

# CHRISTIAN WORKER

“We are workers together with Him...” (2 Corinthians 6:1)

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## A WORD OF THANKFULNESS

Andy Baker

Thankfulness is often a result of what we hear. There is the story of the man who was doing well at a job interview. The interviewer told the man, “You’re a very impressive candidate, but before I offer you the job, I want to know about this five-year gap in your employment here on your resume.” The man said, “Oh, that’s when I went to yale.” The interviewer stood, shook the man’s hand, and said, “I’m thankful to have found a man like you! Welcome to the company!” The man, full of gratitude, said, “Thank you so much for the job.” Thankfulness, despite circumstances, is often a result of what we hear!

The prayer of thanksgiving that Paul offers in Colossians 1 is, by earthly accounts, bizarre. It is Paul’s thankfulness from a Roman prison. It is Paul’s thankfulness for a church full of Christians he had most-likely never met. It is Paul’s thankfulness which he offered continually. It is Paul’s thankfulness based on what he had heard, not seen. It is Paul’s thankfulness for the gospel that the Colossians had heard but were now being drawn away from. The first part of this prayer from verse 3 to verse 8 reads as one long sentence, but repeatedly, the emphasis is thankfulness based on the word “**heard**” (follow this word and its synonyms from verse 3 onward). Notice some principles of the prayer of thankfulness Paul prays based on what was heard:

**Thankfulness to God comes from hearing about the church full of faith, hope and love (1:3-5).** All three of the “big three” (faith, hope, and love) are all mentioned here in this prayer of thanks. Can you imagine Epaphras visiting Paul in jail and telling him excitedly, “Paul, you wouldn’t

believe the church in Colossae. These Christians are so full of faith that everyone in the Lycus Valley has heard about Jesus. Their love for one another is just as fervent as they’re models of Christian character and confident hope (Col. 3:12-14).” The fulness of faith, love and hope of the Colossian Christians occurred solely by the truth of the gospel (v. 5). It was the heresy that they were hearing making them full of the opposite: disloyalty, doubt, and pride (Col. 2:8, 18-23).

**Thankfulness to God comes from hearing that the gospel is still bearing fruit in the world (Col. 1:6).** Center stage in verse 6 is “the truth of the gospel” from verse 5, which has come into to all the world and “is growing” and is present with these Christians. The Colossians had it originally come to them most likely by the Phrygians present on Pentecost who obeyed the gospel (Acts 2:10), or by

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# THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

Cody Westbrook

The greatest crime ever perpetrated on humanity began in the garden and continues to this day. When Satan approached Eve in the garden, he did so with one purpose—the abduction of her heart. The devil is not sovereign, and thus he cannot force his will upon anyone. He is a master of deception and thrives upon his ability to bamboozle and con humanity into believing his lies. If he can kidnap our minds and steal our loyalty, then he has us. “The serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness” (2 Cor. 11:3). He captured her thoughts and thus she sinned, and destruction followed.

This pattern continues to repeat itself daily. The world is full of doctrines, ideas, philosophies, and practices which are carnally appealing. If Satan can persuade us to think as he wants us to think then we will do what he wants us to do (cf. Mark. 7:20-22). If one wanted to know why the culture plunges deeper into the ocean of secularism and hedonism, all one must do is look at how people think. If my happiness is all that matters, then abortion is inconsequential. If my personal feelings are the ultimate determination of what is right, then gender and sexuality are negligible. If there is no God to whom I must answer, then I can think, speak, and act however I want. This is the mentality that plagues our world.

How can Christians live in a world such as this without being corrupted (2 Cor. 11:3)? How can the church serve God and seek the lost in a society hell-bent on destruction? The answer is simple, yet profound. We must prioritize Christ and give Him the place of preeminence He deserves. This is the subject of the book of Colossians.

Colossae was a small city located in the Lycus River Valley. The church there was likely composed of a gentile majority, and although Paul had never visited (Col. 2:1), he was well acquainted with them through Epaphras, a fellow laborer and, perhaps, one of his converts (cf. Col. 1:7-8; 4:12-13; Acts 19). Though they were

faithful and fruitful (Col. 1:3-8), they were in danger. What is known as the “Colossian Heresy,” existed there and contained several components. There was a Jewish element seeking to impose dietary regulations and other trappings of Judaism (Col. 2:11-16). Asceticism also had a presence (Col. 2:20-23) along with other “philosophies” (Col. 2:8) which emphasized the worship of angels (Col. 2:18) and denied the deity of Christ (Col. 1:15-20). Though Gnosticism would not become a major problem in the church for some time, based on Paul’s writing it seems likely that some early variation of it existed in Colossae. Paul wrote Colossians, primarily, to give them the tools they needed to combat these false doctrines. The answer to the problem was simple—Jesus.

