

Straight Words to the Colossians

From Colossians 1:2 we get our name — “*Adelphois en Christo*” — Brethren in Christ. And this epistle well defines those who rightly bear this name. IF we truly ARE conforming ourselves to the marvelous spiritual picture it presents, we ARE Christadelphians.

Paul first thanks God for the joy and courage that their faith and love gave him. How COULD he have carried on if there had not been SOME evidence of success to his labors—some VISIBLE working of the Spirit, transforming natural, animal men and women into spiritual children of God? There are always a FEW faithful, carrying forward the divine purpose and bearing evidence—amid disappointment and distress—that that great purpose is still alive in the earth.

In verse 6 Paul speaks of the Gospel BEARING FRUIT in them—spiritual fruit to God’s glory—the pure beauty of the divine mind and character gradually beginning to glow among them, distinguishing them from common, ugly, perishing clay. The details of this fruit and character are brought out throughout the epistle.

FRUITS ARE REAL, MEASURABLE THINGS

The tree that does NOT bring forth fruit, said Jesus, will be cut down and burned (Matt. 7:19). These fruits are real, MEASURABLE things. In the last day God will measure them. He is no respecter of persons.

Treasure in HEAVEN is just as real and PRACTICAL an affair as treasure on earth. It is simply a matter of time, and effort, and desire. In NATURAL things we get results in direct proportion to how long, and how hard, and how carefully we work. When the books are opened at the last great day of account, exactly how LONG and how HARD we have worked for SPIRITUAL things will be found recorded in clear, impartial, unchangeable figures. There will be no argument or appeal. The full record will be there.

The first spiritual acquisitions that Paul mentions (v. 11) are “*patience and longsuffering*.” How is weak, natural, evil flesh to develop spiritual patience? By keeping the mind firmly FIXED ON GOD—His love, His desires, His greatness, His ever presence beside us—and upon that man who perfectly manifested Him. God’s great plan is being worked out with infinite, divine patience. If we are to be co-workers with God in developing a holy, eternal community for His glory, PATIENCE is essential.

SPIRITUAL PATIENCE

The Spirit through Isaiah, speaking of Christ, gives a wonderful picture of spiritual patience (42:2-4).

“He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the dimly-burning flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment and truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged TILL HE HAVE SET JUDGMENT IN THE EARTH: and the isles shall wait for his law.”

A quiet, loving, persistent, IRRESISTIBLE determination for good—never rough, never discouraged. Infinite care to avoid injury, and yet an unswerving adherence to divine principles. That is patience, as exemplified by the Great Example. Paul continues (Col. 1:11) —

“... patience and longsuffering WITH JOYFULNESS: giving thanks unto the Father.”

Paul—beaten with many cruel stripes and chained fast in the inner dungeon at Philippi—could still at midnight JOYFULLY sing praises to God. He had the true and healthy outlook. God does not want a brooding and self-pitying patience. Paul KNEW that ALL things—in the eternal, ultimate reckoning—work together for GOOD for those that truly love God. He KNEW he was faithfully doing God’s will and helping forward His purpose and that—regardless of the present—time would reward his efforts and justify his joy.

TOO BIG IN OUR OWN PERSPECTIVE

Joy and thanksgiving are the normal state of the spiritual mind. Depression is self-pity and a perverted form of self-glorification. We are too big in our OWN perspective. If we realize that God is ALWAYS in full and active, wide-awake control, overlooks nothing, makes no mistakes, and is steadily bringing to pass His glorious purpose of good, then we shall not be tempted to indulge ourselves in the destructive fleshly pleasure of self-pity.

Are we discouraged by our failure? There is nothing wrong with us—at the worst—that faith and hope and love cannot cure, and there is an abundant fountain where these may freely be found. There is no state of mind that a quiet meditation on God’s Word will not improve. “*Get thee up! Wherefore liest thou on thy face?*” said the Lord to Joshua (Josh. 7:10).

If there is something wrong, then there is something that can be DONE about it. The Scriptures leave no room for discouragement. The great purpose of God is too grand and triumphant. If, like Paul, we FILL our lives with LABOR on behalf of this purpose, and our hearts with THANKSGIVING that we have been offered a place in it, we shall find no room or time for discouragement or self-pity.

HOLY – UNBLAMABLE – UNREPROVABLE!

