

Christ in the Bible

Colossians

by A. B. Simpson

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Chapter 1

CHRIST IN COLOSSIANS

"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18).

"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3: 2).

Each of Paul's epistles has an expression peculiar to itself. The Thessalonian epistles are characterized by the advent tinge, and shine with the glory of the second coming. Ephesians is the epistle of the "heavenly places"; Philippians of the sweetness of the Christian temper; and Colossians is the portrait of Jesus, and its keynote is "Christ is all and in all."

It is said that the celebrated artist, Dannecker, was asked by Napoleon Bonaparte to paint a Venus for the Louvre, and declined. An almost fabulous price was then offered, and he still refused. The insulted emperor, astonished that any one should refuse money, and still more that he should refuse him, demanded why he declined. "I have painted Christ and I can never lower my brush to paint an inferior subject." And it had taken him half a lifetime to paint his picture of Christ. The first time he painted Him, after eight years of labor, he asked his little daughter to look at it. Uncovering the canvas he brought her in. She clapped her hands together with an expression of intense surprise and admiration. "Who do you think it is?" he asked. "Oh," she said, "it is a great man." His countenance fell and he took his brush and daubed the picture into a perfect wreck. "I have failed. It is not Christ." He went to work again and toiled and prayed, and when he took the child in the next time there was not the same expression of wonder, delight and admiration, but the tears came and she stole softly up as though it were the real Christ, whispering, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." Ah, it was Christ! The expression was there!

So there are lives that remind you of a great man, and there are others that reveal the vision of a living Savior; and they are messages that are not forgotten. All that remains is the memory of Jesus, and you feel somehow your heart burned within you as you got near the Master, and you are the better for it. Thus the epistle to the Colossians is the picture of Jesus. It reveals to us the heart of Christ.

1. Christ is all and in all in the Trinity. The epistle brings out His relation to the Father, for we read: "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." The Father is pleased to express Himself in the Son, to pour Himself into Christ and stand back while Christ fills the picture and reveals the Father. We do not directly see the Father, but we see the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Again we read, "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the

Godhead bodily" (Col. 2: 9). He is the image of the invisible God, for God reveals Himself to us in Christ and He wants us to honor Him. Unitarianism, Deism and all "isms" that only make Jesus an exalted Man, or a superior being, dishonor the Father as much as the Son, for God has commanded us to render supreme worship to Him even as to the Father, for "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father," and he that hath rejected Him hath rejected the Father also. May we keep a high reverential estimate of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are living in an age when people think it is well just to love God, and they talk about the "spirit" of Christ, an ethical Christ, and other human Christs. We have heard recently of the Japanese Christ, a sort of evolution of their own national thought grafted on to Christianity. Then we have the socialistic Christ, and it all sounds very well, but it is direct blasphemy and rebellion against the dignity of Jesus and the authority of the Father. Whatever else we fail in let us be orthodox in our conception of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and honor, worship and glorify Him even as the Father, for "it pleased the Father that in his should all fulness dwell."

2. Christ is all in all in creation. "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by his, and for him." Christ is the Author and the End of creation. All the glory of nature is but the reflection of His own glory. The Father is revealed in the Son. The Son is revealed in the majesty of nature. The shining heavens and verdant earth are but the mirror of His attributes and the work of His hands.

They were made for Him as well as by Him. He is the final cause of creation. The lion with his lordship over the lower creation is but a type of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The gentle lamb was made to set forth the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. The ancient rocks and everlasting mountains are but object lessons of the Rock of Ages. The flowers that blossom on the hillside and in the gardens breathe the sweetness of the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley. The radiant sun is but a figure of the Sun of Righteousness, and the glowing stars proclaim the glory of the Bright and Morning Star. The shepherd and his flock, the bridegroom and his joy, the vine with its hanging clusters, the streamlet with its flowing tide, the very bread we eat, all become an alphabet to spell out the greatness and the grace of Him by whom all earthly things were made and who is the real substance of which they are but the shadow. "I am the vine," He says, as though the earthly vine were but a figure created to set forth the true. Even creation will not be complete until the Son of man shall become its recognized Lord and King, and the new creation shall rise as the fair inheritance of Jesus and His saints, and He that sitteth upon the throne shall say, "Behold, I make all things new." In His sublime vision, John pictures every creature that is in heaven and earth and in the sea, the whole universe joining to adore and worship "Him that sitteth upon the throne, and . . . the Lamb forever." Then creation shall have reached its goal and all things shall be for Him as well as through Him.

