

Correspondence April 6, 2003 *from Colossians*

Introduction

"God, fill us with the knowledge of your will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding." Col. 1:9

Derived from the above verse, the purpose of our class is to allow God to fill us with knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding as we encounter Paul's letter to the Colossian church.

Our encounter with Colossians is to include traditional bible study as well as other spiritual disciplines such as spiritual reading, meditation, contemplation and journaling. In addition to the above stated primary purpose, a secondary purpose of the class will be to learn and practice the aforementioned spiritual disciplines as we proceed.

Everyone is asked to read Colossians in its entirety before next week. You are also asked to read the pamphlet on spiritual reading and begin to apply the discipline in your reading of chapter 1:1-8.

Beginning today and each Sunday through the quarter you will receive a correspondence from me related to my reading and reflections on the selected passage. I would ask you to incorporate my correspondence into your study and reading as you prepare for our meeting on Sunday evening.

The text for each week and subjects of our Sunday evening class area s follows:

| Date | Text | Subject |
|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| session1 | 1:1-8 | Faith, Love, Hope |
| session2 | 1:9-14 | Christian Life |
| session3 | 1:15-20 | Christ |
| session4 | 1:21-23 | Who Were/Are You? |
| session5 | 1:24-2:5 | Ministry Leader |
| session6 | 2:6-12 | Living In Jesus |
| session7 | 2:13-15 | Forgiven |
| session8 | 2:16-23 | Reality |
| session9 | 3:1-11 | A New Focus |
| session10 | 3:12-17 | Perfect Unity |
| session11 | 3:18-4:1 | Serving the Lord |
| session12 | 4:2-5 | Full of Grace |

In order to incorporate a form of journaling into our class, I am encouraging you to write a personal correspondence to me each week on your thoughts and reflections on the assigned passage. This will serve several purposes. It will give you the opportunity to review and organize your thoughts. The writing, although different from journaling on a personal level, will provide practice and encourage development of journaling as a spiritual discipline. A point of great significance is that your correspondence can provide me with valuable insights which will help me prepare for each week's lesson.

I am excited about the opportunity we have to allow God to speak to us through our reading and examination of Colossians. Do not neglect to pray fervently for our success in this effort.

Paul's Letter to the Colossians

From Paul, **an apostle of Christ Jesus**. I am an apostle because that is what God wanted. Also from Timothy, our brother.

To the holy and faithful **brothers and sisters in Christ** that live in Colosse:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

In our prayers for you we always thank God, **the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**, because we have heard about the **faith you have in Christ Jesus** and the love you have for all of God's people. You have this faith and love because of your hope, and what you hope for is kept safe for you in heaven. You learned about this hope when you heard the message about the truth, the Good News that was told to you. Everywhere in the world that Good News is bringing blessings and is growing. This has happened with you, too, since you heard the Good News and understood the truth about the grace of God. You learned about God's grace from Epaphras, whom we love. He works together with us and is **a faithful servant of Christ** for us. He also told us about the love you have from the Holy Spirit.

Because of this, since the day we heard about you, we have continued praying for you, asking God that you will know fully what he wants. We pray that you will also have great wisdom and understanding in spiritual things so that you will **live the kind of life that honors and pleases (Christ) in every way**. You will produce fruit in every good work and grow in the knowledge of God. God will strengthen you with his own great power so that you will not give up when troubles come, but you will be patient. And you will joyfully give thanks to the Father who has made you able to have a share in all that he has prepared for his people in the kingdom of light. God has freed us from the power of darkness, and he brought us into the **kingdom of (Christ) his dear Son. (Christ) paid for our sins, and in (Christ) we have forgiveness**. No one can see God, but **Jesus Christ is exactly like (God). (Christ) ranks higher than everything that has been made. Through (Christ's) power all things were made—things in heaven and on earth, things seen and unseen, all powers, authorities, lords, and rulers. All things were made through Christ and for Christ. (Christ) was there before anything was made, and all things continue because of (Christ). (Christ) is the head of the body, which is the church. Everything comes from (Christ). (Christ) is the first one who was raised from the dead. So in all things (Christ) has first place. God was pleased for all of himself to live in Christ. And through Christ, God has brought all things back to himself again—things on earth and things in heaven. God made peace through the blood of Christ's death on the cross.**

At one time you were separated from God. You were his enemies in your minds, and the evil things you did were against God. But now God has made you his friends again. **He did this through Christ's death in the body** so that he might bring you into God's presence as people who are holy, with no wrong, and with nothing of which God can judge you guilty. This will happen if you continue strong and sure in your faith. You must not be moved away from the hope brought to you by the Good News that you heard. That same Good News has been told to everyone in the world, and I, Paul, help in preaching that Good News.

I am happy in my sufferings for you. There are **things that Christ must still suffer through (Christ's) body, the church**. I am accepting, in my body, my part of these things that must be suffered. I became a servant of the church because God gave me a special work to do that helps you, and that work is to tell fully the message of God. This message is the secret that was hidden from everyone since the beginning of time, but now it is made known to God's holy people. God decided to let his people know this rich and glorious secret which he has for all people. **This secret is Christ himself, who is in you. (Christ) is our only hope for glory. So we continue to preach Christ to each person, using all wisdom to warn and to teach everyone, in order to bring each one into God's presence as a mature person in Christ.** To do this, I work and struggle, **using Christ's great strength** that works so powerfully in me.

I want you to know how hard I work for you, those in Laodicea, and others who have never seen me. I want them to be strengthened and joined together with love so that they may be rich in their understanding. This leads to their knowing fully **God's secret, that is, Christ himself**. In him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are safely kept.

