

## THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS : AN EXPANDED PARAPHRASE

**T**HIS paraphrase, like that of the Epistle to the Galatians which appeared in January, 1957, was prepared in conjunction with a series of Bible readings at a young people's conference.

SALUTATION. Ch. 1: 1-2

**T**o the people of God at Colossae, believers and brethren in Christ, this letter comes from Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus through God's will, and our brother Timothy. Grace and peace be yours from God the Father.

THANKSGIVING FOR THE COLOSSIANS' FAITH. Ch. 1: 3-8

We thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in our unceasing prayers for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you show to all the people of God on account of the hope which is laid up in store for you in heaven. You have already heard of this hope in the message of truth, the good news which has come to you—and not to you only, for it is bearing fruit and increasing throughout the whole world just as it has been doing among you from the first day that you heard it and came to know the grace of God in truth. That was how you learned it from Epaphras, our dear companion in the service of Christ, His faithful minister on your behalf ; and it was he who told us of your love—a love inspired by the Spirit of God.

PRAYER FOR THEIR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS. Ch. 1: 9-12.

And for this reason we ourselves, since the very day we heard this news, have never stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will, together with all wisdom and spiritual insight. Thus you will live (and this too is our prayer) in a manner worthy of our Lord, so as to please Him in everything ; you will bring forth fruit and grow in your knowledge of God ; you will be strengthened in every way by His glorious power for every form of endurance and patience ; you will give joyful thanks to the Father who has fitted us to receive a share of the heritage which belongs to the people of God in the realm of light.

CHRIST SUPREME IN CREATION AND RECONCILIATION. Ch. 1: 13-23

In the realm of *light*, I say, for He has rescued us from the dominion of *darkness* and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son whom He loves so dearly—the Son in whom we have our

redemption, the remission of our sins. He is the very image of the God whom none can see ; He is the Firstborn, prior to all creation and supreme over it, because it was through Him that the universe was created. Yes, all things in heaven and on earth, visible things and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers—they have all been created through Him and for Him. He Himself exists before them all, and it is through Him that everything holds together. He Himself, moreover, is the Head of His body, the church ; He is the Beginning ; He is also the Firstborn from the dead, so that His pre-eminence is universal. It is God's good pleasure, in short, that the totality of divine fulness should take up its abode in Him. It is God's good pleasure, too, to reconcile the universe to Himself through Him, through the shedding of His life-blood on the cross. This reconciliation embraces earthly things and heavenly things alike ; and you too have been brought within its scope. Once you were estranged from God, cherishing hostility to Him in your minds because of your wicked deeds. But now God has reconciled you, through the death which Christ endured in His physical body ; and His aim is to set you in His own presence as holy people, free from all blemish and reproach. And this aim will be realized in you, if you remain in your faith, firmly founded and securely established, not shifted by anything from the hope brought to you by the good news which you heard—the good news which has been proclaimed throughout the whole creation under the vault of heaven. It is the communication of this good news that has become my own special ministry.

THE DIVINE REVELATION ENTRUSTED TO PAUL. Ch. 1: 24-29.

Now I am really glad because of all that I suffer on your account: in fact, whatever of Christ's afflictions still remains to be accomplished I myself make up in my own flesh for the sake of His body—I mean the church, whose minister I have become in accordance with the commission which I have received from God in relation to you, to fulfil the ministry of the word of God. I have been entrusted with the revelation of a mystery which was kept secret from by-gone ages and generations, but has now been divulged to the people of God. For God has been pleased to impart to His people among the Gentiles the glorious treasure of this mystery—it is Christ Himself in you, the certain hope of coming glory. This Christ is the One whom we proclaim, while we exhort and teach everyone in all wisdom, so that at last we may present every one fully grown in Christ. With this object in view I wrestle and toil with the divine power which is mightily at work within me.

HIS CONCERN FOR THE CHRISTIANS OF THE LYCUS VALLEY.

Ch. 2: 1-5.