3. Christ is all and in all in the realm of providence. "For by him all things consist" (Col. 1: 17). Literally this is translated in the Revised Version, "All things hang together." He is the cohesive center and principle of nature and providence. He is the Lord and Ruler of universal government. He who by one creative act formed the universe, by continuous activity upholds and sustains it. Not a fluttering bird which sings in the branches, not an insect that floats upon

the air, not a bud that bursts in the vernal spring, not a star which shines in the vast empyrean, but is constantly dependent on the activity of His hand. He who bears the universe upon His shoulder carries His loved ones on His heart, and with a more particular providence plans every instant and incident of their life and causes all things to work together for their good. It is the Lamb who looses the book of seven seals and unfolds every destiny for the individual and the universe. The ascended Christ is Head over all things for His Body, the Church, and while the ambitions and passions of man have their full sway in the evolving of human history, yet He rules or overrules in every event and forges every link into a chain of infinite wisdom, power and love, so that even the things that seem to hinder only help at last His ultimate design. The wrath of man is made to praise. The dark shadows of seeming calamity are but part of the picture of His life and love, and when all is finished, the saints of earth and the intelligences of heaven shall unite to say, "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy."

4. Christ is all and in all in the realm of truth. "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2: 3). The ordinances and ceremonial rites of the old dispensation were but shadows of which He is the substance (Col. 2: 17). The philosophies and speculations with which false teachers were seeking to dazzle and deceive their minds were but counterfeits of the truth of which Christ is the center and the sun. Instead of pursuing these elusive visions the Apostle bids them abide in Him and prays for them that "their hearts might be comforted . . . unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ." This is the mystery of mysteries, the fount of wisdom, the sum of knowledge, to know God and Jesus Christ whom He sent. How little our scholarship and learning will avail in the light of the New Jerusalem! How the graduates will go down and the poor illiterate disciples will go up in the heavenly classes where the test of our standing will be our intimacy with Jesus!

5. Christ is all and in all in redemption; for the cross is the supreme glory of the Gospel and the end to which all revelation has been moving. Indeed, even nature is full of foreshadowings of redemption, some interposition by which wrong should be righted and the lower lifted to a higher life, even as the buried seed grows into the harvest and the chrysalis into the radiant butterfly. And so, early in this epistle we are brought into immediate contact with the great Redeemer "who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." "And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; . . . whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unproveable in his sight." Here we find redemption reaching even farther than sinful men, for Christ hath reconciled all things both in earth and heaven. Perhaps even Gabriel himself is established more firmly in his high estate because the Son of man died to reconcile and redeem. At least we know that He has reconciled us and brought us nigh to God through His precious blood, and that forevermore He will be the first in the trust, the love and the praise of all the choirs of

ransomed men who shall join to sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing."

6. Christ is all and in all the life of His people. For, in the first place our life all begins by receiving Him. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (Col. 2: 6). It is not receiving a sacrament, a creed, a system of theology, a set of moral precepts, but a living, personal Savior. That is salvation. "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

Then further, the continuance and progress of our Christian life is just as simple and as personal. "So walk ye in him." It is a life of dependence and communion, step by step, receiving Him afresh as our all-sufficiency, our wisdom, strength and holiness. Still further, we are taught that we are complete in Him (Col. 2: 10). That is to say, He fills up every possible need of our life and being. For the deeper life of sanctification is simply Christ within. This is the mystery, he says, "which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery . . . which is Christ in you the hope of glory." This is so simple that it really cannot be made more plain. It is not a process of teaching, or even the formation of a character, but it is acquaintance with a Person, an intimate union and fellowship with Him so that He actually comes into our being and becomes the Source and Strength of our very life, reliving His own life in us, and we falling with perfect naturalness into His will, His plan, His steps, and all His perfect life. So deep and intimate is this union that a great variety of figures are introduced to express and illustrate its fuller meaning. We are "rooted in him" (2: 7). We are "built up in him" (2: 7). We are "buried with him" (2: 12). We are "dead with him to our sins" (2: 13). We are resurrected with him (3: 1). Our "life is hid with Christ in God" (3: 3). Nay, He Himself is our very life (3: 4).

And then when it comes to the question of conduct, our actions are to be determined by our relation to Him. It is because we are in Him that we are to act like Him. And so we read, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." To act in the name of Jesus is to act as if you were Jesus, to sustain His character, His dignity, and the life that would be expected from Him if He Himself were here. But it is our relation to Him that inspires our conduct. We need the powerful motive of His life and love, yes, and the actual force of His indwelling Spirit to enable us to live out His life in our daily conduct and conversation. How many of us are as consistent with our high calling as the simple Chinese servant in an Oakland family who applied for a situation in the family of a professing Christian? Poor John was subject to a pretty thorough examination about his habits, but gave satisfactory and unequivocal answers to all inquiries. "Do you drink?" he was asked. "No, me Christian. Me no drink." "Do you play cards?" "No, me Christian," and so on. He was soon at work in his new home and was found efficient and faithful in everything. But one night the family had a big party and John found himself called upon to wait upon them in the usual attendance at such a function. Faithfully and silently he went through the night without a murmur, and saw them playing cards, dancing and drinking wine. The next morning he presented himself to the mistress with a short and plain announcement, "Me go, me no stay." "Why John, what is the matter?" she asked. "Me no drink, me no play cards, me no stay with heathen who drink and play cards. Me go. Me

Christian." To him there was no other logical alternative. If he was a Christian it meant to walk like Christ.