It has been well said that while Ephesians emphasizes the church of Christ, Colossians emphasizes the Christ of the church. Indeed, the subject of Jesus the Christ saturates the book to the extent that references to Jesus can be found in 75 of the 95 total verses it contains.

- Chapter 1 emphasizes the priority and preeminence of Jesus Christ. The heart of the chapter, and the book, is found in Colossians 1:15-23 where Paul lists 7 items proving the deity and superiority of Christ (15-20), then gives what could be considered his purpose statement in verses 21-23. The Supreme Savior has reconciled us to God to be holy in His sight. This remains true so long as we continue firmly grounded in Him.
- Chapter 2 urges the saints to defend Christ. In this chapter, Paul identifies the various strands of false doctrine seeking to steal the minds of the Colossian Saints away from Christ. He commanded, “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of

Clay Bond

men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8).

- Chapters 3 and 4 explain practically how to apply Christ. When we enthrone Jesus as the King of our lives, He will dictate our priorities (3:1-4), direct our moral decisions (3:5-14), determine our worship (3:15-17), and bless our relationships (3:18-4:6).

As we seek to be in the world but not of it, we must be reminded of the necessity of Christ. If we revere Him and apply His teaching and influence as we should, we will have all we need to pursue and maintain holiness in this world. Jesus is the answer for all that ails the church and the culture. It is for this reason that this edition of the Christian Worker, and the ones to follow, seek to engage in a study of Colossians.

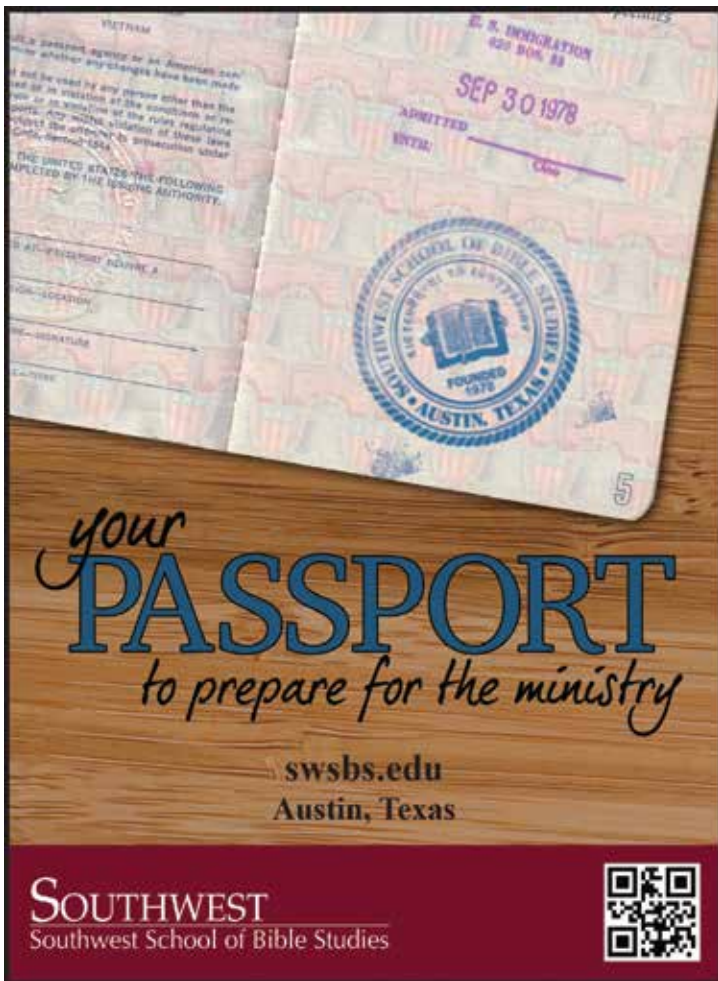
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There are people who have grown up in the church of Christ, but who have never grown in the Christ. What I mean by that is that there Christians who have been members of the church of Christ for decades, but they have never grown spiritually. This was the case with those being addressed in Hebrews 5:11-14, they had remained babes in Christ! Most would agree that the writer of Hebrews addressed these comments to people who had been Christians for 20, or even 30 years, but who had failed “grow up” in Christ.

