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by John Nelson Darby

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John Nelson Darby, 1800-1882

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COLOSSIANS

The epistle to the Colossians looks at the Christian as risen with Christ, but not, as in that to the Ephesians, as sitting in heavenly places in Christ. A hope is laid up for him in heaven; he is to set his affections on things above, not on things on the earth. He has died with Christ and he is risen with Him, but not sitting in heavenly places in Him yet. We have in it a proof of that which other epistles demonstrate, namely, the blessed way in which our God in His grace turns everything to the good of those that love Him.

In the epistle to the Ephesians the Holy Ghost had developed the counsels of God with regard to the church — its privileges. The Christians of Ephesus had nothing to be reproached with:* therefore the Holy Ghost could use the occasion furnished by that faithful flock to unfold all the privileges which God had ordained for the church at large, by virtue of its union with Jesus Christ its Head, as well as the individual privileges of the children of God.

[* How painful it is to see this beloved church taken afterwards as an example of the first love being lost! But all tends to the end.]

It was not so with the Colossians. They had in some measure slipped away from this blessed portion, and lost the sense of their union with the Head of the body; at least, if it was not actually so, they were assailed by the danger, and liable to the influence of those who sought to draw them away from it, and subject them to the influence of philosophy and Judaism, so that the apostle had to occupy himself with the danger, and not merely with their privileges. This union with our Head thank God! cannot itself be lost; but as a truth in the church, or of realisation by individuals, it may. We know this but too well in the church of the day we live in. This however gives occasion to the Spirit of God to develop all the riches and all the perfection which are found in the Head and in His work, in order to recover the members of the body from their spiritual feebleness, or maintain them in the full practical enjoyment of their union with Christ, and in the power of the position gained for them by that union. For us this is abiding instruction with regard to the riches that are in the Head.

2 If the epistle to the Ephesians delineates the privileges of the body, that to the Colossians reveals the fullness that is in the Head, and our completeness in Him. Thus in that to the Ephesians the church is the fullness of Him who filleth all in all; in that to the Colossians, all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily, and we are complete in Him. There is another difference however, which it is important to remark. In the epistle to the Colossians we do not — save in the expression, “love in the Spirit” — find any mention of the Holy Ghost. He is fully brought forward in the Ephesians. But on the other hand, we have Christ as our life far more fully developed, of equal importance in its place. In Ephesians we have more largely the contrast of heathenism with christian privilege and state. The formation of the soul in living likeness to Christ is largely developed in Colossians. It is more, in the well-known expressions, Christ in us than we in Christ, though these cannot be separated. A further important difference is that in Ephesians the unity of Jew and Gentile in one body holds a large place. In Colossians the Gentiles only are in view, though in connection with the doctrine of the body. These differences well noted, we may say that the two epistles have a great resemblance in their general character.

They commence in nearly the same way.* Both are written from Rome, while the apostle was a prisoner in that city, and sent by the same messenger and on the same occasion, as well probably as that to Philemon: so the names and salutations give us reason to believe. The address to the Ephesians places them perhaps more immediately in connection with God Himself, instead of presenting them as in brotherly communion on earth. They are not called brethren in Ephesians 1:1, only saints and faithful in Christ Jesus. They are viewed as walking on earth in Colossians, though risen. Hence there is a long prayer for their walk, though on high and holy ground as delivered. In Ephesians it begins with the full purpose and fruit of God’s counsels. In that epistle the apostle’s heart expands at once in the sense of the blessings enjoyed by the Ephesians. They were blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ. For the Colossians there was a hope laid up in heaven. And there is a preface of many verses referring to the gospel they had heard, and introducing his prayer for their walk and state down here. This brings us where Ephesians 1:7 brings us, but with a much more enlarged development of the personal

glory of Christ, and more in an historical way of God's actual dealings. It is also a more personal church address than the Ephesians

[* The name of Timotheus is not found in the address to the saints at Ephesus.]

3 But let us consider more closely that which is said to the Colossians. The blessed calling of which the apostle speaks (Ephesians 1:3-10), and the privileges of the inheritance (11-14), are wanting in Colossians; risen but on earth, they are not sitting in heavenly places, all things being thus their inheritance. It is not they in Christ there, but Christ in them the hope of glory, and the prayer referred to above fills up the chapter till we come to the common ground of Christ's glory in Colossians 1:15; and even here the divine glory of Christ is brought out in Colossians, the simple fact of the purpose of God as to Christ in Ephesians And not only we have not God's inheritance ours; but in Colossians the Spirit as earnest of it is not spoken of. This indeed we have seen is characteristic of Colossians. The Spirit is not spoken of, but life. We have the Person and divine glory of Christ, and our completeness in Him, more insisted on in Colossians; but not the saints' place with God in the same way. Further, as the saint is looked at as on earth, not in Christ on high, his responsibility is brought in (chap. 1:23). Colossians 1:3 answers to Ephesians 1:16: only one feels that there is more fullness in the joy of Ephesians 1:16. Faith in Christ and love to all saints are found in each exordium, as the occasion of the writer's joy.

The subject of his prayer is quite different. In the Ephesians, where he develops the counsels of God with regard to the church, he prays that the saints may understand them, as well as the power by means of which they participated in them. Here he prays that their walk may be guided by divine intelligence. But this belongs to another cause, to the point of view from which, in his discourse, he looks at the saints. We have seen that in the epistle to the Ephesians, he views them as sitting in the heavenlies. Their inheritance consequently is that of all things which are to be gathered together under Christ as Head. Here he prays for them in view of a hope laid up for them in heaven; his prayer therefore refers to their walk, that it may be in harmony with the object which they had set before them. As on earth and in danger of not adhering to the Head, the believers in Colosse were in danger of departing from that object. He prayed therefore in view

of that heavenly hope. They had heard of this perfect and glorious hope. The gospel had proclaimed it everywhere.

4 It was this gospel preached in view of a hope laid up in heaven which had produced fruit among men, fruit that was characterised by its heavenly source. Their religion, that which governed their heart in these relationships with God, was heavenly. The Colossians were in danger of falling back into the current of ordinances, and of the religious customs of man living in the world, whose religion was in connection with the world in which he dwelt, and not enlightened, not filled with heavenly light. There is nothing but conscious union with Christ which can keep us securely there. Ordinances to reach Him can have no place where we are united to Him; the philosophy of human thoughts none, where we possess livingly divine ones in Christ.

Nevertheless how precious it is — even if we are not in the full height of our calling — to have an object set before our hearts which delivers us from this world, and from the influences which hide God from us! Such is the apostle's object in this scripture. He directs the eyes of the Colossians to heaven, in order that they may see Christ there, and regain that sense of their union with the Head which they had in some measure lost, or were in danger of losing. The groundwork was however there — faith in Christ and love to all saints. They only needed realising their union with the Head; which moreover could alone maintain them in the heavenly element above ordinances, above human and earthly religion.

The apostle, in order to raise them up, sets out as usual from the point where he found good in the saints to whom he wrote. This heavenly hope had reached them and had produced fruit. It is this which distinguishes Christianity from all other religions, and in particular from the Jewish system, which — although individuals who were in it by grace sighed for heaven — hid God behind the veil, and enveloped the conscience in a series of ordinances at a distance from Him.

Now, based upon this hope which placed the inner life of the Christians in connection with heaven, the apostle prays that the Colossians may be filled with the knowledge of the will God in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. It is the fruit of a risen man's connection with God on the earth. This is very different from commandments and ordinances. It is the

fruit of intimate communion with God, of knowledge of His character and of His nature by virtue of this communion; and, although it refers to practical life, as belonging to the inner life, it leaves ordinances completely behind. The apostle had to begin at this practical end, at christian life. Perhaps the Colossians did not at first understand the bearing of these instructions, but they contained a principle which, already planted in their heart and capable of being re-awakened, led them to the point which the apostle aimed at, and was at the same time a very precious privilege, the value of which they were in a position to apprehend. Such is charity. The apostle develops their privileges in this respect with force and clearness, as one to whom such a walk was well known, and moreover with the power of the Spirit of God. They are not in heaven but on earth, and this is the path that suited those risen with Christ and looking to heaven from the earth. It is divine life on earth, not the Holy Ghost putting the soul of the believer at the center of divine counsels, as in Ephesians 3 through Christ dwelling in the heart by faith.

5 The first principle of this practical heavenly life was the knowledge of the will of God — to be filled with it, not to run after it as a thing without us, nor in indecision, in uncertainty, as to what it was, but to be filled with it by a principle of intelligence which comes from Him, and which forms the understanding and the wisdom of the Christian himself. The character of God was livingly translated in the appreciation of everything that the Christian did. And remark here that the knowledge of God's will is based on the spiritual state of the soul — wisdom and spiritual understanding. And this is of all practical importance. No particular direction by man as to conduct meets this at all — rather saves us from the need of spiritual understanding. No doubt a more spiritual mind may help me in the discernment of God's will;* but God has connected the discovery of the path of His will, His way, with the inward state of the soul, and causes us to pass through circumstances — human life here below — to test and to discover to ourselves what that state is, and to exercise us therein. The Christian has by his spiritual state to know God's ways. The word is the means (compare John 17:17, 19). God has a way of His own which the vulture's eye hath not seen, known only to the spiritual man, connected with, flowing from, and to, the knowledge of God (compare Exodus 33:13). Thus the Christian walks worthy of the Lord; he knows what

becomes Him,** and walks accordingly, that he may please Him in all things, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing by the knowledge of God.

[* It is one of the deceits of the heart that, when we really know God's will quite well, we go to ask advice of one no more spiritual than ourselves.]

[** There are three measures given of the Christian's walk in this form: worthy of God who has called us to His own kingdom and glory; worthy of the Lord, here; and worthy of the vocation with which we are called, that is, the Holy Ghost dwelling in the church, Ephesians 2; developed as it is in the end of chapter 3.]

