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### The Missionary Looks at his Work in the Light of St Paul's Letter to the Colossians

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THE MISSIONARY LOOKS AT HIS WORK IN THE LIGHT  
OF ST. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

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A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by  
O. H. Schmidt  
April 1947

Approved by: Jacob M. Bretcher

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THE MISSIONARY LOOKS AT HIS WORK IN THE LIGHT  
OF ST. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

1

The Missionary Speaks with Authority

and yet in Humility

Col. 1: 1.2.

All Scripture is given for our instruction, and is profitable for our advancement also as to understanding and executing our missionary work. Since this work is undertaken in direct response to Christ's command and since this work has to do with proclaiming the word of God, we may indeed expect that the word of God would have something pertinent to tell us as to the nature of this work and the manner in which we might carry it out. Indeed, for people trained in the traditions of the Lutheran church it is self-evident that they would want to review their work in the light of the Holy Scriptures. Anything else would have little meaning for them and would fail to command their attention. Now, one could look at this work, under the light of Scripture, from various angles and aspects, perhaps in topical order. But it may also serve this purpose quite well to scan one of the books of the Bible and then endeavor to find the application of any particular section of that book to the work of missions.

The title given to this paper is somewhat reminiscent of a little book recently published by Bishop Hall of Hong Kong which he has called "The Missionary Artist looks at his Job." That is a rather engaging title, and the booklet makes interesting reading in parts. It is true that the missionary labors in a fashion similar to that of an artist and that he should take a certain delight to

find projects of missionary endeavor get under way, perhaps first started - as John Dewey might put it - by vague stirrings and impulses deep in the heart and mind, probably stirred into being by some Scripture passage one happened to read; how the matter then takes shape and form, and evolves and grows, and how its unfolding becomes an esthetic experience as finally that particular bit of missionary work is completed. To be sure, while we are laboring in this vale of tears we shall never be able to view any piece of missionary work in its entirety and we must look to the blessed experience of eternity to reveal the full extent and effect of our work, each section of which we see here only as a segment and under constantly changing conditions and in an ever-varying flux of application and conditioning, of development and realignment, as our people grow and as we ourselves gain knowledge and as we strive sincerely to fit our work into prevailing conditions and to exploit any favorable factors that may be extant at a given time.

Now then, as we address ourselves to looking at missionary work in the light of St. Paul's letter to the Colossians, we note first that the missionary speaks with authority and yet in great humility. Paul in the fashion of that day names himself first, in the opening sentence of this epistle, and then immediately identifies himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God," ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

He, and the Christian missionary with him, speaks with authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ. An apostle is one who is sent (ἀποστῆλκειν, to send). Paul does not run where no one has sent him; he does not speak where he has no business to speak. But he comes and speaks with the authority of an ambassador of Christ. He became

such an ambassador by the will of God, *διὰ θελήματος Θεοῦ*. The Lord called him to this work. It is the Lord's will that he speak and write. So also the Christian missionary: he does not go to a foreign country out of a spirit of adventure. He does not come as in his own right, with presumptuous arrogance. But he comes to his mission field because he has been called, by the will of God, as exercised through the instrumentality of the Church.

There is abiding and deep comfort in this conviction that the missionary can tell himself and others to whom he speaks that he is not an irresponsible busybody but that he comes as an ambassador of Christ, *ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Κυρίου*, and that he speaks with the authority of one who has the backing of the Lord God of heaven. That will give the missionary the proper courage and steadfastness, even in the face of adverse circumstances, of danger and persecution.

Paul brings out this point of his apostolic authority right at the start of his epistle to the Colossians because he had to counteract the nefarious activity of judaizing false teachers who threatened to wreck the work which he had been doing in Colossae. Perhaps there were also the beginnings of the Gnostic aberrations which caused so much trouble later on. Thus Paul had to make it clear to his readers that what he had to say to them needed to be received with a respectful spirit since he is speaking to them with the authority of an ambassador of Christ. Similarly, we need to have our listeners on the foreign mission field understand clearly that we speak to them with authority. We come as the messengers of the Lord. We speak the word of divine truth. In all the welter of the false teachers that surround them and the superstitions that oppress them,

of self-appointed leaders and irresponsible false prophets that swarm about them, we come to them with the words of living truth, and therefore they should give a respectful hearing to what we have to say to them. Perhaps you would not say this in so many words, but your whole manner and deportment, your whole attitude toward your work and toward your people must reflect this concept that you are speaking with authority as a messenger of Christ. We will therefore not be too timid in our missionary approach. There must be nothing apologetic in our presentation, not even in the location of our churches or manner in which we fit them up. Nor must we break down the force of our message by hinting haltingly that after all the Christian message is so very near to their heathen teachings that they can adopt our Christian teachings without too much of a wrench. Our strength lies rather in this that we have something totally different to offer them, and that we speak with authority of this diametrically different doctrine of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. But be sure that you do speak with this authority, that you actually preach Christ, that your preaching grows out of the word of God and rests upon the word of God, that you rule out everything of human invention in your preaching and teaching on the mission field.

While the missionary speaks with authority he will at the same time speak in deep humility. Awed by the exalted station given him through this authority, he will be filled with a deep sense of his own unworthiness and inadequacy for the work he is doing. Spiritual pride and arrogance will be absent from him when he labors as a missionary of Christ. You can see from this epistle how St. Paul is given to deep humility, as is reflected also otherwise in his writings.

He wants to be nothing else than an ambassador for Christ. He wants the people to forget that he is Paul, the citizen of proud Rome, equipped with a great store of learning and able to discourse with great erudition on many fields of philosophy and literature. The humility of Paul shines forth also from the manner in which he speaks of Timothy, whom he calls ἀδελφός, brother. He puts Timothy upon the same level with himself in this work of being a missionary and so he calls Timothy his brother, while in another connection he calls Timothy his son.

The Christian missionary will be characterized by humility. Satan likes to lead people into pride, and it is very easy for a missionary to fall a victim to Satan's wiles on this score. The missionary works among people who know nothing, or at best very much less than he, of spiritual matters. He comes out of a church milieu that is much more highly developed than that in which he now finds himself. He is probably equipped intellectually far beyond the degree to be found among the native people. The persons around him are rather subservient to him in many ways and he exercises authority over them in many respects. Therefore it is very easy for the missionary to fall into arrogant ways and to develop a haughty spirit and to exhibit unconscionable spiritual pride. That is all wrong. We should be humbly grateful that God is pleased to appoint us messengers of the Gospel, and there should be with the missionary the same combination of consciousness of authority plus a deep humility which characterizes the Apostle Paul. We should look upon our national fellow-workers as brethren and upon the people who are united with us in faith as upon brethren.

While this paper was written primarily with reference to foreign mission work it is obvious that the various practical directions and

hints contained in this epistle are just as applicable to the work in the home mission field. After all, the principles are the same, and you work with the same materials, with the word of God and with human beings.-

The manner in which Paul views his office and in which we will think of our mission work is then also brought out very effectively in the apostolic greeting, v. 2. Only when spiritual pride and haughty condescension is totally absent would we find the Apostle, and the Christian missionary with him, addressing the people to whom he writes and speaks as "saints and faithful (full of faith, believing) brethren in Christ." The unbelieving world is apt to ridicule the idea that the Christians are called saints. The world likes to paint pictures of the believers in overdrawn caricatures of pious attitudes, and likes to contrast the lapses and shortcomings of the Christians with the holiness of outward living which the world expects to see in people who are called saints of God. Far be it from us to excuse or condone these lapses and shortcomings of the Christians, but we should like to point out that the ridicule of the world in this matter rests upon a total misapprehension of what the word "saints" would mean. The Bible makes it a practice to use the word "saints" interchangeably with the word "believers." The believers are saints in the sight of God, for their sins are forgiven through the merit of Christ and by the cleansing power of His blood. When the heavenly Judge looks at them who have their clothes washed in the blood of the Lamb and who are dressed in the spotless garment of Christ's impeccable righteousness, God the Judge sees them as people in whom there is no condemnation. They are saints not in their own right or by their own works, but in Jesus Christ: because they are believers in Christ, because in faith they have grasped the proffered grace of God and are made righteous

before God through Christ. The Christian missionary will accordingly think very highly of the believers to whom he speaks and with whom he works. He will honor and respect them as brethren in the faith and as saints adorned with the wedding dress of Christ's holiness. Such people are to be treated with respect. To such people will go out all the love and brotherly affection of which we are capable through the help of the Holy Spirit. Here, then we will exercise ourselves in humility.

## 2

## The Pastoral Greeting, v. 2

Speaking with the authority of an ambassador of Christ and at the same time with the humility of one who aspires to be nothing else than a messenger of Christ, and addressing his brethren in the faith who are saints before God, the Christian missionary will then bring to his people the same apostolic greeting with which St. Paul addressed the believers in Asia Minor: *Χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* v. 2b: "Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." We do not presume to bring great outward blessings to our people on the mission field, economic independence, political emancipation, social advantages, material prosperity, but with the authority of a messenger of Christ we bring them a greeting which bestows upon them blessings far more precious than the outward advantages which the world may crave. "Grace and peace," - our missionaries usually begin their sermons with this greeting, or a similar word. These words have grown very familiar to us. Oh, that their very familiarity may not dull our appreciation of their glorious import! Grace and peace: the world may speak of good luck, health, prosperity, honor,- all

transitory things that have no abiding value and that bear within them the germ of decay, and in their very enjoyment they begin to be consumed and to pass away; they leave the heart empty, and longing unfulfilled. In contrast to that, our greeting to our people speaks of grace and peace. What lovely concepts, these; what comforting prospects! Where hearts are disturbed by the grasping selfishness of men, by all the strife and seething turmoil that boils about them or where they are perhaps troubled even by the clash of arms and the noise of conflict and the stinging dust of warfare of the Church in her militant endeavors arising to their nostrils; what a balm of benediction to hear the messengers of Christ greet the brethren with the words of grace and peace!

Grace,- this is that wonderful quality in God whereby He forgives the sins of the undeserving, whereby He inclines to our infirmities, whereby all His ineffable love is poured out over us. We are to preach grace, grace to wipe away all sins, grace sufficient for every need, grace to make us children of God and heirs of heaven. But note that this grace is a grace in Christ, ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ. We are given grace in Christ, for Christ's sake. Without Christ and apart from Christ there is no grace. *Extra Christum nulla salus.*

And peace,- that is the second precious concept which the missionary brings to his people in the apostolic greeting. Peace,- what does the world need more than that, war-torn and sin-sick as it is, bleeding out of a thousand wounds from the wars of the ages! With the world sighing and sorrowing under an unsupportable load of grief, filled with the news of evil and the portent of misfortune, ravaged by selfishness, corroded by greed, torn by strife, goaded on

by the unsavory spirit out of the pit to a reckless quaffing of the frothy cup of carnal indulgences to forget for a moment the torment of restlessness and the intransigent terror of their hearts- what a wonderful thing to speak of peace to such a world! And the peace of which we speak is much more precious than a mere cessation of bloodshed, more than a mere pounding of swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. It is a peace of the heart, peace between God and man, a peace that flows over into the unending glory of heaven, the peace that was established for us through Christ. For again you note that it is a peace "in Christ," ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ. And if we have peace in our heart then we can bear all the difficulties of life on earth with cheerful submission to God's will.

And as we thus speak of grace and peace, these blessings are actually bestowed upon the believers. These are no idle, empty words. God actually does what these words say and express. The Holy Spirit is active in and through the word of God. The word of God is a Means of Grace. As we preach of the grace of God and speak of the peace of God in Christ, the Holy Ghost works through these words and gives the people courage to believe those words, and thus actually bestows upon the believing hearers those very things of which we speak, namely grace and peace.

What a wonderful view of the work he is doing is thus given to the missionary! He is to speak of grace and peace; or, to put it into the words found with the prophet Isaiah, he is to comfort the believers: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." See, then, what our work is become, in the light of these words of St. Paul! Oh, how zealously we should therefore carry it on, speaking with authority and

yet in humility, as messengers of Christ and as such who bring grace and peace to grateful believing hearts.

## 3

Prayer an Important Part in the Work of the  
Missionary, v. 3 - 8.

Looking at our work of the Lord's vineyard in the light of St. Paul's epistle to the Colossians, we will be impressed by the fact that prayer is mentioned right at the beginning of the epistle. The very first thing of which the Apostle speaks after giving the brethren his apostolic greeting, is prayer. Thus prayer should play an important part also in our work. You recall the importance which Luther granted to prayer in his work. We are all familiar with the saying: "Oratio, tentatio, meditatio faciunt theologum." And yet we are apt to slight this important part of our work. Our prayer is frequently a somewhat perfunctory performance. Even when prayers are spoken in church they are frequently said so softly and indistinctly that one can hardly make them out, and it almost appears as though people were ashamed to be caught in the act and attitude of prayer.

Another way in which we are apt to turn things around in our prayer is that we are usually inclined to put the petition, the asking, first in our prayer. But with Paul it was a matter of first giving thanks and praise to God. Let us make much of our blessed privilege of prayer. Let us learn ever better to praise the Lord in our prayers. Let us learn to do that without ceasing, daily, while driving or walking. And let us set aside a definite period in our study time which is to be given over to prayer, to those prayers in which we thank and praise God, and also the pastoral intercessory prayer.

