 1 Tim. 3:16). In Colossians, Paul expanded on "the Secret of Christ," His "body." This includes the absorption of Gentiles into the inheritance of the Abrahamic Covenant (Eph. 1:9-11). The 'Secret' had been made known to Paul through special revelation (Eph. 3:3-6).

³⁰ Part of the 'Secret of the Anointed' is the union of all believers with Him, so that there is "One new Man" – the collective Son of God (Eph. 2:15), consisting of the "Head" who is in heaven and His "Body" which is on earth (Eph. 1:7-10, 22-23).

³¹ Compare Paul's earnest desire for the assembly at Laodicea with their actual state as described by Jesus three decades later (Rev. 3:14-22).

treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden.³² 4 But I say this so that no one might entice you with persuasive arguments. 5 For if even being absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in breath, rejoicing and observing³³ your order and the persistence of your faith unto Christ. 6 Therefore, just as you embraced Christ Jesus the Master, so walk in Him, 7 having been rooted, and being built up in Him³⁴ and being confirmed in the Faith³⁵ as you were taught, so excelling in it with thanksgiving. 8 Be on guard so that no one will carry you off as loot through the philosophy³⁶ and empty delusions,³⁷ according to human traditions, according to the principles of the system³⁸ and not according to Christ. 9 For all the fullness³⁹ of the divinity dwells physically in Him⁴⁰ (and in Him you are having been made full⁴¹), 10 being the head of all dominion and authority, 11 in whom also you were circumcised with the circumcision not with hands, in the putting off from the body the sins of the flesh⁴² in the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried together⁴³ in Him in the immersion,⁴⁴ in which you were raised together through

³² Note the omission of the 'Holy Spirit' as a third person (cf. Matt. 11:27; 1 Cor. 8:6; 1 Tim. 2:5). The Secret concerns the Son having been concealed in the Scriptures for an important reason (1 Cor. 2:6-8).

³³ Paul was not claiming to have visited them through out-of-body experiences. Rather, he considered the good report concerning the Colossians brought to him by Epaphras (Col. 1:3-8) as his observation of them, and his letter to them as sharing a part of himself with them. Paul used figurative language concerning personal intimacy with them even though they had never seen his face in the flesh.

³⁴ Built up collectively as a Temple (cf. Eph. 2:18-22).

³⁵ Cf. Col. 1:23

³⁶ The use of the definite article "the philosophy" implies that Paul had a particular philosophical school in view, which is made clear in vs. 18.

³⁷ This construction is consistent with Sharp's first rule, (two nouns of the same case separated by "and" with only the first noun having the definite article). It implies that "the philosophy" and "empty delusions" were viewed as a single unit – parts of the same body of teaching that Paul had in view.

³⁸ The philosophical principles of Greek thought, the true source of the Jewish mystics' claimed knowledge of the divine and angelic beings.

³⁹ See note on Col. 1:19. The Greek term rendered "fullness" (πλήρωμα) was commonly used by the Gnostics and Jewish mystics for the ultimate goal of their imagined hope. This was for the ghost to escape the "prison of the body" and progressively ascend as pure spirit through the "seven heavens" (7 spheres of Plato's cosmology based on the seven visible planets – Sun, Moon, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, Mercury, Mars), each celestial sphere being guarded by Aeons (Greeks) or Angels (Jewish Mystics), and to ultimately merge with the πλήρωμα (the "Fullness"). In his prison epistles (cf. Eph. 1:23; Eph. 3:19; Eph. 4:13; Col. 1:19; Col. 2:9), Paul took the use of this term by the Greek and Jewish mystics and turned it on its head, showing that all the "Fullness" of the unseen God dwelled in the Son and now extends to the local assembly through the Breath of God. Later, John followed Paul's usage in his Gospel for the same purpose (John 1:16).

⁴⁰ See notes on Col. 1:19.

⁴¹ Paul's prayer for the Ephesians was also that "you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19) by means of the local assembly.

⁴² Paul clearly taught the remission of sins occurs in baptism (cf. Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16).

