April to June 2013
Teenz RPG Series on

"Walk worthy of the Lord"

A devotional study of the book of Colossians

Do pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance before you begin your devotional time, for unless the Spirit reveals the meaning, we cannot understand scripture (1 Corinthians 2:10). Then you must read the scripture text; please don't be tempted to read the devotional alone without reading the Bible. Memorizing the scripture text will help you meditate upon it (Psalm 1:2), even long after you have finished your devotional time. After reading the devotional, always end with self-reflection: compare yourself against the standard of God's Word, and humbly yield to the Holy Spirit to direct you towards that standard (James 1:23-25). Be ye doers of the Word, not hearers only!

At the end of this series, may you be able to say as David said "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." (Psalm 63:1)

May all glory be God's alone!

Dn Milton Ang
On behalf of the Teenz RPG committee

ARE YOU PROUD OF WHAT YOU ARE?

The epistle to the Colossians begins thus: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother." Paul was often attacked on his authority, so in this epistle to the Colossian church, he started off by declaring that it was God that had appointed Him an apostle, and by that authority, the words of this epistle are the very Words of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Whilst the Greek word for apostle, apostolos, is also translated as messenger for non-apostles like Titus (e.g. 2 Corinthians 8:23), the term Apostle is only used for those who are given this special commission from God Himself.

Although Paul had this unique commission, he did not look down on his co-laborer Timothy, but commended him as a brother in Christ to the Colossians. Likewise in verse 2, Paul calls the Colossian saints brethren as well. Paul truly was an example in humility, not the least because he always remembered that he was previously an enemy of Christ and deserved severe punishment, but now just like every other Christian he was now a sinner saved by grace. His office in the church was given by God, not by man; and God appointed Paul not because of Paul's abilities, for even these abilities came from God for the purpose of service. Paul also knew the havoc the disease of pride would cause in the church, warning the Corinthian church that they should never be puffed up with pride (1 Corinthians 4:6).

Likewise, we should not look down on others that do not have as significant a role we have in serving God. It is tempting for those who sing in the youth choir to have pride in the collective harmony of voices that can be achieved, and look down on those who sing out of tune. It is tempting for those who serve in committees to have pride in their power to organize things and make decisions, and forget that the higher their office the more they need to minister to others. It is tempting for those who do not have such gifts from God to sing or lead to conversely envy those who do, forgetting that God gives every Christian gifts differing for the specific area of service each Christian is called to (Romans 12:6). Those of you who do not serve should therefore not envy but instead find out what is the area of service that God has called you to. Like Paul, we must all remember not to look down on others, but instead to be faithful to what God has entrusted us with.

THOUGHT: Just like every other Christian, I'm only a sinner, saved by grace!

PRAYER: May I always remember that all my abilities are given by God.

Colossians 1:3-4
Memorise Colossians 1:4
"...none other commandment greater than these..."

DO YOU HAVE TRUE FAITH AND LOVE?

Nearby the city of Colossae was the city of Laodicea, known from the book of Revelations for its lukewarm church (Revelation 3:16). Unlike the Laodicean church, Paul commended the Colossian church for "...your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints" (Colossians 1:4). This should make us recall Christ's answer to the question posed to Him asking which was the greatest commandment: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31). "Faith in Christ Jesus" (v4) is never a dead faith (James 2:17); when one has genuine faith in Christ, believing in His priceless sacrifice, his natural response would be to do his all for Christ compelled by love for Him. The Colossian church loved God not just in word but in action. Through the testimony it was evident that they had faith in God's Word and in the living Word which is Christ, for not only were they totally devoted to God, but they also fulfilled the command to love others as well. Indeed, being able to love even one's enemies is a mark of a true Christian, for this ability can only come from God Himself through the Holy Spirit (v8).

The connection between faith and love is an important one against today's ecumenical world, where so many preach that love unites but doctrine divides. Some would even say that if we could proclaim that all religions point to the same God, then there would be world peace. While love is important, it must never be at the expense of the truth of God's Word (1 Corinthians 13:6). We must have faith in Christ Jesus, believing that it is only by Christ that one can come to God (John 14:6). If others cannot accept that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation, then we cannot unite with them just for the sake of love, for that would be tantamount to betraying our faith in Christ. Dear teen, it may be difficult for you when other Christians discover you belong to a non-ecumenical church and start criticizing you for being intolerant. Remember it is far more important to be lauded by God for one's faith and love like the Colossians were, than to be lauded by men for being tolerant of other religions. However, we must also show love towards others who are so misled by today's ecumenical world, by showing them the truth of God's Word so that they might be saved.

THOUGHT: Will others also commend me for my faith and love?

PRAYER: May I never betray Christ.

Colossians 1:1-3-4
Memorise Colossians 1:3
"...brethren in Christ which are at Colossae..."