6 It was not then only the character of life: this life was productive; it bore fruit, and, as life grew up, by increasing knowledge of God. But this connection with God brings in another very precious consideration. Besides the character and the living energy which are in relationship with this knowledge, the strength of the Lord* is developed in it also. They draw strength from Him. He gives it that they might walk thus. "Strengthened," he says, "with all power, according to the might of his glory." Such is the measure of the Christian's strength for a life in harmony with the character of God. Thus the character of this life is revealed in the heavenly glory on high — Jesus Christ. On earth its manifestation — as it had been in Jesus Christ — is realised in all patience and longsuffering with joy, in the midst of the sorrow and afflictions of the life of God in this world. This form of the life too is striking: all divine strength according to His glory given in order to be patient, to endure. What a character it gives to the Christian's life in this world! And there is a generous bearing with others which it enables us to maintain. Nor is anything a more manifest fruit of power than this. Will too is here subdued. Thus, in spite of all we have to endure, we have with God constant joy. It is a blessed picture of the form in which divine life manifests itself.

[* The antecedent is, I think, here the Lord; but the Lord and God are greatly merged in one thought.]

And here the apostle connects this life of endurance with that which is its source, its aim, and its present possession by faith. Walking thus we are full of joy, and we give thanks to the Father who has made* us meet to share the portion of the saints in light. Here are the saints established in their proper relationship with God (their Father; in heaven — in the light, that which God is, and in which He dwells. Thus we have the state of the

soul, the character of the walk, and the strength in which we accomplish it. As to meetness for God in light, we possess it. Moreover we are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

[* Take especial notice here, that it is not said "will make us meet," as a thing yet to be done, and in which we make progress.]

7 The means employed, and the practical character of the work which sets us in the light, are then presented, introducing us (as far as Colossians does) into the counsels of God, but in a practical way — in their results future or present, not in counsel nor as the mystery of His will.

The Father has delivered us from the power of darkness, and transported us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. It is not a Jewish rule for man; it is an operation of the power of God, who treats us as altogether by nature the slaves of Satan and of darkness; and places us by an act of that power in an entirely new position and relationship with Himself. We see indeed here, if we examine the principles in their origin, the same thing as in Ephesians 1:4, 5; 2:1-6, as to our position before. But it is evident that the fullness and definiteness of a new creation are wanting.* "The inheritance of the saints in light," "the kingdom of the Son of his love," remind us of Ephesians 1:4, 5; but it is not the thing itself, as it is in God's mind, but our having been made meet for it when here; nor consequently the development of a position with which one is familiar as standing in it. The power and the love of the Father have made us meet for it, and although the character of God is necessarily there as light and love, according to His relationship to His Son, yet what we have here is not our own relationship with God Himself, outside the question of whence He took us, but the work in general which places us there in contrast with our previous position. He has delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son; we have part in the inheritance of the saints in light: but where is the saint "without blame before him in love?" where our relationship to Him, according to the counsels of Him who saw only the good which He purposed in His own heart? where the "children unto himself by Jesus Christ," through His predestination before the world was?

[* We shall also see, further on, that the starting-point is somewhat different, and, though Ephesian ground is partially referred to, brings in man as he is found living in sin, and less absolutely to God, who finds him already dead

in sins, and creates him according to His own counsels. But of this hereafter. Further, in Ephesians 1:6 our place is full grace in Christ; in Colossians 1 it is present actual deliverance from the power of darkness and translation into the kingdom of the Son of His love — not grace or favor in the Beloved.]

8 In Ephesians deliverance is brought in as a consequence of the position in which the heirs, the objects of the eternal counsels of God, are seen.* Here deliverance is the chief subject. How dangerous and disastrous it is to depart from the Head and to lose the full consciousness, in the light, of our union with Him! How perfect and precious is that grace which takes notice of our condition, and brings us out of it to God, to make us enjoy — according to the power and grace of God — the inestimable position which He has given us in Christ!

[* This belongs to the principle mentioned above. In Ephesians, all is seen from the point of view of God's eternal counsels before evil existed, the good which He purposed in Himself, although redemption was necessary when evil had come in, and the glory of God Himself and the basis of our glory in the accomplishment of them, was made good in it. In Colossians man in evil is the object of grace.]

The means which the Spirit here employs to accomplish this work of grace is the development of the glory of the Lord, of the Son of His love.

Here alone, I believe, is the kingdom called the kingdom of the Son; and, I think, it is only as introducing His Person as the center of everything and giving us the measure of the greatness of the blessing. It is the kingdom of One who has this place, the Son of His love, into which we are introduced. It is indeed His kingdom; and in order that we may apprehend the character of this kingdom as it is now for us, and our nearness to God as having part in it, it is called the kingdom of the Son of His love. It is this which is the present foundation and characteristic of the relationship with God of those who are truly in and of it. As the kingdom of the Son of man, it is His manifestation hereafter in glory and in government. Here it is characterised by the relationship of the Son Himself to the Father, in His Person, with the addition of that which gives us a full title to share it — redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

9 The apostle, having thus introduced the Son in His relationship to the Father, as the central and mighty object which was to attract the heart of the Colossians and set them free from the yoke of ordinances, sketches now the different parts of the glory of that Person. If therefore the

assembly's own glory is wanting, that of Jesus is so much the rather set in stronger relief before us. Thus God brings good out of evil, and in every way feeds His beloved people.

The Lord Jesus is the image of the invisible God. It is in the Son of His love that we see what God is (compare John 1:18; and also 1 John 1:2). This is the first character of His personal glory, the essential center of all the rest. Now, in consequence of this proper character of His Person, He takes by right the position of representing God in the creation. Adam was created in some sort in the image of God, and placed as center in a creation that was subjected to him. But, after all, he was only a figure of the Christ, of Him who was to come. The Son, in His very Person, in His nature (and for us as in the bosom of the Father), is He who makes God known, because He presents Him in His own Person and in a full revelation of His being and of His character before men and in the whole universe; for all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Him. Nevertheless He is a man. He is thus seen of angels. We have seen Him with our eyes or by faith. Thus He is the image of the invisible God. The perfect character and living representation of the invisible God have been seen in Him. Wondrous truth for us with regard to the Person of our Savior!

But then what place can He have in creation when He has come into it according to the eternal counsels of God? He could have but one, namely, that of supremacy without contestation and without controversy. He is the firstborn of all creation; this is a relative name, not one of date with regard to time. It is said of Solomon, "I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth." Thus the Creator, when He takes a place in creation, is necessarily its Head. He has not yet made good His rights, because in grace He would accomplish redemption. We are speaking of His rights — rights which faith recognises.

He is then the image of the invisible God, and, when He takes His place in it, the Firstborn of all creation. The reason of this is worthy of our attention — simple, yet marvelous: He created it. It was in the Person of the Son that God acted, when by His power He created all things, whether in heaven or in the earth, visible and invisible. All that is great and exalted is but the work of His hand; all has been created by Him (the Son) and for Him. Thus, when He takes possession of it, He takes it as His inheritance

by right. Wonderful truth, that He who has redeemed us, who made Himself man, one of us as to nature, in order to do so, is the Creator. But such is the truth.

In connection with this admirable truth, it was a part of God's counsels that man should have dominion over all the works of His hands. Thus Christ, as man, has it by right and will take possession of it in fact. This part of the truth of which we are speaking is treated in Hebrews 2; we shall consider it in its place. I introduce it here merely that we may understand the circumstances under which the Son takes possession. The Spirit speaks of the One who is man, but the One who is at the same time Creator of all things, the Son of God. They were created by Him, they were necessarily then created also for Him.

Thus we have hitherto the glory of the Person of Christ and His glory in creation connected with His Person. In Him is seen the image of the invisible God. He has created all things: all is for Him; and He is the Firstborn of all that is created.

Another category of glory, another supremacy, is now presented. He takes a special place in relation to the assembly in the power of resurrection. It is the introduction of divine power, not in creation but in the empire of death; in order that others may participate in His glory by redemption, and by the power of life in Him. The first glory was, so to speak, natural — the latter special and acquired (although in virtue of the glory of His Person) by undergoing death, and all the power of the enemy in it. Accordingly it is connected, as we have just said, with redemption, and with the introduction of others into the participation of the same privileges. He is the Head of the body which is the assembly, the Beginning, the Firstborn from among the dead, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence. He is the Firstborn of creation, He is the Firstborn* according to the power of resurrection, in this new order of things in which man is predestined to an entirely new position, gained by redemption, and in which he participates in the glory of God (as far as that which is created can do so), and that by participating in divine life in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and everlasting life; and, as regards the assembly, as members of His body. He is the Firstborn of creation, the Firstborn from among the dead; the Creator and the conqueror of death and the enemy's power.

These are the two spheres of the display of the glory of God. The special position of the assembly, the body of Christ, forms a part of the latter. He must have this resurrection-glory, this universal pre-eminence and superiority also, as being man, for all the fullness (namely, of the Godhead, see chap. 2:9) was pleased to dwell in Him. What place could He have except that of first in all things! But, before speaking of that which follows, some important remarks are yet to be made on that which we have been considering.

[* One of these pre-eminences depends on His divine rights as Creator, the other on His work and on the power displayed in His humanity in the act of resurrection. He holds all as man and all by divine power; but in some sort it may be said that one part of His glory depends on His divinity, the other on His victory as man.]