⁴³ Romans 6:3-4

⁴⁴ Baptism was portrayed by Paul as the seal of the New Covenant.

the faith of the inner-working of God, the one raising Him from among the dead. 13 And you being dead in the trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made alive together in Him, forgiving you all the trespasses, 14 having blotted out the handwriting in ordinances which was contrary to us,⁴⁵ and has taken it out of the midst, having nailed it to the cross. 15 Having stripped the dominions and authorities,⁴⁶ He made a spectacle of them, defeating them in it. 16 Therefore let no one judge you in eating or in drinking⁴⁷ or in some aspect of a Feast,⁴⁸ or of a new moon⁴⁹ or of the Sabbaths,⁵⁰ 17 which are a shadow of what is coming,⁵¹ and the body⁵² [is] of Christ. 18 Let no one defraud you, reveling in self-abasement,⁵³ and the worship of the

⁴⁵ Num. 5:23 The penalties and curses contained in the Law.

⁴⁶ 1 Peter 3:18-22

⁴⁷ The Essenes abstained from wine and meat.

⁴⁸ The Essenes celebrated the Festivals of the Law in an allegorical manner rather than literally sacrificing animals at the Temple. Josephus wrote concerning them: *“they do not offer sacrifices, because they have more pure lustrations of their own; on which account they are excluded from the common court of the temple”* (Josephus, Antiquities, Bk. 18, ch. 1:5).

⁴⁹ The Temple priesthood controlled the timing of all the Feasts by visibly sighting the new moon, thereby setting the first day of each month followed by any Feasts for that month. Because the Essenes rejected the Temple priesthood, they instead invented a solar Feast calendar that was fixed and could be kept anywhere throughout the Roman Empire without relying on the Temple priesthood sighting the new moon. They divided the solar year into fifty-two weeks exactly (364 days), so that every year began on the first day of the week and ended on the Sabbath. Consequently, the festivals always occurred on the same day of the week rather than being counted from the new moon. The Essene calendar is followed in the apocryphal books of Jubilees and 1 Enoch.

⁵⁰ The differences between the Essene and Christian calendars concerning the Feasts put them at odds concerning the celebration of Firstfruits (Jesus’ resurrection day) which Christians called *“τῆ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων”* (“the first [day] of the Sabbaths” {see: Mark 16:2; Acts 20:7}). This was day one of the seven-Sabbaths (50 day) countdown to Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-16), which Christians celebrated annually.

⁵¹ The Feasts are a prophetic shadow of what is coming in the Kingdom, not allegories of ritual purity and denial of the physical, as the Essenes taught.

⁵² The Essenes ritual denial of all bodily pleasures, even viewing what is natural as defilement (including marriage, eating meat, etc.), and their religious ceremony which stressed the spiritual and absolutely denied the physical, were based upon their adoption and adaption of the philosophy of Plato. Josephus wrote concerning them: *“For their doctrine is this: That bodies are corruptible, and that the matter they are made of is not permanent; but that the souls are immortal, and continue forever; and that they come out of the most subtile air, and are united to their bodies as to prisons, into which they are drawn by a certain natural enticement; but that when they are set free from the bonds of the flesh, they then, as released from a long bondage, rejoice and mount upward. And this is like the opinions of the Greeks...”* (Josephus, Wars, Bk. 2, ch. 8:11). Paul’s saying that *“the body is of Christ”* seems to directly counter the Essene – Platonic philosophy, since the hope for the Christian was not to escape the body, but to conquer death through the resurrection of the body, of which Christ’s resurrected body of flesh was the prototype.

⁵³ The Essenes’ had very strict rules concerning diet (far beyond the Mosaic kosher laws), dress, daily practices, and even forbid marriage and procreation. These severe restrictions gave them a false sense of piety and humility, but in reality it was rooted in pride.

messengers,⁵⁴ intruding into that which he has not observed, being inflated under the mind of his flesh, 19 and not holding the Head, out from whom the whole Body (being furnished through the joints and ligaments and fused together) grows with the growth of God.⁵⁵ 20 If then you died together in Christ⁵⁶ from the elements of the system,⁵⁷ why (as living within the system) are you being subjugated [by ordinances] – 21 you should not touch; you should not taste; you should not handle – 22 which is all unto ruin with practice, according to the commands and teachings of men? 23 These things indeed having a word of wisdom, in sanctimony and lowliness and in neglect of the body, do not have any value against indulgence of the flesh.⁵⁸