HOW OFTEN DO YOU PRAY FOR OTHER CHURCHES?

Colossians 1:3-4 thus reads, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints". The phrase "since we heard" as well as what Paul says in Colossians 2:1 seems to show that he never visited Colossae. Colossians 1:7-8 suggests that Epaphras was probably the founder of the church, and was the one who brought the report on the church to Paul. Paul relied on such verbal and written reports, instead of relying on gossip and hearsay, and certainly this is wisdom concerning how we should communicate with our overseas missions. Although it is likely that Paul did not know the Colossians personally, he showed an interest in them, and prayed for them – always – and wrote to them, as in this epistle. Note how Paul did not simply praise them, for they might be puffed up as a result; instead he gave thanks to God for their testimony, and ensured that the glory ultimately went to God.

Here we see a wonderful example for us to follow. We all tend to pray for those missions that we know more about, and also tend to pray for those missions that have many needs. Like Paul, we should praise God for those missions that seem to be doing fine, and even then we should still pray for them continually. I myself stopped praying for a daughter church of my church several years ago because it seemed that the church was stable, but was mortified to find out recently that the church was being torn apart from within. Just like every Christian needs praying for, every church needs praying for, that God may give the grace for the Christian and the church to handle every trial that they face. When the church is faithful, let us rejoice with that church and praise God from whom all blessings flow.

THOUGHT: How often do I praise God for the testimony of others?

PRAYER: May I pray more for those I do not know.

THURSDAY, APRIL 4

Colossians 1:5-6
Memorise Colossians 1:5
"...hope that is laid up for you in heaven..."

ARE YOU AFRAID OF BEING A WITNESS FOR THE TRUTH?

The gospel brings hope for sinners who have believed in Christ as their Lord and Savior, the hope that they will be delivered from the wages of death, and upon leaving this life will thus rest from their labours forever in heaven. The word "laid up" in verse 5 has the idea of being reserved, that no one can snatch it away. The hope that the Colossians had was one that was reserved for them in heaven. They were thoroughly convinced of this hope because it came "in the word of the truth of the gospel". We see here that in order to have this same hope, we must have the full truth of the gospel. There are many religions that suggest various forms of afterlife, but only the gospel is true. Anyone that preaches heaven without pointing to Jesus as the only way, is not preaching the truth, but only giving false hope. Some so-called preachers of the gospel do preach Jesus, but they leave out some very important truths concerning His death or resurrection, or of man's sin and the need for repentance. In so doing, they miss out parts of the truth of the gospel, and are not really preaching the gospel at all! Only the full truth of the gospel brings us hope, and gives us the certainty that there is a place in heaven reserved for us.

That is why the only way to preach the gospel is to preach the truth of God's Word, and let the Holy Spirit convict hearts that what they are hearing is true. Any other method robs God of His glory, for all other methods have some degree of error. As a teen, you might fear that others will scorn you for your youth and inexperience, skeptical that you can be so sure of the afterlife when you are still not past the second decade of this earthly life. You might be concerned about your lack of eloquence, compared to others who are so convincing in their speech. Dear teen, remember that you are sharing the absolute truth of God's word, and not your opinion or any other man's theory. Indeed, knowing you are being a witness for the gospel should be encouraging to us, for when we are a witness for anything else, we always have some fear that what we are witnessing for is wrong in some way. In preaching the gospel, we can have confidence knowing that we are speaking only the absolute truth of Christ as given in His infallible Word. Is this what you are doing with your life?

THOUGHT: Why am I afraid of being a witness of the truth?

PRAYER: May I strive to hear my Lord say, well done, thou good and faithful servant.

FRIDAY, APRIL 5

Colossians 1:5-6
Memorise Colossians 1:6
"...and bringeth forth fruit..."

HOW DO YOU PRAISE OTHERS FOR THEIR GOOD WORK FOR CHRIST?

The hope that the Colossians possessed had brought forth fruit, which verse 4 described as their "faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints". Truly this was an example of the seed of the gospel falling upon good ground, which bore such fruit (Matthew 13). Lest the Colossians become proud in thinking they deserved reward for such fruit, Paul pointed out that the gospel "which is come unto you, as it is in all the world", meaning that the gospel came upon the Colossians by grace alone, for salvation is of the Lord, and that the gospel is universal in reach, not just to the Colossians. Paul furthermore goes on to say likewise that the fruit bearing occurs both in the world as well as in the Colossians, thus indicating that the ability to bear fruit comes from God as well.