The Son is here presented to us as Creator, not to the exclusion of the Father's power, nor of the operation of the Spirit. They are one, but it is the Son who is here set before us. In John 1 it is the Word who creates all things. Here, and in Hebrews 1, it is under the name of Son, that He, who is also the Word, is revealed to us. He is the Word of God, the expression of His thought and of His power. It is by Him that God works and reveals Himself. He is also the Son of God; and, in particular, the Son of the Father. He reveals God, and he who has seen Him has seen the Father. Inasmuch as born in this world by the operation of God through the Holy Ghost, He is the Son of God (Psalm 2:7; Luke 1:35). But this is in time, when creation is already the scene of the manifestation of the ways and counsels of God. But the Son is also the name of the proper relationship of His glorious Person to the Father before the world was. It is in this character that He created all things. The Son is to be glorified even as the Father. If He humble Himself, as He did for us, all things are put into His hands, in order that His glory may be manifested in the same nature in the assumption of which He humbled Himself. And already the power of life and of God in Him is manifested by resurrection, so that He is declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection. This is the proof of it.

In the epistle to the Colossians that which is set before us is the proper glory of His Person as the Son before the world was. He is the Creator as Son. It is important to observe this. But the persons are not separated in their manifestation. If the Son wrought miracles on earth, He cast out devils by the Spirit; and the Father who dwells in Him (Christ) did the

works. Also it must be remembered, that that which is said is said, when He was manifested in the flesh, of His complete Person, man upon earth. Not that we do not in our minds separate between the divinity and the humanity; but even in separating them we think of the one Person with regard to whom we do so. We say, Christ is God, Christ is man; but it is Christ who is the two. I do not say this theologically, but to draw the reader's attention to the remarkable expression, "All the fullness was pleased to dwell in him." All the fullness of the Godhead was found in Christ. The Gnostics, who in later years so much harassed the assembly, used this word "fullness" in a mystical and peculiar sense for the sum and source (and yet after all, in the sense of a locality; for it had limits which separated it from everything else) of divinity which developed itself in four pairs of beings — syzygies — Christ being only one of a pair.* It is not necessary to go further into their reveries, except to observe that, with different shades of thought, they attribute creation to a God either inferior or evil, who also was the author of the Old Testament. Matter, they said, did not proceed from the supreme God. They did not eat meat; they did not marry; at the same time they gave themselves up to all sorts of horrors and dissoluteness; and, strange to say, associated themselves with Judaism, worshipped angels, etc.

[* Indeed added to the four as supplementary.]

The apostle was often in conflict with these tools of Satan. Peter also mentions them. Here Paul sets forth, by the word of God, the whole fullness of the divinity of Christ. Far from being something inferior, an emanation, or having a place however exalted in those endless genealogies, all the fullness itself dwelt in Him. Glorious truth with regard to the Person of the Lord our Savior! We may leave all the foolish imaginations of man in the shade, in order to enjoy the perfect light of this glorious fullness of God in our Head and Lord. All the fullness was in Him. We know indeed the Father, but revealed by Him. We possess indeed the Spirit, but the fullness of the Spirit was in Him, and because, having accomplished our redemption and our purification, He then received that Spirit for us. And God Himself in all His fullness was revealed, without any reservation, in the Person of Christ; and this Christ is ours, our Savior, our Lord. He has been manifested to us and for us. What a glorious truth for us!

It is for His own glory, no doubt, that He should be known as He is, as love; but it is not the less true that this revelation was in connection with us. It is not only the Son revealing the Father, sweet and precious as that fact is; it is the fullness of the Godhead as such that is revealed and shown forth in Christ. It was the good pleasure of the fullness to dwell there.

But Christ was not only the Head of creation in virtue of the divine glory of His Person, and the Head of the assembly as risen from among the dead and victorious over the power of the enemy; creation, and all those who were to form the assembly, were alike far from God, and the latter were so even in their will; to be in relationship with God they must be reconciled to Him. This is the second part of the glory of Christ. Not only was it the good pleasure of the fullness of the Godhead to dwell in Him, but by Him to reconcile all things to itself, having made peace by the blood of the cross. This reconciliation of things in heaven as well as on earth is not yet accomplished. Peace is indeed made by the blood, but the power has not yet come in to bring back the whole into actual relationship with God according to the value of that blood.

Thus, in Israel, the blood was put upon the mercy-seat, and expiation — peace, was made; but besides this everything was sprinkled, and the sins of the people were confessed. This, with regard to Israel and to creation, has not yet been done. As to that which is outward, it remains still at a distance from God, although peace is made. We know that it is the good pleasure of God to reconcile all things in heaven, and on the earth, by virtue of this blood. All things shall be restored to order under a new rule. The guilty, remaining in their sins, will be outside this scene of blessing; but heaven and earth will be completely freed from the power of evil (and even from its presence during the millennium, as regards manifestation — still later, absolutely from its presence itself), according to the virtue of that blood which has separated between good and evil, according to the character of God Himself, and so glorified God that peace is made. God can act freely for blessing; but here the work is twofold, like the glory of the Person of Christ, and refers to the same objects as His glory. It is in the counsels of God to reconcile unto Himself all things in heaven and on the earth through Christ. But Christians He has already reconciled. Once not only defiled, like the creature, but enemies in their minds, He has already reconciled them in the body of His flesh by means of death. The

perfect work which Christ accomplished in His body, blotting out our sins and perfectly glorifying God His Father, has brought us into relationship with God in His holiness according to the efficacy of that work; that is to say, it is efficacious to present us, perfectly reconciled, holy, without blemish and without blame before His face; and with the consciousness of it, and of the love that has wrought it, and the favor into which we are brought, so that in the sense of this the heart is brought back to God: we are reconciled to God. This supposes that we continue steadfast in the faith unto the end.

The position of the Colossians gave room for this warning, being viewed as walking on earth.* We have seen that they had a little departed, or were in danger of departing, from the realisation of their union with Christ.

[* When the Christian is viewed as in Christ, there is no "if": we are in Him. When he is viewed as a pilgrim here, we are on the road to actual glory, and have to reach the goal, and here "if" comes in, and danger, and the need of being kept. But then we have the fullest assurance that we shall be kept and never perish, and be confirmed to the end, and the good work completed. Thus dependence on God is maintained in the saved, and confidence in His faithfulness.]

It will be noticed also, that the apostle speaks of his gospel as spread abroad in all the world. Grace had overstepped the narrow limits of Judaism and the expectation of the Messiah, in order to make known the testimony of the perfect love of God in the whole creation under heaven, of which Paul was the instrument as the apostle of the Gentiles.

[* Note here how clear and full the statement is: verse 14, redemption and forgiveness; verse 21, reconciliation with God; verse 13, deliverance and introduction into the kingdom; verse 12, we are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. All this we have, and so are called to walk worthy of the Lord.]

Hitherto, then, the Spirit of God has set before us the two pre-eminences of Christ, that over creation and that over the assembly, and the two reconciliations which answer to them; namely, first, that of the things over which Christ is set as Head, that is, of all things in heaven and earth; and second, that of Christians themselves: the latter already accomplished, the former yet to come. The ministry of the apostle had now the same double character. He has not undoubtedly to preach in heaven; but his ministry is exercised in every place under heaven where there is a soul to hearken. He

is a minister of that gospel; and then he is a minister of the assembly, a distinct service or ministry, making known its true position and its privileges, connected indeed with the other, in that the gospel went out also to the Gentiles to bring them in (v. 23, 25). By this last instruction he completed the word of God: an important principle with regard to the exclusive authority of the written word, which shows that its totality already exists, demonstrated by the subjects which it comprises; subjects which are entirely completed, to the exclusion of others which people may seek to introduce. The circle of truths which God had to treat, in order to reveal to us the glory of Christ and to give us complete instruction according to His wisdom, is entire, when the doctrine of the assembly is revealed. There were no others to be added.*

[* It is not a question here as to the dates of the books, but of the circle of subjects. The law, the kingdom, the Person of Christ, redemption and the ways of God, had already been brought out; the doctrine of the assembly was then to be revealed, in order to make the communications of God complete as to their subjects.]

But this doctrine in particular exposed the apostle to persecution and sufferings, which the Jews especially, and the enemy sought in every way to inflict upon him. But he rejoiced in this as a privilege, because Christ had suffered on account of His love for the assembly — for His own. The apostle speaks here, not of the efficacy of His death, but of the love which led Him to suffer. Looked at in this point of view, the apostle could participate in His sufferings, and we also in our little measure; but the apostle in a peculiar manner, as the special witness-bearer to this truth. If Christ had been content to accept the position of Messiah according to man, He would have been well received. If Paul had preached circumcision, the offense of the cross would have ceased: man could have taken part in the religion of God, if His religion had recognised man in the flesh. But if God is revealed, if His grace extends to the Gentiles, if by this grace, and without having respect to the Jew more than to the Gentile, He forms an assembly, which is the body of Christ, sharing the heavenly glory of His Son — this is what the flesh cannot endure. To be thus shut out as nothing worth before God, even in its religion, take what pains it might — this is unbearable. This is the source of the enmity of the Judaising spirit, which is founded on the flesh, on man, and which is constantly reappearing in the apostle's history, whether as exciting the hatred of the heathen, or as

corrupting the doctrine of Christ and the simplicity of the gospel. Religion in the flesh boasts its own peculiar privileges (see Philippians 3).

Thus we have a double ministry, as well as a double preeminence of Christ, and a double reconciliation; and each having a similar relationship the one to the other: Christ, the Head of all things in heaven and earth, the Head of the assembly; all things in heaven and earth are to be reconciled, Christians are reconciled; Paul exercises his ministry in the whole creation under heaven, he is the minister of the assembly. Naturally his ministry was limited to the earth. In every respect the extent and bearing of the glory of Christ, and of the ministry, went beyond the limits of Judaism, and were in contrast with the whole system.

The apostle then insists on the second part of his ministry, of which he had been just speaking; dwelling however particularly on that which met the need of the Colossians, and developing it, in order to secure them in the enjoyment of the whole circle of these precious truths. He completed the word of God by announcing this mystery, which had been hidden from all ages and generations, but was now manifested to the saints. No display of the ways of God since the creation had (in the truths on which it was founded, in the revelation of God — of His power, or of His thoughts, which formed its basis and gave it its character) contained the mystery contained in the doctrine of the assembly. It had not been communicated to any of those who formed part of the system which preceded it, or who were the medium of light to others, as instrumental in the revelation of the light of God. Angels, men, Israel, the prophets — all were alike in ignorance of it. The assembly (this body united to the Son of God become man and glorified) and the calling of the Gentiles into that unity was hidden from them all.