The consciousness of our high calling and our union with such a Master must lift us above the world and all its ways. It is said that the Dauphin of France, the poor orphan child of the murdered Louis XVI and his queen, was committed by his enemies to the care of a very brutal and wicked man who was to teach him only that which was evil. The poor lad had to look and listen to nothing but that which was degrading and wrong, but often he would say when tempted to stoop to the level of his companions, "I cannot say, I cannot do such things. I was born to be a king!" Yes, there was an impulse and a memory of higher things, and it kept him above the low and the base. The love of Christ, the life of Christ, the higher spiritual consciousness which His presence gives must lift us to the place of holiness and lead us to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called.

7. Christ is all and in all in our future hope. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3: 4). Christ in you is the hope of glory, and when that glory comes it will be all Christ, His presence, His fellowship, His likeness, we shall be like Him, we shall be with Him. The Lamb is all the glory in Emanuel's land. Such is an imperfect outline of the Christ picture of Colossians. God help us to reproduce it in our lives.

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Chapter 2

THE CHRISTIAN IN COLOSSIANS

"Praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love that ye have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven" (Col. 1:3-5).

Faith, hope and love, the great trinity of Christian graces, were the foundation of the Christian character of the disciples at Colosse. From these all the graces of the Spirit unfolded in a manifold and beautiful variety and completeness. Nowhere have we a simpler, stronger and more attractive picture of an ideal Christian life.

I. THEIR EVOLUTION

It was out of darkness. "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1: 13). It was out of doom. For they had been under condemnation as the enemies of God. "You, that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled," (Col. 1: 21), "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Col. 2: 14). It was out of death. "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col. 2: 13). Dead in sin once, they had become dead to sin now through the cross of Jesus Christ. Crucified with Him they had come forth to resurrection life. They were risen with Christ, and he could say of them, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

There is something very definite about their experience. It is all expressed in the perfect tense. He "hath delivered us from the power of darkness." He "hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." "He hath reconciled us in the body of his flesh through death." "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." "We were resurrected with Christ." "We have put off the old man with his deeds." We have "put on the new man." We are "complete in him." There is no ambiguity, no place for mere hoping and half believing. We have an accomplished salvation, and the great transaction is done.

II. THEIR LIFE

It is a redeemed life. It was forfeited and brought back by the ransom of the Savior's blood. Therefore it is not our own, but belongs to him (Col. 1: 14). It is a resurrected life. "If ye then be risen," or better, were resurrected "with Christ, seek those things which are above." It is not the

old natural life improved. It is something of foreign birth, something that has come to us out of heaven, something that is wholly divine. It is Christ Himself "living in us." It is a life which is hid. "Your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3: 3). It is hid from the world which cannot understand us. It is hid from the devil who cannot steal it. It is hid often from our own consciousness, and, when we think it gone and mourn our lack of feeling, we find that Christ is still there waiting till the eclipse is over to reveal Himself in unchanging love. The security of our life is not in our experience, but in Him.

John Newton tells us of the singular dream which led to his conversion. Sleeping in his hammock in the Adriatic, he dreamt one night that an angel gave to him a jeweled ring telling him that it was the pledge of his salvation. Soon after a demon form stood by his side and dared him to throw it into the sea. In a moment of reckless madness he yielded to the tempter and the ring was gone. Then the fiend turned to him and told him that he had lost his soul. And at the same moment an awful flame seemed to light up the sea and shore, and a voice whispered that he was lost. Then there appeared another form. It was Jesus. He stood a moment by his side and gave him one look of upbraiding love, and then leaped into the sea. After long struggling with the waves He arose to the surface, and, weary and almost dead, brought back the precious jewel and held it up to his wondering gaze. But He would not let him have it again. "I have rescued your precious soul," He said, "at awful cost, but if I trusted it once more to your keeping, it would be lost again. I will keep it for you, and when you enter the heavenly gates it will be handed back to you as the pledge of your admission." And Newton awoke to seek the Savior, and afterwards to write those precious hymns which tell of His redeeming love.

III. THEIR DRESS

By a very fine metaphor the Apostle describes the Christian life under the figure of disrobing and robing a person. Our garments are frequently used to denote our character. And so the word habit has come to mean both our dress and manner of living. There is first the process of disrobing. It begins with the putting off of our old habits and dispositions, our old clothes. "Ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another." All this has reference to sinful acts and dispositions. Next, however, we strip not only to the skin, but to the bone, and to the very heart. For we put off our very selves. "Ye have put off the old man with his deeds" (Col. 3: 8, 9). This is the entire renunciation and crucifixion of our old self and our whole natural life.