There is a definite temptation for us who are bearing fruit to be proud of this fruit. Ever so often well-meaning brethren praise us for such fruit, without realizing such praise has the potential to make us proud. For example when we lead singspiration well and someone praises us, our heart swells, and then we start analyzing in our hearts how we are better than the next person leading singspiration! We must remember that it is God who gives everyone gifts differing to able to serve Him in different capacities, and we should not boast about it even to ourselves. We should not yearn for such praise, but when it is given, we should simply accept it with humility. Likewise, while we should praise others for a job well done in order to encourage the person, it may be better to praise God for giving them the gift and ability to do whatever they had done well, thus giving all glory to God. Obviously let us not swing to the other extreme of not praising each other at all, for indeed since all spiritual gifts are meant to serve the body of Christ, it is the body of Christ that should recognize who has such gifts. In either case, we should not stumble others in their walk with God. So like Paul, let us learn the right way of praising others for their service to the Lord.

THOUGHT: How do I currently praise others?

PRAYER: May I always remember that all gifts to men are given by God.

SATURDAY, APRIL 6

Colossians 1:7-8
Memorise Hebrews 13:17
"...declared unto us your love in the Spirit..."

WHAT WILL YOUR PASTOR SAY ABOUT YOU BEFORE GOD?

From verse 7, we can see that Epaphras was probably the pastor or a leader of the Colossian church, being described as a faithful minister of Christ. It was he who in verse 4 had reported back to Paul about the good testimony of the Colossians. This testimony report is elaborated on in verse 8, "Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit." The Colossians had the love that only the Holy Spirit could give to every Christian, the love that enabled them to love God and to love their brethren. The faithfulness of Epaphras described in verse 7 does not refer to how well he reported back to Paul about the Colossians, but rather that Epaphras was faithful in being a minister to the Colossians ("for you"). Epaphras must have been instrumental in exhorting the Colossians towards such love, doubtless because he was faithful in watching over the flock as a leader, knowing that one day he must give an account to God for how well he has watched over their souls (Hebrews 13:17), and for now he gives a status report of this to the Apostle Paul.

While our pastors will try their very best to watch over our souls by faithfully preaching the whole counsel of God to us and warning us when we stray, it is our own fault if we do not heed this counsel. Remember that this accounting is before the Almighty God who is holy and true, so do not expect your pastor to declare anything else but the truth to God. How sad it is then if your pastor begins his truthful accounting of you by saying "I lovingly tried my very best to warn him, but he refused to repent". You might think that your pastor has never personally known of your sins, but understand that in the body of Christ, there are also teachers and ministry leaders over you as appointed by the pastors and elders, so do not ignore their warnings given to you in love. Instead we must strive towards a life whereby the people around us can proudly testify of you that you are one who does show forth true life in the Spirit.

THOUGHT: How do I react to those who warn me?

PRAYER: May I give my pastor cause to give an account of me with joy not with grief.

ARE YOU COMPLACENT?

The natural reaction of anyone in Paul's shoes when hearing about the good report about the Colossians would be to simply rejoice and praise God, as he did in verse 5, but Paul did not stop there, but from verse 9-11 prayed earnestly that the Colossians continue towards spiritual maturity. Here he reinforced the importance of the Colossians not being complacently satisfied of their testimony so far, and instead continuing to walk close to God, and being strengthened for the inevitable trials that they will face. Indeed, chapter 2 will speak about certain issues that the church had to maturely tackle. The double emphasis in both verses 3 & 9 that Paul continually prayed for the Colossians reminds us that continuing towards maturity is a constant spiritual battle that requires constant prayer and reliance on God.

When we see things are smooth sailing in our walk with the Lord, it is so easy for us to think we can congratulate ourselves and simply maintain what we are doing. Instead, we should remember it is important to strive towards spiritual maturity, which is something even the apostle Paul always knew he himself had not yet achieved (Philippians 3:13). The minute we stop growing, we are in danger of backsliding. In such complacency, any trial that will cause our hearts to feel the trial is too hard to handle will cause us to backslide even further. In our Christian walk, we cannot be standing still; we must either be pressing upwards, or we will be in a spiritual decline. Pray that God will enable you to constantly abound in your spiritual lives. Also, when we read of the good reports of other churches, do pray that they will likewise continue on to spiritual maturity, instead of simply assuming that they do not have any prayer needs.

THOUGHT: Am I complacent in my Christian walk?

PRAYER: May I always be moving forwards in my walk, not backwards.

DO YOU PRAY FOR THE PHYSICAL OR THE SPIRITUAL?

The second part of Colossians 1:9 deserves study: "...and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding". Paul's intercession for the spiritual maturity of the Colossians starts with praying that they may know God's will. The extent of this knowledge is threefold:

a. That they may be filled i.e. to be complete in this knowledge of God's will (Colossians 1:25, there the word "fulfil" is the same word in Greek for "filled" in Colossians 1:9)
b. That all their wisdom may be based upon this knowledge of God's will, instead of worldly philosophy (Colossians 2:8)
c. That this knowledge may bring understanding of all things spiritual, as will be revealed by the Holy Spirit (Colossians 1:26)

What a wonderful thing that Paul does to intercede for others that they may know God's will, instead of selfishly only praying the same for himself! Note also that this intercession was for spiritual blessings rather than physical, that the Colossians should thus pursue spiritual things instead of material things. That was how Paul always patterned His prayers, for he knew what was most important. It was never for material gain of comforts, but only that lives would be more conformed to the will of God.