Now that Christ the Head of the assembly, the Head of the body, was glorified, the mystery of this body was made known. The apostle here dwells on one particular side of this subject, which, after the Person of Christ, forms the center of all God's ways. This side is Christ in us, especially as Gentiles, the hope of glory. And in this again we see how the saints are viewed as on earth, though in the power of resurrection. The aspect here given of the mystery is, Christ in us down here, not union with Him actually in glory, though inseparable from that. In fact, this mystery

was in every way a new thought, a new truth. That which was known was a Messiah who should be manifested among the Jews, the accomplishment of glory in their midst; the Gentiles at most having part in it, as subordinate to the people of God. But according to the doctrine of the assembly, Christ invisibly dwelt in the midst of the Gentiles,* and even in them; and as to the glory He was only the hope of it. A Christ dwelling in the hearts of men, and of men formerly rejected and outside the promises, and filling their hearts with joy and glory in the consciousness of union with Himself — this was the wondrous mystery prepared of God for the blessing of the Gentiles. It was this Christ, a Christ such as this, whom Paul preached, warning every man, and teaching every man according to the full development of the wisdom of God, which wrought mightily in the apostle by the Spirit, in order that he might present every man in a spiritual state answering to this revelation of Christ, as being also its fruit. Not that every man would receive it; but there was no longer any limit. All distinction between them was blotted out, alike by sin and by grace, and there was but one thing to do; that is, to seek that every man, by the power of the word and the Spirit, should reflect Christ and grow up unto the stature of His fullness, as revealed in the doctrine committed to the apostle. He labored for this according to the working of Christ in him; for Christ was not only the object, but the power that wrought to form souls after His own image.

[* I have already remarked that the Gentiles are especially in view in the Colossians, not the union of Jew and Gentile in one.]

Now this power wrought in the apostle's weakness; in a human heart, that felt the necessities of men and the difficulties that occurred by the way — that felt them as a man, although according to God, and was the fruit of His love. He desired that the Colossians should understand the conflict he had for them, and for all those who had never seen him, in order that they might be encouraged and be thoroughly united in love; so that they might understand, in all the riches of a full assurance, the mystery of God.

The apostle felt that it was this which they needed and which would be a blessing to them. He knew that union with Christ, realised in the heart, was a safeguard from the wiles of the enemy, to which the Colossians were exposed. He knew the unutterable value of this union, and even of its realisation by faith. He labored, he wrestled in prayer — for it is indeed a

conflict — in order that the full sense of this union with the glorious Head might be wrought in their hearts, so that the Christ on high should be in them by faith. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge were found in the mystery, of which this was to their souls the center and the power. They had not to seek elsewhere. Science, falsely so called, might pretend to furnish them with heights to which the simplicity of the doctrines of Christ did not reach; but in fact the wisdom of God and the depths of His counsels left these cloudy efforts of the human mind at an infinite distance. Moreover they were truth — reality — instead of being but the creatures of imagination inspired by the enemy.

For this reason the apostle had brought forward these marvelous revelations of God respecting the double glory of Christ, and with regard to His Person. He declared them in order that no one should beguile the Colossians with enticing words. He avails himself of the order that existed among them, and of their faith to guard them against the danger they were in from these thoughts, which might glide unperceived into their minds, while all was yet going on well, and the consciousness of their faith was not touched. This often happens. People have faith in Christ, they walk well, they do not perceive that certain ideas overthrow that faith; they admit them, while still maintaining the profession of faith together with these ideas; but the force of the truth and the sense of union with Christ and the simplicity that is in Him are lost. The enemy has so far attained his end. That which is received is not the development of Christ, but something outside Him.

Therefore the apostle says, “As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him; rooted and built up in him, and confirmed in the faith, even as ye have been taught.” When we have received Christ, all the rest is but a development of that which He is, and of the glory which the counsels of God have connected with His Person. Knowledge, or pretended knowledge, outside this, does but turn us away from Him, withdraw our hearts from the influence of His glory, throw us into that which is false, and lead our souls into connection with the creation apart from God, and without possessing the key to His purposes. Thus, since man is incapable of fathoming that which exists, and of explaining it to himself, his efforts to do so cause him to invent a mass of ideas that have no foundation, and to endeavor to fill up the void that is found in his knowledge through his

ignorance of God, by speculations, in which (because he is at a distance from God) Satan plays the chief part without man's suspecting it.

Man, as a child of Adam, is not at the center of the immense system of God's ways. Out of Christ and without Christ, he does not know the center; he speculates, without foundation and without end, only to lose himself more and more. His knowledge of good and evil, and the energy of his moral faculties, do but lead him astray the more, because he employs them on higher questions than those which simply relate to physical things; and they produce in him the need of reconciling apparently inconsistent principles, which cannot be reconciled without Christ. Moreover the tendency of man is always to make himself, as he is, the center of everything; and this renders everything false.

Christians then ought to walk with simplicity in the ways of the Lord, even as they have received Him; and their progress ought to be in the knowledge of Christ, the true center and fullness of all things.

When man occupies himself philosophically with all things, the insufficiency of his own resources always throws him into the hands of an intellectual leader, and into tradition; and, when religion is the subject, into traditions which develop the religion of the flesh, and are suited to its powers and tendencies.

In those days Judaism had the highest pretensions to this kind of religion, allied itself with human speculations and adopted them, and even pursued them assiduously; offering at the same time proofs of divine origin, and a testimony to the unity of the Godhead, which the absence of the grossness of Pagan mythology and the meeting of human consciousness of the divine rendered credible. This relative purity tended to remove — for enlightened minds — that which was disgusting in the Pagan system. The Jewish system had, by the death of Jesus, lost all pretension to be the true worship of God; and was therefore suited (by the advantages it offered in the comparative purity of its dogmas) to be an instrument of Satan in opposing the truth. At all times it was adapted to the flesh, was founded on the elements of this world, because by its means, when owned of God, God was proving man in the position man stood in. But now God was no longer in it; and the Jews, moved by envy, urged the Gentiles to persecution; and Judaism allied itself to Pagan speculations, in order to

corrupt and sap the foundations of Christianity, and destroy its testimony.

In principle it is always thus. The flesh may appear for a time to despise tradition, but that which is purely intellectual cannot stand in the midst of humanity without something religious. It has not the truth nor the world which belongs to faith, and for an immense majority superstition and tradition are needed; that is to say, a religion which the flesh can lay hold of, and which suits the flesh. God by His power may preserve a portion of the truth, or allow the whole to be corrupted; but in either case true christian position and the doctrine of the assembly are lost.*

[* There were some very beautiful legends, embracing partial truths, in the Gnostic system; but they had lost God and truth, and reality of conscience before God.]

We may indeed find philosophy apart from the religion of the flesh, and the latter apart from the former; but in this case philosophy is impotent and atheistic, the religion of the flesh narrow, legal, superstitious, and, if it can be so, persecuting.

In our chapter we find philosophy and the emptiness of human wisdom united with the traditions of men, characterised as “the elements of this world,” in opposition to Christ: for we have a heavenly Christ who is a perfect contrast to the flesh in man living on earth, a Christ in whom is all wisdom and fullness, and the reality of all that which the law pretended to give, or which it presented in figure: and who is at the same time an answer to all our wants. This the apostle develops here, showing death and resurrection with Him as the means of participating in it.

And first all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily. Instead of the misty speculations of men and fantastic aeons, we have the fullness of God bodily, in a real human body, and thus efficaciously for us, in the Person of Jesus Christ. In the second place we are complete in Him; we need nothing out of Christ.* On the one side, we have, in Him, God perfectly presented in all His fullness; on the other side, we possess in Him perfection and completeness before God. We are wanting in nothing as to our position before God. What a truth! What a position! God, in His perfect fullness, in Christ as man; we in Him before God, in the perfection of what He is — in Him who is Head of all principality and power, before

which man in his ignorance would incline to bend the knee! We are in Him, in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells as to His Person; in Him, who is above all principality as to His position and His rights as Christ, man exalted on high.

[* These expressions relate to the double character of Christ already set before us in chapter 1. They show us what we have in Christ in a positive way, as that which follows applies it to everything here below which would prevent our enjoying it. In Christ is the fullness of the Godhead, the object of our delight, in whom we possess all things. We have also in Him a position above all creation, in the perfection which has placed Christ there. We are completed in Him who is the Head of all principality and of all power. As regards the phraseology, the change of a word, to one not however better in itself, shows the mind of the apostle. In Him dwelleth all the completeness of the Godhead bodily; and we are complete in Him.]

The apostle then enters into some details of application to demonstrate that the faithful have all in Christ, viewed according to the position which He has taken without having anything to seek elsewhere here below.

Circumcision (the divine token of the covenant with the Jews, and of the putting off the flesh, which was required in order to form part of God's people) had its reality in Him. By the power of the life which is in Him, and which is theirs — being made partakers of the efficacy of His death — Christians account themselves to be dead, and have put off this body of sin by faith. This is the true circumcision of Christ made without hands. Circumcision made by hands was but the sign of this putting off the body of the flesh — the privilege of the Christian in Christ. Having a new life in Christ, he has efficaciously put off the old man.