Next comes the process of robing. This begins inside. There must be a new man first before he can wear his new clothes. You would not put clean and beautiful garments on an unbathed person. And so we read, "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all and in all" (Col. 3: 10, 11). This is not the old man improved, but it is the Christ man, the Lord Jesus Himself becoming our new life so perfectly that even our national, social, and ecclesiastical distinctions, peculiarities and characteristics disappear, and Christ is all and in all. Then having put on the new man, we

put on the new clothes, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Col. 3:12, 13). Here we have the fine undergarments of bowels of mercies, a sympathetic, tender sensitiveness to the sufferings and feelings of others, a kind and loving manner, a meek and lowly spirit, a longsuffering patience, the beautiful robe of forgiveness full of pockets that are all open at the bottom, where we receive the wrongs of others to drop them behind us. Then there comes as the last article of our new apparel, the girdle, which in Oriental countries binds all the robes compactly around the person, and enables him to move and work without embarrassment. And so love is our girdle, compacting all our graces into service and enabling us to use our blessing for the blessing of others. This is the meaning of the fourteenth verse. "Over all these things put on love, which is the perfect girdle." Beloved, here is the fashion plate from the heavenly wardrobe for a well-dressed Christian. Let us see to it that we are in the style of the kingdom and the society above.

IV. THEIR WALK

As soon as we are dressed it is right that we should go forth to our various walks. First we read of their former walk in evil things. "In which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them" (Col. 3: 7). Next we have the companion of their walk. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (Col. 2: 6). This is not a solitary walk, but like Enoch they walk with God. Then we have the posture in which they walk, their pose of lofty dignity as the children of a king. "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing" (Col. 1: 10). And finally, we have their walk before the world. In all carefulness and consistency, so deporting themselves as not to bring reproach upon the name of Christ before the ungodly, and to use every opportunity to bear witness for the Lord, and to be a blessing to men. "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time" (Col. 4:5). Beloved, is this our walk?

V. THEIR TALK

It is not a silent life. Our conversation forms a large part of our activity and influence, and just as the tongue is the best sign of good or bad health in the physical world, so a wholesome tongue is the symptom of true holiness, and an ungoverned tongue setteth on fire the whole course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell. James has said with awful emphasis that "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." Our conversation among our Christian associates is vividly described in Colossians 3: 16. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." It is to be flavored with the word of Christ. It is to be illuminated by songs and gladness, and even when we have to admonish and reprove our brethren it is to be with sweetness and love. But especially in our general conversation are we reminded, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col. 4: 6). This is a high standard and excludes a good deal of the light and frivolous and inane conversation even of Christians. We should never speak without saying something. The salt

suggests wholesomeness, purity and good sense. The word grace suggests enough of religion to lift it above the ordinary plane, yet not too much to make it stilted and set. It is possible to talk to the people of the world in such a way as to commend Christ without preaching at them. "That ye may know how ye ought to answer every man," suggests the need of tact and discrimination. "Answer not a fool according to his folly," is just as timely sometimes as the other precept, "Answer a fool according to his folly," is at other times. Christ was the Master of right speech. His noblest victories were in silencing the criticisms and carpings of His enemies by replies which searched their very hearts and exposed them to their own contempt and the ridicule of the people so that "they durst no more ask him any further questions." God give to us a "wholesome tongue."

VI. THEIR EDUCATION

For just as the child must be instructed so the Christian has to pass through the school of discipline. And so we read, We "do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; . . . increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1: 9, 10). It is spiritual wisdom, and the knowledge of God that formed the subjects of their high study. And the special theme of their deepest inquiry, the philosophy that is more profound than all the wisdom of the ages, is the "mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you the hope of glory" (Col. 1 :26, 27). He prays for them in the next chapter that they may know "all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:2, 3). This was to be their safeguard against the seductions of false philosophy. This was to save them from "intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind" (Col. 2:18). Christ is the wisdom of God and there are depths and heights of truth for those who are taught of the Spirit the deep things of God, truths that satisfy the intellect and feed the heart and bring not only light but life and love.

VII. THEIR TEMPER

The Christian temper has reference especially to the finer qualities of disposition rather than to the cardinal virtues, moralities and proprieties, which, of course, are taken for granted in a life of holiness. Many of these finer traits are touched upon in this beautiful portrait. Here is a finer touch. "Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto," not some great achievement, some eloquent address, some outward activity; but to suffer in sweetness, or as is so finely expressed here, "unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness." To suffer, to suffer long, to suffer all not only with patience, but with joyfulness. That, indeed, is a final touch of the refining fire. Here again is a fine touch. "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts" (Col. 3: 15). There is nothing more delightful to the possessor or comforting to his associates than a tranquil, peaceful spirit. There is a delicate charm in the peace of God which sheds beauty and benignity upon the most ordinary countenance and manner. Then we have the heavenly

temper (Col. 1: 1, 2). "Seek those things which are above." "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." This gives loftiness to the character and lifts the soul above the groveling things of time. Finally, there is the thankful and happy temper which runs as an undertone through many passages in this epistle, "Be ye thankful . Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord . . . Giving thanks unto God and the Father by him." (Col. 3: 15, 16, 17.) There is nothing more welcome in this world of clouds and tears, than a cheerful disposition, a shining face, a thankful heart. Of such a spirit one of our simplest poets has said:

"There's not a cheaper thing on earth,
Nor yet one half so dear;
'Tis better than distinguished birth,
Or thousands gained a year."