I say this so that no one can fool you by arguments that seem good, but are false. Though I am absent from you in my body, my heart is with you, and I am happy to see your good lives and **your strong faith in Christ**.

As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so continue to live in (Christ). Keep your **roots deep in (Christ)** and have your **lives built on (Christ)**. Be strong in the faith, just as you were taught, and always be thankful.

Be sure that no one leads you away with false and empty teaching that is only human, which comes from the ruling spirits of this world, and **not from Christ**. All of God lives in **Christ fully (even when Christ was on earth)**, and you have a full and true life in **Christ, who is ruler over all rulers and powers**.

Also in **Christ** you had a different kind of circumcision, a circumcision not done by hands. It was **through Christ's circumcision, that is, (Christ's) death, that you were made free from the power of your sinful self**. When you were baptized, you were buried with **Christ**, and you were raised up with **(Christ)** through your faith in **God's power that was shown when he raised Christ from the dead**. When you were spiritually dead because of your sins and because you were not free from the power of your sinful self, **God made you alive with Christ**, and he forgave all our sins. He canceled the debt, which listed all the rules we failed to follow. He took away that record with its rules and nailed it to the cross. God stripped the spiritual rulers and powers of their authority. With the cross, he won the victory and showed the world that they were powerless.

So do not let anyone make rules for you about eating and drinking or about a religious feast, a New Moon Festival, or a Sabbath day. These things were like a shadow of what was to come. But **what is true and real has come and is found in Christ**. Do not let anyone disqualify you by making you humiliate yourself and worship angels. Such people enter into visions, which fill them with foolish pride because of their human way of thinking. **They do not hold tightly to Christ, the head. It is from (Christ) that all the parts of the body are cared for and held together.** So it grows in the way God wants it to grow.

Since you died with Christ and were made free from the ruling spirits of the world, why do you act as if you still belong to this world by following rules like these: "Don't eat this," "Don't taste that," "Don't even touch that thing"? These rules refer to earthly things that are gone as soon as they are used. They are only man-made commands and teachings. They seem to be wise, but they are only part of a man-made religion. They make people pretend not to be proud and make them punish their bodies, but they do not really control the evil desires of the sinful self.

Since you were raised from the dead with Christ, aim at what is in heaven, where **Christ is sitting at the right hand of God**. Think only about the things in heaven, not the things on earth. Your old sinful self has died, and **your new life is kept with Christ in God. Christ is our life, and when (Christ) comes again, you will share in (Christ's) glory.**

So put all evil things out of your life: sexual sinning, doing evil, letting evil thoughts control you, wanting things that are evil, and greed. This is really serving a false god. These things make God angry. In your past, evil life you also did these things.

But now also put these things out of your life: anger, bad temper, doing or saying things to hurt others, and using evil words when you talk. Do not lie to each other. You have left your old sinful life and the things you did before. You have begun to live the new life, in which **you are being made new and are becoming like (Christ) who made you**. This new life brings you the true knowledge of God. In the new life there is no difference between Greeks and Jews, those who are circumcised and those who are not circumcised, or people who are foreigners, or Scythians. There is no difference between slaves and free people. But **Christ is in all believers, and Christ is all that is important.**

God has chosen you and made you his holy people. He loves you. So always do these things: Show mercy to others, be kind, humble, gentle, and patient. Get along with each other, and forgive each other. If someone does wrong to you, forgive that person because **(Christ) forgave you**. Do all these things; but most important, love each other. Love is what holds you all together in perfect unity. **Let the peace that Christ gives control your thinking**, because you were all called together in one body to have peace. Always be thankful. **Let the teaching of Christ live in you richly**. Use all wisdom to teach and instruct each other by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. **Everything you do or say should be done to obey (Christ) your Lord**. And in all you do, **give thanks to God the Father through (Christ)**.

Wives, yield to the authority of your husbands, because **this is the right thing to do in (Christ)**.

Husbands, love your wives and be gentle with them.

Children, obey your parents in all things, because **this pleases (Christ)**.

Fathers, do not nag your children. If you are too hard to please, they may want to stop trying.

Slaves, obey your masters in all things. Do not obey just when they are watching you, to gain their favor, but serve them honestly, **because you respect (Christ)**. In all the work you are doing, work the best you can. **Work as if you were doing it for (Christ)**, not for people. Remember that you will **receive your reward from (Christ), which (Christ) promised to his people. You are serving the Lord Christ**. But remember that anyone who does wrong will be punished for that wrong, and **(Christ) treats everyone the same**.

Masters, give what is good and fair to your slaves. Remember that you have a Master in heaven.

Continue praying, keeping alert, and always thanking God. Also pray for us that God will give us an opportunity to tell people his message. Pray that we **can preach the secret that God has made known about Christ**. This is why I am in prison. Pray that I can speak in a way that will make it clear, as I should.

Be wise in the way you act with people who are not believers, making the most of every opportunity. When you talk, you should always be kind and pleasant so you will be able to answer everyone in the way you should.

Tychicus is **my dear brother in Christ and a faithful minister and servant with me in (Christ)**. He will tell you all the things that are happening to me. This is why I am sending him: so you may know how we are and he may encourage you. I send him with Onesimus, **a faithful and dear brother in Christ**, and one of your group. They will tell you all that has happened here.

Aristarchus, a prisoner with me, and Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, greet you. (I have already told you what to do about Mark. If he comes, welcome him.) Jesus, who is called Justus, also greets you. These are the only Jewish believers who work with me for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.

Epaphras, **a servant of Jesus Christ**, from your group, also greets you. He always prays for you that you will grow to be spiritually mature and have everything God wants for you. I know he has worked hard for you and the people in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. Demas and our dear friend Luke, the doctor, greet you.