We must be honest that a lack of spiritual growth is detrimental to our soul. It produces mediocrity, indifference, apathy, and spiritual stagnation, none of which are pleasing to God (Heb. 10:38). When a person fails to grow spiritually, they have no way of having their spiritual “senses exercised to discern both good and evil” and therefore they are in no position to bring glory to God (Heb. 5:14; 1 Thess. 5:21-22; John 15:8). The goal of spiritual growth is to build Christ-like character. Jesus Christ said, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (John 8:31).

There are a host of passages that put a tremendous amount of emphasis on spiritual growth. When Jesus gave the Great Commission, He stressed the importance of spiritual growth by stating that those who are taught the Gospel and baptized would need further teaching (Matt. 28:18-20). After baptism, every Christian needs to add to their faith the Christian graces recorded in 2 Peter 1:5-11. In fact, the whole epistle of Second Peter emphasizes spiritual growth. Peter defines spiritual growth in chapter one, talks about the challenges to spiritual growth in chapter two, and gives incentives for spiritual growth in chapter three. Additional passages that discuss spiritual growth are: 1 Timothy 4:12-15; Ephesians 4:14-15; Philippians 1:9-10 and Colossians 1:9-10.

Spiritual growth does not happen by accident. First, there must be a sincere desire to grow. Peter wrote, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1 Pet. 2:2-3). Sometimes, Christians start off on fire for the Lord, but over time they lose that zeal and their faith becomes like smoldering coals, dwindling and on the verge of going completely out. If that describes your faith, you need to rekindle the fire that at one time burned within you. Remember, we are to be fervent in spirit as we serve the



Lord (Rom. 12:11).

If we are going to grow, we must follow a process. In Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9-10 we see a step-by-step process that will help us achieve growth. Paul prayed that the brethren would be filled with a knowledge of God's will. This would be an intellectual knowledge that comes from studying God's word. As Peter declared, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen" (2 Pet. 3:18). God has given us His word so we can know how to live for him (2 Pet. 1:3). A knowledge of God's will teach us the difference between what is holy and unholy, acceptable, or unacceptable. Ignorance will keep us from experiencing everything God wants us to enjoy as His children and will ultimately destroy us (Hos. 4:6).

Paul then prayed that Christians would take that intellectual knowledge and treat it with wisdom and spiritual understanding. God does not just want us to know His word, He wants us to *do* something with it! As Paul said,

"Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). As we learn God's Word, we must make it personal. Next time you study God's Word stop and ask yourself these two questions: "What is the writer saying?" and "How does this apply to me?" This is how we take intellectual knowledge and treat it with wisdom and spiritual understanding.

Paul also prayed that Christians would walk worthy and bear fruit. This has to do with the application of what we learn and understand to be right. It is not enough to know the Word and understand it. As James said, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (Jas. 1:22). Application of God's Word brings about spiritual transformation which glorifies God. Jesus said, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:8). Bearing fruit unto God is bringing forth the product of right and holy living which is essential if we are going to faithful children of God. This does not happen by accident. There is a Divine process that helps us achieve this which is seen in Paul's prayer.

There is one final thing that we note in Paul's prayer for spiritual growth, he begins with "knowledge" and then at the end he mentions "knowledge" again. The goal here is not just intellectual knowledge of the Scriptures. God wants our intellectual knowledge to create intimacy with Him. An intimate knowledge of the Scriptures, pair with life application, brings us into a closer relationship with our Heavenly Father. Spiritual growth is the process of a Christian drawing near to God (Jas. 4:7-8).

Every Christian needs to be growing. Every Christian can be growing if they will cultivate in their heart a sincere desire to grow, determine to take proper nourishment from the Scriptures, and set their minds to make application of God's Word. Remember, spiritual growth does not happen overnight. It takes time, patience and effort on our part. If we will do our part, God will work with us and polish us into the shiny diamond that is of great worth in the sight of God.

CW



## THE PREEMINENT CHRIST

Neal Pollard

So often, Colossians has been called the epistle that exalts the Christ of the church. These particular verses have been called "the Christ hymn." Notice how Paul sings His praises in this paragraph of his epistle. How is His preeminence demonstrated?