In the next few verses, Paul centers our attention on Christ the Head of the Body, in whom and through whom the whole purpose exists. It is HIS mission (v. 22) to present us holy and unblamable and unrepvable in God's sight. HOLY – UNBLAMABLE – UNREPROVABLE! The goal is very high. The POWER is God's but the APPLICATION of it is up to us. Complete devotion to His Word is the way. The power lies there in abundance, waiting for the few wise who will heed, but He will not force it upon any.

"Warning every man, that we may present every man PERFECT" (Col. 1:28).

To the Ephesians he said (Acts 20:31) that for the space of THREE YEARS he had ceased not NIGHT AND DAY to warn everyone WITH TEARS. There certainly must be very GRAVE DANGER of failure, if such incessant and urgent warnings are necessary! Are we SURE we are fully alive to the deceptiveness of the danger that threatens us? "Narrow is the way, and FEW there be that find it" – but those few DO find it, and all others COULD if they were willing to make the necessary effort.

NO EASY SLIDING INTO GLORY

The warning is to seek FIRST the Kingdom of God—to make SURE of that ONE thing to the sacrifice of everything else. It is quite possible to ALL—but only with the utmost effort. There will be no easy sliding into glory. A constant, tearful warning is needed against the Truth-choking concerns of this life and the deceitfulness of treasure on earth.

"That your hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love" (Col. 2:2).

The only thing in which there is TRUE comfort, and the only thing that can effectively knit ANYONE together is—as he continues—"the riches of the full assurance of UNDERSTANDING . . . the treasures of WISDOM and KNOWLEDGE." How much of this divine treasure have WE laid up?

FOOL'S GOLD

There is a mineral called "fool's gold." It resembles gold in glitter and appearance and is often gathered by inexperienced miners. This thought strongly presents itself to the mind when the scriptural picture regarding wisdom and treasure is considered, as also do the searching words of Christ –

"Thou FOOL, this night thy life shall be required of thee: THEN whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Lk. 12:20)

HEAVENLY treasures knit brethren together in love: EARTHY treasures separate them, as they did Abraham and Lot (Gen. 13:6-7). Lot's choice of Sodom was the result of this separation. Trouble followed, then disaster. Was the wealth worth it?

"I am with you in spirit, joying and beholding your ORDER, and the steadfastness of your faith" (Col. 2:5).

Harmonious order and steadfast faith present a beautiful picture. The spiritual mind will delight in orderliness. All God's vast creation, from infinitely great to microscopically small, reflects the beauty of ORDER. Disorder is destructive, and alien to God. Voluntary and mutually-agreed order—faithfully complied with—is essential to spiritual growth together. As Paul told the Corinthians (1 Cor. 14:33 – Revised Version) – "God is NOT a God of confusion."

AN EASY, BUT UNHEALTHY, WAY

The larger an ecclesia is, the more order is necessary – IF all are to take a part. Of course, if the work is left to a FEW, then forms of procedure and detailed arrangements may be greatly reduced – this is an EASY, but UNHEALTHY, state. ALL should work while it is day.

"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the SABBATH days: which are a SHADOW of things to come, but the BODY is of Christ" (Col. 2:16).

This is a clear charter of freedom from the ordinances of the Law of Moses, of which the most ardently advocated element today is the SABBATH. But God does not go backwards. If He THEN, in days of shadow, required one full day in seven for His service, He certainly requires NO LESS today. As Paul clearly shows later in this epistle, the ONE-day Mosaic sabbath has become the SEVEN-day Christian sabbath (3:17, 23-24) –

"WHATSOEVER ye do in word or deed, do ALL in the name of the Lord . . . WHATSOEVER ye do, do it HEARTILY to the LORD, and not to men, knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward."

To what extent do WE consciously do ALL things as to the Lord? The COMMAND is clear enough. Its PURPOSE is self-evidently good and fitting. It gives ALL an opportunity for limitless service to God—regardless of circumstance. It fixes the mind ALWAYS upon God. Properly followed, it would completely eliminate from our lives all activities that could NOT be sincerely done as service to God, and it would ennoble all others and give the meanest task value and dignity.

"WHATSOEVER YE DO, DO IT HEARTILY"

God HATES half-heartedness. There is no pleasure in it to Him, or satisfaction to the doer. It is a burden on both sides. God requires our enthusiastic BEST in all things—lovingly given—because the only frame of mind that is pleasing to Him is that which is ever eager and ANXIOUS to give Him its utmost. Jesus said (Mk. 12:30)—

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with ALL thy heart, and with ALL thy soul, and with ALL thy mind, and with ALL thy strength: THIS is the FIRST commandment."