Dear teen, do you know God's will to such an extent? Remember that the prayer was for spiritual blessings rather than physical, and this teaches us that God is pleased to answer such prayers. God is not glorified in the giving of good exam results to you itself if it is purely for personal gain, but is glorified more in the way that you relied on Him, the way you refused to cheat, the way your motives were pure, the way you gave Him all the glory instead of taking any for yourself. Indeed, question your motives as to why you pray for good results. Are you hoping for the praise of men, or ambitiously looking to your future prospects, or maybe to just get pressure off your back? Should you not pray instead that God may give you true wisdom in studies to discern everything in this world by His Word, that studies may help you hone your spiritual gifts to serve Him, and that you may be a good spiritual testimony to others in your studies? Dear teen, know God's will, what He desires for you, instead of fulfilling your own desires.

THOUGHT: To what extent do I know God's will?

PRAYER: May I pray for and pursue spiritual blessings rather than physical.

Colossians 1:10
Memorise Colossians 1:10
"...ye might walk worthy of the Lord..."

HOW DO YOU MEASURE YOUR CHRISTIAN WALK?

The prayer of Paul for the Colossians to pursue spiritual maturity continues thus: "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." (Colossians 1:10) Spiritual maturity does not stop at knowledge of God's will, but is also evidenced by one's conduct as a Christian. Paul discusses four criteria to measure one's conduct:

a. That it might be worthy of the Lord, i.e. that one is a true ambassador for Christ, everyone can see that the person's conduct is worthy of his high calling as a Christian.
b. That it pleases God in all aspects of one's life, that he shows forth a consistent testimony not just in church but also in school, home, recreation, work, etc.
c. That it is fruitful in every good work i.e. that not only the work itself is good but the manner the work is done shows the fruit of the Spirit. A Christian teen might pack his room at the behest of his parents, but the manner he does so is grudging instead of cheerful. Both the work and the manner it is done must glorify God.
d. That this conduct may result in knowing God even more; for the greater the extent a Christian lives his life by the rule of God's Word, the more he learns to trust His Word, and knows more about God as a result. Faith in God and His Word can only increase by learning through such trials that test one's faith (James 1:2-4).

Again we must remember this is not an impossible goal, for Paul prayed this for the Colossians. You must not be tempted to think that as a student or being a youth you cannot achieve all this. I have seen several teens serve God wholeheartedly, whereby in church they are good servants for Christ in various ministries, in school being acknowledged as a Christian in a praiseworthy manner (as opposed to one of hypocrisy), at home being a wonderful testimony of being subject to parents not just in results but also in behavior, and growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ over time in spite of difficult trials faced. So don't just pursue spirituality in knowledge alone, but examine your conduct as well.

THOUGHT: Do others know I am a Christian because I say so or because I am one?

PRAYER: May I measure my conduct daily against these four criteria.

Colossians 1:11
Memorise Colossians 1:11
"...according to his glorious power..."

DO YOU TRY TO LIVE BY YOUR OWN STRENGTH?

Paul's intercession for the Colossians to pursue spiritual maturity ends in this manner: "Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness." (Colossians 1:11) Paul pointed out that this knowledge of God's will and this Christian testimony in Colossians 1:9-10 could only be achieved by God giving the strength to the Colossians to do so. That is why this is not mission impossible for a Christian, who "...can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13) The phrase "strengthened with all might" points to the same, that God will give all the strength we will need to face the trials He has appointed us to face. That we ourselves do not possess this strength is implied by the following phrase "according to his glorious power", for in the display of this strength, God is glorified. The extent of this strength is that it is shown not only in how the Christian endures through both trials ("patience") and difficult people ("longsuffering"), but is able to do so "with joyfulness", knowing he is doing God's will.

Thus the spiritually mature Christian not only knows God's will and submits to it (v9), but also does it God's way (v10), that the glory may go to God alone for enabling the Christian to do so (v11). David knew it was God's will that the heathen giant Goliath be defeated for defying God and submitted to this will. Although young David had previously slain a lion and a bear, God's way was not that David would wrestle with Goliath for that would cause David to rely on his own strength and be glorified in victory; instead the giant was felled by a stone from a sling, that the glory would go to God alone (1 Samuel 17:47).