Is it not striking that the prayer of the Apostle is first of all a prayer of praise to the Lord? Perhaps we would not complain so much about all kinds of things about us that seem all wrong if we schooled ourselves to pray more prayers of thanksgiving to the Lord, if we more frequently stopped to thank the Lord for the many blessings He has showered upon us and our congregations and mission stations. Paul at the time of writing this letter found himself in very trying circumstances. He was in bonds, he was facing a trial for his life, and he was confronted with all kinds of difficulties. There were many things about the Colossians which filled him with concern and for which he could have criticized them. But he does not start on that note. His first word is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

He was prompted to such a prayer when he heard of their faith and love, v. 4. Epaphras, who is mentioned a little later, had probably served as a messenger to report to Paul on the status of the Colossian congregation. Paul was gratified to hear of their faith in Christ Jesus and their love towards the saints and faithful brethren. Theirs was a proper faith, engendered by the word of God and embracing Christ, trusting in His blood and righteousness. This faith had brought forth love and fraternal regard for their fellow-believers. Even if their faith was still weak and their love perhaps still mixed with many deficiencies, yet it was to be seen that faith and love were present in the Colossian congregation, and for this Paul is thankful and for it he praises the Lord, since it is only by the grace of God that faith and love come into being. Let us be ready to recognize the faith and love that may be found in our mission stations, and be quick to thank God for this. Let us not spend our time in grumbling and complaining but let us acknowledge that there are evidences of

faith and love, however weak and small, and render our heartfelt praise to the Lord that He has thus blessed the preaching of the Gospel.

It is noteworthy that, linked immediately with faith and love, the Apostle speaks of the hope of the Christians, v. 5, and also for this hope his prayer of praise rises up to the throne on high. The apostles worked with a feeling of the near consummation of their hope. Perhaps that was a result of the many dangers that surrounded them and the imminent prospect of meeting a violent and sudden death. Undoubtedly this feeling was caused also by the manner in which Jesus spoke of His return, and the fervent longing of their hearts to see their beloved Master again. With us it is frequently the case that we speak of our Lord's return and our hope of heaven as something that is rather far off. We are so much occupied with the present that we do not feel so keenly the longing for the peace of heaven. That is regrettable. That takes a good deal of effectiveness out of our preaching. Let us learn to put the prospect of heaven and the consummation of our hope into immediate juxtaposition to our preaching of the forgiveness of sins and of God's providence for this life, not that our hope is something afar off and only remotely related to our faith. And when we speak of heaven, let us learn to do it as St. Paul does here, or St. Peter in the first chapter of his first general epistle. Let us bring out the fact that our inheritance is laid up for us in heaven, *ἀποκεῖμεν* *ἡμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς* . There it is secure from grasping enemy hands and can not be taken from us by the changing fortunes of war or business reverses whereby so often men's earthly hopes are dashed to the ground. Amid the uncertainty of the times, and with very many of our members especially in the Asiatic mission field having but very small hopes and prospects of earthly prosperity, this precious hope of our

heavenly inheritance should be set before them frequently and should always be brought into immediate connection with the Gospel.

That it is a certain hope, an expectation that will not disappoint them, is brought out not only by the thought that the inheritance is laid up for us in heaven but also by the added assurance that the word which tells them of this hope is the word of truth of the Gospel, *ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ὑπερβολῆς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου*. Emphatically that is stated: the word of the Gospel which told you of the hope of heaven is the word of truth. Many promises of future bliss which people will hear in this world are false, are chimerical, are like will o' the wisps that lead nowhere. But what we have to proclaim is something definite. This is the word of truth. And all our preaching and the very manner in which we speak of the Bible and our whole attitude towards it must reflect our own sincere confidence that this is the word of truth. - How fervently should we with St. Paul praise God for this hope and for giving us the sure word of truth of the Gospel by which it is proclaimed!

This word of the Gospel has come to the Colossians, Paul goes on to say in v. 6, even as it has gone out into all the world. Just as it is quite proper that we are trying to carry the Gospel into China and India and other countries of the world, and are endeavoring to find ever new fields for its proclamation, so Paul, personally or through others, brought the Gospel to Colossae. Of this Gospel Paul can say that it brings forth fruit and that it grows and spreads, it is

*καρποφοροῦμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον*. The word of God is a living word, proceeding out of the mouth of the living God and partaking to some extent of the qualities of its divine Author, and so this word is not a dead thing but it will bring forth fruit. It does not return void unto Him who sent it. We should be very thankful, therefore, to view

our work in that light and to find that our preaching of the Word is fruit-bearing, *καρπὸς ποροῦμενος*, be the fruits ever so meager, and that the word of God grows and spreads, as is evident from the very extent of our mission work in China and India. Our missionaries would not be in those countries and we would not have our stations in them, if the Gospel had been without fruit both as regards its effectiveness at home and in those distant countries. Let us not be blind to these fruits and blessings. Gratefully let us acknowledge them and praise the Lord for them, not only occasionally when our attention is called to them, but as a matter of our daily fervent prayer of praise.

## 4

## Intercessory Prayer as Part of the Mission Work

## v. 9 - 14

As the missionary looks at his work in the light of this Epistle he will see also that his prayers are very largely of an intercessory nature. Paul has thanked God for the faith of the Colossian Christians; now he goes on to ask God that these people be kept in the faith and that they be given an increased knowledge of the will of God and supplied grace to work with ever greater effectiveness according to the will of their God. Paul was a faithful pastor who dearly loved the flock that was entrusted to him. Thus he says that from the time he has heard about their faith and love he has not ceased praying for them and beseeching the Lord on their behalf. Intercessory prayer is an important part of the work of the missionary, an integral function of his job. He ought to set aside a definite time for it and give it the dignity of a specific part in his program. That should be a regular practice with us that we set out to pray for our congregations and missions, as groups and as individuals. We will probably have a list

of names of people who are particularly in need of comfort or of strengthening or for whom we can utter a special word of thanksgiving. The intercessory prayer of the missionary is not something that is paraded before the world, and we who have such a great fear of appearing sentimental are probably overcautious and unduly reticent in speaking of these things. Perhaps there is a great deal more of intercessory prayer than we imagine. Still, I cannot rid myself of the feeling that we are not as faithful in this matter as we ought to be. I believe we would see more evidences of it if there really were the proper amount of intercessory prayer. "Ask and it shall be given to you, Seek and ye shall find, Knock and it shall be opened unto you," that still holds good. Instead of complaining that our people have so little spiritual knowledge, let us pray like Paul that God should fill them with spiritual knowledge of Christ. And why should we not freely and often tell our people, if we can do it truthfully, that we are praying for them?

It made a deep impression on me, when I was leaving our home church in Chicago the last Sunday before starting out for Western Canada, to have a white-haired old gentleman shake hands with me and say: "Go in God's name; we are praying for you." And throughout these disturbed times, when our missionaries were so frequently in danger, and had to go into concentration camps, to have them all kept safely, and to see new doors opened again and again, that gives you the distinct feeling that this was on account of the many prayers being sent up to Heaven's throne on behalf of our mission work.

Speaking again of our prayers: they will have much of thanksgiving in them, even as St. Paul here launches once more into praise of the Lord who has made the Colossian Christians fit to receive the inheritance of the saints in light, *εἰς τὴν κληρονομίαν τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ φωτί*, v. 12. At

the same time the Apostle reminds the Christians of all the things God has done for them: that it was God who lifted them out of darkness and made them children of His beloved Son, and Paul winds up this glorious passage with the repeated reminder that with Christ we have redemption, namely the forgiveness of sins, *τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν, τὴν ἀφ' ἧς τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν*, v. 14. We need to be told about this ever and ever again. It is such a glorious truth, and at the same time something so utterly beyond human reason and invention, that it needs to be stated again and again that in Christ we have forgiveness of sins.

Let us learn to look at our work in this light, faithfully to bring our intercessory prayers before the Lord and never to grow tired of telling our people how blessed they are in this that God has made them His children and grants them forgiveness of sins for the sake of the Savior.

## 5

## Beautiful Savior

## v. 15-23

As the missionary looks at his work in the light of this epistle he sees that it is brought out very clearly and emphatically that he is to preach Christ. That means that we will tell our people, and keep on telling them, who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for them. How this preaching may be carried out is demonstrated in this next passage in which St. Paul sings in exalted strains of our Beautiful Savior: *Schoenster Herr Jesu, Schoepfer aller Dinge*. In this marvellous passage, beginning with verse 15, we see our Lord Jesus revealed in all His glory and beauty, as the image of the invisible Father, *εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου*. Luther says that if you want

to know how God looks you should look at the Lord Jesus: what you see when you look at Jesus that shows you how God is minded towards us. Jesus is the image of the Father. He is born of the Father. St. Paul brings out this truth very distinctly that there is a fundamental difference between the Son and those who otherwise are called the children of God: the latter are all created while the Son is called  $\pi\rho\omega\tau\acute{o}\tau\omicron\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ , firstborn before all creation. Our Lord Jesus Christ is before all creation. He antedates all creation. He is from eternity in the bosom of the Father. The Son is the Creator, - Schoenster Herr Jesu, Schoepfer aller Dinge. St. Paul goes to considerable trouble to establish that point that all things were created by the Son, v. 16.17. St. Paul anticipates what the next chapter is specifically to accomplish, namely to fortify the believers against false teachers who wanted to pull Jesus down to a subordinate position and make Him a mere demiourgos.

And not only is Jesus the Creator but He is also the Preserver of all things. It is He who executes divine providence. Oh, what comfort is there in this fact that it is just Jesus, our loving Savior, who manipulates the events of history and shapes the destinies of nations and who also has our lives in His hands!

The beauty and glory of our Savior is then brought out also in this that He is the head of the church, v. 18. What a beautiful relation is pictured here, that of the head and the body, the vine and the branches. Christ is the head of the church, the Lord and Preserver of the church. But we and all our members are on the same level. We therefore are not to lord it over the congregations nor arbitrarily to take their destinies in our hands.

When St. Paul sets forth the greatness of our Beautiful Savior he then brings in another factor. Also with the resurrection Jesus

made the beginning. Without Him there would be no resurrection. But with Jesus leading the way out of the tomb, when He assumed life unto Himself again, we confidently expect that our Glorious and Beautiful Savior will also lead us out of the tomb when on the last day the trumpet resounds and His voice penetrates the sod to stir our dust into immortality.

In Christ therefore all things are bound together. All things exist in Him and to Him and through Him. In every respect and from every viewpoint He has the preeminence. But it is a gracious reign established by His work of redemption. He made peace through the blood of His cross, not a peace such as the world would like to have, but peace for heart and conscience, and emphatically it is repeated that all this comes into being through Christ, v. 20.

Immediately that is brought into connection with the Colossian Christians, v. 21-23. Looking at our work in the light of this Epistle, we can certainly learn to be practical. We can learn to make our preaching always fit the people who are before us and to turn everything into immediate connection with them and their lives. Our preaching must never be such an impersonal thing that it leaves the hearers untouched, that it leaves them unconcerned, as though they were but spectators in church and could pass an objective opinion as to whether the pastor's effort that day was a good one or not. Therefore we should never be satisfied to set before our people warmed-over fare, an old sermon written years ago and probably under vastly different circumstances. And we should train our catechists and evangelists to write a new sermon every time, even if we have to supply material for them. Thus St. Paul, when he wants to paint the greatness

of the redemption for the Colossians, reminds them of the terrible state in which they had been and in which they would still be if it had not been for Christ's work of redemption: ye were once alienated and enemies of God, *πρὸς ὅντας ἀπηλλοτριωμένους καὶ ἐχθροὺς* but now reconciled through the body of Christ through death. We need to keep telling our people that by birth and nature we were enemies of God and that the only way to save us was by the death of Christ upon the cross; it was all God's doing, and nothing that we had deserved. But now we have been washed clean and are made saints before God. However, now it is necessary that we remain with God, that we be faithful to that supreme Lord of heaven and earth who made us His own by the blood of His covenant, v. 23. To that end let us faithfully hear the Gospel.

## 6

## Experiences in the Ministry

## v. 24 - 27

Looking at our work in the light of this Epistle, we can learn how we are to regard our experiences in the ministry. We speak a good deal about our experiences, and rightly so. They are important to us, and we get much out of an exchange of experiences. We shall probably have the same kind of experiences that marked the ministry of St. Paul. There will be sufferings, and joyful experiences. As we try to learn to look at these things the way St. Paul did, we will see that his first reaction is joy in his sufferings. The reason for that joy is this: by his suffering he serves his people, as when missionaries remain on their field in a time of danger, suffering the pangs of separation from their families or risking internment and

concentration camps and all kinds of indignities, but by their very remaining upon the field they serve their people. And otherwise: in our sufferings we can be an example to our people, an example of patience and submission to the divine will, and of the ability to draw blessings out of what would seem disaster to the unbelieving children of the world. And then St. Paul has an odd thought. He seems to feel that there is a certain average of suffering, and if he can bear an extra amount that might ease the load for some other soul. He therefore rejoices in his suffering, since that may save his members some measure of suffering. And it is a common experience that sufferings draw us closer to our God. Also for that reason we should rejoice in them, as instruments for the cleansing and strengthening of our faith. Read 1 Peter 1: 3 - 9 for that. Also, when the pastor has a great amount of suffering to bear, that will bring out the love and sympathy of his people in a manner not to be experienced otherwise. It takes a strong faith to rejoice in sufferings, but let us train ourselves to that, through the help of the Holy Spirit.