VIII. THEIR PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

Of course, their Christian life was a practical one, reaching through a whole circle of domestic, social and public life, making them better wives, husbands, fathers, children, masters, servants and business men. But it is not their practice so much as their principles that the Apostle emphasizes. Christian ethics do not consist so much in a thousand minute directions about the details of duty, as a few sound, comprehensive principles of action which apply to every question and settle every point. Three such principles are given here.

1. "Walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing" (Col. 1: 10).
2. "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17).
3. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Col. 3: 23).

The first of these principles sets before us a high aim and we are inspired to live up to it. We have been lately told that the reason the late Commissioner Waring required his street cleaning brigade to wear white duck suits at their dirty work was because he felt that it would be an incentive to them to keep the streets so clean that their clothes would not be soiled, and he succeeded. And so God robes us in the garments of kingliness, and then bids us live up to it by keeping them clean.

The second of these principles requires us to identify ourselves so fully with Christ that we really act as if we were He. A great actress lately said that when she was acting the part of some strong character she actually felt all the emotions, affections and sufferings required by the play, and that her tears, her smiles and all her expressions were absolutely natural and spontaneous, and for the time being she was really lost in her character. Beloved, God gives to you and me the honor of acting the title role in the greatest drama of the ages. You are permitted to represent the very character of Christ Himself and exhibit to the world the excellencies and graces of Him who is the glory of heaven and the paragon of all goodness, loveliness and grace. Surely this is an inspiration to live up to the highest things.

Then the third of these principles, a single aim to glorify God, is as far-reaching and uplifting in its power. A distinguished clergyman once told the writer that he announced a special sermon

on popular amusements, and great numbers of young people came to hear it. He did not once mention cards, dancing or the theater, and yet two at least of his auditors went home that night saying to each other, "I will not play cards, I will not go to the theater, I will not indulge in the worldly dance again." He had simply brought home with convincing power to the hearts of his hearers the single verse, "The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things which please him." This will accomplish more to lift people above the world than all our denunciation of forbidden things.

IX. THEIR HOPE

"For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven"(Col. 1: 5). This was one of the things for which he thanked God. "To present you holy and unblamable and unproveable in his sight" (Col. 1:22). This was the glorious purpose of Christ's atonement. "That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1 :28). This was the holy ambition of his own personal ministry, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3: 4). This was the glorious transfiguration which the Lord's coming was to bring to them. "Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:24). This was the recompense for which they were toiling at their lowly and servile task. "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1: 12). This was the present preparation for the Lord's coming which His grace had bestowed upon them, and this is the attitude in which we still should be waiting for His coming; meet now and ready always that we may be found of Him in peace. Thus would He have us waiting for His appearing. It has lately been stated that the great Von Moltke, who planned with such signal success the victorious campaign of the German army against France, had been ready for many years for that expected event, and when one night an orderly knocked at his door with a message from the king that war was imminent, he simply directed the orderly to go to a certain pigeonhole in his office where he would find all the directions to the different commanders with all the necessary papers ready for instant delivery. And there they were, the plans of the campaign, plans of fortresses, orders to generals of divisions, all ready; and then he turned over and quietly went to sleep. He had been ready for years. So should we be diligent that we may be found of Him in peace, and that when He cometh we may open to Him immediately. So may we be found meet for the inheritance of the saints of light.

Christ in the Bible

Colossians

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Chapter 3

THE CHRISTIAN WORKER IN COLOSSIANS

"A faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord" (Col. 4:7).

We have had the picture of Christ and of the Christian in Colossians. Now let us study the composite portrait of the Christian worker as presented in the different ideals set forth in this delightful apostolic letter. One of the highest qualities of a great life is to inspire others with its own spirit and aims, and reproduce its work in other workers. The divine Master has done more through the workers that He called and commissioned than through His own personal ministry. And so the great Apostle Paul had the peculiar gift of setting others to work and so communicating to them the principles and objects for which he lived that his life and work were reproduced in them. Paul was the center of a glorious cluster of men and women who finely represent the manifold gifts and ministries of the Spirit. A number of them are brought to the front in the incidental allusions and the personal salutations of this epistle, and as we have said, they together form a composite picture of the ideal Christian worker.