The accent is on the "all." Its essence lies in its COMPLETENESS, because unless it is complete and all-embracing, then it is not the genuine thing at all. Unless it consistently dominates the whole life, it is a mere EXTERNAL "form of godliness," lacking the living power.

EVERY DAY A SABBATH

Unless we are truly keeping ALL days as holy sabbaths to God, and doing ALL things heartily as unto Him, we have a very unconvincing case against the sincere but misguided advocates of the old Mosaic "shadow" sabbath.

"If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are ABOVE" (Col. 3:1).

Paul is referring back to their baptism, mentioned in chapter 2, verse 12. The reasoning is this:—By your symbolic submission to death in baptism, you signify a willingness to die to all the things belonging to the world, and to attach yourself unreservedly to the things related to Christ, and you entered a solemn covenant to set your heart and interest on heavenly things. ARE YOU LIVING UP TO YOUR WORD? A covenant with man is a solemn obligation—a covenant with GOD is infinitely more so.

"Set your affections on things ABOVE, and not on things on EARTH" (Col. 3:2).

Jesus tells HOW—"Lay up treasure in heaven and not on earth, for where your TREASURE is, there will your HEART be also." That is, arrange your LIFE in harmony with your PROFESSIONS—accumulate nothing on earth to hold your attention and desires. Conduct your affairs so that ALL your prospects and pleasures and advantages are bound up with the FUTURE and not the present. Jesus' way is very simple—IF we wholeheartedly accept it. It is the ONLY way.

"FOR YE ARE DEAD" (Col. 3:3).

A dead man has no worldly cares or attachments. The believer—in baptism—voluntarily dies to the world. There is no greater break that can be made than DEATH, yet how difficult it is to realize ALL that is implied in this symbolic action! Paul is pleading for the REASONABLE necessity of a WALK consistent with the position we have professedly taken—a position we voluntarily took in hope of great personal gain. If you are dead to the world, he reasons, WHY are you concerned with its empty, perishing possessions and customs and interests?

In the following verses he lists several things to be put away, most of which, fortunately, it is not necessary to mention among us. But the final crowning item in this list of ungodly vices is such a subtle part of our sin-flesh as to ALWAYS be a problem—"COVETOUSNESS, which is IDOLATRY." The Spirit could use no stronger expression of abhorrence and condemnation than "idolatry" in describing covetousness.

"THE DESIRE TO HAVE MORE"

Covetousness—"the desire to have more," as Young's Concordance translates it. Why does God HATE it so? Because it is so DESTRUCTIVE of ALL the principles of the heavenly teaching of Christ upon which salvation depends. "Having food and raiment, therewith BE CONTENT" is the command—the PLAIN command—of our Master. The world is ENTIRELY given over to covetousness and greed. It is the root, says Paul (1 Tim. 6:10) of ALL EVIL. Jesus (Mk. 7:22) associates covetousness with theft, wickedness and deceit. Again he says (Lk. 12:15)—

"BEWARE of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

It is an evil, consuming disease, a mocking waster of time and lives. Because of the infection in the Brotherhood of this universal malady, countless hours are spent in getting worldly things that could be given to the service of God. When the Lord comes to demand an accounting of his servants, WHAT SHALL WE SAY? Shall we proudly show him our houses, our clothes, our cars? It will be difficult to explain to the Lord of heaven and earth that OUR standard of living and worldly possessions during our probation had to be so vastly greater than HIS. “The servant is not above his master.”

“Covetousness, which is IDOLATRY: for which things’ sake the WRATH of God cometh on the children of disobedience” (Col. 3:5-6).

RENEWED IN KNOWLEDGE

“Put on the NEW man which is renewed in KNOWLEDGE after the image of Him that created him” (v. 10).

KNOWLEDGE is the key to the whole process. Knowledge is a matter of learning and effort. We should ALL know the Scriptures FAR better than we do. Daily we are reminded of our ignorance in this direction—of the countless wasted opportunities for learning and study. In verse 16 Paul says—

“Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”

There is much material for reflection in the hymns we sing, on this matter of KNOWLEDGE, as on the others—“O, how love I Thy law! It is my study ALL THE DAY.” But IS IT? Or are we just mouthing meaningless words?

DO WE MEAN IT?

Again we sing: “Firm to the fight I stand! What terror can confound me?” and “Thy way, not mine, O Lord.” Noble words! But IS God’s way, and not our own, always the paramount consideration with us? “Not mine, not mine, the choice, in things or great or small.” Truly godly sentiments—IF they are consistently followed out. Our hearts can say.