Dear teen, I pray that you too realize that we can only live this life by submitting to God. It is not His will that you live by your own strength; on the contrary it is a recipe for disaster if you do so. We face our own spiritual Goliaths in the trials that beset us, and it is tempting to wallow in despair or use our own wisdom to manage these burdens. Remember, God means it for us to face life by knowing His will and doing it, and relying on Him for strength, so that He may be glorified. May you be fully surrendered to Him.

THOUGHT: David as a hero of faith won the battle by surrendering to God.

PRAYER: May my submission to God be absolute, not partial.

DO YOU LOOK FORWARD TO HEAVEN?

Paul in Colossians 1:12 wrote "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." Paul reminds the Colossians that God is not just a god that the heathen try to compare to other gods, but He is our Heavenly Father, who loves us as His children and has given us a priceless inheritance. The phrase "partakers of the inheritance" makes one recall how God meticulously commanded Israel to divide up the Promised Land amongst the tribes, down to the family level. As children of God, each one of us has a part of the kingdom of heaven that God has worked out. The phrase "hath made us meet" has the sense of qualifying; it is God who qualifies us to this inheritance; we cannot qualify ourselves, nor lose this qualification, for it is the Father's doing. The verse ends off with a reminder that this inheritance is in light, not in darkness, and our heavenly home is holy, for God will never give us anything in darkness.

See how much care God has put into preparing this place for us! The question is, do you give thanks unto the Father for such a wonderful gift, and live with eternity's values in view; or do you live your life your earth right now as if there is no such inheritance? When you are going on holiday and have booked a hotel room, and read up on the internet beforehand about how nice your hotel room is going to be, it gets you excited as you prepare yourself to make full use of the facilities. Here we have a mansion in heaven that God our Father has lovingly "booked" for us and paid for, and prepared for us, doubtless better than any hotel room on earth for it is a place of eternal rest free from sin and the cares of this world. Are you excited about it enough to start preparing for heaven? Or do you look forward instead to the darkness of this world and whatever pleasures this world offers, and live your life as if there is no heaven to live for?

THOUGHT: Am I more excited about heaven or earth?

PRAYER: May I live my life preparing for my eternal home.

FRIDAY, APRIL 12

Colossians 1:13-14
Memorise Colossians 1:13-14
"...delivered us from the power of darkness..."

DO YOU REALIZE DARKNESS HAS POWER?

Paul in Colossians 1:13-14 tells us that God "...hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." We see from verse 13 that darkness does have power; otherwise we would not need to be delivered from this power. From verse 14, we see that darkness has the power to tempt us to sin and to keep us in sin, and we are thus condemned to punishment for our sins though we do not realize it. There are many in this world under the power of darkness, believing they have the right to do whatever they enjoy and can get away with it, especially when no one else knows about it. This power is so great that it is only by the greater power of the blood of Jesus Christ that we are able to be freed from it, and turn to Christ that our sins be forgiven and we are redeemed. Indeed, God actually "translates" us into the kingdom of Christ, meaning we are transferred, like being moved from one country to another. Paul deliberately uses this term to indicate we are now free from the power of darkness, and should thus live a new life as citizens of heaven, living in light rather than wishing to be in darkness again.

Such is the power of darkness, that even though we are free from the bondage of sin, we can still be attracted to it. There are teens that rebel against this notion that their life should be clean and free from scandal, thinking that such a holy life is either impossible, undesirable, or something they are not interested in. They do not want to accept that they are now ambassadors for Christ, not willing that their lives should now show they are citizens of heaven and light rather than being secret visitors to darkness. If you are one of these teens, do realize you are in a very dangerous position, in allowing yourself to toy with the power of darkness. Even if you are really saved by the blood of Christ, you risk your Christian testimony being ruined when what you have been doing under cover of darkness is subsequently exposed, and living a life of regret when you later realize your sins have consequences even on earth. Just ask those Christians who have been caught for various offences and sentenced to prison; they all had assumed no one would ever find out about their secret sins.

THOUGHT: What do I risk by living in darkness?

PRAYER: May I be sure that my sin will find me out.

Colossians 1:12-14
Memorise Acts 26:18
"...turn them from darkness into light..."

DO YOU REALIZE THE GOSPEL HAS POWER?

Paul in Acts 26:18 testifies that Jesus Christ gave him the following commission to the Gentiles: "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." This is the same process described in Colossians 1:12-14, and thus tells us that Paul is thankful to God that his commission to the Gentiles is being fulfilled, even though in the case of the Colossians he did not directly bring the gospel to them. Paul gave thanks for the power of the gospel, that those in darkness may have their eyes opened to see their sinful estate, and thus be freed from Satan's clutches by the forgiveness of their sins, and receive their inheritance as adopted children of God.