**He is the picture of God (15).** John, introducing Christ in his gospel, says, "No one has seen God at any time" (John 1:18; cf. 1 John 4:12). People have tried to depict God many times, but from Michelangelo to George Burns, all fail. Only Christ is the accurate image of the invisible God. John writes, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we behold His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of

the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

**He is the firstborn (15).** This means that He is supreme and preeminent, not a created being. The very next verse tells us that He created everything that was created (He couldn't create Himself). He is placed above His creation, but He is not aloof or detached from us.

**He is the agent of creation (16-17).** When we look at what Paul says here, we are in awe of Christ. His participation in creation was exhaustive (16). Paul keeps repeating the word “all.” The phrase “all things” is used by Paul three times here, just in case we miss the point! The production of His creation is exquisite (16). Just examine the heavens and the earth. Look at photos of underwater life, outer space, and all seven continents. Think about what you can see but also what you cannot see--wind, sound, involuntary actions of the body! Further, the place over His creation is exalted (16-17). All is subject to Him! His power over His creation is extreme (17). He holds it all together. The earth is rotating at a speed of 1040 miles per hour. There are approximately two million asteroids one kilometer across or larger hurtling through our solar system at any given time. The earth averages 93 million miles from the sun. If it was 83 million or 103 million, we'd all be dead. If the gravitational forces extended by the sun and moon with the rotation of the earth changed or ceased, we would have a tidal wave of catastrophes. Why do things continue to exist on this earth? Christ holds it all together!

**He is the head of the church (18).** The next time you feel sorry for yourself, think about the role Christ plays right now--today! In addition to His sustaining work over the earth, He is the head of the church (Matt. 28:18). Contrary to what some teach, Christ does not share His authority with anyone. Paul mentions the headship of Jesus later in the letter (2:10; 2:19). If He is the head, only He can make the rules and determine right and wrong. There is radical change occurring in the religious world right now. Religious leaders are reversing previous stances or creating new beliefs. That's not how it works! He will come to have first place in everything!

**He is the firstborn from the dead (18).** He is not just before us in the creation, but He's also the forerunner of the new birth. “Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). This has been the message since the first gospel sermon (Acts 2:24). This is the reason we have hope today (1 Pet. 1:13).

**He is the One in Whom is all fulness (19).** If he missed anything, Paul sums it all up by saying “all fullness dwells in Him.” He will soon say, “In Him all the fulness of deity

dwells in human form” (2:9).

The false teachers Paul addresses in this letter had it wrong. Christ is not just sufficient. He is supreme! I'm afraid the Christ of too many people's religion and personal life is far inferior to the Christ revealed in Colossians. They have reduced and replaced His teaching. They have denied His creation. They have ignored His sustaining. They have forgotten His second coming.

Steven Hawking was asked what the biggest unsolved problem is in physics today. He said, “The theory of everything...We feel that we are near, but we never get there. It always seems just over the rainbow's edge.” But that question was solved 2000 years ago for people who accepted God at His Word. Men will continue to grope for that pot of gold somewhere over that rainbow, until they accept Christ.

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## THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL

John Haffner

**T**he theme of hope holds a prominent place in the New Testament. Unlike how many use the word today, Biblical hope is never doubtful. The Greek term describes confident and joyful anticipation of blessing or reward. This concept is linked numerous times with the identity and role of the Savior. The Lord Jesus Christ is our hope and the anchor of the soul (1 Tim. 1:1; Heb. 6:19-20). As bondservants of Christ let us remember the joy and peace which is found only in Him (John. 13:16-17; Rom. 15:13). Based on the promises of His word, it is appropriate to expect blessing through submitting to His gospel and living for Him in faithful obedience (Gal. 2:20; 3:7-9). Rather than becoming distracted in earthly pursuits, our focus must remain on the hope of the gospel. This is what Paul addressed in Colossians 1:21-23.