While speaking of this, St. Paul again explains his connection with the Colossian church: he is become a servant of the church, according to the divine economy, v. 25. This operates also now, and for us. God could bring His Gospel to China, India and other countries in a different fashion than through our efforts, but He is pleased to use us. Now we should act in such a fashion that the people see and feel how we regard ourselves as servants of the Gospel, not as lords over the flock; that we respect the commission given us on their behalf, and that the main thing in our ministry is the

proclamation of the glad tidings of salvation, to unfold the divine plan for the redemption of the world, v. 26. That plan and will of God is indeed a mystery; it is something that is hidden from the world; it could not be discovered or evolved by human reasoning; it is the very opposite of natural religion; it is a matter of revelation and must be disclosed to man by God. This mystery now revealed centers in Christ, in His Epiphany as the Son of God and Savior of the world, v. 27. What a marvellous thing that Christ should come to the Gentiles and His glory be revealed to them and they be made to partake of the hope of eternal life! This is our business, to preach Christ to them in this fashion. We must not use up our time and talents with endeavors which might be termed approaches and side issues, which things may be well and good in themselves but which deserve no other place in the missionary scheme than to be regarded and used as an approach. We mean such things as education, economic uplift, philanthropic endeavors of various kinds, amelioration of distress in this or the other direction. Let us do for our people what we can reasonably accomplish along that line, but let us not permit these things to usurp too much of our time and strength. Let us do these things in their proper proportion of manpower and financial resources, keeping the main thing ever before us: the preaching of the word of God, the teaching and warning, Law and Gospel, with Christ as the main topic, the heart and center of all our preaching. Accordingly, we view our preaching as revolving about Christ and presenting Christ, as the next verse, 28, then so clearly sets forth.

## Our Preaching in the Light of this Epistle

v. 28

In the scheme of missionary work the public proclamation of the Word, the preaching of the Gospel ministry, will naturally loom up as something of prime importance. As various phases and divisions of mission work are illumined by the trenchant remarks of the great missionary Apostle so also this important part of the work of the preaching on the mission field finds rich illumination in this Epistle. The Lord Jesus has sent us into all the world that we might preach the Gospel to every creature. Preaching is therefore of utmost importance in the work of the church. Everything rests upon and rises or falls with the preaching of the Gospel. Yet one can easily become superficial, fall into careless ways, and be guilty of slipshod methods just on this score of preaching. Under the pressure of the many other things which the missionary is called upon to do and under the temptation that thorough study and careful preparation are not so necessary since he deals with people of very limited spiritual knowledge, the missionary is only too apt to slight the work of preaching. We need to study this part of our work again and again, and gratefully will we receive the instruction as to our preaching which this eloquent verse contains.

There is something to be noted first as to the contents of our preaching. "Whom we preach," says St. Paul, ὃν ἡμεῖς καταγγέλλομεν. When St. Paul wants to describe the contents of his preaching he answers with a personal pronoun, "whom," namely Christ. If he were asked what constituted the substance of his preaching, he would answer not with a statement of certain ideas but with a direct personal pronoun, not what, but whom, we preach. We preach Christ, and Him crucified,

he says at another place. That is something distinctive and characteristic about the Christian missionary's preaching, that it is inextricably intertwined with the person of Christ. All our preaching starts out from Christ, and leads to Christ; it is Christo-centric in the fullest sense of the word. You cannot preach the Christian religion without preaching Christ. It is not thus otherwise in the world. You could read the poems of Heinrich Heine or Lord Byron, or the writings of Tagore or Lin Yutang, and find in them many excellent thoughts and delightful sentiments which you could accept without regard for what you think of those authors or persons themselves. But you cannot do that with Christ. He is the very center and heart of the Christian religion, and so we preach Christ. In contrast to all other religions, which present abstract thoughts and systems of reasoning and a collection of human ideas, the Christian religion preaches a person, namely Christ. And whereas other religions set before you a system of human inventions and a row of abstract philosophical speculations and developments of human theories, all of which you might accept or reject, or adopt in part, totally apart from their author or authors, you cannot do that with the Christian religion. For our religion preaches the person of Christ and rests upon the person of Christ and revolves about the person of Christ, and so the content of our preaching is given thus in our verse: Whom we preach, namely Christ. That means that we tell our hearers who He is and what He has done for us; that we speak of Him to our congregations in the light, for instance, of what this chapter says of Him: that He is the first-born of the Father, from eternity in the bosom of the Father; that He is the image of the invisible Father; that He is the Creator and Preserver of the

universe, for in Him and to Him and through Him all things exist; that He is the head of the church, which is His body; that He is the first in the resurrection, that He has preeminence in all things. Furthermore, we preach Christ in this manner that we speak especially of the fact that He made peace for us with God through the blood of His cross; that He took the handwriting which was against us and in which our sins and debts are enumerated, and nailed it to the cross, thus removing it as a barrier which would block our way into heaven; that He is the Savior, and the only Savior, of mankind. There you have the content of the preaching which the Christian missionary is to do: he is to preach Christ. What a glorious privilege! Oh, that this might ever be the chief topic and the all-inclusive content and the ever-recurring refrain of all our preaching: Christ and Him crucified!

#### Our Manner of Preaching

This verse then also gives us some excellent instruction as to the manner of our preaching. We are to preach, *καταγγελλόμενοι*. That is an emphatic word. Out of the fullness of our heart, with a clear voice, with unmistakable intent, are we to proclaim that which Christ gives us to proclaim. We are not to spin out our own thoughts nor present our own speculations, but are to serve as a messenger, *ἄγγελος*, to convey tidings entrusted to us. We are not to speak as a professor seated behind a desk and propounding his findings with probably little interest in the reaction of his students, but we are to serve as messengers of the Lord, with hearts filled with deep concern that the hearers of our message should believe our message and react favorably to it. We are to get up before our audiences and look them in the face and with a distinct voice preach to them, and preach to them in such a manner that they feel we are expecting

results. It must not be a mere routine job for us, but our preaching of the Gospel must be a matter of throbbing concern to us.

Verse 28 then also defines our preaching for us when it says that we are to admonish and to teach, *ἠγορεύοντες καὶ διδάσκοντες*. We are to preach Law and Gospel, each in its place and both rightly divided from each other. In our preaching of the Law we must be specific enough and clear enough. Our preaching of the Law must not move in mere generalities, which would be of no more effect than the firing of blank cartridges. People must be made to see their need of a Savior, to understand their sinful condition. We must make certain that our people grasp the nature of sin and its terrible consequences, that sin is rebellion against God, and leads to perdition. But all our preaching of the Law must lead up to and culminate in that which is the main subject of our preaching, namely Christ, the Gospel, the comfort of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Merely to lead a man to a knowledge of his sinfulness and to terrify him with the prospect of the judgment, and then not to show him the Savior, that would only make his confusion the greater and his despair the more devastating. Let our preaching therefore lead up to and revolve about the glorious message of salvation through the blood of Christ. And very pertinently the Apostle here adds the words "in all wisdom," *ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ*. The Holy Spirit must supply ability to preach the Gospel. He must give us the wisdom and the understanding by which we are enabled to be preachers of the Gospel. If we were left to our own devices, we would not know how to preach the Gospel nor when to apply it. Let us consistently and humbly pray for that wisdom from on high which will make us proper messengers of the Gospel.

Another pertinent point which comes before us as we view our

preaching in the light of this verse is the fact that it is aimed at every man, *πάντα ἄνθρωπον*. Three times that is brought out in this one short verse. The Lord is very much in earnest about it that every man should hear this word, that all nations should hear the Gospel. To all men is the Gospel addressed, high or low, Greek or barbarian, free or slave, rich or poor. The word of God brushes aside the surface differences and goes straight down to the deep-lying wants of the human soul. For here they are all alike. Under the professor's flowing academic gown and the king's ermine-trimmed robe and the workman's grease-bespattered jacket and the beggar's tattered rags there beats the same heart with the same desperate needs and wicked desires, the same perverse proclivities and sinful predilections, the same abject fear, intransigent terror and grinding hopelessness. But to them all the Gospel brings a message of comfort and hope. All should therefore hear the word of God. That is a thought especially pertinent to those engaged in evangelistic endeavors. Let us really try to reach as many as at all possible, in whatever outward condition of life we may find them.

#### The Object of our Preaching

From this verse we then make the further observation that also the object of our preaching is clearly outlined: "To present every man perfect in Christ," *ἵνα παρουσιάσωμεν πάντα ἄνθρωπον τέλειον ἐν Χριστῷ*. It is not the object of our preaching primarily to make this world a better world to live in. That may result and should result from our evangelistic undertakings, but it is only of secondary importance and would be in the nature of a by-product of our work. The chief purpose of our mission work is to present people perfect on Judgment Day. That means to preach Christ to them in such a way

that they come to faith in Him, receive forgiveness of their sins, and thus can stand on the day of judgment. St. Paul always has his eye fixed on the horizon from which he expects the break of Christ's great day. He is always working under the pressure of that great day to come. So will we labor in our missionary endeavor with our mind fixed upon the Judgment Day, trying earnestly to equip our hearers so that they might stand on that great day. That will put emphasis into our preaching, and fervor into our hearts. That day will prove the worth of our preaching. How many a languid pew and lifeless pulpit would be galvanized into entirely new activity if their occupants but once saw burning in upon them the blazing light of that great white throne! Or, the object of our preaching might be summed up in the words of an old neighbor pastor of mine, when he described his aim in the fifty years of his ministry. He said: "I wanted the people to get to heaven, and I wanted to get there too."

## 8

## The Missionary Learns to Work with Agonized Straining

## v. 29

And then, as we view our work in the light of this Epistle, we catch another very important point from St. Paul, namely as to the earnestness and tearful intensity with which we should carry on our work. St. Paul had just spoken of the aim of his preaching, to get people into heaven. Now Paul lets his heart speak out as to the earnestness with which he tries to accomplish that aim. He strives for this aim with an agonized straining, *κοπιῶν ἕως θανάτου*. You may have seen motion pictures in which galley slaves were shown tugging at the oars, under the stinging lash of the whip. How they

pulled and strained at those sweeps with an agony of effort that was painful to behold! That kind of rowing is different from leisurely pulling at the oars when you take your best girl boat-riding in Central park. Here in this verse you catch something of the drive which catapulted St. Paul through the successive stages of his spectacular missionary career. It is in this sense that Paul speaks later in this Epistle of redeeming the time, of taking heed to one's ministry to fulfill it. You perceive that same sense of urgency and intensity in the words of our Lord Jesus: "I must do the works of him that sent me.- Let us work while it is day, before the night cometh when no man can work." We also must catch something of that spirit. We must preach as dying men to dying men. We must be aware of the fact that this particular sermon which we are now preparing or delivering, may be the last opportunity for some poor soul to hear the Gospel, or it may be your last opportunity to preach the Gospel. We too must agonize over our preaching and do it in a spirit that is moved to tears of frustrated love if that preaching seems to be of no avail. It must be a sowing in tears. But this agony of effort must be genuine. Nothing will so quickly and completely alienate an audience as to have them catch insincerity, and they are quick to catch it, in the artificial pathos of a preacher.

Let us learn from St. Paul to work at such white heat of intensity and under the drive of this urgency. Let us shake off any lethargy of the flesh that may want to fasten itself upon us. Let us not find easy excuses in outward difficulties, in such things, for instance, as the wilting effect of the climate. I dare say it became hot enough also where St. Paul was laboring, but we do not

find him urging the debilitating effect of the climate. But as we train ourselves, after Paul's example, to strive with an agonized straining, let us do so in all humility. No one should grow proud of himself as though he were consuming himself in the Lord's service, when probably it is only an unwise division of his time, and perhaps a measure of self-indulgence in the quaffing of coffee that makes him sit up until the wee hours of the night and then sleep long the next morning. St. Paul was a zealous servant of the Lord, but he does not preen himself with that, rather does he attribute anything in the line of diligence and earnestness which may have been connected with his work, to the Lord who endows Paul with zeal and strength. It is the grace of God which is working in Paul and through Paul, working mightily to accomplish that which God wants to carry out through St. Paul as a humble servant of the Gospel. Thus we shall want to ascribe any diligence and earnestness which may be noted about our work altogether to the grace of God. The less we think about how much we do and how hard we work and the more we put our mind upon the glorious privilege of working for Jesus and the urgent need of the souls whom we are trying to lead to the light, the better it will be for us and the easier will our work appear to be.

## Chapter II

The Missionary Learns to Fortify his Flock  
against False Teachers

Col. 2, 1-8.