Greet the brothers in Laodicea. And greet Nympha and the church that meets in her house. After this letter is read to you, be sure it is also read to the church in Laodicea. And you read the letter that I wrote to Laodicea. Tell Archippus, "Be sure to finish the work the Lord gave you."

I, Paul, greet you and write this with my own hand. Remember me in prison. Grace be with you.

Correspondence from Colossians



1st Letter

My dear friends,

I am very pleased that we are able to spend time together each Sunday evening. I look forward to our sharing God's word from Paul's letter to the Colossians.

I am thankful to God for our church family. Expressing thanksgiving is every important. I am deeply aware of and appreciate the thanks that are offered for me, most usually as an elder, but it is sometimes troubling because there is no credit due me. Paul's response to the news of the Colossians' faith and love was to thank God. I encourage you to consider this.

It is usual and even courteous to thank someone for their service. However, as a Christian, I am what I am because of God. William Barclay says, "There is no such thing as a self-made man; there are only men whom God has made, and men who have refused to allow God to make them." For a person such as I, who feels the temptation of self-pride so acutely, the out-pouring of thanks to me and not to the one truly responsible for anything that is good about me is a disservice to me and to God. It is my purpose as a Christian to glorify God. If there is a feeling of disappointment to hear thanks to God for my service instead of accolades for George it would be clear that I am not a man made by God but one who has refused to allow God to make me. As we see God working in one another's lives let us give thanks to God for each other. In doing so, God be given the glory and we will be spared the temptation of self-pride. I would also add that there is great joy in knowing that God has been glorified.

As I read the first few verses of Colossians, my mind settled on the word hope. I have been thinking and praying about hope. I am always looking for insights to being a better Christian. Paul says the faith and love the Colossians displayed came from hope.

Correspondence from Colossians

When I think of hope sometimes what comes to mind is what I wish would happen. This is hope as wishful thinking. Such hope is not the source of faith and love.

Sometimes hope is just optimism. It is possible to live our lives based on optimism. "Everything will be OK tomorrow." Admiral James Stockdale, Medal of Honor recipient for his bravery as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, when asked who were the prisoners that did not survive, replied, "The optimist." Just having an optimistic outlook is not the hope that produces faith and love.

I believe hope that is the source of faith and love is neither wishful thinking nor an optimistic attitude. It is a gift of God in which we have a sure and confident expectation of what has been promised. When our hope is in God there is no doubt just patient anticipation.

"I pray that the God who gives hope will fill you with much joy and peace while you trust in him. Then your hope will overflow by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 15:13 NCV)

Because of Christ,
George

Correspondence from Colossians



2nd Letter

My dear friends,

I trust that God has blessed you this past week. I have been praying for you and our class. I was stimulated by Paul's prayer for the Colossians and begin to examine other passages where Paul expresses his prayers for others.

As I examine Paul's prayers for others, a dimension and focus that I have not often included in my own prayers becomes apparent.

Consider the following petitions I have paraphrased from Paul's letters.

- God fill me with the knowledge of your will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. (Col 1:9)
- Give me the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that I may know Christ better. (Eph. 1:17)
- I pray that my eyes be focused and clear, so that I can see exactly what you are calling me to do and grasp the enormity of the glorious way of life you have for me as a Christian. (Eph. 1:18)
- Help me understand the incomparably great power for us who believe – endless energy, boundless strength like the strength you used to raise Christ from the dead. (Eph. 1:19-20)
- God make me fit for what you have called me to be. I pray God, that you will fill my good ideas and acts of faith with your own energy so that they will amount to something. (2 Thess 1:11)

- Dear God, I pray that my faith, which I share with my church family, is apparent in all of the good things I do and people recognize Christ in all of it. (Philemon 1:4)
- I pray that my love will flourish and I will love not only more, but also with greater knowledge and understanding, so that I may be able to distinguish what is best and may be pure and blameless ... filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ— that glorifies and praises God. (Phil 1:9-11)
- Dear God, I pray that out of your glorious riches you may strengthen me with power through your Spirit in my inner being, so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith. (Eph. 3:16)
- Because I am firmly planted and established in love, I pray that I may have power, together with all my brothers and sisters in Christ, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge— that I may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:17-19)

I encourage you to consider these petitions and adopt them in your own prayers as I intend to do.

Because of Christ,
George

Correspondence from Colossians

3rd Letter



My dear friends,

Easter reminds us that Jesus is alive. A book I have been reading recently declares that the most important question about Jesus is whether he is alive or dead. He is alive and because he lives we truly have a "living hope". As I read about the supremacy of Christ (1:15-20) I was struck by the enormity of the truth about Christ.

As I thought about what Paul had to say it occurred to me that I sometimes seem to overlook Jesus. I do not mean that I don't believe he is the Son of God or think he is unimportant but he is sort of in the background. It is almost like I think he is great but I really need to talk with the guy in charge. Much of my focus has been on developing my relationship with God as if God is distinct from Christ and the Holy Spirit. Perhaps in the back of my mind is the idea that once I get my relationship with God straightened out I can start working on getting to know Jesus and then possibly the Spirit. That may be logical but it is not scriptural. God is three (God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit) and he is one. As Christians we are to enjoy God and that means enjoying all that he is, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is one but he relates to us in all three of his persons.

Consider of one aspect of Christ, Christ as the "image of the invisible God" as an example of the added dimension God the Son brings to our understanding of God the Father. This can help bring deeper understanding and more meaningful relationship with God.

The Message says: "We look at him and see the God who cannot be seen." The New Century Version says: "No one can see God, but Jesus Christ is exactly like him." In Christ, we have answers to one compelling question about God ... What would God look and act like as a human being?