When I say this, I want you to know how great is my spiritual wrestling on your behalf, and on behalf of the Laodiceans and all who have not yet seen me face to face. The purpose of this spiritual contest is that their hearts may be strengthened, and that they themselves may be established in love, so as to attain the whole wealth of full understanding until at last their minds grasp the very heart of God's revelation, which is nothing less than Christ Himself. For it is in Christ that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are laid up in store. What I mean is this: don't let anyone talk you round with persuasive language. For even if I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit, and I rejoice as I see your orderly life and the stability of your faith in Christ.

THE FULNESS OF CHRIST THE ANSWER TO FALSE TEACHING.

Ch. 2: 6-15.

Now the teaching which has been delivered to you has Christ Jesus our Lord Himself as its centre and circumference. Therefore let your life be lived in Him ; see that you are rooted in Him, built up on Him, in keeping with what you have been taught ; and overflow with gratitude. Take care that no one leads you captive by means of "philosophy" and empty deception, the product of a merely human tradition, derived from the elemental powers of the world and not from Christ. For it is in Christ that the whole fulness of deity is embodied and has its abode, and it is in Christ that you have found your completion—in Christ, who is the Head of every principality and power. In Him, too, you have been circumcised—I am not referring to literal circumcision but to that circumcision of the heart which involves the stripping off of the lower nature, Christian circumcision. This took place at your baptism, when you were buried along with Christ ; and not only were you buried with Him then, but you were also raised along with Him through faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead. Yes! when you were dead by reason of your sins, when you were untutored pagans and nothing more, God raised you to new life along with Christ. He did more: He forgave us all our sins ; He blotted out the signed acknowledgment of debt that was being held over our heads as a threat, with all its list of broken laws, and took it right away when He nailed it to His cross. Nor was that all: for He stripped the principalities and powers of their armour, and held them up to public gaze when He led them in triumph as His conquered captives, on that same cross of His.

## GUARD YOUR FREEDOM! Ch. 2: 16-19.

Since that is so, don't let anyone sit in judgment on you in a matter of eating and drinking, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath day. These things are mere shadows of a coming reality; the reality has now come and it is found in Christ. Don't let anyone condemn you when he indulges in self-humiliation and angel-worship, taking his stand on his mystic experiences, blown up by his carnal mind, instead of holding fast to Him who is the Head, the One from whom the whole body, furnished and fitted together by means of the joints and ligaments, grows up with a growth which is fostered by God.

## YOU DIED WITH CHRIST: THEREFORE . . . Ch. 2: 20-23.

Now, when you died with Christ you were liberated from the elemental spirits of the world. Why then do you behave as though you were still living under that old world-order? You have no need to submit to regulations such as "Don't handle this!" "Don't taste that!" "Don't touch that other thing!" The things to which these regulations refer are mere material things which are destroyed in any case by the very use that is made of them! No: these regulations are matters of human injunction and teaching; they have a plausible appearance of wisdom by reason of their self-willed worship and self-humiliation, but they are of no value at all against the indulgence of the lower nature.

## YOU ROSE WITH CHRIST: THEREFORE . . . Ch. 3: 1-4.

But if you not only died with Christ, but have been raised with Him too, go in for the higher things, those things which belong to the region where Christ is, seated at God's right hand. Let your mind be taken up with the higher things, and not with those that belong to this earth. For, now that you have died with Christ, your life is laid up in safe concealment with Christ, in God Himself; and when Christ, our true Life, is manifested, then you also will be manifested in glory with Him.

## THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: OLD VICIES TO BE PUT OFF. Ch. 3: 5-11.

So then, look on your former earthly activities as dead things—fornication, impurity, lust, evil cravings, and covetousness, which is downright idolatry. These are the things which incur the wrath of God. Once upon a time you yourselves behaved in that way, when your life was spent in such pursuits. But now you must put them all off—anger, bad temper, malice, slander, bad language—get them right out of your mouths! Don't tell lies to one another

any more, for you have stripped off the old Adam-nature, with the conduct that went with it, and you have put on a new nature—the new nature which is constantly being renewed until it attains fullness of knowledge after the image of its Creator. Here there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave or freeman; but Christ is everything and Christ is in you all.

## THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: NEW GRACES TO BE PUT ON. Ch. 3: 12-17.

Put on, then, as the chosen people of God, holy and dear in His sight, tender-hearted compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another and show a forgiving spirit when one has a complaint against another. You ought indeed to forgive one another as the Lord forgave you. And, over and above all these things, put on love, for that is the perfect bond which binds them all together. Let the peace of Christ act as arbitrator in your hearts, for it was into His peace that you were called as fellow-members of His one body. And never forget to be grateful. Let the word of Christ dwell in its rich fulness among you, as you teach and encourage one another in all wisdom, singing with thanksgiving in your hearts to God in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. In short, whatever you do, in speech or in action, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

## THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS. Ch. 3: 18-4: 1.

Those of you who are *wives*, defer to your husbands, as is fitting for those who acknowledge one and the same Lord. Those who are *husbands*, treat your wives lovingly and don't be harsh with them. *Children*, obey your parents in everything, for this too is a pleasant thing in those who confess the Lord. *Parents*, don't exasperate your children and make them lose heart. Those of you who are *servants*, obey your earthly masters in everything. Don't serve them only when their eye is on you, as if you simply had to please men; but serve them with an honest heart, as those who reverence the Lord. Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically: consider it as a service rendered to the Lord and not to men. You know that it is from Him that you will receive the recompense which is your due, for the Lord and Master whose servants you really are is—Christ. But he who misbehaves will have his misbehaviour requited to him: there is no favouritism with this Master. And you *masters*, treat your servants justly and fairly, for you know that you yourselves have a Master in heaven.

## WATCH AND PRAY. Ch. 4: 2-6.

Persevere in prayer ; as you pray, keep spiritually alert, and give thanks at the same time. Pray for us too, that God may open up a door for our message, so that I may declare the revelation of Christ (which is the cause of my present imprisonment) and make it known as I ought. Behave wisely in the sight of outsiders ; buy up every opportunity. Let your language always be characterized by grace, seasoned with salt. Learn how you ought to answer each separate individual.

## PAUL'S MESSENGERS. Ch. 4: 7-9.

Tychicus will tell you all about my affairs. He is a dear brother to me, a faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord, and I am sending him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how it fares with me and have your hearts encouraged by him. Along with him I am sending Onesimus, my trusty and well-loved brother, who is one of yourselves. These two will tell you all that is going on here.

## GREETINGS FROM PAUL'S COMPANIONS. Ch. 4: 10-14.

Aristarchus, my companion here as a prisoner-of-war, sends you his greetings ; so does Barnabas's cousin Mark (by the way, you have had your directions about him ; give him a welcome if he comes to you) ; and so does Jesus—or Justus, as they call him. These are the only men of Jewish birth who are working along with me at present for the kingdom of God ; they have been a real comfort to me. Epaphras also sends you his greetings ; he is one of yourselves, a servant of Christ Jesus, always contending on your behalf in his prayers, that you may be established in full spiritual maturity, thoroughly furnished in all the will of God. I can testify to the strenuous intercession in which he engages for you and those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. Luke, my dear physician, and Demas also send you their greetings.

## VARIOUS GREETINGS AND MESSAGES. Ch. 4: 15-17.

Give my greetings to the brethren at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church that meets in her house. When this letter is read to your gathering, see that it is read in the church of Laodiceans as well, and that you read the letter from Laodicea. And here is a message for Archippus: "Pay attention to the ministry which you have undertaken in the Lord, and discharge it faithfully".

## FINAL GREETING AND BLESSING. Ch. 4: 18.

Now here is a greeting from myself, signed with my own hand—**PAUL**. And remember that the hand which writes this is hand-cuffed. Grace be with you.