As the pastor and missionary worker looks at his work in the light of this Epistle he learns from St. Paul that it is an important part of his God-given work to warn and protect his flock against false teachers. In former days there used to be a periodical which we saw every once in a while called "Schwert und Kelle." In the days of Nehemiah, when the Jews returned from the captivity and set about to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, they worked with the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other. We dare not be satisfied with merely presenting the right, true and correct doctrine but we must also warn people against false doctrine. Such warning, however, must proceed from proper motives and must be done in the proper spirit. Mere scolding will not bring about any good results. Let us learn from St. Paul how we may attack this matter. Paul begins with a "captatio." He shows the Colossians his love and concern for them. Perhaps not all of them have seen him in the flesh. Yet his love towards them is real and true; if he sounds a word of warning they will understand that this is well meant; if he speaks sharply they will not resent it because they know it flows out of a sincere concern for them. Paul uses the word ἀγῶνα, he agonizes over them as a mother over a sick child. He wants to see them comforted. He would like to see them fortified. And this is accomplished by their possession of the true knowledge of the mystery of grace in Christ, v. 1.2.: "For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my

face in the flesh; That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;"

Right from the start therefore, Paul sets them up against the claims of the errorists by showing them that in Christ they have everything, v. 3. *ἐν ᾧ κρύβονται πάντα τὰ θησαυροὶ τῆς σοφίας καὶ τῆς γνώσεως ἀπόκρυφαι.* "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Then he tells the Colossians why he is so emphatic about their having the *πάντα πλοῦτον* of spiritual knowledge in Christ: they will then not be fooled so easily by false teachers who come with claims of great wisdom and learning but who have only trifling and feeble things to offer, *πιθαρρολογία*, v. 4.

"And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words."

These first verses of the chapter might be called merely quick jabs at the false teachers, later Paul launches forth with heavy body punches against them. We can learn from Paul's manner. There is a good hint for us here. Our people are so easily impressed with the high-sounding claims of others, "Christian Science" which is neither Christian nor scientific, the claims of yogi and Buddhist and Theosophist, of New Thought and Modernism, - all of this sounds captivating, and our people are easily dazzled by those claims. But we must tell our people that they should not permit themselves to be fooled. All these claims are "enticing words," and they are "kid-stuff" in comparison with what the Christians have. The Christians should not trade a fine diamond for a plugged nickel.

## Order and Organization are a Decided Help

2

Again Paul swings back to that tactic of a captatio, v. 5, when he repeats his statement of concern for them and then praises them for the good things he sees in them, their order and steadfastness, *ταῖς ἰσχυραῖς καὶ ἁγλαῖς* of faith. How much we can learn from Paul! Instead of scolding, criticizing, belittling, acting as though we expect only the worst and probably take a somewhat malicious delight in finding our evil predictions come true, let us learn to see what good things there are to be noted about our people. And we do not need to hesitate to tell our people how glad we are about those things. I remember a mission festival in Duluth where the pastor made a few introductory remarks before the collection was taken up and incidently said that he had never been let down by his congregation and he was sure that now also they would do the proper thing. That was in line with Paul's method here, and I need hardly add that the mission offering was a worthy one. Paul speaks here of order and organization, *ταῖς ἰσχυραῖς καὶ ἁγλαῖς*, and these things are quite a decided help to keep the Christians from falling away. Team-play is valuable. The lone wolf usually gets into trouble. Man is by nature a gregarious creature and he is benefited by order and organization. If a man belongs to a congregation and is an active member, and if that congregation works in an organized and systematic manner, then there is much less danger of such a man falling away than if there were no such order or system. We are not forgetting, of course, that the real work of keeping them steadfast is done by the Holy Ghost through the Word, but order and organization are a valuable aid. Let us learn from this point for ourselves, in our conferences and station work and for our mission

work in general. We do not want to overemphasize organization and a fixed order of things, but we should know the value of these things and we should capitalize on the opportunities presented through them. This would apply, for instance, to the introduction of the Common Order in our services, and to such things as having the congregation send a representative to annual meetings with other congregational delegates, and taking an active part in all the organized work of the Church.

Now Paul, v. 6, after building up so skillfully and leading up to this point so carefully and getting the Colossian Christians into the right mood for what is to come, lets fly with a stirring call to walk in Christ, *Εἰ αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε*, vs. 6. Nothing less is compatible with your present station: you have received Christ, now walk in Him. Let your life be wrapped up in Him, let all your thinking and all your activity be circumscribed and bounded by Christ.

Christians will want to do that out of gratitude. Christ has lifted them out of their former sinful and lost state and has rooted them firmly in the truth and the faith; now they will surely want to show forth their thankfulness by living in Christ, v. 7.

"Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."

This was an additional build-up for the real punch which is coming now, with Paul's solemn and earnest call to the Christians to see to it that no one might mislead them with the false philosophy of the world, v. 8.

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

The Colossians were subjected to such attacks and misleading tactics. Judaizing false teachers had broken into the Colossian fold. These men

tended to disparage Paul's Gospel work and offered their own teachings instead, which they paraded with a great show of learning and false humility. Don't fall for that, is Paul's warning. He is not afraid to tackle that problem, nor should we be afraid to attack false teachers for what they are, empty sham, hollow show, a-b-c stuff, kinder-garten lore. Those people acted as though they had all wisdom, but they have only the beginnings, they have only the first things, the rudiments, the first elements, *ἡτοιχία*. Paul tells the Christians that they as Christians are far beyond that and should therefore not let those false teachers bluff them. Perhaps it is human tendency to think that the pastures are greener on the other side of the fence and that those other teachers have a greater wisdom than your own. But Paul asks the Christians to see what would happen if they listened to the false teachers: they would then be fooled, would be open to disappointment, and so Paul calls out sharply to them: don't fall for that stuff! And notice the sharp contrast: what those people have to offer is according to this world and not according to Christ, *κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν*. Let us make much of this difference. It is a mistake to minimize the difference between the Christian teachings and the heathen teachings. The strength of our mission work lies not in offering something very near to what the heathen already have but in offering them something totally different from what they have had and which could not satisfy the hunger of their hearts.

## 3

Learn to Fortify your Flock against False Teachers

by Showing your Christians that in Christ they have Everything

v. 9-15

It is quite striking, as you look at your work in the light of this

Epistle, to see how the positive note shows so prominently in the presentation of Paul's defense against false doctrine. His first move is proclamation of the right doctrine, with the underlying thought that the people will see how very foolish it would be for them to exchange the good thing they have for the very shoddy article the false teachers offer. In Christ we have everything, v. 9, says Paul to the believers, *πάν το πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος* . The false teachers claimed that what the Colossians had received from Paul and his fellow workers was good enough as far as it went, but that it was very incomplete and that the people needed further enlightenment, a more complete lining up of teachings and rules, which these false teachers in their charming and disarming humility were ready to supply. Paul sweeps that away by the clear statement that in Christ the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily, *πάν το πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος ὀυαδικῶς* . The fullness of the God-head - there is nothing lacking on that score, there is nothing deficient here, there is nothing additional that needs to be supplied. And v. 10 tells the believers that also on their side of it they want nothing and lack nothing, for they are complete in Christ. The very tense of the verb *πληρωθέντες* indicates that completeness. It is a rounded-off process. It is a process that has been brought to a conclusion. Again there is nothing that needs to be added, nothing still needs to be supplied, the Christians are complete in Christ, - what a wonderful defense and effective fortification against false teachers! When you know that you have everything then you will not fall easily into the trap of the false teachers that they would supply needs, since those needs do not exist. The false teachers were prating about angel ranks and principalities; that was trifling stuff; Christ

is the head of all principalities and power, v. 10, ἡ κεφαλὴ  
 πᾶσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας.

Another devastating blow at the Judaizing false teachers is given in the next verse, v. 11, showing that also on the score of circumcision the believers lacked nothing. They have that circumcision which really counts before God. The claims of those false teachers that the Christians would have to submit to the whole ceremonial law is therefore shown to be utterly baseless. The Christians lack nothing on this point, since they have been baptized, and Paul shows clearly what baptism does for them namely that it is the putting off the body, of the sins of the flesh, being buried with Christ in baptism and being raised up again from the dead, v. 11. 12. Not only have the believers all knowledge but they also have a new life in Christ. They were buried with Christ and are raised up again with him from the dead, sharing with Christ, partaking with Christ in the fullest sense, so that if the believer looks at the crucified Savior he can say: "there hang I." To make sure that his readers understand the fullness of their blessings in Christ Paul in the next few verses, v. 13-15, carries out beautifully just what we have in Christ. It is Paul's manner that he frequently expounds great teachings in a sort of parenthesis, in remarks made on the side. Thus it is here when Paul tells the believers: you people were dead in sins but God has quickened you to spiritual life, has forgiven you all your trespasses, blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us. (What a fine touch, to include himself), that the catalogue of our sins was moved out of the way where it blocked our progress towards God and heaven, yea rather that it was nailed to the cross. What a wealth of imagery, what a profusion of terms to make that clear that our sins are forgiven.

Or to add another: our sins are cast into the depths of the Sea. Just east of the Philippine Islands is the deepest spot so far discovered in the ocean; a bright coin dropped into a glass of water would still be visible, dropped into the clear water just off the wall of Dewey Avenue in Manila, eight feet deep, the coin might still be visible; but cast into the ocean where it is over thirty thousand feet deep it is effectively lost to our sight. Thus God puts away our sins. Now then, if you have all this fullness of knowledge and all this grace of forgiveness, what possible appeal would be left for you in the picayune claims of those false teachers? Let us learn in similar fashion to meet the dangers which threaten our people from false teachers.

## 4

## Stand in Your Christian Liberty

## v. 16-22

As we look upon our work in the light of this Epistle we see how danger threatens our people from false teachers who want to rob them of their Christian liberty. Those false teachers make all kinds of rules. The demand implicit obedience and yet they act with a great show of humility and modesty while setting up their arbitrary and man-made rules. Let us learn to see that there is a danger in these things. As paradoxical as it seems there is nevertheless a certain appeal in rules thus arbitrarily set up and obedience thus sternly demanded. That appeals to the Old Adam who wants to earn his salvation and achieve righteousness by his own efforts, and the harder such tasks seem and the more exacting such rules appear the more the Old Adam likes it. Let us not be blind to that danger and let us learn to meet it in the manner demonstrated here, namely with Paul's rousing call: Stand in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free.



said also for our work and life in the Orient that we should be very careful not to abuse and misuse our Christian liberty. We must not offend by doing things that may be permissible by themselves in some other country or under other circumstances but which might be misunderstood here. In that connection also we should remember that we have the body in Christ and that we should not trade it off for a mere shadow.

## 5

## Beware of False Humility, v. 23

Notice then how Paul warns his people against the pitfall of the false humility of heretical teachers. They make a great show of their humility. They pretended that they were far too humble to seek God directly, rather would they approach the throne of God through angel mediators. How very much like the Roman Catholics with their saints who are to serve as intercessors. But Paul shows that this claim of the false teachers was baseless. They had not even seen those angel mediators, - how could they bank on their intercession? Anyway, that would be starting things at the wrong end. We should take hold of the head, Christ, to whom we have free access. Explicitly we are directed to pray in the name of Jesus. How illogical, if you have died with Christ over and against the things of the world, still to let those things dominate and tyrannize you. Stand in your liberty! That whole show of humility is a sham. In reality it is pride which would set aside the directions which God has given and would put up its own rules as to how you may approach God. That is no humility which walks along with downcast face and hat drawn down over the eyes, but which looks sideways at every reflecting show-window to admire itself. And what small stuff it was after all, dealing with commands like:

touch not, taste not, handle not, revolving about things that you consume. How silly to trade off your Christian liberty and lose Christ, in whom all the fullness of the God-head dwells, for such trifling things. Take good care of the body, to be sure; but only in order that the body may serve you and the Gospel. And do not give the care of the body too much importance, v. 23.

"Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh."

That may be the source of some of our difficulties on the mission field that we give too much importance and prominence to the minor mechanics of living and squabble too much in a rather undignified manner about hill cottages and furloughs. Let us get so wrapped up in the big questions of spreading the gospel that we will have little time or inclination to bother much with matters that are but trifling in comparison.

Stand in your liberty! That will also help to solve the caste question. Don't let caste tyrannize you. On the other hand we missionaries should be very careful not to cram our ideas about caste down the throats of people who feel altogether differently about such matters than we do. Let us put this whole matter under the viewpoint of Christian liberty and it will tend to solve itself in the course of time. If it is a matter of Christian liberty then there is no compulsion, no legalistic coercion and therefore also none of the natural tendency to resist and fight back and with unnecessary tenacity to cling to age-old traditions that are now seen to be out of harmony with Christian principles.

## Chapter III

## The Missionary Learns to Point his People to Those

## Things which are Above

Col. 3: 1-4

1

As the missionary looks at his work in the light of this Epistle and as we learn to deal with people in St. Paul's immensely practical manner we see how Paul calls his people to Christian life. What a ringing appeal this is: τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖτε, v. 1, seek those things which are above. The premise is established that they are risen with Christ, now the conclusion is drawn that they should seek those things which are above. That is evangelical procedure. In this way we should act when we want to train our people to Christian living. It would be all wrong to try to force them to be good by threats of the big stick. The story is told of a missionary vehemently waving his clenched fist before the face of a frightened native and vociferously talking at him, and when the native then meekly promised to do what the missionary wanted, the latter turned with deep satisfaction to his companion and said: "there you can see that the Word brings forth fruits, da sieht man die Kraft des Wortes." We must learn rightly to divide Law and Gospel. I am afraid that there is frequently much confusion on this point, and then we wonder why our people do not make better progress in Christian living. But here in our Epistle we see how we are to go about it when we want to help our people to a better Christian life. They cannot escape the stringency of this argument: if you are risen with Christ, then seek that which is above.