Hope is lost by our sin (Col. 1:21a). Paul expressed how the spiritual condition of the saints and faithful brethren in Colossae was once very different. Before obeying the word of the truth of the gospel, they were without hope. Their previous lives, devotions, and activities were under the power of darkness. He described them in this state as being alienated, that is, estranged and excluded from fellowship. We should highlight in this section the concept of personal responsibility. Their sad former condition was not God's fault (Jas. 1:13-14). It wasn't the result of sin committed by

Adam or their other ancestors (Eze. 18:20). Notice how Paul by inspiration specifically mentions the Colossians' mindset and their works. Their hopeless condition was a direct result of their own wrong thinking and wrong actions! The same is true for those in sin today. Our deeds grow from where we allow our mind to focus (Pro. 23:7; Matt. 12:35). As with others, they had conducted themselves according to worldliness to become enemies (in opposition, adversaries) of Christ (Eph. 2:2, 12; Jas. 4:4). Wickedness separates from our Holy God and the hope He provides (Isa. 59:2; Hab. 1:13).

Hope is gained by Christ's sacrifice (Col. 1:21b-22). This shameful state is transformed into a joyous one through the work of Christ the Reconciler. He is the only way to come to the Father (John 14:6). Due to Jesus "having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20), all are granted the opportunity for cleansing and to turn from enemy to ally. Confident expectation of blessing is for those who stand with God, not opposed to Him (Nah. 1:6-7; Rom. 8:31). Our text provides the purpose for this reconciliation—to make us holy and blameless in God's sight. Those who receive the inheritance are those found in Him and abiding in His doctrine (Eph 1:7-12; Phil. 3:8-9; 2 John 9). What's more, Paul added power to this teaching by giving a location. Where were the Colossian brethren reconciled? They were reconciled "in the body of His flesh through death." This shows the importance, not just of the sacrifice given at the cross, but of the security of placement within His body. The Lord adds the saved into His one body, the church (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 1:18). The church was purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 1:18-19), and all those outside that body need reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-21). Uniting with His death is essential to having salvation, hope, and every spiritual blessing (Rom. 6:3-5; 8:24; Eph. 1:3).

Hope remains by our loyalty (Col. 1:23). We must see that this joyous state of right fellowship with God is conditional. Paul told the Colossians how maintaining their devotion and commitment would be required. Elsewhere in the New Testament we read, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed" (John 8:31) and "in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Gal. 6:9). Conditional statements such as these speak to the truth that a Christian can lose their salvation. It is possible to fall from grace (Gal. 5:4). Just as a relationship with sin separates from God, a relationship with God requires separation from sin (1 Pet. 1:13-16; 1 John 3:3). We must live out our loyalty to the message of truth which was once for all delivered (Jude 3). We should grow our faith, remember Christ's cleansing, and be diligent to be found by Him in peace (2 Pet. 1:5-11; 3:14). To remain in alignment with Christ's

will, we must always prioritize conduct worthy of the gospel (Eph. 4:1-2; Phil. 1:27). If we desire to never be moved away from the hope of the gospel, then we must set our focus firmly upon the Lord and His teaching (1 Cor. 15:58; Col. 3:1-4).

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## CHRIST IN YOU

Kevin Cauley

God had an eternal purpose to establish the church based on the work and merit of Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:11). He knew that man would sin, sever his relationship with God, and instigate division with other people. So, He devised a plan to pay for all of mankind's sins, restore their relationship with Him, and foster human unity. This plan was Christ and the church. Paul discusses this in detail in Ephesians chapters two and three. In Colossians 1:24-29 he summarizes this as He focuses on the central Person of that plan, Jesus Christ.

Paul was behind this plan one hundred percent and suffered because of it, but he rejoiced in those sufferings knowing that God's eternal purpose was being fulfilled. Paul's desire was to "fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ." He was not suggesting that Christ's afflictions lacked anything. Rather, it was he who lacked the level of sufferings that Christ experienced. As Christ suffered so that He might establish the church, Paul also sought to follow that example that he might know "the

fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil. 3:10).

For the church, Christ made Paul a minister (*diakonos*). This is the Greek word from which the English word deacon derives and correlates to the specific service to which God called Paul: to minister the word of God to the gentiles (Acts 9:15-16, Rom. 15:16). God wanted the gentiles to know the gospel so that they could be part of the church.

God’s purposes, however, were not always fully known. They were, at one time, a mystery that even the angels sought to understand (1 Pet. 1:12). This mystery was hidden for many years by God, veiled in prophecies that hinted at, but did not fully reveal, the gospel. God unveiled this message, however, to Paul and the other apostles through revelation, and they preached it plainly to those who would hear and obey (Rom. 16:25-26, 1 Cor. 2:10-13).