I. TYCHICUS, OR THE FAITHFUL MINISTER (Col. 4:7, 8).

This is a very simple but a very high picture of a true minister of Christ. First of all he is "a beloved brother," for it is more important to be than to do. His personal character is the foundation of his public work. Then he recognizes himself as a servant, "a fellow servant of Paul." For the fundamental idea of service is divine ownership and entire dedication to the Master and His work. But above everything else he is "a faithful minister." He may not have been brilliant, but he is true, and this is the highest testimony that can be given to a servant. He can be depended upon. He is thoroughly reliable and he is always ready for whatever message or trust his leader had to commit to his hands. On the present occasion he was sent from Rome to carry this epistle and to bear the greeting of the Apostle to the church at Colosse, and he was just as ready to be an errand boy and a messenger as a teacher or an apostle. He was also a minister of comfort. The Apostle sent him that "he might comfort their hearts." The true minister must have a heart of sympathy and the power to cheer and comfort the distressed. Beloved, can it be said of us whatever ministry as pastor, evangelist, elder, Sabbath School teacher, parent, that we have been faithful ministers of Jesus Christ?

II. EPAPHRAS, OR THE PRAYERFUL MINISTRY (Col. 4: 12).

This beloved brother was a member of the Colossian church, and in the testimony that Paul bears to him he knows that he is appealing to the people that are acquainted with him and that

mere idle words have little weight unless his life bears out the testimony. The ministry of Epaphras was the power of prayer, that silent ministry that the world knows nothing of, but counts in heaven. It is the work of our great High Priest above, and it is, perhaps, the most potent work that any of us do below. It is no easy dream of sentimental feeling, but a strong and forceful energy "laboring fervently for you in prayers." This is the power that stands behind every great spiritual movement. The world may see the man who stands upon a platform or leads the advance movement on the field, but mightier than either is the silent heart that wrestles in the closet and brings the power from on high. This was the ministry of Epaphras, and this is the holy priesthood to which God is calling many of His people.

His prayers were very definite and practical. We are accustomed to hear the conventional request for prayer that somebody may be converted or healed, or that deliverance may come in some exigency of life. But here we find a man making his business to pray for three whole churches, and to hold them up continually to God in intercession that they might "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." He was asking for no special emergency, but simply for sustaining grace and sanctifying power, and standing like a great supply pipe in some complicated system of waterworks, whose business it was to convey the water from the reservoir to the various places of distribution. This is exactly the figure used by the prophet Zechariah in his picture of the supernatural supply of the Church of God with heavenly power, where the two anointed ones are compared to the pipes that convey the oil to the various lamps. It is the ministry of believing and habitual prayer. Happy the church that has such ministers of the inner sanctuary, such waiting ones to stand before the Lord with the names of His people upon their hands and upon their hearts in the exercise of an everlasting priesthood. Epaphras had consecrated himself to this work and had a great zeal for it, praying with all his heart for his brethren, not only in Colosse, but for the church in Laodicea of Hierapolis. Beloved, is there not here a lesson and a pattern for you? Have you been true to your ministry of prayer, and are there souls that are famishing, churches that are barren, and fields that are neglected because you have come short in this highest ministry of the children of God?

III. ARISTARCHUS, OR THE SUFFERING MINISTRY

"Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner" (Col. 4: 10). Here we have one engaged in no active service, with silent lips and activity restrained by the fetters of a prison cell. But he can suffer along with his friend. He can bear the reproach and share the loneliness of the Apostle's life. He is one of the shut-in ones. His ministry is suffering love. A high and noble ministry indeed it is. Nanssen, the Norwegian traveler, dedicated his book to his wife in these terms: "To her who christened my boat, and then had the courage and the love to let me go forth alone." Hers was the part of heroic suffering. And while her brave husband went out into the darkness of the frozen North, she waited alone until at last the suspense and suffering became so great that the physicians would not allow his name to be mentioned in her presence, even by her little child, for fear the pressure would snap the last thread of reason and of light. Such is the service of many a mother who waits at home while her boy goes to the mission field or the martyr's grave; many a sister who sacrifices earth's fondest ties to bear the unselfish burden of her home; many a daughter, who gives up affection, wifehood, high Christian work and the ambitions of active life

that she may wait as a prisoner of the Lord by some mother's couch, or comfort and sustain the old age of some infirm, dependent father. Such is the ministry of those royal hearts who stand for the sake of principle and some high and holy friendship, sharing the reproaches of some cause which is unpopular, some Christian leader and worker who is misrepresented or maligned, some trust to which the heart has become committed in honor and duty, prisoners of Jesus Christ held back by circumstances which you cannot control, from work which you would love to do, from activities for which every fiber of your being is reaching out, while you can only suffer in silence and find comfort in remembering, "They also serve who only stand and wait."