Other passages:

A child has been born to us;

God has given a son to us.
He will be responsible for leading the people.
His name will be Wonderful Counselor, Powerful God,
Father Who Lives Forever, Prince of Peace. (Isa 9:6)

"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"
— which means, "God with us." (Matt. 1:23)

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (John 1:14)
... whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say." (John 2:50)
Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. (John 14:9)
Christ himself was like God in everything. (Phil 2:6 NCV)
... Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor. 4:4)

The Son reflects the glory of God and shows exactly what God is like. (Heb. 1:3)
It is clear that in Christ we can discern on a human level the glory of God. The idea of becoming more God-like is no longer an impossibility but a reality as we "... serve in the new way of the Spirit". (Rom 7:6)

If our purpose is to come to a deeper understanding of God's will for our lives, it is important that we grasp the fullness of the trinitarian God ... God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

Because of Christ,

George

Correspondence from Colossians

4th Letter

My dear friends,



I don't know about you but when I read Colossians 1:21 I struggled as I thought about the words ... "enemies of God" ... "evil behavior". Those Colossians must have been a bad bunch is what I wanted to think; but I was confronted with a deeper reality. Was I an enemy of God? Is it possible that all of us either are or were an enemy of God? A sinner yes ... but an enemy of God? Have you ever really thought of yourself as an enemy of God? Maybe I am not as good a friend as I should be, but I sure wouldn't count myself an enemy. I must be clear, only in the more recent years of my life have I begun to grasp that reality. This has been very important milestone in my spiritual journey. I really identified with a story Larry Crabb shared in a recent lecture as he talked about perceptions of sin. He and his wife were traveling in a rural area of Colorado and passing through a quiet community. As they drove along at a very leisurely speed, enjoying the scenery and each other, a police car approached from the other direction. Larry gave a friendly wave and was surprised when the policeman turned on his lights, turned around and pulled them over. The policeman approach and addressed Larry in a very "Barney Fife" fashion.

"Do you know how fast you were driving?" the officer asked accusingly.

"Maybe 25?" Larry replied innocently, thinking this was probably a courtesy stop to welcome them to the area or maybe he wanted warn them about some danger ahead.

"You were going 27 miles per hour" the obviously serious and certain officer "Barney" answered.

"Do you know what the speed limit is?" he sternly continued the interrogation.

"25?" was Larry's bewildered and somewhat hopeful response.

Just as serious and definite as before, the officer said, "It is 20 miles per hour."

Larry Crabb said his silent response was, "Ok, so put on the handcuffs. Lock me up. You've got me. Come on give me a break. What is the big deal?"

He then went on to make the point that that story illustrates how we often view our sin. Going 20 miles per hour in 25 mile per hour zone and our attitude is: "What's the big deal?"

The big deal is ... sin makes us enemies of God. Consider the following passages and resist the temptation to attribute them to really bad people and remember that they are describing you and I in our sin.

Isa 59:2

It is your evil that has separated you from your God.
Your sins cause him to turn away from you,
so he does not hear you.

Rom 3:10-18 (NCV)

...Jews and those who are not
Jews are all guilty of sin. As the
Scriptures say:

"There is no one who always
does what is right, not even one.
There is no one who understands.
There is no one who looks to God
for help. All have turned away.
Together, everyone has become
useless. There is no one who
does anything good; there is not
even one."

Psalms 14:1-3

"Their throats are like open
graves; they use their tongues for
telling lies."

Psalms 5:9

"Their words are like snake
poison."

Psalms 140:3

"Their mouths are full of cursing
and hate."

Psalms 10:7

"They are always ready to kill
people. Everywhere they go they
cause ruin and misery. They don't
know how to live in peace."

Isaiah 59:7-8

"They have no fear of God."

Psalms 36:1

Eph 2:1-3,12

As for you, you were dead in your
transgressions and sins, in which
you used to live when you
followed the ways of this world
and of the ruler of the kingdom of
the air, the spirit who is now at
work in those who are disobedient.
All of us also lived among them at
one time, gratifying the cravings of
our sinful nature and following its
desires and thoughts. Like the
rest, we were by nature objects of
wrath. ...remember that at that
time you were separate from
Christ, excluded from citizenship
in Israel and foreigners to the

covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

Titus 3:3

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and

enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

The more I understand that my sin makes me an enemy of God, the deeper appreciation I have for God's love.

Because of Christ,

George

Correspondence from Colossians

5th Letter

My dear friends,

As re-read last week's letter I was disappointed to find an error. (Can you believe that?) After relating what I thought was a great story I misstated the point. Instead of saying ...that story illustrates how we often view our sin. Going 27 miles per hour in a 20 mile per hour zone... I wrote ..."Going 20 miles per hour in 25 mile per hour zone."

I hope that wasn't a "Freudian slip". Although going 20 in a 25 mph zone doesn't illustrate the point of the story, it does reflect perhaps another way in which we may view our sin and relationship with God. Self-righteousness can give us the idea that we are really a really good person. We deceive ourselves into believing we are doing everything right and begin to feel that God owes us and that we are better than others.

My letter this week is a somewhat disjointed. My state of mind this week has been like that. I have been struggling to focus. As I write this I am reminded of the prayers in letter #2.

"God make me fit for what you have called me to be. I pray God, that you will fill my good ideas and acts of faith with your own energy so that they will amount to something." (2 Thess 1:11)

"I pray that my eyes be focused and clear, so that I can see exactly what you are calling me to do and grasp the enormity of the glorious way of life you have for me as a Christian." (Eph. 1:18)

I suspect the problem this week has been too few prayers and too much George.