Chapter 3

Genuine Holiness in Light of the Genuine Hope

If then you were raised together in Christ,⁵⁹ seek what is above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.⁶⁰ 2 Be disposed to what is above, not to what is on the land, 3 for you died⁶¹ and your life has been hidden together in Christ in God;⁶² 4 when Christ our life should be shown forth, then you also will be displayed together in Him in glory. 5 Therefore, exterminate your body-parts⁶³ upon the land – fornication, impurity, passions, evil desires, and covetousness which is idolatry, 6 because of which the wrath

⁵⁴ The Jewish mystics had elaborate mythologies concerning angels and their assigned roles, alleging to possess superior knowledge of the unseen angelic realm. The Book of Enoch pretends to give eyewitness accounts of some of these things. Josephus wrote of the Essenes: “Moreover, he swears to communicate their doctrines to no one any otherwise than as he received them himself; that he will abstain from robbery, and will equally preserve the books belonging to their sect, and the names of the angels. These are the oaths by which they secure their proselytes to themselves,” (Josephus, Wars, Bk. 2, Ch. 8:7). The Essenes claimed a kind of mystical joining with the angels in heaven (receiving visions of heaven) through their self-abasement, and (like the Gnostics) hoped to ascend through seven heavens (each guarded by divine beings or angels) to eventually arrive in the presence of God where He is worshipped by the angels (Isa. 6:1-3).

⁵⁵ Note that Christian ‘growth’ is collective – with the whole assembly – rather than personal (cf. Eph. 4:15-16).

⁵⁶ Having died together in Christ, having been buried in Him, and having been raised in Him, are all metaphors that point to baptism (cf. Col. 2:11-14; Rom. 6:3-8; Gal. 2:19-20; Col. 3:1,3).

⁵⁷ The pseudo-piety based on meticulous observances of rituals.

⁵⁸ Pride is a work of the flesh, which Paul attributes to false humility found in these kinds of rituals and denial of the body beyond what is required by God (v. 18).

⁵⁹ Col. 2:12

⁶⁰ Psalm 110:1

⁶¹ In baptism – Col. 2:11-14

⁶² In baptism, the repentant believer is joined with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Thus, the hope of resurrection is bound up in the prototype Himself whom the Father raised from the dead, who is now seated at the Father’s side as the embodiment of what we will be one day when He returns and calls for the dead from their graves.

⁶³ No doubt Paul had Jesus’ words in view concerning plucking out the eye or cutting off the hand if these body parts cause you to sin (Matt. 5:28-30).

of God is coming upon the sons of stubbornness, 7 among whom you also once walked when you lived in these things. 8 Yet now put away from you also all these things: anger, rage, malice, blasphemy, dirty-talking from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to each other, having shed the old man along with its practices,⁶⁴ 10 and having put on the new [man]⁶⁵ which is being renewed unto full-knowledge according to the image of the One who created him, 11 where there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and among all. 12 Therefore, as the chosen of God, holy ones and having been beloved, put on compassions of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, 13 tolerating each other and being gracious among yourselves. If anyone should have a complaint against another, just as Christ was gracious to you, you also do likewise. 14 But over all these,⁶⁶ [put on] love which is the bond of maturity. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, into which you were invited in one Body, and become thankful [people]. 16 Let the word of Christ reside richly in you, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing yourselves with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Master. 17 And everything, whatever you may be doing in word or in action, do everything in the name of the Master Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. 18 Wives are to⁶⁷ submit to husbands as is appropriate in the Master. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh towards them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is well-pleasing to the Master. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, so that they not be discouraged. 22 Slaves, in all things obey your masters according to the flesh, not with appearances as flatterers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing God. 23 And all, in everything you may do, act out from the soul,⁶⁸ as to the Master and not to men, 24 having observed that you will receive from the Master the compensation of the inheritance.⁶⁹ For you are serving the Master Christ. 25 But the one harming shall receive the harm,⁷⁰ and there is no favoritism.