So often when we go tracting or evangelizing, we lack faith, assuming that the non-Christians in this world are weary of listening to the gospel, having already heard of Christ so often from other sources. We forget that evangelism is actually 100% effective; that whomsoever God has meant to save, that person will be saved, for their spiritual eyes will eventually be opened by the power of the gospel. We forget that we ourselves were once lost in sin as well, and we only saw our need for a Savior by the power of the gospel. Like Paul, our commission as ambassadors for Christ is simply to preach the gospel, and to leave the rest to the power of the gospel that is greater than the power of darkness. The gospel seed we have sown may be reaped by another, but like Paul we all rejoice in the power of the gospel and that we are given a part in this great commission. Knowing this, we should no longer quake in fear when faced with the prospect of preaching to others. Dear teen, have a compassion for your friends who do not realize they are in spiritual darkness, and realize that if God wants them to be saved, then the gospel will work in their hearts, and they will certainly be saved. Like Paul we can rejoice that God has given us a part to play in this.

THOUGHT: Satan is the ruler over darkness, and over the lives of those not saved.

PRAYER: May I do my best in the gospel work that lost souls be saved from darkness.

WHAT GIVES THE GOSPEL ITS' POWER?

Colossians 1:14 is very similar to Ephesians 1:7 "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." In both verses, Paul used the word "redemption". This word has a different meaning from the common uses in our current time. Leon Morris explains that in antiquity, the victor of the battlefield often brought many of their captives back to their homeland to sell as slaves. When some of the captives were found to be rich, the victors offered these back to their families for a price. The process of buying back prisoners of war from captivity was called "redemption", and the sum of money was called "ransom". In a similar way, a Jew in poverty who had been sold into slavery could be redeemed and set free by his brother (Leviticus 25). However in both cases what was redeemed was the physical person in captivity or slavery. The question is, what can redeem the soul who is slaved to sin his master? No amount of money can redeem the soul from sin, and any other soul born in sin cannot be its substitute.

In both verses, Paul also used the term "in whom", to signify Christ is the Redeemer, who alone has set us free from sin our previous master. Paul also points to the ransom: that the price was paid only "through his blood". 1 Peter 1:18-19 echoes this: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things...But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." It was both the spotless life of Christ on earth and the shedding of this precious blood on the Cross that was our ransom. Finally, in both verses Paul explains that only the blood of Christ is that which brings us "the forgiveness of sins"; that Christ has not only redeemed us from the wages of sin, but has completely forgiven all our sins which had enslaved us in the first place. It is therefore the precious blood of the Lamb that gives the gospel its' power!

Do you realize, dear teen, how precious you are in the sight of God your Heavenly Father, that it was the blood of Jesus Christ that redeemed you? Are you thankful, as Paul was, or do you simply take it for granted? Do you live your life for Christ who has redeemed you and deserves your adoration as your LORD; or do you ungratefully live your life for yourself? Do you realize how complete the sacrifice of Christ was for you that you need never fear death, or do you wish to continue in the sin that necessitated Christ's sacrifice?

THOUGHT: Do I realize how heavy the price of my ransom is?

PRAYER: May I do my best to repay this gospel debt that I owe.

Colossians 1:15
Memorise John 1:14
"...the image of the invisible God..."

HOW IS CHRIST THE IMAGE OF GOD?

In Colossians 1:15, the word 'image' is the Greek word 'eikon', or icon, meaning something which represents the real thing. The same word is used in Hebrews 10:1 to describe the law as not the very image of what was to come, but only a shadow (like a sketch) of it. Christ is thus the very image of God. Since God is invisible, is it possible to have an image of something invisible? The answer is that Christ displays all the attributes of God in visible form, just as the Westminster Shorter Catechism gives the following answer to what God is: 'God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth'. Christ as God Himself came to teach men directly, in comparison to the prophets who brought the Word of God to men (Hebrews 1:1-3, Jon 1:14). While man is also made in the image of God, he is only capable of imperfectly displaying some of the attributes of God. Only Christ is the very image of God, meaning to say that He is indeed God himself, and displays all the attributes of God perfectly.

There were some heretics during the time of the early church who disputed either the full divinity or humanity of Jesus Christ. They claimed that He was not fully God or not fully man. This is heresy because in order to perfectly bridge the gap between God and man that is there because of sin, Christ had to be the perfect representative of both God as well as man in flesh, in order to save us.

There are some heretics today who point man to idols and claim these are god. You might get into someone's car and see such a statue being placed on the dashboard, as if the idol might protect against accidents. You might read in the newspapers about certain people being idolized as modern day gods. Dear teen, if your friend or relative has fallen prey to such lies, ask them to seek who is both God and man, for surely no one should fully trust a dead statue or a living imperfection instead. Don't just confess to them in your words that Christ is indeed the image of God, but also show through your testimony that you live your life patterned after Christ your perfect example rather than any other. It is sad when others see more of a Korean pop star in your behavior than they see Christ.