There is an interesting phrase ... "fine sounding arguments" ... in Colossians 2:4. "I tell you this so that no one may deceive you with fine sounding arguments." Other translations say: "enticing words" (KJV); "persuasive arguments" (NLT); "arguments that seem good, but are false" (NCV); "plausible arguments" (RSV). Paul does not tell us what



the fine sounding arguments were but I was struck by the fact that today we are constantly challenged by some 'fine sounding arguments'. There are several "fine sounding arguments" that I encounter on a regular basis. I ask you to think about this and perhaps write down the "fine sounding arguments" that you encounter and consider how you respond to them.

I want I want to share a small "jewel" that I discovered while re-reading the 1st chapter from "The Message". In verse 5 we talked about hope and what it means. "The Message" paraphrases that verse:

"The lines of purpose in your lives never grows slack, tightly
tied as they are to your future in heaven, kept taut in hope."

I felt this was a beautiful expression that communicates the hope that we were talking about earlier.

Because of Christ,

George

Correspondence from Colossians

6th Letter

My dear friends,

As I write this letter my heart is about to burst with emotion. There is so much I want to share and I feel so inadequate. For that reason I am praying for God to deliver his message to you by whatever means.

I have been contemplating Colossian 2:6-7 and I have been convicted and challenged. I was led to listen to a lesson by Lynn Anderson entitled "Hope in a World Gone Mad". God spoke through him in a powerful way that brought Paul's words into sharper focus.

"...just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

There is so much hopelessness in the world. I do believe that Jesus is the hope of the world but sometimes that truth seems so far away and the words so hollow. It is when I feel that way that I need to hear what Paul had to say. I need to remember what brought me to Jesus, hopelessness. And I must remember what I found in Jesus, hope, a hope so great that I was willing to declare Jesus my Lord and Master. I want to live my life under the Lordship of Jesus.

What does that mean? It means that I am so connected to Jesus that he is my life. Paul says that means that my life is "rooted" in him. That which holds me in place and is the source of my life and vitality is Jesus.

It means the whole foundation of my life and being is build upon Jesus. As my Master I willing to place myself in his care and service. I am a wise man who built his house on the rock and when the storms come it does not fall.

It means my strength comes not from me but from Jesus. I trust his words.



"All power in heaven and on earth is given to me.

...I will be with you always, even until the end of this age."

Jesus has not abandoned me. He is with me. He is my living hope. He is the power of my life and he is changing me to be like him. Only the power of God can transform me.

Lynn Anderson told a story about General Douglas McArthur. In World War II when the Japanese forced him out of the Philippines he vowed "I will return". When the tide of the war changed and McArthur was able to return as a liberator he waded ashore as the cameras were rolling and declared, "I have returned". The soldiers of the Philippine army felt so indebted to McArthur as their liberator that whenever there was roll call:

"Santiago".

"Here".

"Garcia".

"Here"

And finally when all the names are called, someone shouts, "General Douglas McArthur" and the soldiers together answer with a resounding, "Here"!

Jesus said: "I am with you". We can all shout, "He is here"! We do not have to go it alone.

"...do what you have been taught. School's out; quit studying the subject and start living it! And let your living spill over into thanksgiving."

(Col. 2:7 The Message)

Because of Christ,

George

Correspondence from Colossians

7th Letter

My dear friends,

Often when the concept of suffering is discussed as we did last Sunday, there is a tendency to paint the Christian life with a broad brush that leaves the impression that we are the *Les Miserables*. This past week, God spoke powerfully to me. Two writings came to my attention. Both were very helpful in illustrating the spiritual journey. First, I received a letter from a member of our class. Her letter described the process of pregnancy and how that process and its attendant suffering illustrates the spiritual journey. This was most encouraging as well as enlightening.

Secondly, I came on a very wonderful and helpful writing by Larry Crabb in his book *Shattered Dreams*. His commentary on the spiritual journey pictured as the Jewish custom of engagement in Jesus time was very powerful to me and I wanted to share it with you. The scripture context that Crabb is referring to is John 14:1-3:

Jesus said, "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house; I would not tell you this if it were not true. I am going there to prepare a place for you. After I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me so that you may be where I am. (NCV)

The following is his commentary:

When a first-century Jewish man fell in love with a woman, he would travel from his father's home to hers to seal the engagement. In that culture, an engagement was not what it is today. It wasn't a trial period during which premarital counseling would help the couple decide whether to continue on or break off the relationship. It represented rather a legal contract, complete with a price paid by the groom that set the woman apart exclusively for her man.

They were immediately regarded as husband and wife, irrevocably bound. To symbolize their covenant, each would drink from a cup of wine over which a betrothal benediction had been pronounced. Following that ceremony, the groom would return to his father's home for a period of twelve months. For that entire time, he remained separate from his bride. She would not see him again until it was time to consummate their union.

The bride had one job during his absence—to prepare herself for his coming and for the rest of her life with him. All other activities revolved around that one ruling purpose. While she waited, she knew what her groom was doing. He was spending the year adding an apartment to his father's home in which they would eventually live together. An honorable man would have an eye for no other woman and would not rest until preparations were made for them to be united. She would rest, secure in the knowledge that all the bridegroom's energies were directed toward their being together.

When the engagement year ended, at an exact day and hour that the bride did not know, the groom would gather his wedding party and, in a torch-lit procession, travel to where his bride was living. His arrival would be preceded by a shout from one of his friends, alerting the woman that her groom was arriving.

She was ready. She had no greater dream than his coming and was confident he would arrive to take her to be with him in the home he had prepared. With her attendants, she would travel to that home. When they arrived, she would walk into a party waiting to happen.