We are buried with Christ by baptism (this is its meaning), in which also we are risen with Him by faith in this operation of the power of God whereby He was raised from among the dead. Baptism was the sign and expression of this;* faith in the operation of God which raised Him, the means by which is effected in us this marvelous resurrection with Christ into a new state and scene — this happy death, or rather this precious participation in the death of Him who has accomplished all for us. And when I say "faith," it is the power of God's Spirit working in us. But it is the power of God Himself, as it wrought in Christ, which works in us to give us the new standing in life. Viewed in connection with our resurrection with Christ it implies — by the very fact of our receiving it — that we are

forgiven perfectly and for ever. We were under the burden of our sins, and dead in them. This burden Christ took upon Himself, and died for us, accomplishing what put away our sins in going down into death. Raised up with Him, inasmuch as partaking of that life which He possesses as risen from the dead, we have — like Him and with Him — left all that burden of sin and condemnation behind us with the death from which we have been delivered. Therefore He says, “Having forgiven you all trespasses.”

[* Some do not connect “risen” with baptism. If so, I apprehend the passage must be read thus: “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism; in whom also ye are risen together meaning with Christ] through faith,” etc. Baptism clearly signifies death, and it is not the baptising but the coming out of the water which can be applied to resurrection. The giving of life is in no way the sense of baptism even as a figure, but leaving the life of Adam by death (the death of Christ) and entrance through that gate into a wholly new place and position.]

Christ, when He arose, left death and the weight of condemnation under which we were lying, behind Him — we also being raised up with Him. Naturally God, in thus raising us up from the state in which we were, has not raised us up to condemn us, or with condemnation attached to this new life, which is Christ Himself. For He had already born the condemnation, and satisfied the justice of God, and died for the putting away of sin, before He communicated this life to us. God brought us out of death and condemnation with Christ who had born it for us. But this is connected with another aspect of this work of grace, spoken of here, and also in Ephesians, and even in John 5 and 2 Corinthians 5. He who is alive in sins is dead in them towards God. If I look at him as alive in them, death must come in and has come in on the cross (see Romans 6). This side is not brought forward in Ephesians; only death in Romans; in Colossians death and resurrection in Christ, of which we have spoken. In Ephesians this is not spoken of at all. We are viewed as dead in sins, dead towards God, and all good is a new creation according to God’s counsels. We are quickened together with Christ when dead in sins. This also is taken up in Colossians: only it is not spoken of as a new creation. But in both a new life is given when we are dead; only Ephesians begins with this in Christ raised and exalted, and by the same power in us. In Colossians it is introduced as completing what is taught of the administration of this

doctrine of death in baptism, and our resurrection by faith of God's operation in Christ. In Ephesians grace finds us dead and quickens with Christ. In Colossians it finds us alive in sins and brings in death and resurrection, and completes this by quickening with Christ.

All the ordinances likewise, which belonged to the rudiments of this world and which applied to man in the flesh, and weighed as an unsupportable yoke upon the Jews (and to which they endeavored to bring others into subjection), which put the conscience always under the burden of a service unaccomplished by man, and a righteousness unsatisfied in God — these ordinances were blotted out. In them the Jew had put his signature, so to speak, to his guiltiness; but the obligation was destroyed and nailed to the cross of Christ. We receive liberty as well as life and pardon.

This is not all. There was the strength of principalities and powers against us — the might of spiritual wickedness. Christ has vanquished and despoiled them on the cross, having triumphed over them in it. All that was against us He has put aside, in order to introduce us, entirely delivered from it all, into our new position. It will be seen here, that what the apostle says of the work of Christ does not go beyond that which He did for our deliverance, in order to set us in the heavenly places. He speaks (v. 10) of the rights of Christ, but not as sitting in the heavenly places, nor as leading the enemy captive; neither does he speak of us as sitting in Him in the heavenlies. He has done all that is necessary to bring us into them; but the Colossians are viewed as on earth, though risen, and in danger at least of losing the sense of the position which was theirs in virtue of their union with Christ, and were in danger of slipping back into the elements of the world and of flesh, of the man alive in the flesh, not dead, not risen with Christ; and the apostle seeks to bring them back to it, by showing how Christ had accomplished all that was requisite — had taken out of the way all that prevented their attaining it. But he cannot speak of the position itself: they were not consciously in it. In the things of God we cannot comprehend a position without being in it. God may reveal it. God may show us the way of it. The apostle does so here with regard to the Person of Christ, which alone could bring them back to it; and at the same time he develops the efficacy of His work in this respect, in order to set them free from the shackles that kept them back, and to show them that all obstacles

had been removed. But in detail he has to apply it to the dangers that beset them rather than to display its glorious results in heaven.

Jewish ordinances were but shadows, Christ is the substance. By bringing in angels as objects of homage, and thus putting them between themselves and Christ, they would separate themselves from the Head of the body, who was above all principalities. The simplicity of christian faith held fast the Head, from which the whole body directly drew its nourishment and thus increased with the increase of God. It looked like humility, thus to bring themselves into relation with angels, as superior and exalted beings who might serve as mediators. But there were two faults of immense importance in this apparent humility. Firstly, it really was thorough pride — this pretension to penetrate into the secrets of heaven of which they were ignorant. What did they know of any position held by angels, which would make them the objects of such homage? It was pretending to mount up into heaven for and by themselves, and to measure their relations with God's creatures without Christ, and at their own will to connect themselves with them. Secondly, it was to deny their union with Christ. One with Him, there could be nothing between Him and them; if there were anything, then they were dead and twice dead. Besides, by this union they were one with Him who was above the angels. United to Him, they received, as we have seen, a communication, through all the members of the body, of the treasures of grace and life which were in the Head. The mutual links between the members of the body itself were thereby strengthened, and thus the body had its increase.

Two applications of the doctrine that they are dead with Christ and risen with Him follow (chap. 2:20). He applies the principle of death to all the ordinances, and to the asceticism which treated the body as a thing vile in itself which ought to be rejected; and (chap. 3:1) he uses the resurrection to raise their hearts into a higher sphere and to bring them back to Christ by looking up, they being dead as regards the old man.*

[* These applications flow from chapter 2:11, 12: It is to be remarked that Romans from chapter 5:12 treats of death to sin, in which man (as child of Adam) was alive. In Ephesians man is reckoned as dead in sins as towards God. Colossians takes up both: chapter 2:11, 12 follows them out, adding resurrection with Christ. Verse 13 follows Ephesian doctrine. Chapters 2:20, 3:1, follow on chapter 2:11, 12, and we have the putting off of the old and putting on of the new man.]

To make these instructions more plain by showing their connection, we may remark that the apostle points out the double danger, namely, philosophy, and human tradition, in contrast with Christ (chap. 2:3; see v. 9-15). While identifying us with Christ, he speaks of the bearing of the work of Christ Himself rather than of this identification. In verses 16-19 he applies it first (v. 16) to subjection to ordinances, that is, to the Jewish side of their danger; and then (v. 18) to the Gnostic philosophy,* science falsely so called, which linked itself with Judaism (or to which Judaism linked itself), reproducing itself under a new form. From verse 20 the apostle applies our death and resurrection with Christ to the same points, or to the deliverance of the Colossians by raising their thoughts on high.

[* Although this word has the appearance of learning and of not being scriptural, this is not the case. Science, falsely so called, of which the apostle speaks elsewhere, is in Greek “gnosis,” whence this presumptuous and corrupting philosophy was called “Gnosticism,” and its votaries “Gnostics.” It plays an immense part in the history of the church, with which I have nothing to do here. But its principles are frequently found in the New Testament, brought forward by the apostles in order to combat them. The Jews had largely fallen into the notion of a mediatorial work of angels, though not in the form exactly of Gnostic philosophy.]

But the Colossians are not the only ones who may have been in this danger. In the main these principles have been the ruin of the church at all times. They are those of the mystery of iniquity,* which has so much ripened since then, and produced effects so various, and under such different modifications on account of other principles which have also acted, and under the sovereign providence of God. We shall see the deep simple, and decisive principle which is involved in it in the verses that follow.

[* This was working in the apostle’s days; Paul withstood it in the energy of the Holy Ghost. After his departure that power was gone. The historical church never had the two great fundamental principles of Christianity, perfection in Christ (“by one offering he hath perfected for ever”), and the presence and leading power of the Holy Ghost down here. These were supplanted by sacraments and the clergy.]

The verses already quoted, as far as the twentieth, had judged this whole Judaeo-philosophic system from the point of view of Christ’s work, of His resurrection, and of union with Him in His heavenly position.

That which follows judges it after our position. The preceding verses had demonstrated that the system was false, because Christ and His work were such as is declared in them. The passage we are going to consider shows that this system is absurd, cannot be applied to us, has no possible application, because of our position. On the one hand it is a false system, null and void in all its parts, if Christ is true and is in heaven and, on the other hand, it is an absurd system in its application to us, if we are Christians. And for this reason: it is a system which supposes life in this world, and relationships to be acquired with God, having their foundation in that life, while it pretends to mortify flesh; and yet in addresses itself to persons who, for faith, are dead. The apostle says, that we are dead to the rudiments of this world, to all the principles on which its life acts. Why then, as though we were still living (alive) in it, as though we were still alive in this world, do we subject ourselves to ordinances which have to do with this life and which suppose its existence? ordinances which apply to things which perish in the use of them, and which have no connection with that which is heavenly and eternal. They have indeed a semblance of humility and self-denial as regards the body, but they have no link with heaven, which is the sphere of the new life — of all its motives, and all its development; and they do not recognise the honor of the creature, as a creature come out of the hand of God, which, as such, has always its place and its honor. They put a man in and under the flesh, while pretending to deliver us from it, and they separate the believer from Christ by putting angels between the soul and the heavenly place and blessing; whereas we are united to Christ, who is above all these powers, and we in Him.

These ordinances had to do with merely corruptible things — were not connected with the new life, but with man living in his life of flesh on the earth, to which life the Christian is morally dead; and as far as regarded this life, they did not recognise the body as a creature of God, as it ought to be recognised.