IV. ONESIMUS, OR THE CONSECRATED SERVANT AND THE HUMBLE HELPER (Col. 4: 9)

Onesimus was a runaway slave who had been found by Paul at Rome and converted through his ministry, and whom the Apostle, with a very tactful letter, was sending back to Philemon, his former master. A happy play is made upon his name, which means "profitable," and which Paul uses as an augury of the future, hoping that he may now prove as profitable as he was unprofitable before. Onesimus is here introduced to them with high honor as one of themselves, and called a faithful and beloved brother. There is no hint of humbler station or his disgraceful fault in escaping from his master. There is a fine tone of Christian ethics about this epistle in dealing with the question of master and servants. There is no encouragement to neglect the servant's duty, but there is the clear recognition of the equality of all men before God, and in the Church of Jesus Christ. In Colossians 3: 22-25 those of them who were in menial and servile positions are reminded that they are to consider themselves the servants of Jesus Christ and look over the heads of unjust and unkind masters, and work "not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God" and doing everything heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men. They are reminded that they shall receive their reward from the heavenly Master, and that there is no respect of persons with Him, but that every wrong done them will be justly punished by Him, and that every service will be recompensed likewise.

Many of us are in similar positions. The curse of slavery is gone, but the law of service is perpetual, and there is high and holy work to be done for Christ in our various positions of dependence and responsibility to human employers. Many a girl in some ungodly household in this city has been used of God in her laundry and her kitchen through her bright and happy face and the sweet temper which the grace of Christ gives, to lead her mistress to seek for higher things. Many a nurse girl in what might be called the monotony of her life of drudgery and care has exercised an influence upon some child's heart that has given the inspiration of all its future life. In the great world of nature there are millions of blades of grass for one lofty oak or pine, and in the economy of grace there are innumerable little ministries that must be done by someone. It is there that Christian character tells, and that service for Jesus may be made up of many little things. Down in the slums of New York a woman was seen picking up something from the street and hiding it in her apron. A policeman rudely arrested her and demanded to know what she was stealing. She opened her apron and said "Oh, I was just picking up the bits of broken glass that I saw on the pavement for fear the little barefooted children should step on them and get hurt." It wasn't much to the rough policeman who dismissed her with a coarse laugh, but it was much to the Master.

V. MARK, OR THE RECLAIMED BACKSLIDER (Col. 4: 10).

Mark was one of those young enthusiasts who are always stepping out before they are ready, and attempting some great enterprise without counting the cost. Mark had been brought up in luxury in the home of Mary, his wealthy mother in Jerusalem. Her home was the rendezvous of the Early Church, and as he was accustomed to meet the great leaders on familiar terms, he imagined that he was farther on than he was. So when the first great missionary party started, Mark was one of the volunteers and he went along with Paul and his uncle Barnabas. But when they got up into the highlands of Asia Minor and found themselves amid the barren cliffs and savage people of Pisidia and Pamphylia, he became disheartened and, like many other young missionaries, wanted to go home to his mother, and practically deserted his mission. Paul was disgusted, for the time at least, with the new recruit, and would not have him on their next mission. But Barnabas stood by him and took him as his associate, and by and by even Paul was glad to send for him, and say, bring Mark even to Rome, and the terrors of Nero's presence, "for he is profitable to me for the ministry." There still are Christian workers who have to fail before they can succeed. God has to chasten their young enthusiasm and humble their self-confidence, and in the end, like Peter, they are better for their humbling fall. Do not get discouraged if you have started once and gone back, but start again, and when self has died and you have thoroughly learned that you are utterly insufficient in yourself, then God can use the things that are not, to bring to naught the things that are and make the very Valley of Achor a Door of Hope.

VI. DEMAS, OR A REAL BACKSLIDER (Col. 4: 14).

There is something very sad and hollow in the mention of Demas in this epistle, when we remember Paul's later announcement, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." Mark, the deserter, comes back. Demas, the friend, goes back to return no more. The difference of the two men was all in the heart. Mark failed, but still loved the Lord. Demas kept up the appearance of a Christian worker for a while, but he loved the present world. In the beautiful park at our Grimsby Convention, we saw a striking illustration of the sad story of Demas. A great tree had just fallen across one of the avenues. Its form had been most stately, its branches spreading and symmetrical, its leaves green and verdant, but as it fell we noted that for months and years it had been hanging as by a thread. There was a thin rim of wood fiber around the outside just beneath the bark scarcely an inch thick, and the whole heart was filled with rottenness, the wood decayed and filled with parasites and worms. Its heart was false and had been all the time, and it only needed one touch of the testing storm to overthrow it. Such is the life that is maintaining the semblance of service in profession while the heart is set on earthly things, which can only end like Demas. Awake, dear friend, in time, and ask God to save you from a divided heart and to make you true to Him.