Before the celebration began, the bride and groom would be escorted to the bridal chamber where, for the first time, they would express their covenant to each other with physical union. Then the husband would emerge from the room alone, and a seven-day feast would begin. At its conclusion, his wife, unveiled for the first time, would appear and be officially welcomed to her new home as a member of the family.

From then on, the heaven of unhindered intimacy and unrestrained blessing was hers to enjoy.

With that custom in mind, as it was in the minds of the disciples, perhaps we can better hear what our Lord means when He tells us to live now with untroubled hearts.

"I know things are not now as you want them. I know many of your dreams are not coming true. I want you to understand that things are not as I will one day make them. I like neither the distance between us nor the pain you suffer."

"Until I come to bring you to My Father's house, I am devoting Myself to only one thing: I am preparing a place for you. And My Spirit, on My behalf, is devoting Himself to only one thing--preparing you to enjoy Me and all that I will provide."

"I have called you not to the secular journey where you must make everything in your life now as pleasant as possible. I have called you to the spiritual journey, to a process of enlarging your heart to desire Me above everything else."

"Do not be troubled by all the dreams that will shatter while you remain on earth. You will feel deep pain. But every sorrow you experience will be used by My Spirit to deepen your desire for Me. He will speak to you about Me."

"Listen for the voice. You will hear Him most clearly when suffering humbles you enough to want to hear Him, to know you cannot go on without hearing Him."

"This time of distance, when you will feel such disappointment both with your life and with yourself, will awaken your heart to receive Me with great joy when I finally come. I will not delay. I will come at exactly the appointed time."

"My Father will give the signal. Listen for the shout."

And our response is, Come, Lord Jesus; come soon!

Until then, we wait with untroubled hearts. We scream, we cry, we fail, but we wait, confident that He has paid a price for us that guarantees our eventual intimacy. No one, not even Satan, can prevent us from entering the bridal chamber with Jesus where our greatest dream will be realized.

Then, not until, every good dream will also come true. The Trinity will pour out every blessing Their infinite imagination can conceive. That will be heaven.

Because of Christ, George

Correspondence

8th Letter

from Colossians



My dear friends,

There is so much I want to talk with you about. The joy of discovery often results in frustration because there are so few occasions to share and sometimes a sense there is not much interest. I keep reminding myself that I need to be still and trust God, but it is so difficult.

This week I have been mulling over a phrase from Colossians 2:17 "... the reality...is found in Christ." Often things that fill our lives are products of our self-deception and denial. We are unable or unwilling to discern reality...what is really true.

I was reminded of a book I read years ago, entitled *Reality Therapy* by Dr. William Glasser. I do not remember what prompted reading a book about a new approach to psychiatry but Glasser left some lasting impressions and I went back and re-read some of it. I found many of Glasser's premises of reality therapy to be analogous to the process of spiritual formation. I will not attempt to go into great detail but consider a few of Glasser's ideas about psychiatric disorders and the process of reality therapy.

...the common characteristic of psychiatric patients is that they all deny the reality of the world around them.

Therapy will be successful when the patient is able to give up denying the world and recognize that reality not only exists but they must fulfill their needs within its framework.

...at the time any person comes for psychiatric help he is lacking the most critical factor for fulfilling his needs, a person whom he genuinely cares about and who he feels genuinely cares about him.

The three procedures of Reality Therapy are:

1. There is involvement. The therapist must become so involved with the patient that the patient can begin to face reality and see how his behavior is unrealistic.
2. The therapist must reject behavior which is unrealistic; but still accept the patient and maintain his involvement with him.

3. The therapist must teach the patient better ways to fulfill his needs within the confines of reality.

There is obviously much more to Reality Therapy than these few ideas but I think these can be very helpful as we think about our life in Christ and the fact that "the reality...is in Christ". Glasser gives no indication that he is a Christian but he could be accused of stealing his theory from the Bible.

Like persons with a psychiatric disorder deny the reality of the world around them, we as sinners deny our condition and refuse to face reality. (Romans 1:18-32) Likewise, as sinners we will find healing when we understand our hopelessness and face reality. We realize we are sinners and we realize there is salvation through God's grace in Christ Jesus and understand that our deepest need can only be met in reality ... truth ... Christ.

Our relationship with Christ validates the procedures of Reality Therapy. Christ is involved in our lives. In fact, he dwells in us. He is our life. He is our example. Our shepherd. In Jesus we can see our imperfections and find our perfection. He teaches us how to love and act.

Christ accepts us where we are and tells us to go and sin no more. He will not leave us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. He teaches us how we are to live and gives us the power to do what pleases his Father.

I am constantly tempted to deny the reality of my sinful actions and sinful thoughts in my heart. When I succumb to those temptations I have lost connection to Christ because reality is in Christ and only in him will I know the truth and find freedom.

Because of Christ,

George

Correspondence from Colossians

9th Letter



My dear friends,

If I ask you what books in the last decade have sold 80 million + copies, with 65 titles in 37 languages and their authors hold the record in The Guinness Book of World Records for having the most books on the New York Times bestseller list at one time; seven books on May 24, 1998, what would be your answer? The answer is the Chicken Soup for the Soul books written by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen.

The stated purpose of the authors was to produce books that "would uplift humanity by helping people open their hearts, rekindle their spirits and give them the courage to pursue their dreams". The title, Chicken Soup for the Soul, came as Jack visualized the image of his grandmother's chicken soup and remembered how she told him it would cure anything. The book would have the same healing powers as that soup, but not for the body - for the soul.