What is the central message of this revealed mystery? It is Christ in you, the hope of glory. To fully restore the broken relationship created by sin, God offered the sacrifice of His only Son, Jesus Christ. He punished Him for the sins of the world so that He could be both just and the justifier of them that believe (Rom. 3:26). This sacrifice restored fellowship between God and mankind and provided the basis upon which every single person could come together in loving fellowship in the church. Christ Himself is the wealth of this mystery, and He dwells in the heart of every believer (Eph. 3:17). His Spirit treats every Christian as His holy temple (1 Cor. 6:19).

Only Christ gives the hope of glory guaranteed to the Christian by His indwelling Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22, Eph. 1:14). Just as Christ was glorified by resurrection, the Christian will be glorified with a resurrected body to dwell in eternity (1 Cor. 15:50-54). This hope is the anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, linked to Jesus (Heb. 6:19-20).

Having these great blessings in Jesus Christ, Paul let others know about it. “Him we preach!” This preaching involves both warning and teaching in all wisdom. This wisdom comes from above, not from below (Jas. 3:13-18). Only in Christ may one obtain “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). Philosophers have sought this for generations. The so-called great men of the world have never ceased to look for it, but without Christ, they are doomed to futility.

The purpose of communicating this truth is that everyone may be presented perfect in Christ Jesus. The word “perfect” comes from the Greek word *teleios*. It means to be brought to an end, completed, finished. In reference to people, it means that one is a full-grown adult, mature, capable of reproduction. God wants spiritual adults who

may reproduce and fulfill His purposes—Christians who can produce more Christians—so that as many people as possible may come into the body of Christ. To this end, Paul worked, and it is the end to which Christians must work today.

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other disciples who brought the message to them (perhaps Epaphras - see v. 6-7). The gospel is what has the power of God to change men. Neither stories, nor suppositions, nor man’s wisdom or any other thing which we hear can cause us, or the church, to grow as God desires. The gospel pure and simple is what Christians must hold to – a point which has great bearing upon the point of the Colossian letter and the proper perspective of the “Colossian Heresy” dealt with later.

**Thankfulness to God comes from hearing and learning from faithful gospel preachers who tell us the grace of God in its fullness (1:6-8).** The way Epaphras is described here leads us to believe he was either a local preacher or maybe a regional preacher in the area surrounding Colossae (see Col. 4:12-13; Phm. 23). The church heard and learned the “grace of God in truth” from him (v. 6-7). The Holy Spirit through Paul describing Epaphras as a “faithful minister” shows that he had a good reputation that both Paul and the Colossians knew. He told the church what is right and was fully invested in them holding to what is right. The church should be thankful for where the gospel is preached in fullness, in a spirit of love, and in a way people can easily hear and understand (Rom. 1:16-17). Where gospel preaching is substituted for weak and diluted philosophies of men, the church needs to reassess what REALLY has the power to save and desire ONLY to hear that from their preacher (Rom. 10:13-17)!

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## From the Director's desk



Steven Lloyd  
Director SWSBS

**A**t the 2022 Freed-Hardeman Lectures, Jared Jackson gave me a copy of the reprinted work “Notes from the Margin of My Bible,” a work of his father’s from years ago. It was originally a two-volume paperback set. It is now in a beautiful hardbound edition.

Troy Cummings was my Greek and Hermeneutics instructor in the late 1970’s. When he passed away, he left his library and notes to my dear friend Don Ruhl and to me. We had to flip a coin on a number of his works to determine who got what. I ended up with Troy’s Bible (ASV). To thumb through its pages, makes me think it had been through a tour with the Red Cross with all the red ink notes and underlining and circled words. I wish I could decipher what he meant by some of the marks.

I have a few marks in my Bible as well. As a case in point, I circled every reference to “death” in Romans 6:1-14. It occurs at least 15 times. It may not occur in every verse in the range of verses from 1 to 14, but it occurs more than once in other verses. I am including any form of the word “death” like “died” or “dead.” I encourage you to read the text with this in mind.

Chapter 5 ends affirming that where sin abounded, grace abounded more exceedingly. Based on that affirmation, Paul anticipates the question he poses at the beginning of chapter 6: “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” He responds with a resounding “No!” Why? Because we died to sin. We are “free from sin” and have become “servants of righteousness” (6:18). The emphasis in Romans 6:1-14 is on “dying” to sin.

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