⁶⁴ Paul again refers here to baptism (cf. Rom. 6:2-9).

⁶⁵ Becoming a part of the 'Body of Christ'

⁶⁶ Paul used the metaphor of putting on love as the final over-garment on top of all of the previous things.

⁶⁷ Paul's consistent pattern in his epistles was to instruct the wives indirectly, through their husbands. He nowhere else commanded the wives directly (second person imperative), but rather used infinitive mood verbs ("wives are to ..."), subjunctive mood verbs ("wives should ..."), or used third person imperatives ("have the wives ...") – directed to the husband. It is possible that this is the only exception, since the majority of manuscripts have ὑποτάσσεσθε (second person imperative). However, two very old uncial manuscripts (Codex Sinaiticus & Codex Boernerianus) have ὑποτάσσεσθαι (infinitive). We have followed this reading here because it is consistent with Paul's usual pattern.

⁶⁸ From the inner man, from the heart, as opposed to being superficial or putting on external appearances, be genuine

⁶⁹ Acts 7:5; Eph. 5:5; Gal. 3:18; Col. 1:12; Heb. 11:8

⁷⁰ The Law demands justice, eye for eye, tooth for tooth.

Chapter 4

Masters, provide for your slaves what is just and equitable, having observed that you also have a Master in the skies. 2 Persevere in prayer, being alert in it with thanksgiving, 3 simultaneously pray also concerning us, so that God may open for us a door of the word, to speak the Secret of Christ (because of which I have also been incarcerated), 4 so that I may make it comprehensible, just as it is necessary for me to speak. 5 Walk in wisdom towards those outside, redeeming the appointed time, 6 your words always having been seasoned with salt,⁷¹ having observed how you must answer each one.⁷²

Concluding Remarks

7 Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow-slave in the Master will make known to you all my affairs, 8 whom I sent to you for this purpose (so that you may know that which concerns you, and he may comfort your hearts), 9 along with Onesimus,⁷³ the faithful and beloved brother, who is out from you. They will make known to you everything here. 10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark (cousin of Barnabas, about whom you received instructions if ever he should come to you, receive him),⁷⁴ 11 and Jesus (called Justus). Of those who are out from the circumcision, these are the only fellow-laborers for the Kingdom of God who became solace to me. 12 Epaphras greets you, who is from you, a slave of Christ, always struggling for you in prayers so that you may stand mature, having been filled in the whole will of God. 13 For I testify of him that he has zeal over you and those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. 14 Luke, the beloved physician, greets you and Demas. 15 Greet the brothers in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the assembly [which meets] in his house.⁷⁵ 16 And whenever this letter should be read to you, make sure that it is also read in the assembly of the Laodiceans, and that you read the letter from Laodicea.⁷⁶ 17

⁷¹ Matt. 5:13

⁷² 1 Peter 3:15

⁷³ Onesimus was a slave who had escaped from his master, Philemon. In the letter to Philemon and the Laodicean assembly, Paul explained that Onesimus had become a Christian in Rome through Paul's outreach. He encouraged Philemon to receive him back without punishment for his escape (Laod./Philm. 1:10-21).

⁷⁴ There may have been some apprehension concerning Mark, since he abandoned Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, and Paul had refused to take him along on the second journey (Acts 12:25; Acts 13:13; Acts 15:37-38). However, Barnabas took him on a separate missionary journey instead, where Mark apparently proved to be useful and faithful (Acts 15:39-41). Here it is apparent that Paul had forgiven his initial failing, and he commended Mark to the Colossians. Paul later called for Mark during his second imprisonment at Rome just before his execution (2 Tim. 4:11).

⁷⁵ The assembly which met at Nymphas' house was probably located in Heirapolis, only about three miles north of Laodicea, since Paul mentioned both cities only two verses earlier.

⁷⁶ The letter to the Laodiceans is incorrectly referred to as 'Philemon.' See introduction to Laodiceans/Philemon.

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Also tell Archipus: “Look to the service which you received in the Master so that you may be fulfilling it.” 18 The salutation is by my own hand – Paul.⁷⁷ Remember my bonds. Grace be with you, Amen.

⁷⁷ Compare 2 Thess. 3:17-18