Moreover, we should gladly seek those things which are above.

We should desire those things because they are the best things. It

should be the joy of our hearts to strive for those things, because Christ sitteth at the right hand of the Father. Another compelling reason for making us seek those things which are above is the thought of the permanency of these things Christ is enthroned there. That is His fixed abode. He rules as King and is exercising His royal position. And all of this is above the change and decay which we see all around us. This very contrast from the uncertainty and constant change to the permanency and assured certainty of the heavenly things should mightily draw our hearts and make us seek those things which are above, and to do so gladly and with longing.

## 2

## Love those Things which are Above, v. 2-4

V. 2 repeats the argument with an added fine pastoral and evangelical appeal: τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε, "love those things which are above, put your affection on the things which are above, and not upon those which are on the earth." Not only should we seek them because these things are best for us (sometimes things are good for us and yet are bitter), but we should love those things which are above, and one could well say that they deserve our love. Again you would have the sharp contrast from the things of this world which are all of a transitory nature and cannot really satisfy the hunger of our hearts, cannot supply a true object for our love. But those things which are above are undefiled and incorruptible and never fade away, I Peter 1: 4. Those things of our Lord are utterly pure, whereas whatever the world has to offer would be tainted with an admixture of impure things. Those things which are above are always fresh and never never lose their charm, whereas even the finest flowers fade quickly and the most exquisite joys soon begin to pall. And the things

which are above are eternal and will never become a prey to the gnawing tooth of time, whereas the things of this earth are all subject to decay and destruction. What cogent reasons can we therefore advance to our people why they ought to put their affections on the things which are above! And again we can back up this invitation with an argument the stringency of which they cannot escape. We can tell them that for them to seek that which is above is the logical conclusion of their having become a child of God. In our preaching we so often make the mistake of permitting our people to dwell too much in this world; we travel along with them in terms of this world; we take it for granted that they are so wrapped up in the affairs of this life; and we shrink from drawing the sharp distinctions which ought to be put between the things of this world and the things that are above. We somehow hesitate to make the last division and to draw the final conclusion, and our call to our people to seek and love those things which are above does not ring out as clearly and as urgently as it ought to do. But that is cheating our people. Let us learn from the Apostle Paul that true pastoral love will call upon the believers to set their hearts above. We must not permit our people to lose sight of it that our religion is a religion of the beyond, eine Jenseitsreligion. There is an inestimable blessing in this fact and we should learn this. The inheritance above and the love which now already seeks and yearns for the things which are above compensates very decidedly for some of the things which our people may seem to lack and is a rich counterpart for that in which our people may seem to fall short here on earth. Here is a splendid recompense, if one can use that term, for poverty and the general lack of distinction which may be attached to our people here in this world.

And in order to give the people an added incentive to seek and love those things which are above and to make them dwell in their thoughts a great deal on those glories Paul sets before them the marvellous revelation of Christ's great day of return when also all our glory in our heavenly status will be revealed. If we learn from St. Paul to think much on these things and to draw the thoughts of our people to these things, then we shall find it much more easy of accomplishment to have them seek those things which are above and to have them set their affections on them.

It is astonishing to note the many practical hints for our work which we can glean from a review of this Epistle. Thus you see the deep understanding with which Paul puts the more appealing things first and then advances something which may not be so welcome to the flesh. Thus Paul first calls upon the Christians to love all those beautiful, glorious things which are above; - well, that should not be difficult, here he should meet with a ready response. But then he comes with the demand to mortify your flesh. That will not appeal to the Old Adam, at this demand our old flesh is apt to balk. But since Paul has placed the appeal to seek those things which are above first and put this appeal upon its logical basis and supported it with all its glorious expectations and implications then he can the more readily secure their assent to the necessary mortifying of the flesh. The text has the word *νεκρωσάτε*, v. 5, to kill, to make to be dead. That is a painful prospect for the old flesh, and yet it is altogether reasonable. For these members are on earth, they belong to the earth, they are out of harmony with the inheritance awaiting you in heaven. Therefore these things must be put off, or in the language of the text: the old flesh must be put to death.

## Put off the Things of the Flesh

v. 5-11

Paul then catalogues these things and thoughts and gives a very cogent reason why they should be drowned and put down, v. 5: they are idolatry, εἰδωλολατρεία, and for these things the wrath of God descends upon the children of disobedience. As you study the manner in which Paul goes at these matters you marvel at the wealth of terms and the profusion of turns employed by him to show that it is altogether right and proper for the Christians to put down those things of the flesh. These things are simply incompatible with their Christian calling. Let us remember to treat this matter in a similar fashion. We are too apt sharply to demand and critically to condemn; let us rather learn from Paul to invite and draw with the beauty and glory of that which is above, and then to show that we now ought willingly and gladly to put off the earthly things which are out of harmony with all the splendor and glory of our heavenly inheritance. The text makes it clear that there are things which need to be put off, and Paul in his practical fashion reminds the Colossian Christians that they also have been guilty of those unbecoming, earthly things which need to be put off. We need constantly to be reminded of our former sinful estate so that we value the present glorious estate and willingly live in accordance with it, v. 7. 8. One frequently finds that pastors hesitate to speak of those things. In my various travels I have listened to many so-called sermons in which the word sin did not once occur. And when we do speak of sin in our sermons we may be so vague that our listeners never catch the truth that they too are such persons who have sins that need to be forgiven. Paul is very practical, very close to the people, understanding the people and motivated by a sincere desire that his people should profit by the Gospel of forgiveness and grace and that they

should crucify the flesh to live a life which would grace and adorn the glorious Gospel they have embraced in faith. So Paul now speaks of the very common sins of the lips and asks the Christians not to lie to one another. That is a very common practice with the children of the world. But such lying to one another is unbecoming to the Christians, since they have put off the old man and put on the new man. Glowingly, appealingly, invitingly Paul pictures the new man, asking the believers to put on that new man. This new man is in the image of Christ and is patterned after God. In this new man all outward differences that ordinarily divide men vanish and fall away. What a strong invitation to draw and incite you to put on the new man! We, who endeavor to lead our people onward into a good Christian life, should learn to speak in this fashion, to draw and call with the Gospel, taking it for granted that since we are speaking to believers we can appeal to them with the glowing picture of the new man, and keeping in mind that it would not accomplish anything good on this score if we were merely to scold and to thunder away with the law.

## 4

## Put on the Garments of the New Man

## v. 12-15

We pastors and missionaries who would like to train our people to lead a truly Christian life may well learn from St. Paul how to effect such training. He uses all kinds of pictures and appeals; he draws and invites. He pulls and attracts but does not drive or coerce. In all his activity you will notice the evangelical manner and the absence of legalism. In this section of the chapter Paul uses the appealing picture of the bright garments of the new man. "Put on the garments of the new man," is his invitation; "see how pretty they are; see how

well you will look in these brave new garments." Frequently people have the idea that to become a Christian is a sour, hard thing; that it would mean putting away all light and joy, that Christianity is a drab and cheerless existence which would turn a person into a puritanical sourpuss. We missionaries probably operate a little too much with "don't this and don't that." From St. Paul we can learn a different way, that of appeal, the attempt to show how bright and attractive Christianity really is. This is the method here: to ask the Christian: "Do not these clothes appeal to you? all of them are shining and glorious! And they are the proper clothes for you. You are the elect of God, you are made a new man. Now it is only right and proper that this new man should be clothed in appropriate new garments." Let us, as we view our work in the light of this Epistle, learn to speak like that to our people, that since you have this exalted and distinguished position that you are the elect of God, that you are saints and faithful brethren (ch. 1: 1) it is but meet and right that you should put on the garments of the new man. - Then there follows a line-up of these virtues which we have just called the beautiful garments of the new man, "kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

And on top of them all put on the bond of love, ἀγάπη, ὅ ἔστι  
 ῥάκος τῆς τελειότητος . Probably the Apostle pictures this love as a sort of sash or girdle which is put on last over all the other garments and which holds them all together. The flowing Oriental garments probably needed some such scarf or sash to hold the other articles of clothing in their proper place. Thus love is the crowning Christian virtue, the chief distinction and the one characteristic which

holds all the other Christian virtues together and gives them their full glory. Without love we would be as a tinkling cymbal and sounding brass, 1 Cor, 13. Let us make much of that, of the Christian virtue of charity, a lovable Christian attribute which hallows and sanctifies all the relations of the believers and which makes it possible for them to live peaceably together and effectively to work together.

Thus Paul's wish for the believers, as he closes off this appealing picture of the new man, is this, that the peace of Christ which stabilizes them and gives them a firmness so that they stand solidly and are not easily moved, are not easily swayed and wafted hither and yon by every shifting wind of circumstance, should be granted to them. With his eye on the practical implications of his encouragement Paul knows that it will enable them to live a Christian life if they remember that they are knit together in the one body of the Christian church. We so easily lose sight of the glorious fact that the Lord has called all His children into His church and that there they are one body and that He has adorned them with the garments of the new man, be they ever so frail and weak and be the evidences of their Christianity ever so small, but that nevertheless they have the grace and peace of God.

## 5

## Strength for a New Life

v. 16

But if our members are to put on the garments of the new man and are to demonstrate charity and other Christian virtues, then we must show them where they can find the strength, the ability and willingness for that. All these things are not the achievement of their own striving but they come into being only through the grace of God and are nourished only through the consistent application and use of the Word of God. So

we must learn from the Apostle to point our people to the Word of God and teach them to find sustenance for their faith and strength and willingness for Christian living in the Word of God. We must show them that and train them in that. We must not shy away from the effort and personal contact which this training entails. It is not enough merely in a general way to call upon our people to live a Christian life, we must now also take the time to contact our people and in a direct, living, pastoral manner to train them to find the strength and nourishment for a Christian life in God's word. And then they are encouraged and enabled to help others in the same fashion. Thus in the next two verses of this chapter, v. 16. 17., we have the loving admonition of St. Paul to the believers that they let the Word of Christ dwell richly in their midst in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another, singing to the Lord in their hearts, and whatsoever they do in word or deed, to do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. How practical Paul is! He calls upon the Christians to put on the beautiful garments of the new man and then he immediately shows the believers how they may find the willingness and the sustaining strength for that: only through the continued application and use of the Word of God. Accordingly, he would have them use the Word of God a great deal. He advocates the family altar and would have the Christians teach and admonish one another. Paul perhaps has the picture of a Christian, in the cool of the evening, visiting some neighbor and then talking about spiritual things, and to get into the discussion of spiritual matters in the most natural fashion in the world. Paul would like to have the Christians speak of spiritual matters also in their casual meetings, like the women of the village meeting at the town well. The Christians should keep in mind that they

may well assist one another with their talks on religious matters, and we must show our people how to do this. First, of course, we must learn to have and to practice it among ourselves. I believe we are much too slow to do this in our own midst. Repeatedly I have been in groups of pastors who spent hours together and never was there a single allusion to spiritual things but the conversation revolved merely about earthly matters. Those things have their place too, of course, but we should not overlook the need of spiritual discussions among ourselves also. Furthermore, the Apostle stresses the singing of the Christian church. Singing has ever characterized the Christian church and it has proven a splendid means of helping the children of God to put on the new man and to keep those garments of the new man on. You all know what an important role singing played in the spreading of the Reformation. In recent journeys in China it was very interesting to me to note what great importance China's new government is placing upon the community singing in the development of new political life and interest in that nation. We should make much of our singing. This is a wonderful means for getting spiritual truths into the hearts and lives of our people.