Thus the system of ordinances had lost Christ, who was their substance. It was connected with the pride that pretended to penetrate heaven, in order to put itself in relation with beings whom we do not know in such a manner as to have any relations with them — pride which in so doing separated from the Head of the body, Christ, and thus disowned all connection with the source of life, and with the only true position of the

soul before God. This system falsified equally our position on earth by treating us as though still alive after the old man, whereas we are dead; and dishonored the creature as such, instead of recognising it as coming from the hand of God.

That which was a danger to Christians in the apostle's days characterises Christianity at the present time.

The Christian's position was thus set forth, but in its application thus far rather to the danger of Christians than to their heavenly privileges. Thus grace has provided us with all we need, using every privilege, using the faith of some, giving warnings and instruction above all price, and turning the faults of others to account.

Now begin the direct exhortations founded on the truth that has been developed, and adapted to the state in which the Colossians were; that is, viewed as risen with Christ, but not sitting in heavenly places.

Risen with Christ, they were to set their affections on things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God, and not on things on the earth. The two could not go together. To look, to have one's motives, above and below at the same time, is impossible. Be tempted by things, have to resist them, we may; but this is not to have them as our object. The reason for this is however found in our position: we are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God. It does not say, "we must die." Man cannot do this by will: we cannot deny will by will. Nor would the will of the flesh ever do it. If it acts, it does not abdicate. We are dead: this is the precious comforting truth with regard to the Christian by virtue of Christ having died for him. He has received the life of Christ, and all that Christ did for him in that life belongs to him. Thus he is dead, because Christ died for him. The life with which the power of temptation, guilt, the attacks of sin, are connected, exists no longer to faith. By death all that was connected with it has come to an end. Now that which was connected with the life of the old man was sin, condemnation, weakness, fear, powerlessness against the assaults of the enemy — all that is past. We have a life, but it is in Christ; it is hidden with Him in God. We are not yet manifested in its glory, as we shall be manifested before the eyes of all in heaven and earth. Our life is hidden, but safe in its eternal source. It has the portion of Christ, in whom we

possess it. He is hid in God, so also is our life: when Christ shall appear, we shall also appear with Him.

It will be remarked, that the apostle does not speak here of our union with Christ, but of our life, of the fact that we are dead, and that our life is hid with Him in God. He does not speak of the assembly with regard to our position; he speaks, no doubt, of Christ as being its Head, as to His personal glory, but not of it as to us. He speaks of us individually. Each one has his own life in Christ truly, but as his own; it is not union with other Christians. We have this life in Christ, but it is not here our union as one body with Him. It is the individual character of the Christian, to whom Christ, the Head, is everything.

That which is also highly important to observe in connection with this truth is that in this epistle there is nothing said of the Holy Ghost. The apostle speaks practically of their love in the Spirit, but in the instruction of the epistle he does not name Him. Even when he says, "there is neither Jew, nor Greek," etc., it is in the new man, not because we are one in Christ. The individual was to cleave to the Head. He was no longer living in this world; he was dead, and his life hid with Christ in God. But this was for himself; he was to know it, and hold it fast for himself, as necessary truth, that he might be preserved from the wiles of the enemy. In a word, it is life in Christ. Elsewhere we see many of the things which the apostle here mentions spoken of as the fruit of the Spirit, by which communion and union are maintained; but here it is simply in the nature of the life that these fruits have their source. It is quite natural consequently, that the compass and the assemblage of all spiritual relationships in one, in Christ, which we find in the divine instruction when the Holy Ghost is introduced, are wanting here.

In the epistle to the Ephesians this operation of the Holy Ghost is found everywhere, and characterises the whole of that which is developed in communion with the Head, Christ, with whom we are united in one body by the Spirit. Thus we are individually sealed by the Spirit of promise, the earnest of our inheritance; we all have access to the Father by one Spirit; we are also builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit; the union of the Gentiles in one body is now revealed by the Spirit; saints are strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man; there is one body and one

Spirit; we are not to grieve the Spirit; we are to be filled with Him; the word itself is the sword of the Spirit. The union of the body with Christ, our resurrection with Him, that we are sitting in the heavenlies in Him all that flows from this union, is fully developed; but at the same time the Holy Ghost, who unites us to Him, and unites us all together as one body, and who here below characterises the presence of God in the church, who acts in us, secures our future, and becomes our strength in the present — the Holy Ghost, I repeat, is found everywhere, to complete the truth and to give it its present force for us here below.

Many of the exhortations in the epistle to the Ephesians are nearly the same as those to the Colossians. But in the epistle to the Ephesians they are connected with the Spirit; in that to the Colossians, with the action of the word and of grace in the heart. This gives an immense range and a connectedness to the doctrine of the epistle to the Ephesians, in that which regards our position here below, because it brings in God Himself, and as dwelling in us by the Spirit, and filling us, whether as in the individual or in the oneness of the body; and gives the full scope of the counsels of God.

Yet the possession of life is in its way as important as the presence and indwelling of the Holy Ghost. It makes the blessing ourselves, not merely an operation in us, and, as we have seen, the character of divine life is far more fully developed; whereas in Ephesians it is more contrast with the previous state.

In the epistle to the Romans we have (chap. 8) this action and presence of the Holy Ghost presented in a very remarkable way as to the individual. He characterises us vitally in the principle of our resurrection, is the witness in us that we are children, filling us with joy and with the hope of glory as heirs, the support of our weakness and the source of our petitions and our groans. In the epistle to the Romans it is in connection with our personal relationship to God; in that to the Ephesians, as the presence of God in us in connection with our union to Christ as one body.

There is another thing to be noticed here which throws light on the purpose of the Holy Ghost in these epistles. The starting-point in that to the Ephesians is the counsels of God Man is looked at as he is, without one pulse of life as regards God; he is dead in trespasses and sins, by nature the child of wrath. God is rich in mercy; He raises him up with

Christ who in grace went down into death, and places him according to His counsels in the same position as that Christ is in. We are His workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus. God is pleased to bring us into His presence according to His own counsels and His nature. It is not said that we are dead with Christ. Man is not viewed as living in the flesh, so that in one way or in another he had to die. This was not necessary. The Ephesians were to apprehend, on the one hand, the full contrast between God and man according to His counsels; and on the other, man's sinful state according to nature. In their epistle all is the work of God Himself according to the original purpose of His own heart, of His nature, and of His will;* man is already dead, and even Christ is not brought in as to His place till viewed as dead, and thereon risen and exalted on high.

[* Hence we have no justification in Ephesians It treats of a new creation.]

The Colossians were in danger of subjecting themselves to ordinances, and thereby were in a position to consider man as living in the world; and the apostle makes them feel that they are dead with Christ. He was obliged in grace to follow them where they were, for their danger was to take man into consideration as living on the earth; in order, nevertheless, to show that the Christian had already died with Christ, and his life on earth was as risen with Him.

In the letter to the Ephesians man is not said to die with Christ. He is dead in his sins when God begins to act towards him. No man is alive to God. The Christian is quickened together with Christ, Christ Himself first viewed as dead.

This character of the Colossians however, the dwelling on life or the new man, has its value for us all, and a great value, because the life, the new nature, and grace working in it, are much less brought forward in the epistle to the Ephesians, where the subject is the energy of God, who creates men in Christ and unites them to Him, fills the believer and the assembly here with the nature and the character of the new man. and thereby of Christ, yea, of God Himself.* One might suppose that there was only the Holy Ghost acting in the fullness of His power, and filling the individual and the assembly. But in this epistle to the Colossians we find that there is a new nature, an intrinsic change, not of the flesh indeed, but of the man. For we are viewed, not merely as quickened by the Son, but as dead and risen with

Christ, the Man who had died, so as to have passed out of — put off — the old standing of a child of Adam, and into a risen one with Christ — put on the new man. This is at once a standing and a state before God, a source of tastes, of sentiments, of desires, of arguments, and of moral capacities, which are in connection with the very nature of God, who has caused it to spring up in the heart. We are renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created us. But this source is a life, which needs that the Holy Ghost should reveal to it the objects that are suited to it, and that awaken these tastes and feelings, which satisfy them and cause them to grow. It needs that the Spirit of God should act in it to give it strength; but it is a real life, a nature which has its tastes attached to its very existence,** which, being enlightened by the Holy Ghost, is conscious of its own existence; and in which we are the children of God, being born of Him.

[* This difference is of deep interest, and brings out the character of the epistle to the Ephesians in a remarkable way — an epistle in which everything is influenced by the high point of view taken by the Spirit, and flows from the original and eternal counsels of God, and from His operation to bring those counsels to perfection — the settled purposes of His own heart. He desires to have — He creates — something in order to show forth the immense riches of His grace. He has taken the dead and the lost: but they are only the objects of His operations, suited to make these manifest on account of their own condition. He does not work upon the nature of man, because it is contrary to His own, in order to destroy this contrariety. He quickens from the dead, and creates. In Colossians the death of the old man is spoken of, which it was necessary to take into consideration. God be praised, we are entitled to view it as already dead, because Christ has died for us. I may add here to that which I have said of the Holy Ghost, that, when the apostle speaks in Colossians of the power of hope in us, he does not mention the earnest of the Spirit. It is still Christ in us, the hope of glory. Throughout it is Christ, and Christ as life.]

[** With this difference between the actings of the Spirit, and the existence of the new life, is connected the liberty of the soul. When we are born of God, we have necessarily a taste for holiness; love acts in us; we take pleasure in the righteousness of God. But, by virtue of these sentiments, although my heart appreciates love in God, and this love attracts me and inspires me with a measure of confidence, yet my conscience condemns me, I feel that I am not that which I love. I am under the law, and uncertain of my relationship with God. When I have learnt the value of Christ's blood, that He is my righteousness, the Holy Ghost dwelling and acting in me gives me the sense of my relationship with God. I have the consciousness of it in my soul, and the Holy Ghost bears witness of it. There is liberty.]