I must confess that I have not read any of the Chicken Soup for the Soul books. It is interesting and encouraging that so many people are presumably looking to find something that will "open their hearts, rekindle their spirits and give them the courage to pursue their dreams". I am certain that those books contain very worthy and inspiring material that is an encouragement to people and aids them as they pursue their dreams.

The ironic thing is, although chicken soup is great, grandmother was wrong, chicken soup doesn't cure anything. There are many good things about chicken soup and loving grandmothers, but they ultimately have no curative power.

I must confess that much of my Christian experience has been characterized by a belief that "chicken soup" will take care of whatever ails me. Don't get me wrong, "chicken soup" is really good and it has some great benefits but it is not the real thing. Perhaps you can think of examples in scripture where people were looking for and depending on "chicken soup". Two examples from Jesus' ministry come to me.

Jesus fed five thousand plus people (John 6:1-59) who were following him with five barley loaves and two small fish. They ate to their fill and food was left over. Afterwards they followed Jesus. He told them they were following him because they had their fill with the loaves and fish, that they should work for eternal food not fish and loaves ... ("chicken soup"). They didn't understand and Jesus pressed the matter, "... the work of God is to believe the one he has sent."

The people insisted on a miraculous sign. Jesus said God would send not manna but true bread from heaven. "Give us the true bread", they said.

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty", Jesus told them.

They were perplexed but Jesus didn't let up. "...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Many of his disciples responded, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

"... The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." Jesus told them.

John then writes: "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."

In Luke 9:57-62 Jesus speaks to those who would follow him wherever he goes. He tells them, not only there is no place to lay their head, the priority of the Kingdom of God is such that it is more important than burying their dead or saying good bye to their families. Jesus is telling them they must choose, not good over bad but what is better over what is good.

"...I think that all things are worth nothing compared with the greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him, I have lost all those things, and now I know they are worthless trash. This allows me to have Christ and to belong to him. Now I am right with God, not because I followed the law, but because I believed in Christ. God uses my faith to make me right with him. I want to know Christ and the power that raised him from the dead. I want to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death. Then I have hope that I myself will be raised from the dead."
(Phil 3:8-11 NCV)

Why spend your money on something that is not real food?
Why work for something that doesn't really satisfy you?
Listen closely to me, and you will eat what is good;
your soul will enjoy the rich food that satisfies.
Come to me and listen; listen to me so you may live. (Isa 55:2-3 NCV)

Don't settle for chicken soup.

Because of Christ, George

Correspondence from Colossians

10th Letter



My dear friends,

I thank God for the opportunity to study and contemplate the book of Colossians with you. His Spirit has spoken boldly and I have been challenged and encouraged by the Word and his working through you. It has been, and will continue to be, my prayer we will not only hear the truth but that our lives will be transformed. I want to do what pleases God and I am confident that you want to also. I am tempted to be content contemplating my "spiritual navel". It is wonderful to discover God and to know the infinite nature of his being but there is more.

My spiritual journey, of which I became aware when I was twelve years old and before, using the book of Colossians as a "road map" started at chapter 3 verse 5 with "Put to death...". My relationship with God was mostly characterized by "do not" and "do right". I started my journey with much hope (wishful desire) and enthusiasm. I was on the right path but unfortunately headed the wrong direction. Despite my misdirection, the experience was mostly exhilarating and self-satisfying. Being right and righteous is a powerful motivation. The pathway of my journey, though occasionally up hill and sometimes rugged, was mostly level and in many cases paved.

I did not realize, as is the case for many who set out on a journey without a compass and careful reading of the map, I was walking in circles. There was no real progress in reaching my destination. I was wandering about hoping to find my way. The experience was good but nothing really changed. As long as the good things outweighed the bad I just kept trudging along and enjoying the experience and feeling pretty good about myself.

Fortunately, the journey took a turn for the worse. Some real difficulties, actually insurmountable difficulties, arose. The journey was no longer fun and self-satisfying. None of the skills and experiences gained in on my journey to that point were any help. Previously, even though I really wasn't making any progress, at least I was moving. Now, suddenly, I was paralyzed; barely able to move. It didn't really matter because I had didn't know where I was going. It was in that circumstance that truth began to be revealed.

The truth was, I was not able to "do not" and "do right". My failure revealed the truth about myself. I had only my power and no direction. I had nothing to offer God. My journey had been self-guided, fueled by pride and self-sufficiency.

If there is a Bible story that describes my journey, it is the story of Elijah in 1st Kings. Though I am obviously not a prophet of God, Elijah's story speaks in a profoundly personal way to me. I will not,

for the sake of brevity, relate the whole story but the key points will hopefully explain how his story relates to me.

Elijah is a man who received the blessing and Spirit of God and performed mighty works in God's name. His miracles and works were astounding. Then a really strange thing occurred. When Elijah received word of Jezebel's threat against his life, he fled in fear. He lapsed into depression and was immobilized, escaping in the refuge of sleep. What happens next clarifies why he fled in fear at Jezebel's threat. A threat, insignificant compared to what he had already faced and the power that God had demonstrated through him.

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. ...he...went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep.

...The angel of the LORD ... said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night.

And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

¹⁵The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, ..." (1 Kings 19:3-15)

Not unlike Elijah, I failed remember that it is God that directs my way and I cannot make the journey without him. Miserable and defeated, God lifted me up and supplied the nourishment to sustain me through the desert to the place where he resides. He called me to explain my presence. I could do nothing but confess my heart. He revealed himself in a way that I had never experienced nor expected. Everything suddenly changed but nothing changed. He asked the same question and my answer was still the same. And then, as with Elijah, he sent me back to where I came from. Here I am on the pathway of my spiritual journey at the intersection of Colossians 3:5.