THOUGHT: Am I more like Christ or more like a human idol in my testimony?

PRAYER: May I follow after Christ as my perfect example.

DOES COL 1:15 MEAN CHRIST WAS CREATED?

Colossians 1:15 continues with this interesting phrase about Christ being "the firstborn of every creature". Does this phrase mean Christ was created? We know from the well-known verse John 3:16 that Christ was begotten, not created. The word "begotten" thus speaks of Christ coming from the Father, but not being created by the Father. Later Colossians 1:17 ("he is before all things") also affirms Christ was there before creation began, and the preceding verse ("for by Him were all things created") tells us that Christ was the Creator, not the one who was created. Therefore the phrase "the firstborn of every creature" refers to the status of Christ. It is first not in terms of time but in terms of quality, of His superiority and sovereignty over all creation. He is the Son of God, compared to us the sons of God, and like the eldest son in the family He has the highest rank amongst all sons, and we must treat Him as such. There is therefore no support for the Arian heresy citing this phrase that Christ was created (and therefore inferior to God).

Dear teen, we must always endeavor to have a deeper understanding of God's Word, otherwise it is easy for heretics to cite such phrases as these to cause our faith to waver. The study of the phrase must be done within the context of Colossians 1:15-17, instead of simply being taken out of context. What seems to be a contradiction by looking at the phrase alone is actually not a contradiction at all, and the problem actually lies with our own failure to know more of God's Word. Scripture must interpret scripture, and when we realize that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, we must therefore study the Bible as a unified whole that already fits together, rather than rely on others to interpret verses for us, and for some critics to cite certain verses out of context to cause us to doubt the unity of scripture. May you learn how to search the Scriptures for yourself, and study the Bible daily just as the Bereans, who "...received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." (Acts 17:11).

THOUGHT: Is it my fault or God's fault when I don't understand God's Word?

PRAYER: May I search the scriptures daily to ascertain truth from error.

Colossians 1:15-17
Memorise Acts 17:28
"...by Him all things consist"

DO YOU BELIEVE GOD IS IN ULTIMATE CONTROL OF EVERYTHING?

"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." (Colossians 1:16-17) What a definitive statement for the scope of creation, for not only has Christ created all things in earth that are under the jurisdiction of kingdoms and nations, but He has also created all things in the heavens which are beyond the authority of men. His creation also extends to the spiritual realm as well which is invisible to men. Indeed all things, every single thing, whether physical or spiritual, was created by Him. Truly Christ has dominion over all creation, especially since all things were created "for him" i.e. for His glory; and "by Him all things consist", meaning He continues to be our providential God, in ultimate control of all creation, upholding all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). Even when men build the most amazing buildings and congratulate themselves with the latest technological devices, it is no use for life itself, as the water and food man requires for life needs to come from nature and cannot be synthetically created out of nothing. Even the very air we breathe comes from God, and when He chooses to take away the breath in our nostrils, no amount of riches can ever restore back this life.

Dear teen, what do you realize about God as a result of studying this passage? Look around you and above you, and realize that Christ who created all this creation created you too as part of this creation. Just as all creation is for His glory, so it is for His glory that He continues to provide for you and sustain your life. If you are His child, what should you do in return? Should you not glorify God with your life, trusting Him to provide for all your needs? Even if men were to think you mad for glorifying Him in your actions, and trusting Him in all things, will you still do so? Should you not rejoice that you need not fear death or any other trial in life, but instead live your life in joyful hope and anticipation that He is your God? When we see the world around us descend into calamity and chaos, we can be secure in the knowledge that God is always in ultimate control, and we can with all confidence point others in despair to Him.

THOUGHT: Have I ever realized how vast God's power is?

PRAYER: May I trust God to provide for all that I need.

Colossians 1:18
Memorise Colossians 1:18

"...that in all things he might have the preeminence..."

DO YOU GIVE CHRIST THE PREEMINENCE?

Colossians 1:18 continues declaring the divinity of Christ: "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." Christ is the head of the universal church, and that is why we Presbyterian churches believe that Christ is the head of our churches, and the presbytery (pastors and elders) are only under-shepherds of the flock. Christ is here called the beginning because He began the church. This does not refer to Christ being at the beginning of creation as that was already mentioned in prior verses. Christ is also the beginning in the sense of being the firstborn from the dead, meaning Christ was the first to be resurrected never to die again. His death and resurrection subsequently enables our own resurrection to immortality, for just like Him we shall also be given a glorious body (Philippians 3:21), that collectively we may be His spotless Bride. So we who are part of His body the universal church must give Him the preeminence, just as God has given Him the preeminence over all things. He must be first, for He is first.