## 6

## A General Rule for Christian Living, v. 17

Then Paul gives a general rule, v. 17, in which he sums up all Christian activity under one head: "Whatsoever you do whether it is in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, thanking God and the Father by him." That is the general rule. Whatever you do, whether you practice singing with a group of children or teach dogmatics to a class in the seminary, whether you teach sewing to a group of older girls in a village or instruct budding catechists in writing outlines

for their catechetical lessons, whether you work in the garden or ride a bicycle down a dusty path, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus and with the proper thanksgiving to God. That is a marvellous general rule which puts all Christian activity and all the various phases of our Christian life into the proper relationship to God and has them flow out of the proper motive. Our whole lives should be framed, so to say, by the Lord Jesus. The grace that comes to us in our Lord Jesus hallows and sanctifies every little thing we do. It gives the proper dignity to our lives and supplies a gracious setting for our small actions. And as the joy of the Lord sings in our hearts and as we give thanks to God for all blessings we then find it easy to carry on the work which has been given us to do. Let us learn this for ourselves; let us really translate that general rule into our lives, and ever so much will be gained. We are too much inclined to think only of spectacular stunts and outstanding heroics when Christianity is considered in its outward aspects. But in the main Christian living is a matter of simple every day actions, of graciousness and kindness of attitude, of consideration for others, and of thankfulness to God in respect to all the little happenings of the day. How rich our lives would be if we consistently followed this rule! What an outstanding service we could render our people if we teach them this lesson and show them how to put it into practice! Let us learn from St. Paul, and also in this respect to view our work in the light of this Epistle so that we may profit for our daily lives. And it is especially in connection with our work on the foreign missions field that a marvellous opportunity for service has been given to us by the Lord just on this score. Amid all the drab and colorless lives of the people about us, that deadening routine of back-breaking labor with its meager returns,

with that almost universal disappointment and hopelessness of any improvement in their condition, with that lack-luster expression in their eyes and the attitude of not even trying to make things nicer in their environment, what a blessed opportunity is given to the Christian workers to bring color and life and hope into such living if we but set before them the pattern of our own life in the name of the Lord Jesus, serving the Lord with gladness and being given to constant thankfulness to our Lord. And here is where the wives of the pastors and missionaries have such a beautiful opportunity for service. It is very largely in their domain to show how the simple and apparently commonplace occurrences of Christian living can be made to shine, just as that wiper in the locomotive repair shop said, when he was asked for an explanation of his joy in his work and the resultant greater polish of the locomotives in his care: "I've got a glory in my heart." If the missionary wives go about their work singing and happy, cultivating daily thankfulness for little blessings and if they show that also in the care devoted to their homes, freshening up their living-rooms with new chintz hangings once in a while, that will bring a tremendous lift to the husbandly morale and be a decided addition to missionary effectiveness. Let us not be slow to seize the opportunity, and to follow out this general rule of St. Paul that everything be done with thankfulness.

## 7

## Rules for Specific Cases

v. 18-22

As we proceed, we see again what an immensely practical person the Apostle Paul was. As if he had thought along the line in which we have just spoken, he goes on to show how Christian living will work out and he applies the general rule he had just given to individual cases and situations. After all, a rule is of little good if it does

not work in specific instances and cases. Thus St. Paul says to the Christian wives: *ὡς τὸ ἄρρετόν τοῖς ἀνδράσιν*, be subject to your husbands as in the sight of the Lord. Our heavenly Father in His wisdom has ordered things in this manner that the man should be the head of the household. In America, under the influence of comic strips of the Maggie and Jiggs type it has frequently become a joke to think of the husband as the head of the household. He is frequently nothing more than a meal ticket, and the moment a more prosperous person is in sight the unscrupulous gold-digging woman divorces her husband and goes after bigger game, or she grabs a rich husband and then discards him, bilking him out of <sup>all</sup> the alimony an indulgent court will stand for. It is no dishonor if Christian wives carry out the injunction of Holy Scripture and respect their husbands as the head of the household. And no Christian husband would abuse that position of trust, but they are to love their wives and are not to act bitterly against them, like the fellow who said he was going home to supper, and if supper was not ready he would raise a big fuss and if it was ready he would not eat. In the Christian household there will be mutual love and respect. The Christian wife honors the position given to her husband that he is to be the responsible head of the household. And the Christian husband looks upon that position as a sacred trust for which he is responsible to the Lord and which he should meet to the best of his ability. St. Paul tells the Christian husbands to love their wives; not as one of my classmates said in our sophomore college class when the professor caught him day-dreaming and asked him in connection with our catechism review: "Wie sollen die Maenner leben mit ihren Weibern?" and the bemused student answered: "Mit Furcht and Zittern," upon which the professor said: "Na, ganz so schlimm ist es denn doch nicht."

How much sin is piled up on this score of lovelessness and bitterness in the home! How many a Christian wife must suffer under the thoughtlessness and rude carelessness of a husband! And let us not think that pastors and missionaries are above falling into such serious faults. We need ever to watch over ourselves. And then we need tactfully and consistently and patiently to train and lead our members on this score. This again is a point where the pastor's work dare not remain with mere broad generalities such as the general admonition to his people to lead a good Christian life, but that he also attack specific phases of Christian living and show how such Christian living might be carried out in more detailed relationships.

Directions are then also given to children, servants, the employers and the employees, in v. 20 to Ch. 4, v. 1. The children are to be admonished that they obey their parents in all things, not only in things that the children like to do but also in things which children might find irksome and unnecessary. The reason for such obedience is the fact that this is well pleasing to the Lord. This would fit in with God's plans. Because children are not yet of a ripe enough judgment or are physically unable to cope with the exigencies of life and because they need training, the Lord gives them parents or people who act in loco parentis. This is a wise provision, and God is pleased to see it observed. Of course, the obedience of children to their parents is qualified by the restriction indicated elsewhere in Scripture, that children are to obey their parents in all things in which God has placed them over us. The father, or parents in general, are admonished not to provoke their children to anger lest they become discouraged. Frequently parents plague their children with unreasonable

demands and unnecessary restrictions. Such a misguided manner of child training will result in discouraged, dispirited children. What sad experiences have darkened many a pastor's or teacher's home just because this kind admonition and sensible rule of St. Paul was not properly observed.

## 8.

## Christian Views on the Labor Question

v. 23-4:1

The servants are to obey their masters, not with a mere outward compliance but with a ready and hearty agreement with the desires of their employers, or to put it into the words of the Apostle "not with eyeservice as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God," v. 22. We are to obey them that have the rule over us for the Lord's sake, because that is God's way of ordering things. And again all taint of dishonor is removed from such service if you remember that this obedience and compliance with the rules of governments and masters should flow from respect to God and be done "as to the Lord and not unto men," v. 23. There you have the proper dignity given to whatever service or obedience may be rendered. And in order to elicit the more ready obedience and more single-hearted compliance the Apostle Paul tells the servants that they shall receive the reward of the inheritance, again, bringing in the thought that they serve the Lord Christ. What rich comfort and what a glorious encouragement for people who may be in a lowly position otherwise, slaves in the days of the Apostle, if they can look upon their tasks as rendered unto the Lord Christ, with the dignity of a regal service and with the prospect of a kingly reward. Nor does Paul want to be looked upon as a spineless and weak old dodderer, but he also calls attention to the fact of accountability and of punishment for evil-doers even in matters of this nature, v. 25.

Much attention should then also be given by us to the instruction to masters and employers, Ch. 4, v. 1, to give unto their servants that which is just and equal; knowing that they also have a master in heaven. This is in line with the way Paul usually speaks to masters and employers. He would have them treat their servants with Christian consideration and courtesy. Paul's anger would blaze out against men who would exploit helpless servants. I wonder what Paul's reaction would be to an article recently published in the Saturday Evening Post under the title "So You Can't Keep a Servant." Surely there is much room for instruction on these matters. We need to touch on matters of this nature which trouble the world so greatly in our day and which are among the underlying causes of revolutions, war and bloodshed. Also from the fact that a wrong slant on these things may well endanger the work of the Gospel, we should be anxious to impart the proper instruction on these relationships. We need to take care lest labor as a body and as a movement turn against the church. We should not be blind to the fact that just this is happening in many instances, and most church people are either oblivious to this danger or do not know what to do about it. Here in this section of our Epistle you have the principles for a Christian relationship of capital and labor. It was a matter loaded with dynamite for St. Paul to talk about such relationships in his day, nevertheless he does speak on them, with the proper Christian approach and motivation. As we view our work and the needs of our times let us also speak out courageously on questions of this nature. But we must be careful that we speak in the proper Christian tone, upon the foundation of what the Gospel means for the Christian, and with the proper tact and loving concern for the persons to whom our words might apply. We should render a great favor to the

world if we very earnestly and yet in an evangelical manner proclaim the truths set forth in the Word of God and also in just this part of our Epistle, and that we endeavor to train our members also in this respect to put on the fine garments of the new man.

## Chapter IV

## 1.

## Praying for a Door of Utterance

Col. 4: 2-4

As we who are engaged in church and mission work look at our task in the light of this Epistle and as we now come to the fourth chapter of this letter, we see again what a very important part prayer plays in this whole endeavor. We note here how Paul urges his fellow members in the church to pray for one another. That is a marvellous way of promoting spiritual life. One can hardly think of anything so well calculated effectively to bring about peace within a congregation and hearty cooperation among the members as this: to have the members trained to pray for one another. A person will hardly slander a man for whom he has just said a prayer, nor will he be inclined to cheat a person for whom he has just prayed. It would be altogether unnatural for a man to be jealous that another man has been elected a deacon in his stead if he has just prayed for this man. If we want to bring about peace and harmony in the congregation let us train our members to pray for one another. This practical aspect of the need and blessing of prayer is of course altogether aside from the need in general, that the Christians pray for each other.

And then we observe how prayer and vigilance are linked together. Let us learn also to hook up very closely these two features of prayer and of watchfulness. Once again observe how immensely practical the Apostle Paul is, and how we can learn from him on that score. We may often speak of watchfulness. We may urge our people to be sober and vigilant. But we may not always be careful enough to connect that with prayer. A mere attempt at watchfulness, without prayer, will not help much. Mere urging to vigilance without close connection with

with prayer is too likely to lead to reliance upon one's own self, upon one's own moral fortitude, upon one's own spiritual strength, and then you may have a repetition of that pitiful spectacle of Peter's denial in the court of the High Priest.

Observing Paul's method and tactics, the missionary then learns to proceed from the general to the specific, from the general need for prayer to an urgent appeal that the Christians should pray for something definite and specific. And here the great heart of the missionary speaks out when St. Paul asks them to pray for a door of utterance. What a moving appeal to the Christians: "Pray for us that God give us a door of utterance." Paul was a zealous missionary. He was willing to throw himself whole-heartedly into mission endeavors. No hardship or difficulty stopped him, nor was he intimidated by the threats of the enemies of the cross. But Paul knew that God had to open the door for him, that here too "all depends on our possessing God's free grace and love and blessing." Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter and he was faced with many other difficulties. The Gospel was hindered in Colossae by false teachers. How his heart yearned for a door of utterance, not only in respect to cities which he had already visited but also regarding other sections of the world which were still held captive in darkness. He himself prays for an opportunity to preach the Gospel but he also asks others to pray for a door of utterance. Surely we can learn in this matter. Let us learn from St. Paul to put our heart into prayers for a door of utterance, that we really mean it when we repeat the words of the prayer: "Send forth laborers into Thy harvest." Too frequently these words are spoken in such a perfunctory manner that it is evident that there is no real earnestness connected with that plea. Too frequently one can hardly

escape the feeling that if God took such a person up and said to him: "Well, that is fine that you have such sentiments; I will send you out to China as a missionary," that person would be very much astonished and would stammer and blush and try to make excuses: "What? Me? Oh, Lord, send some one else; I am really not ready to go that far." And then the Lord would have to say: "So you did not actually mean it when you asked me to send laborers into the harvest!"

And as we ourselves pray earnestly and sincerely for an open door, let us induce our people to pray for openings for mission work. We observe that Paul asks for a door of utterance. He wants no breaking into another man's bishopric. Paul has no patience with proselytizing. Paul is very anxious to do mission work. But he must have a legitimate door of utterance. Thus we need to observe the rules laid down by the Lord for prospective mission fields. We need to have a door and must not be tempted to climb over the wall into some other church's fold. But we must also maintain that in the end we are the persons who must decide what constitutes an open door for us. No other person or church body can make up our mind for us on that point. When therefore a church conference of other denominations on Mindanao passed a solemn resolution, after I had met with them on the question of possible Lutheran church work in the Philippine Islands, that in their opinion the Lutheran church had no contribution to make to the spiritual life in the Philippines, that resolution means nothing to us as an effective barrier to any work we may attempt to undertake in that region. It is we who upon our own conscience must decide whether there is an open door for us at this or the other locality. But when the Lord does show us an open door then we must also have the courage to grasp that opportunity and resolutely step through that open door which the Lord has swung ajar for us.

## Doors of Utterance Today, v. 3

Pray for a door of utterance: that is a word in season for our church right now. Think of the parts of China that had been occupied by the Japanese during the recent war: how fervently will we pray the Lord to open the door for us again! It is true that some church work was being carried on even in the occupied area from which all foreign missionaries had been excluded by repatriation. National pastors and evangelists were still carrying on, and at one place a layman read sermons to the small flock that was left. The Christians who were left in these areas were subjected to tremendous pressure. We know how the Japanese were doing their utmost to coerce Christian bodies in Korea, Manchukuo and Japan to amalgamate into one so-called evangelical church with a very spineless constitution and very little specific Christian confession and a determined attempt to introduce Shinto elements into the worship. Undoubtedly efforts along that line were also being made in occupied China.

In fact the Japanese already had their bishop in China; I can tell you his name; it is Abe. It took a good deal of sanctified fortitude for our Chinese Christians to remain true to their Lutheran confession and Christian principles. Under that situation it was almost out of the question to think of much advancement of the Christian work in occupied China. Oh, how will we therefore pray for a door of utterance, that the Lord might make it possible for us to return to those fields and to rebuild the walls of our Zion there, undoubtedly left in a state of devastation and crumbling ruin.