Nothing has changed but everything has changed. I have been to the mountain of God and he has revealed himself and shown me who I am. I know my destination. The direction is clear as the Spirit leads me. My journey is still "do not" and "do right". Nothing has changed but everything has changed. I

am not alone. There is an army of those who have not forsaken God. The pathway ahead is sometimes pleasant but more often difficult but never insurmountable. The journey is joyous because arrival at my destination is certain and what awaits me is wonderful beyond all that I can think or imagine. Nothing has changed but everything has changed.

Because of Christ,

George

Correspondence from Colossians

11th Letter

My dear friends,

Our time together in Colossians has come to an end. I hope our original purpose to allow God to fill us with knowledge of his will has been accomplished to some extent. The measure of success is whether are we being transformed and allowing his spirit to guide our lives.

As we have examined Colossians, my thoughts about my Christian walk have been significantly affected by several ideas. One idea that comes to mind first is that Christ is everything. That idea permeates the entire letter and is summarized in 3:3 "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."

I was deeply impressed with the overwhelming presence of Christ in the Colossian letter. This became very clear when I put together the handout that highlighted the occasions in Colossians where Christ was referenced directly or indirectly. A phrase we often hear that is most appropriate is ... "That's what it's all about." Colossians tells us emphatically that Christ is what it's all about.

I have been thinking about the all-consuming nature of our relationship with Christ. This idea is particularly difficult to accept in our culture of "individualism" ... the "me culture". Our way of life makes self supreme and sovereign over everything. This presents a major conflict between our culture and Christ's call to follow him and leave everything behind.

As long as we hold on to ourselves and our desire is only for... "Jesus to come into our lives."... We will be frustrated in our relationship with Christ. We make Christ just one more part of our lives that we have to fit into our busy schedules. We struggle with our priorities. What is most important? What would Jesus do? What do I give up? God doesn't want me to be unhappy. How much time do I devote to church? After all, we must keep some balance in our lives.

As long as we treat Christ as an incremental part of our lives we will not find peace and our relationship with God will be unfulfilled. The words of Colossians and other scripture have been echoing in my mind: "...in everything he might have supremacy." "...you received Christ Jesus as Lord." ...the realit is found in Christ" "God made you alive with Christ." "...your life is now hidden in Christ." "...Christ is all, and is in all." "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord..."

"If people want to follow me, they must give up the things they want. They must be willing even to give up their lives to follow me. Those who want to save their lives will give up true life, and those who give up their lives for me will have true life." (Matt 16:24 NCV)

The reality in Christ is I have died to self. I no longer live but Christ lives in me. I am a new person created in the likeness of Christ. Jesus hasn't become a part of my life. He is my life. There is only one priority and that is Christ Jesus.

The challenge of my spiritual journey is to follow Christ and let the Spirit direct the course of my life.

I pray God has blessed you with "...knowledge of his will, through all spiritual wisdom and understanding..." during our study of Colossians and that you will "...live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way..."

Because of Christ,

George

Dear George,

After class Sunday night, I could not stop thinking about the events of the week and the question you asked about if we thought suffering or ministry came first. I felt compelled to write you a letter. I don't know why, I not a writer, so please over look my writing skills and lack of knowledge about the bible. We talked about transformation, suffering and ministry and great joy the Lord gives us. Pregnancy came to mind. I hope I'm not too far off with my analogy and I know you have never been in that condition but it makes sense to me. When you go through pregnancy, a transformation happens, maybe Christian's go through a similar process.

The first trimester in pregnancy you suffer in your past sins, questioning if you're worthy of becoming a mother (Christian), worrying about the baby's healthy or will the sins from the past harm the baby. You suffer doubt, you suffer morning sickness (guilt). Then the joy (spirit) overwhelms you. and want to tell (ministry) other of the good news. (Christ). You start going to the doctors (church) because you know of the high immortality rate for infants that are without good care. Then you read books (Bible) to learn more, and start hanging out with other mothers (Christians). The transformation has begun.

Second trimester: the honeymoon is over and you begin to show. You start to realize it's not your body any more, someone else live in you (Christ). Nothing fits anymore,(the world). You are tired all the time so you may not exercise like you should and you may eat too much (not ministering sin, and temptation) and gain too much weight and feel bad about yourself (guilt).. The fear of labor pains overwhelms you and depression could play on you (Satan).. You miss your old body because it will never be the same and sometimes you question if it is worth it. You suffer and you Pray and ask God why it has to be this way. Then something happens, you feel the baby move inside you(the holy spirit) and the joy returns. You start spending more time at the doctors office and you hear the heart beat (Jesus) . You may tell the doctor how you have been feeling and he could prescribe vitamins (repent) . Your friends give you a baby shower to give you support (Christians). At work a friend just found out she is expecting and is afraid and alone, you tell her the books to read and invite her to your doctor's office.(church).

Third trimester: The closer you get to birth (transformation) the more suffering there is. You carry a heavy baby and with it great responsibility.. You suffer back pain, swelling, sleepless nights. There is so much to do and you are running out of time. Fear of labor gets stronger, you could suffer false labor (false teachings). You still worry about the baby, did you go to the right Doctor., you worry could you have taken better care of yourself and the baby, you worry if you have told everybody you should have. Then labor starts and the real pain begins. In the hospital they strip you of your clothes, stick you with needles hook wires and leave you. You ask your husband to stay with you but he falls asleep in the chair and you are left alone with the pain. You feel betrayed, No one told you how bad it really hurts no one can take the pain for you so you pray to God take this cup from my hand, is there any other way. Then a miracle happens the child is born, and you find joy with the lord. Transformation is complete and you forget the pain.

God Bless, Patty Puleo