“Tis not for present power or wealth, or worldly fame we look to Thee” . . . “All I ask for is enough.” Do we, as we sing, consider the REAL MEANING of these things, and frankly examine our own activities in the light of them? “Life’s fleeting treasures I resign.” Does it come from the heart—or just the lips?

There are many subjects in which we can find scriptural admonition in the hymns. “We should learn the rather free from wrath and strife to live, FAR REMOVING ALL THAT MIGHT OFFEND OR GRIEVE.” To what extent can WE declare before God that we sincerely try to avoid ALL things that offend and grieve others? We can all think of several things among us—some quite easily dispensed with—which grieve our brethren. Even if these things were right in themselves, it is clearly evident that the spirit of Christ is lacking in us if we persist in them when we know they trouble others. Some day God will ask us just WHY we followed this course. WHAT SHALL WE SAY?

“PURE RELIGION BEFORE GOD IS THIS” —

Then we sing so heartily to each other, “Work, brethren, work!” But are WE working? A cardinal element of TRUE religion is to visit the afflicted (Jam. 1:27; Matt. 25:43). How much visiting do WE do? In other words, how much true religion do we actually possess? And to the alien we take pleasure in singing: “How long your strength and substance waste on trifles light as air?” Let us make sure that EXAMPLE corresponds with PRECEPT.

The whole of Hymn 170 is a searching indictment of a common failing—“The thoughtless still with levity and mirth delight to dwell.” Paul says “Foolish talking and jesting are not befitting” (Eph. 5:4—Revised Version). And in this very epistle we are considering (4:6)—

“Let your speech be ALWAYS with grace, seasoned with salt.”

The important word is the “always.” To mean anything, it must be a consistent principle of life, faithfully applied in all circumstances.

IS THIS US?

“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved...” (Col. 3:12).

These are very exalted titles. They define a people of a character, disposition and purpose far removed from the world. “Elect of God, holy and beloved.” A rare and different kind of people who are strikingly outstanding—as the apostle continues—for “kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.” IS THAT US? Does the description fit?

“And let the PEACE OF GOD rule in your hearts” (Col. 3:15).

We are told, “Great peace have they which LOVE THY LAW and NOTHING shall offend them.” Peace is a precious gift of God, bestowed ONLY where HIS conditions are complied with. We are told “*the work of RIGHTEOUSNESS shall be peace*” (Isa. 32:17). And conversely (Isa. 48:22), “*There is NO peace to the wicked.*”

Peace is spoken throughout the Scriptures as a supreme divine blessing. Like many blessings, it requires a certain amount of spiritual discernment to even RECOGNIZE its desirability, and usually too, a certain amount of previous worldly disappointment. Peace is a spiritual quality that has little appeal to the pride and ambition of the flesh.

PEACE WITH GOD

It is not just abstract peace, as such, that is the promised blessing. It is “*peace WITH GOD through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Rom. 5:1). It is a living, personal relationship of joyful unity and harmony with the Eternal Creator.

Jesus laid the foundation for this peace in the bitter road he trod that culminated in Calvary. Peace with God is clearly not a lightly-won privilege. Nor is it lightly HELD. Its requirements are summed up in the following verses (Col. 3:16-17) –

“Let the word of Christ DWELL IN YOU richly in all WISDOM – whatsoever ye do, do ALL in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Here again, “all” is the key. Bound up with this “all” lies life and peace. Short of that, there is only conflict. Again we sing: “Yet while I seek, but find Thee not, NO PEACE my wandering mind shall see. When shall all my wanderings cease, and ALL my steps to Thee-ward tend? Is there a thing beneath the sun that strives with Thee my heart to share? Tear it thence and reign alone the Lord of EVERY motion there.”

HOW MANY FIND IT?

When we ACCOMPLISH in our lives that of which we SING in our hymns, THEN – and ONLY then – have we “*peace with God.*” Paul, who said “*Be ye followers of me,*” said also –

“I count ALL things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of ALL things, and count them but refuse that I may win Christ” (Phil. 3:8).

And he continues, a little farther on, “Be careful for nothing,” we sing that, too! (Phil. 4:6) –

“Be careful for NOTHING: in everything rely on God, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

In very similar terms our Great Example said (Matt. 11:29) –

“Learn of me, for I am MEEK and LOWLY: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

THAT is peace. HOW MANY FIND IT?

(Taken from “Be Ye Transformed” Volume 2 Pages 302-310 by Bro. G. Growcott.)