VII. LUKE, THE BELOVED PHYSICIAN (Col. 4: 14).

Here we find a man in professional life rising above and reaching beyond his professional duties, and accomplishing the noblest service for God and man. For Luke became the friend of

Paul, the author of one of the most beautiful and valuable of the Gospels, and the chronicler of the history of the Early Church.

So God loves to use men in unconventional ways. The need of the Church today is not a larger number of ordained clergymen, but a larger number of men and women in social, secular and professional life whose entire influence and talents are at the service of the Master; not a salaried and dependent priesthood who preach the Gospel because it is expected of them merely, but a great body of consecrated irregulars, Nehemiahs, Josephs, Esthers, Daniels, who use their earthly station in the providence of God as a standpoint from which to serve and witness for their heavenly Master, and bless their fellow-men.

VIII. NYMPHAS, OR THE CHURCH IN HIS HOUSE (Col. 4:15).

Here we have a consecrated home. The Early Church had no ecclesiastical edifices. Its sanctuary was the family circle. Mary of Jerusalem, Priscilla of Corinth and Ephesus, "Gaius mine host," and many an "elect lady" and public-spirited man had the high honor of making his house another Bethany, and entertaining the ascended Lord, and the infant Church. Christian families, how are you using your homes for God? In our great and lonely cities there are hundreds of young men who have come from happy home circles, but have little social life except what they find in the club, the theater, the ballroom or the fashionable call. What a blessing it would be to these boys at the crisis of their young manhood to have the advantage of a truly Christian home circle to visit. What a ministry the refined and consecrated woman could exercise! And even the humblest home can be consecrated to the cottage prayer meeting, the parlor meeting, the gathering together in His name of the two or three who often constitute the nucleus of some great spiritual movement, and whose counsels and prayers reach farther frequently than the great ecclesiastical assemblies. There is little doubt that a majority of our best Alliance branches have had their birth in some little home circle of united faith and prayer. May the Holy Spirit give us to see the ministry of many a modern Nymphas and the Church in his house.

IX. ARCHIPPUS, OR THE FAITHFUL MINISTER

"Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it" (Col. 4: 17).

This may apply to any ministry whether as pastor, elder, Sabbath School teacher, evangelist, mission worker or even parent. Whatever our service, let us be true to it. Even your little Sunday School class may hold in it all the possibilities of a noble and happy life for some of those young hearts to whom God has given you not only as their teacher, but perhaps the only safe mooring and uplifting influence in all their life. It is not so much the instruction you give them that tells, as the advantage of having in you a friend, a guide, a mature and experienced example and guardian of their undeveloped hearts and lives. Are you doing your best, or have you neglected your trust and allowed some little ship to break to pieces upon the rocks because your light has gone out?

X. PAUL, OR THE IDEAL MINISTER

But all these patterns meet in the one great life around which they clustered, the great Apostle himself, of whose faithful ministry we have so many striking intimations even in this little epistle.

(a) We see the deep foundation of it in a life of prayer. "Praying always for you"(Col. 1: 3). "I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh" (Col. 2: 1). Here we find him praying not only for his acquaintances but for multitudes that he had never met, and holding men to God as "with hooks of steel."

(b) His love was the impulse of his ministry. His heart was with his people. "Though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order. and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ" (Col. 2: 5).

(c) The spirit of self-sacrifice. "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: Whereof I am made a minister" (Col. 1 : 24, 25). His very life was laid down on the altar of sacrifice, and it was his greatest joy to bear their burdens and share with their great High Priest all their needs and sufferings.

(d) He was a minister of the truth. "I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God." His commission was to preach God's Word, and especially to carry to men that deeper mystery of the Gospel as the fountain of a deeper life in Christ; that wondrous message of the Christ life which has transformed so many millions of lives, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1: 25-27).

(e) His fidelity. "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:28). He dealt individually with men. He did not try to please them, but to save them. He felt that he must present them one by one at last to his glorious Master and that he stood as one that must give account, and therefore his work must be well done and ready for the testing fire. We cannot always be pleasant with people, but sometimes our faithfulness may seem severe. I think it is General Booth who tells the story of a little girl who prayed that God would save the little rabbits from being caught in her brother's traps, and after she had prayed quite a while, wound up by saying, "Dear, Jesus, I know You will." Her mother asked her why she was so sure that her prayer would be answered. "Why," she said, "Mamma, I smashed the traps." We must not only pray for the souls and point the better way, but uncover and destroy the devil's snares that beset so many heedless lives.

(f) The supernatural power behind his ministry. "Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working which worketh in me mightily" (Col. 1 :29). This is the secret of every effectual ministry; not I, but Christ, the outworking of a life that flows from the inworking of the living One. God is waiting to give such a ministry to every single-hearted servant. He does not ask us for service until He first gives it. He will fill us with His love and clothe us with His power and when all is

done help us to say, "I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Amen.