When we speak of praying for a door of utterance we also think of the unoccupied part of China, free China. Here it does look as though

the Lord is opening a wide door for us. The present Central Government is very favorably inclined towards Christian missions and their work. Not only are the Generalissimo and Madame Chiang Kai Chek professing Christians, but eight out of ten of the leading men in that Central Government of China are Christians, and throughout Free China about fifty percent of the leading people are either themselves Christians or are the products of Christian schools. The tremendous advance in literacy which raised the former 5% of children going to school to 65% also opens a wide door for the dissemination of the Gospel through the printed page. It is perfectly astonishing to note the rapidity with which the Chinese buy up all available Bibles and Bible portions. The great migration which swept forty to fifty million Chinese from along the sea-coast into the interior, walking 1200, 1500 and 2000 miles, to have them mingle with the people of the hinterland, has broken down many of the old walls of superstition and exclusiveness. The terrific impact of the war has swept away in its devouring holocaust much upon which Chinese people were wont to build their expectations. The people have been shaken up out of their former somnolence and indifference as to what the rest of the world was doing. War is a stern taskmaster and admits of no inattention. A fundamental change is taking place in the pattern of Chinese national life also in this respect that formerly their life was organized within the narrow confines of the family, but now cooperative enterprises are teaching a number of families to work together in thousands of instances. Christians who had to flee from their old homes are now giving witness to their Savior in their new localities. You can see how all this must spell opportunity for the Christian church, especially when you take it in connection with the almost complete breakdown of heathenism as a cult

or religion, with the Chinese people completely disillusioned as to the protection their former idols were supposed to give them.

Pray for a door of utterance: how does that apply also to the Philippines: A tour of investigation convinced us of the possibilities for mission work on our part in that country. Think of the seventeen million people living on those seven thousand emeralds or islands, rich in resources agricultural and mineral, with a salubrious climate, people who for four centuries have been exposed to Christian influences but who are today to the largest extent unchurched, for all practical purposes; people among whom you can begin working through the medium of the English language from the day you land on those shores, and people moreover of a rather friendly and open disposition.

And what shall we say of praying for an open door for India? We still have an open door in this country. Political upsets might threaten to close some of those doors. What an urgent need, therefore, for us to pray that God keep open the door for us. And who of us would be blind to the fact that in India we have just begun to scratch the surface? Who, when he hears this plea of St. Paul for a door of utterance, does not fervently wish and pray that God would grant to us a decided and definite forward and upward sweep in our work in India? And thus we might speak of opportunities and open doors in Central and South America. We might enumerate the great opportunities for our church in our homeland in America where also the present dislocation of population spells mission opportunity for us. Not only will we want to follow up our own people when they move about, or as they return from a temporary sojourn at a defense plant, or as young people come back from service with the armed forces, and as our people are shuffled about because of the housing shortages, but we should make

a systematic and energetic effort to reach the many thousands of families who have had some loose and superficial church connections before but who are really unchurched now, or who are now found in a trailer camp or a mushroom new city development. We must have an eye for people whom we could reach and win if we but saw that here the Lord has given us a door of utterance. We must consistently train our membership in personal mission work, never letting up on the thought that every Christian is a missionary, showing them how they can do such mission work and assisting them to undertake and carry on such efforts, either concertedly, or by individual endeavor, and we must carefully follow up every lead which they uncover and communicate to us. The Lutheran Hour is serving magnificently as a missionary enterprise. We have a church body that is Bible believing and that is well equipped to do effective work when it sets out to enter by the door of utterance which the Lord may grant to us. Who can adequately envision the opportunities and possibilities that may be unfolded in Europe now the war is over, in Russia, in Germany, in the Balkans and in many another country where the Lutheran church might possibly gain a foothold or help to rebuild the unkempt fields and broken hedges and crumbling towers of the Lord's vineyard? Oh, let us pray earnestly, and get our members to pray fervently and consistently, for a door of utterance, and then also for the courage to use any such doors! For here we must play fair with God. We must mean it when we ask Him to grant us a door of utterance.

What a glorious prospect this whole matter sets before us! For why do we desire an open door? It is for the purpose of preaching the mystery of Christ. We will notice from our Epistle how emphatically and clearly Paul sets that forth as the object for which he wants to enter the open doors, to preach the mystery of Christ. No matter

how great the demands may be for us to engage in social rehabilitation and material reconstruction and educational realignment and for plain charity- and the demands will be great - we must remember that our chief purpose must be the unfolding of the mystery of Christ. Paul calls it a mystery, for it is a mystery to natural man, it is incomprehensible to <sup>have God</sup> give His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. That is a mystery to natural man, but it is our priceless privilege to unfold and to make it known, to preach of that boundless love, to urge upon people that they be reconciled to God through the blood of His Son.

With that prayer for an open door and with the glorious content of our preaching, namely the revelation of the mystery of God's love for the sinner in Christ, it is hardly necessary, one should think, to say much about urging the Christians to do this work. Yet that feeling of urgency rests very heavily on St. Paul and he therefore says in the next verse "as we ought to speak," ὡς δεῖ με λαλῆσαι. We must learn to look upon our work in that same light. This is something we ought to do, we need to do. Divine necessity is laid upon us here. We too will experience something of that feeling of "woe is me if I do not preach," which drove Paul on with burning impatience and consuming restlessness. How he must have chafed in his bondage in Rome: A whole world needed to be filled with the Gospel, many nations needed to be conquered for Christ, Paul wanted to speak of this mystery of divine love and of a gracious redemption to them, and here he is shackled to his soldier guard in Rome! No wonder he prays for a door of utterance, for an opportunity to set out once more on some of his missionary journeys. We must catch something too of that spirit of urgency and the driving power of that intensity and necessity, even as

Jesus says: "I must do the works of Him that sent me," and at another time: "Let us work while it is day, before the night cometh when no man can work." Let us catch the stringency of the case, the need for haste. There is no room here for dalliance; the cause is too sacred, the need too great, the prize too precious to permit any postponement of effort, any delay in mission activity where it is at all possible for us to go forward. Nor dare we stop because of some apparent danger or real danger. Paul was in bonds for the Gospel's sake. Our missionaries in China faced concentration camps if they remained on their posts, but Christians will say: "Let it be so, but let us not desert our post." We should, of course, not court martyrdom, but let us also not be too quick to leave fields and flocks into which the Lord has led us. Let us honour our China missionaries who remained on their fields and faced internment and who knows what kind of indignities for the Gospel's sake. And for our encouragement we see that God did not let them suffer. Some of them did come into concentration camps. But all of them came out of these and other difficulties unharmed in body or spirit. Let us not find it strange that the Gospel's progress should be linked with bonds and dangers. It has always been thus, but times of stress and difficulty have ever proven times of bloom and growth for the Christian church.

Pondering this text, with Paul's plea for a door of utterance, I could not help but think how on recent trips by the Executive Secretary to the Oriental mission fields we were again and again faced with an impasse, when we thought that we were blocked and stopped, but how again and again the door would be opened to us and it would be possible for us to continue. I am certain that this was the result of many prayers for a door of utterance sent <sup>up to the throne of grace</sup> by our Christians at home and on the mission field.

## 3.

## Redeeming the Time v. 5. 6.

Under the pressure of all that urgency and with the need to find and use open doors of utterance, St. Paul drives himself and others to redeem the time, τὸν καιρὸν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι v. 5, to be such people who dig out of any given situation all possible fruit, who exhaust the possibilities of any situation, who scoop out of it all that can possibly be gotten out of it, like children licking the spoon and scraping the bowl when mama has baked some chocolate cookies. We are to redeem the time, to buy it out, auskaufen, like a store is bought out completely when a shortage threatens and people find that out. A recent issue of the Life magazine shows pictures of a store that had made a fortunate purchase of alarm clocks, quite difficult to secure in war times, and when it became known that this store had alarm clocks for sale, immediately, lines were formed and purchasers stormed that store and in a short time their stock was completely exhausted. With that same desire to get out of any opportunity just everything that could be gotten out of it, should we labor, redeeming the time.

In order that this might be accomplished Paul then tells the believers that they should walk in wisdom over and against those who are without, ἐν σοφίᾳ περιπατεῖτε πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω, v. 5. What an apt expression for those who are not yet members of the Christian church that they are called simply "without." The Bible makes this distinction, between those who are within and those who are without. In Ephesians is found this striking expression "Fremde und ausserhalb der Buergerschaft Israels." It will not escape us that again Paul shows how very practical he is. He has just been talking about prayers for a door of utterance.

His heart is concerned about mission work. Right away he swings into a practical method for doing mission work, namely to walk wisely towards them that are without. The daily walk and conversation of the Christian is to be a missionary agency. The Christians are to let their light shine before men, they are to be witnesses for the Lord in their very daily lives. Their honest and decent behavior and godly conversation should be an attraction towards the Christian teachings. They are therefore to walk wisely in regard to those who are still without the pale of the Christian church; they are to conduct themselves with such wisdom and fine Christian consideration that their very conduct and walk will be an invitation to those people to look into the matter and to see how the Christians get that way. This is a point in which we can continually urge our congregations and individual members to prove themselves faithful witnesses for the Lord. When the Apostle calls upon the Christians to walk wisely that surely also includes avoiding wisely any needless provocation of antagonism. Perhaps it is not superfluous to speak a word of caution here also as regards our own walk and conversation, and I mean this also in regard to outward things, for instance in regard to political situations. The proper Christian wisdom which Paul urges upon us here will restrain a person from giving vent to his own political convictions if such vociferousness on his part might endanger the work of the missions. We cannot afford to indulge ourselves in the luxury of voicing personal antipathies if thereby the work of the Gospel is jeopardized.

## 4.

Learn to Speak the Truth in Love, v. 6

The next verse is also one that contains many fine lessons for us. St. Paul tells us here that we should learn to speak the truth in love,

ὁ λόγος ἡμῶν πάντοτε ἐν χάριτι, what you say should always be spoken in charity. You can say some very solemn and sharp truths if it is evident that you are speaking in love. We must be very particular about this that whenever we preach the Law, and let us preach it with all severity and not break off the sharp points of the Law, we however preach it in love, with the evident and plain desire to help the people to whom we are speaking. The danger is that a missionary becomes impatient and thunders away with the Law in a patently loveless manner. But that gets us nowhere. And we must learn to speak in love. That is not a natural accomplishment. The ability to speak the truth in love must be acquired. That comes through the study of the Word of God and by consistently schooling ourselves to follow the example of Christ. This is something which the Holy Spirit must work in us through the Word. And as we endeavor to speak the truth in love so we should also train our people to talk that way. They too must learn to speak in love. Particularly when people have been downtrodden and kicked around a great deal it will be very difficult for them to learn that they should speak in love.

Then come other fine hints from St. Paul when he tells us that our speech should be seasoned with salt, ἄλατι ἡρωτημένον. There is to be something of taste and of body to our speaking. We are not to move in vague, empty platitudes. We should have something to say when we get up to talk. Our conversation should be meaty. The world has long discovered that if you want to catch the attention of the people your talk should be seasoned with salt; only, the world has gone too far in that matter and has permitted the seasoning with salt to degenerate into the salacious. Anything of that nature is of course

altogether out of order with the Christians. And then Paul would have us learn in our talks and conversations to give every one his due in the right sense, to learn how to give to each one that which is rightfully coming to him, in the right kind of judgment. What we say should profit the people with whom we speak, we should say things that fit into each situation in which we undertake to speak. This calls for wisdom, for tact and consideration, for the exercise of judgment, ἐν ἡμετέροις ἀποκρίσεσθε, and it is possible only upon the basis of regular prayer and a good store of Bible knowledge. But what a rich service is opened up to the Christian here if he will but learn to speak in love and to say things that have some sense and will benefit people, that the conversation of the Christians be distinguished by fine tact and good judgment and discrimination and especially that it be adorned with Bible sentiments.

## 5.

## Learn to Cultivate Thoughtfulness also in Minor Matters

## v. 7-16

You will note that the rest of this chapter is dedicated practically to personal greetings, with quite a number of people mentioned by name, or addressed to various congregations. It is an arresting thought that so much of the precious space in this short Epistle should be taken up with matters of such a personal nature. But also here there is something from which the missionary can learn and from which we can draw profit for our missionary endeavor. We must not be too busy to think of matters like this, the sending of personal greeting to some one with very little expenditure of time or effort. Yet how infrequent are the occasions when we actually do this. I am not now speaking so much of personal greetings to some fellow missionary or to

a relative, but Paul here apparently sends greetings to a number of other folks. Not to think of sending greetings when one could easily do so amounts to a discourtesy and can easily be interpreted as lack of interest. It is a matter of Christian love to remember others with greetings. There is a fine way of promoting Christian life in a congregation by watching such things a bit. A little extra consideration, a little extra thoughtfulness, particularly coming from a foreign missionary for people of a different nationality, will go very far towards winning that person's heart. To be sure, this is not to be overdone. One must not expose himself to the danger or the suspicion of becoming too intimate with his members. The missionary must ever be careful not to lose dignity in the sight of his members. One of our old professors said: "You need not wear a badge to proclaim to all the world that you are a minister, but no one should be surprised to find out that you are a minister." An old saying on this score is: friendly with all, intimate with none. It can all be summed up with this that we need to learn to cultivate Christian love, for the proper exercise of Christian kindness will take care also of these matters.