Neither is it unimportant that we should learn, with regard to the life of the flesh, and when thinking of it, although it be on the negative side, that we

are dead; that God recognises nothing belonging to the old man; that He takes pleasure in a new nature, which is indeed ours by grace, but which is of God Himself, and which is the moral reflection of His own.

We are dead then, and our life is hid with Christ in God We have members on earth — no recognised life; and we have to put to death* all these members of the old man. The Christian has to deny them practically as belonging to the old man, while his life is there where Christ is. They bring down the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Christians walked in these things when they had their life in them; but this is no longer the case; and they deny not only gross sins, the fruit of positive lusts (chap. 3:5, 6), but all the workings of an unbroken will and an unsubdued heart, every indication of the actings of the will of that nature which knows not God, and is not ruled by His fear, all anger and malice and falsehood flowing from selfishness or the fear of man (v. 8). Truth reigns in the heart which has put off the old man, according to the simplicity of the new man,** which is renewed also in knowledge after the image of Him who created it (v. 9, 10). The new man walks in the light. It is not only that there is a conscience which judges good and evil according to that which man ought to be according to his nature as a responsible being; there is a new man who judges the old man altogether, judging good and evil according to the knowledge of God. Such is the putting off.

[* It is a very different thing from dying to sin. This supposes evil in the thing that dies (save of course in the case of Christ who did it for those who had); whereas putting to death is an act of power in that which is good — the new man.]

[** These three form the whole character of evil in man: generally, violence and corruption, the last taking the twofold form of lust and falsehood. So, before the flood, the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. Falsehood is Satan's form of corruption, and violence also characterises him. The Lord declares him to be a liar and a murderer (John 8:44). Man adds the lust because of flesh.]

Before Christianity, which is the full revelation of God, there were indeed, as need not be said, souls born anew; but their rule, when a rule was definitely given, was man's responsibility (whatever piety and grace might inspire), and the law, which was the perfect measure of that which man, as a being responsible to God, ought to be. Saints then did not distinguish between a new and an old man, although of necessity they had the

conscience of the old man and the tastes of the new in measure in many respects. The sense, for instance, of the evil of falsehood had not at all the same place as with the Christian. Now the new man is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created him.* God Himself in His nature is the standard of good and evil, because the new man has the knowledge of what that nature is; he is made a partaker of it, and he has the light of God. It is an intelligent participation by grace in the nature of God, which is the marvelous and precious privilege of the Christian. God works in this nature; but by communicating it He has placed man in this position. Christ is the perfect model of this image, the type of the new man.

[* Note here the difference of the corresponding phrase in Ephesians There the Christian is created after God in righteousness and true holiness. Here it is the new apprehensions of the divine life which knows God. It is our state, not God's creative act. Not that this contradicts the Ephesian view; on the contrary, "renewed here is another word from Ephesians It is that which is wholly new, never was there before. In Ephesians "renewed" is what is kept fresh and new.]

Other differences have disappeared: there remains but the old man, which we only acknowledge as dead, and the new man. To the latter Christ is all; so that there is none but He whom they see and whom they acknowledge, and He is in all believers They put on therefore as such, as elect, holy, beloved (Christ being their life), the character of Christ, mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another if offense has been given, even as Christ has done to us.* Finally they put on love, the bond of perfectness, that which gives a divine character to all the qualities that have been enumerated, and that were manifested in Christ, and a divine check on taking amiable nature for divine grace, for divine love is holy.

[* Remark here how patience and graciousness and longsuffering characterise the Christian. It is remarkable how this is the case everywhere. So must it be in a world like this. So was it in Christ. So in 1 Corinthians 13 the traits of charity are all subjective and of this character. Not that that is a definition of charity, but it is characteristic of it. Where these traits are wanting, charity is.]

And note here, that the putting on of these qualities is in the consciousness of the blessed place before God expressed in the words "elect of God, holy and beloved." It is as such. Nor can we do it otherwise. It is in the sense of

this wondrous favor that grace develops itself in our hearts. So in Ephesians, “as dear children.”

Several of these qualities may be resembled by things in nature; but the energy, the features, the bond of divine love, which acts in the sense of communion with God, are totally wanting in the latter; and this gives a character, a completeness, a righteousness of application, a perfection, a propriety, and an energy to the manifestation of these qualities, which love alone can give. For it is indeed God Himself who is there, acting in His nature which He has imparted to us. For He who dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him. With regard to the state of the soul, there is a crown to this walk, wherewith they who follow it constantly are adorned. The peace of Christ reigns in the heart, that sweet and ineffable peace which nothing could disturb, though His spirit passed through everything to try it, for He walked ever with God. God has also called us to this; He is the God of peace. And here the apostle introduces the oneness of the body, not as to its privileges in Christ, but as to the fact that Christians are called to be together in the unity of which peace is the seal and the bond. And then there will be thanksgiving; for the soul is conscious of the love and the activity of God, and everything flows to it from that love.

But, besides peace and thanksgiving towards God, there is the development of life in the knowledge of what is revealed, its food and joy. This too is enjoyed in the activity of life and love towards others. The enjoyment of God and of that which is in His presence leads to this activity of the soul. When the latter is real, it is the joyful liberty of a nature that is itself in the activity of love that is natural to it, and which receives its energy from communion with God, according to His nature. The word of Christ unfolds all that is revealed to the soul as that in which it lives, and in which it expands itself, and is thus the rule, and active and directing power, because it is the expression of that nature, and the revelation of all its ways, and of its active energy in love in Him.

The apostle therefore exhorts that the word of Christ may dwell in them richly. This is the development, according to the perfection of God, of the new man, and the wisdom of God to form and direct him. Paul desires that Christians may fully realise this. It is by communion with the Lord, holding intercourse with Him, that it is done. The word being that in which

the wisdom is found; also according to this development the saints can teach and admonish each other.* But in this case it is not only wisdom that we learn, and that is displayed in us, but affections in connection with Him in whom we have found this wisdom, so that these expressions of the life of Christ as true wisdom in the world, find their voice in our hearts in praise, in thanksgiving, in singing His excellency. All the intimate affections in which spiritual life develops itself express themselves, according to what we have learned: they flow from the Spirit of Christ, and are the expression of the soul's connection with Him, and of the feelings this produces in the heart. Christ in His Person, in the consciousness of His presence, as the object of our thoughts, and in the moral fruits proceeding thence, sustains the intercourse and the communications of the soul that is occupied with His praises.

[* It is simpler to put the stop after "one another," and only a comma before "teaching."

But this consciousness of relationship with Christ, in the life which is of Him in us, applies to everything. Nothing is done without Him. If He is the life, all which that life does has Him for its end and object, as far as the heart is concerned. He is present as that which is the governing motive, and gives its character to our actions, and which preoccupies our heart in performing them. Everything relates to Him: we do not eat without Him; (how can we when He is our very life?) we do not drink without Him; what we say, what we do, is said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus. There is the sense of His presence; the consciousness that everything relates to Him, that we can do nothing — unless carnally — without Him, because the life which we have of Him acts with Him and in Him, does not separate from Him, and has Him for its aim in all things, even as water rises to the height from which it descended. This is what characterises the life of the Christian. And what a life! Through Him, dwelling in the consciousness of divine love, we give thanks to our God and Father.

Observe here that the christian life is not only characterised by certain subjective qualities which flow from Christ, but by its having Christ Himself for the aim and object of the heart and mind in all that we do in every respect. Christ personally reigns in, and is present to, the heart in everything.

To the inexperienced eye of man nature is often confounded with grace; but the intelligent consciousness of Christ as the heart's object, of His presence, of the seal of His approval when one thinks of Him, cannot be confounded with anything. There is nothing that resembles it, nothing that can appear to take its place. When He reveals Himself to our heart, and the heart walks with Him, and communes with Him in all things, and seeks only the light of His countenance, the seal of His favor on the soul in all things, then He is known, well known. There is none but He who thus communicates Himself to the soul when it walks in the way of His will, as expressed in the word.

After these great and important principles of the new life the apostle enters into the diverse relationships of life, giving warnings against that which would endanger them, by showing what the christian character of each one of them is. To the wife, obedience — affection was natural to her. "Thy desire shall be to thy husband." To the husband, affection and kindness — his heart may be indifferent and hard. Children are to be obedient; fathers, gentle, in order that the children's affections may not be estranged from them, and that they may not be induced to seek that happiness in the world which they ought to find in the sanctuary of the domestic circle, which God has formed as a safeguard for those who are growing up in weakness; the precious home (if Christ is acknowledged) of kind affections, in which the heart is trained in the ties which God Himself has formed; and that in connection with the Lord, and which, by cherishing the affections, preserves from the passions and from self-will; and which, where its strength is rightly developed, has a power that, in spite of sin and disorder, awakens the conscience and engages the heart, keeping it away from evil and the direct power of Satan. For it is God's appointment.

I know indeed that another power is required to deliver the heart from sin and to keep it from sin. Nature, even as God created it, does not give eternal life, not does it restore innocence or purify the conscience. We may, by the energy of the Spirit, consecrate ourselves to God outside these relationships, renounce them even, if God should call us by more powerful obligations, as Christ teaches us in the gospel. The rights of Christ over man lost by sin are sovereign, absolute, and complete. He has redeemed him; and the redeemed one is no longer his own, but belongs to

Him who gave Himself for him. Where relationships exist, sin indeed has perverted everything, and corrupted the will; passions come in; but the relationships themselves are of God: woe to him who despises them as such! If grace has wrought and the new life exists, it acknowledges that which God has formed. It well knows that there is no good in man, it knows that sin has marred everything, but that which sin has marred is not itself sin. And where these relationships exist, the renunciation of self-will, death to sin, the bringing in of Christ, the operation of life in Him, restore their power; and if they cannot give back the character of innocence (lost for ever), they can make them a scene for the operations of grace, in which meekness, tenderness, mutual help, and self-denial, in the midst of the difficulties and sorrows which sin has introduced, lend them a charm and a depth (even as Christ did in every relationship) which innocence itself could not have presented. It is grace acting in the life of Christ in us which develops itself in them.

To be without natural affection is a sign of hopeless apostasy and estrangement from God, of the complete selfishness of the last days.

I am not drawing a false picture, or speaking poetically, as though the bright side were all; I only say that God has formed these relationships, and that whosoever fears God will respect them. Grace is requisite. They give occasion, through their intimacy itself, to all that is most painful, if grace does not act in them. The apostle warns us here of this danger. If the Lord is the bond in them, if our still closer union with Him forms the strength of our natural relationships, then grace reigns here as elsewhere; and, to those who stand in these relationships, they become a scene for the lovely display of the life of Christ.

It will be observed how the apostle consequently introduces Christ into them, and especially in regard to those who are subject in them, wives and children; in order to sanctify, by so exalted a motive, the obedience suited to their position. He does this still more where the tie is not of nature but one which has its origin in a sinful world — and from sin itself that between slaves and their masters. Grace does not set itself to change the state of the world and of society, but to lead souls to heaven by renewing them after the image of God. I doubt not that it has very much altered for the better the social condition of man; because, through bringing the

conscience immediately before the only true God whom it has revealed in His own perfections, and establishing by its authority that of the natural relationships in the human family, grace has had its effect upon that conscience even where the heart was not converted, and has furnished it with a rule in that which regards morality. But Christianity, as to its own doctrine, treats the world as alienated from God and lying in evil — man as the child of wrath, and lost.

Christ, the Son of God (who if He had been received could have put all things right, and who will hereafter by His kingdom establish righteousness and peace), was rejected by the world, and the friendship of the world is enmity against God. The state of man is treated in the gospel in a deeper way than in regard to his social condition. It is viewed with reference to the souls connection with God, and consequently with that which is eternal. God imparts a new life unto us, in order that we may enjoy those new relationships with Himself which redemption has gained for us. Now as Christ, while living, was the expression of the love and the omnipotent goodness of God in the midst of a fallen creation, so, being now rejected by the world (which thus condemned itself), Christ, who dwells by His grace, in the heart of one who has received life, becomes to that heart a source of happiness in communion with the love of God, which lifts it up and sets it above circumstances, be they what they may. The slave, in possessing Christ, is free in heart; he is the freed man of God Himself. The master knows that he himself has a Master, and the relationship in which he finds himself takes the form of the grace and love that reigns in the heart of him who in it exercises his authority.

But as I have said, to the poor slave Christ is especially presented as a resource. He may serve his master, whether a good or bad one, with faithfulness, meekness, and devotedness; because in so doing he serves the Lord Himself, and is conscious that he does so. He will have his reward there where nothing is forgotten that is done to glorify Christ, and where masters and slaves are all before Him who has no respect of persons.

Two principles act in the heart of the christian slave: his conscience in all his conduct is before God; the fear of God governs him, and not his master's eye. And he is conscious of his relationship to Christ, of the presence of Christ, which sustains and lifts him above everything. It is a

secret which nothing can take from him, and which has power over everything, because it is within and on high — Christ in him, the hope of glory. Yes, how admirably does the knowledge of Christ exalt everything that it pervades; and with what consoling power does it descend into all that is desolate and cast down, all that groans, all that is humbled in this world of sin!

Three times in these two verses, while holding their conscience in the presence of God, the apostle brings in the Lord, the Lord Christ, to fill the hearts of these poor slaves, and make them feel who it was to whom they rendered service. Such is Christianity.

The apostle ends his epistle with some important general exhortations.

He desires that the saints should continue through prayer in communion with God, and in the sense of their dependence on Him, conscious of His nearness to them, and of His readiness to hear them. For that which speaks to the heart for our walk is not enough; the soul must know its own relations with God, exercising itself in those relations; and it must receive directly from Him that which assures it of His love. There must be perseverance in this. We are in conflict with evil, which has a hold upon our own hearts if we are without the strength of God. We must therefore commune with God. We must watch therein with settled purpose of heart, not merely as an occasional thing: any one can cry out when he is in need. But the heart separated from the world and all that is of it occupies itself with God, with all that regards the glory of His name, according to the measure in which we are concerned in it. The conflict is carried on with a tender and freed spirit, having only His glory as the object, both in the assembly and in the individual walk. But thus one understands that God works, and that He does not forsake us, and thanksgiving is always mingled with the prayers we address to Him.

Paul felt his dependence on this blessing, and he asked for a share also in their prayers, that God might open his mouth, and that he might proclaim the gospel as he ought to do.

Now we are in a hostile world, in which hostility is easily awakened where it does not already exist openly, and in which offense is quickly taken at things wherein perhaps we neither saw nor intended evil. We must take

away the occasion even from those that seek it, and walk in wisdom with respect to them that are without.

How clearly the within and the without are here distinguished! Those within, whom God acknowledges, His family, His assembly — they are His own. Those without, they are the world, those who are not joined to the Lord. The distinction is plainly marked, but love is active towards them that are without, and, being itself in the enjoyment of communion with God, it is careful to do nothing that might prevent others from enjoying it.

But there was something more: they were to redeem the time. The natural man, taken up with his own affairs, and disinclined to serious things, gave christian love little opportunity to set grace and truth before him and make him care for his own soul, thus serving the Lord and using time in His name. The heart of man cannot always escape the influence of surrounding circumstances, which bear witness to his heart and conscience that he is under the dominion of sin, and already eating its bitter fruits here below — circumstances which bring to his conscience the remembrance of a too much forgotten God, which speak with the mighty voice of sorrow to a broken heart, glad at least to have a resource in God when his hand is pierced by the broken reed on which he leaned. God Himself acts upon man by these circumstances, and by every circumstance of life. One who is walking with the Lord knows how to avail himself of them. Satan may indeed deceive a man, but he cannot prevent God at all times from speaking to the heart. It is a happy thing so to walk with God that He can use us as His voice, when He would thus speak to poor sinners. Our speech ought always to be the expression of this separation from evil, this power of the presence of God which keeps us inwardly apart from it, so as to make that power felt by others; and that, in all the questionings which arise in the heart of man, wandering out of the way in confusion and darkness, and even leading others astray thereby, we may know how to give an answer which comes from the light and conveys light.

Tychicus was to carry the testimony of the interest which the apostle took in the welfare of the Colossians, and of his confidence in their interest in him. Paul bears witness to the love of others, and to their concern also in the progress of the gospel and the prosperity of the faithful.

Marcus, who had formerly drawn back from the toils of the work, receives a testimony here on the apostle's part and a still better one later (2 Timothy 4:11), for he had made himself useful to the apostle himself. Such is grace. The secret of the interest Barnabas took in him comes out here: he was nearly related to him. This dear servant of God was from Cyprus too. He went there and took Mark with him. The flesh and Judaism find their way everywhere. The power of the Spirit of God is requisite to raise us above, and set us beyond, their influence.

Demas receives no especial testimony. The apostle conveys his greetings, but is silent as to himself. Only in the epistle to Philemon is he named as a fellow-laborer of the apostle. Afterwards he forsook Paul. He was a brother: the apostle admits his claim but says nothing; he had nothing to say. "And Demas," for Paul's style is terribly cold.

We may observe that the epistle to the Ephesians was written at the same time, and sent by this same Tychicus. The one "from Laodicea" is, I doubt not, one that they were to receive from that assembly, written by Paul, and by which the saints at Colosse were to profit; possibly the epistle to the Ephesians, which he may have had communicated to the Laodiceans. Be this as it may, all that is said is that it was one of which the assembly at Laodicea were in possession, and by no means that it was directly addressed to them: rather the contrary. It is very possible that a letter, or a hundred letters, may have been written by Paul to others, which it was not in the purposes of God to preserve for the universal assembly: but here there is no proof that a letter had been written to the Laodiceans. Tychicus was the bearer of two: he may have been the bearer of three, one of which differed only in some details of application which might serve to confirm the Colossians without being in the main another divine communication for other days; but, I repeat, it does not appear to be so from that which is said here. It might be said, a letter "from Laodicea," because it was there, instead of a letter to Laodicea; but it is not the usual mode of expression. We have seen that the letter to the Ephesians is another communication of the Spirit of God. It has been preserved for us. We do not know whether that from Laodicea was the same, communicated by them to the Christians of that city; or another, which they were to send to the Colossians (an assembly in their vicinity) and which — adding nothing to the divine relations — has not been preserved for us.

It appears that Christians were not very numerous at Laodicea. The apostle salutes the brethren there. There were some who assembled in the house of one Nymphas; they were not in a case to have a letter addressed to them in particular: still the apostle does not forget them. But that which he says here is an almost certain proof that the apostle had not addressed any epistle to them. He would not have sent greetings through the Colossians to the brethren in Laodicea, if at the same time he had written a special epistle to the latter. The case is plain enough: there were brethren at Laodicea, but not in great numbers, and not in that distinct position which gave rise to an epistle. But this little assembly in the house of Nymphas was not to be forgotten; it should profit by the epistles addressed to other assemblies more considerable than itself, and whose condition required an epistle, or gave occasion to write one which epistles were transmitted to Laodicea, according to the apostle's order.

With regard to the epistle to the Colossians, it is not a supposition. The apostle commands them expressly to have it read in the assembly at Laodicea. The latter had also received another epistle from some other assembly, and the Colossians were to profit by it in the same manner. The two assemblies, which were near each other, were mutually to enjoy the spiritual favors that were granted them.

The apostle does not forget individuals even. Archippus receives a solemn exhortation to take heed to the ministry which the Lord had committed to him, and to fulfill his service.

The apostle had not seen these assemblies (chap. 2:1).