You will notice that St. Paul gives Tychicus a very fine send-off. This Tychicus has proven himself a splendid fellow-worker and a very considerate helper for St. Paul, and the Apostle honors him for that. Fine pastoral tact is also noticeable in the manner in which St. Paul speaks of Onesimus. In another Epistle Paul speaks specifically of Onesimus having left his master and of his return, but in this epistle to the Colossians Paul merely calls him a faithful and beloved brother. How much different from the manner in which even in our circles people may make catty remarks about others. Some lady who may think she is about the leading member of the Ladies' Aid Society will continually

put in nasty remarks in her conversation. For instance, she refers to Miss Brown, and gratuitously adds: "You know, she is an adopted child." Or a person speaks of a certain man and then adds: "You know he had a brother who failed in business in Detroit," when those remarks contribute nothing whatever to the understanding of the topic under discussion and merely exhibit the uncharitable heart of their author. St. Paul could have said about Onesimus: "You know, he is a runaway slave who has now been converted." But Paul merely speaks of him as that beloved brother and saves the remark about his being a runaway slave for the special letter in which he deals with that case and with the persons in question.

## 6.

## Let us Take Heed to our Ministry

## v. 17

With the stirring and earnest appeal of the Apostle to redeem the time ringing in our ears, we shall want to gird our loins for increased and ever-renewed efforts for the spreading of the Gospel and the building of the kingdom of our Redeemer. As we missionaries look at our work in the light of this Epistle we open our hearts to the call to take heed to our ministry. The Apostle says: "Take heed to thy ministry which thou hast received in the Lord." *Βλέπε τὴν Δικονίαν,* take heed, look at it, think seriously about this ministry. It will help us a great deal if we take a good look at our ministry and consider it in all its glorious aspects, that it really comes home to us what a precious thing it is. Rightly the Apostle elsewhere calls it a "*καλὸν ἔργον*," a beautiful work. You know how the Bible speaks of it otherwise. It is called *Das Amt, das die Versöhnung predigt*. You recall the manner in which Isaiah is carried away by the preciousness

of this work when he exclaims: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings." Where in all the world could you find a manner of employing your time and talents in a more satisfying, beautiful, glorious endeavor than in this ministry? Take heed to it, therefore, look at it properly, review it again and again in all its glory and splendor.

Take heed to thy ministry, that would also mean that you look at it right now, that you try to catch what it means and what it should do in the present time and in the immediate future. Take heed to thy ministry, that would mean that you subject your ministry to a careful and critical review and revaluation. The Apostle certainly would not be satisfied to have you take over your ministry and then just thoughtlessly go along in a groove into which you had sunk, without thought for changing conditions or the challenge of new possibilities. Not that the nature of our work will ever change essentially, but when the Apostle tells us to take heed of our ministry he will certainly want us to fit it into the circumstances of any given time and to grasp the opportunities which any given constellation of conditions may offer. Thus we should take a good look at our ministry as it shapes up right now in this time of crisis. One way to explain the Chinese character for "crisis" is to look at it in its two component parts, and the one means "danger" and the other means "opportunity." We ought to look at the nations among whom we are carrying on our mission work in this present time of seething unrest when many portentous changes may be expected. We ought to have open eyes for the fact that these nations are being shaken up out of the somnolence of centuries, that they are coming forth out of the temples of the past into the blinking sunlight of the present day, somewhat bewildered,

asking us in effect: "What have you to offer us? Whereto can you lead us?" The people among whom we work in China and in India can hardly remain indifferent to all that is going on about them. The Chinaman cannot remain wrapped up in a sleepy contemplation of the golden age of the sages five hundred years ago when planes of the twentieth century go roaring overhead and bombs threaten to blast him out of existence; when the political ideologies of the day march into his back yard and set up a cat-and-dog fight on his doorstep; when the rice is being snatched from under his uplifted chopsticks. The people in India cannot help but be affected by the convulsions of a world in travail as we see it today. Oh, if we can but bring the full import of the Gospel to bear upon these nations at this particular point in the history of the world, then we may be able to make a substantial contribution to the peaceful progress of civilization for centuries to come, altogether apart from the blessings which our Gospel work brings to individual souls in the meantime. We need, therefore, to have vision and courage in very high degree, and you may be sure this is something which the Apostle would like to pour into our hearts with his earnest pastoral admonition: take heed to thy ministry, look to your work in the light of God's Word.

Take heed to thy ministry, that would also mean that we remain true to the prime functions of our ministry. Emphatically the Apostle speaks of that ministry which we have received in the Lord, not any kind of a ministry but a special kind of ministry. Our ministry is that which preaches Christ as the Son of God and the only Savior of the world. Amid all the perplexity of men, amid all the undecided turning from one thing to the other which characterizes so much of the outward activities of churches today let us stick to it that we are to

preach Christ and crucified. Let us not use up too much of our time with social and philanthropic endeavors, good as these things may be in themselves, but let us concentrate our main power upon the proclamation of the Gospel, preaching the good tidings of redemption through the blood of the Lamb.

Note that the Apostle says you have received your ministry in the Lord. You are called to this work. The Lord has put you into your ministry. Take comfort from this thought that the ministry in which you are engaged has been conferred upon you by the Lord. The fact that He has called you and placed you where you are gives the proper dignity to your position and will fill your heart with courage and patience. You will then also trust the Lord that since He has called you and given you this work to do He will bless your ministry and will keep you by His divine providence while you are thus in His Service. There is an implied promise of blessing here, stated explicitly and directly otherwise. Since the Lord has put us into our ministry we will then also render our service as unto Him. We will labor for the Lord's sake. We will be glad to put aside all thoughts of self and ease and will dedicate ourselves ever and ever again to the ministry for the Lord, to His honor and glory.

7.

Let us Remember that our Ministry Means

Labor and Service, v. 17

However, when we look at our work in the light of this text we want to remember also that it is distinctly called a ministry. That word means a service. It means work and labor. When the Apostle calls upon us to take heed to our ministry and to fulfil it, he would urge upon us all possible earnestness and sincerity in the execution of

our office. We must labor with an agonized straining at the oars, pulling with all our might. The Bible uses that very term "ἰσχυροσπονδία" "agonizing effort. When we sow the seed of the Gospel it must be a sowing in tears, that we be so much in earnest about our sowing the seed that we are moved to tears of frustra<sup>ted</sup>love when apparently the seed falls upon barren ground. The sowing in tears is followed by a joyous bringing in of the sheaves.- Let us put forth all diligence in our work, laboring with the intensity of the Apostles who went out like men turning the world upside down, speaking at white-heat, pleading with men to be reconciled by Christ.

And then we will not overlook the last few words of the text where the Apostle says: "take heed to thy ministry that thou fulfill it." Our ministry needs to be fulfilled. It needs to be filled up. It needs to be used up to the final and last opportunity which may be there. It is a question of redeeming the time, of getting out of it everything that can possibly be gotten out of it. As we view our ministry in the Lord we shall all of us have to confess with shame that this is a point where we fall short, that we do not fully use up our time and completely fill up our ministry, that we do not squeeze the last drop out of the opportunities offered us. Too quickly are we satisfied, too soon do we stop and console ourselves with the thought that we have done a fair day's work, too readily do we find excuses for not doing more in the Lord's work.

You may think, as you ponder these admonitions of St. Paul: "These are rather sharp words." But if you remember that they were addressed in the first instance to Archippus, and that this Archippus probably was the minister at Laodicea, and if you recall what Scripture has to say about the lukewarmness of the Laodiceans, then you may concede that

there probably was a good reason for this rather sharp admonition to fill up the ministry. Let us take to heart what is thus so earnestly put before us. And let us remember also that if we are to fulfill our ministry we need to grow in it, to seek to excel, to develop the talents and gifts with which the Lord has equipped us.

To fulfill our ministry would also mean that we fulfill the object of our ministry, namely that through our preaching of Christ we bring people to faith in their Redeemer, so that they serve their Lord with gladness, find comfort in the forgiveness of their sins, and solace in the peace and light of heaven's promise.

May God grant us grace that we may properly take heed to the ministry which we have received in Him and that we may fulfill it, to His honor and glory and the welfare of the souls whom we are sent to serve.

8.

May Grace be with Us

v. 18

As we ponder the Apostle's solemn words regarding our ministry; as we remember how despite dangers and difficulties the work of the Gospel went forward even in trying times; as we look back upon one hundred years of blessed church life in America, and fifty years in India, we will be filled with the thought that no doubt God expects great things from us for the Gospel work in the future. Well may we therefore be awed by the sense of responsibility that must come to us, and to our church members. What a wonderful thing that we can then turn to the closing verse of this precious Epistle, with its gracious benediction: Grace be With You.

Ἡ χάρις μετ' ὑμῶν, says the Apostle. That is his parting

wish and prayer: "Grace be with you." That seems very limited in view of all their needs, needs of which the Apostle was well aware and of which he had spoken at other times. They needed knowledge and steadfastness and protection against errorists. There were dangers and persecutions in those perilous days, even as St. Paul must have gazed at the chains on his wrists as he lifted up his stylus to write this closing word with his own hand. But the only thing of which St. Paul speaks here is that grace should be with them. However, while this would appear like a very limited wish it is also allsufficient. The Bible nowhere promises us everything we might desire, but it does promise those things which are essential. "As your days are, so shall your strength be," says the Bible, in a limited but also an allsufficient promise. If we have the grace of God then we have everything that is necessary even if we do not have everything which a covetous and greedy heart might desire. Having the grace of God we have everything we really need.

Grace be with you: Grace, as we have heard in the beginning of this letter, is that quality of God whereby He forgives the sins of the undeserving. The text says "ἡ χάρις," that special grace. St. Paul is not speaking of just any kind of grace but he has in mind that special grace which comes to us in Christ Jesus, whereby our sins are forgiven because of the work, the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Grace, that means that we are forgiven and have eternal life without our own works, solely through the love of God. Grace is therefore the greatest boon that could possibly come to us. And of this grace we will think particularly at certain special occasions of the Church Year, such as the Lenten Season, when the Christian in spirit accompanies his Savior up to Jerusalem, follows Him through

the successive scenes of His great passion and stands at last under the cross, sunk in pious meditation of that miracle of divine grace by which the Son of God hangs transfixed upon the accursed tree.

When the Apostle says: "Grace be with you," he thereby wishes and prays for us that gift or blessing which will supply our needs for time and eternity. The grace of God not only forgives us our sins but also grants us that measure of security amidst danger and strife, and of comfort for every occasion which is to be meted out to us according to the divine and ever-gracious will of God. This grace of God comes to us by Word and Sacrament, and is accepted by us in faith. The believing heart trusts that grace. What rich and blessed days when the Christians can give themselves to a detailed study of the Word of God, hear Bible-inspired sermons, and partake of the Holy Supper, a means of grace whereby the Lord conveys and seals to each one of us individually the grace of which our text is speaking.

May this grace be with us and with our congregations! May it abide with us and dwell among us. May the Lord with all His grace continue to set up His abode with us, so that day after day His grace may comfort us and supply all our need! Whatever, then, our lot on earth may be, the important thing is that the grace of God abides with us, for the sake of Jesus.

The grace of the Lord made us children of God and heirs of heaven. Now this grace also helps us to do the will of our heavenly Father. As children of God and heirs of heaven we are to serve the Lord. In Isaiah, chapter 43, verse 21, we read: "This people have I prepared for Myself, they shall show forth my praise." The Lord would be glorified by us, wants us to show forth His praise. And it

is His grace which enables us to glorify Him, only by His grace can we make His praise known. The grace of God helps us to do something, just as it has done something for us. Only the grace of God qualifies us to serve God. Without the operations of divine grace we would not be ready to serve God. Without the grace of God and faith which accepts it we would not want to serve the Lord nor would we know how to go about it. Even if man by his natural inclination wanted to serve God, and his conscience tells him that he ought to do so, he would be at a total loss to know how he might acceptably serve God. But grace supplies the proper motive and the correct incentive, and keeps us at this matter of serving God, serving Him with joy and not with fear.

Having ourselves experienced the grace of God it is now our task to make known to others this grace of God. That is done by various means, for instance by the personal lives of the missionaries and of the believers in general. We speak of a person graced by certain qualities which adorn him and decorate his life and character. The very way in which a Christian lives and talks is to be a witness for the Lord. And then we are to serve the Lord and make known His grace through the organized work of the church as well as by personal efforts for mission work, by inviting others, by our prayers, by setting up and supporting public services of worship, by our contributions of time and talent and financial gifts, and in whatever other way we may assist in proclaiming the grace of God to others. If our vision of a great and vigorous indigenous church growing up out of the soil of India is to be realized then we must, all of us, devote every effort in a zealous service towards making known that grace of God, and then the grace of God must work mightily in us and all Christians here

for the accomplishment of the plans of our gracious God. Oh, may the grace of God move all of us to give every attention to this glorious undertaking!

The Apostle began this letter to the Colossians with the thought of grace. His apostolic greeting was: "Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father." And now he also closes this Epistle with the thought of grace, "Grace be with you." For the Christian, for his own life and faith, everything hinges upon the concept of grace and all things are bounded by the grace of God. And upon this thought we bring to a conclusion our attempt to draw lessons for our pastoral work and missionary activity from this letter of St. Paul, shutting out the world and bringing heaven very close: May grace be with us, in Christ Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

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