This statement of Christ being the head and the one who began the church clearly refutes the Roman Catholics who instead believe that Peter began the church and that subsequently every pope has the status as head of the universal church. What a terrible thing to place created man as pre-eminent, instead of Christ having the preeminence! Yet, you and I must also look at ourselves as well to see if we are tempted to give ourselves or our fellow Christians the preeminence instead of what is due to Christ. In all things, be it in our personal life or in our churches, Christ must always have the position of primacy. When a local church begins, we must confess that it is Christ who began the church, and give Him the glory, even though Christ used certain godly men to do His will. In the same way, when we see a need for a ministry, let us start by praying that Christ may send labourers to this harvest field, rather than start with human wisdom and carry out surveys and feasibility studies. When you and I see a need still being unfulfilled, pray even more that Christ may start this ministry if it is His will, rather than criticize our leaders for not realizing the need or doing something about it, as if ministry relies solely on human effort and not on Christ. Trust Him that if it is His will, He will move godly men to fulfill it, in His time.

THOUGHT: He must be first, for He is first.

PRAYER: May I give Christ preeminence in everything.

Colossians 1:19
Memorise Colossians 1:19
"...that in him should all fullness dwell"

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT GOD IS SUFFICIENT FOR ALL YOU NEED?

What does the phrase "that in him should all fullness dwell" mean? Paul later uses a similar phrase in Colossians 2:9, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily", and there Paul emphasizes that Christ is fully God. Here in Colossians 1:19, this usage of the word fullness simply means that Christ is all sufficient for whatever the church needs. Lest we think that God the Father's status is usurped by Christ having the preeminence in the eyes of men, Colossians 1:19 starts with the phrase "For it pleased the Father", meaning it is God the Father who first gave this preeminence to Christ His Son for what the latter has done in His salvific work. Without Christ, there is no salvation, no gospel, no church. Only through His death and resurrection could the church begin, and then spread the gospel to the uttermost parts of the world, even to the island of Singapore. It is God's plan that through Christ the local church is sustained; souls are saved and believers grow in the grace and knowledge of God. We bear the name Christian because we recognize that Christ is all sufficient for not only our salvation but also sufficient for all our needs. The early church martyrs carried this name to their death believing that Christ would give all the grace that they needed to suffer through all trials they are called to and to eventually die for His sake. They knew that Christ had arisen from the dead, and trusted they too would be resurrected after death, just as He promised.

If the early church martyrs trusted that Christ was all sufficient for them even to face the specter of death, surely we should likewise trust Him to fully meet all our needs for all these lesser trials that life throws our way. If we do not believe that He is all sufficient, then who is it that we really trust? Ourselves? The people around us? That is robbing God of His glory! You may see your parents earning money to put food on your table, or see yourself achieving good exam results, but fail to acknowledge that all this comes from God. Likewise you might despair that you do not have enough money or good enough results, and fail to acknowledge His grace is all sufficient for your needs. Dear teen, don't have such weak faith in Christ, He whom God Himself has deemed to be all sufficient for us.

THOUGHT: Should it only be the full time workers that trust God to provide everything?

PRAYER: He is my everything, He is my all, He is my everything both great and small!

ARE YOU AT PEACE WITH GOD?

In Colossians 1:20, Paul now focusses on the salvific work of Christ: "And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven." Where there was once enmity between God and man due to man's sin, because of what Christ has done, God and believers in Christ are reconciled and are now at peace. The term "by him" is mentioned twice, to emphasize Christ alone is the author of this reconciliation, for sinful man cannot reconcile himself, and there is salvation in no other (Acts 4:12). Christ's salvific work is sufficient to reconcile both us believers who are on earth, as well as those believers who are dead in Christ and now in heaven (i.e. believers who died before the death of Christ). Basically the blood of Christ is infinite in value. Through this blood, all saints in time past, in the present, and in the future can be reconciled to God. This verse therefore does not mean that absolutely all men are reconciled, but rather that Christ reconciles both those in earth and in heaven the same way, by the blood of His cross. Christ's work not only saves us now but also for eternity!

The question we need to ask ourselves, do we want to be at peace or at war with the true living God? Dear teen, do realize you are either at war or at peace. If you have not confessed Christ as Savior and thus reconciled to God, you are at war with God, and there can only be one outcome. If you have confessed Christ as Savior you are no longer His enemy, but Christ has made peace for you! This is a perfect peace that comes from God, and it means that you are now in complete harmony with God. If that is the case, then be a peacemaker and bring others into the same reconciliation with God. Look out at the unsaved millions who are leading lives of misery because they do not know how to be reconciled to God; share with them what the blood of His cross has done. Remember, no one in their right minds wants to be at war with the true living God.

THOUGHT: Peacemakers are called children of God; are you?

PRAYER: May I realize that I am called to be a peacemaker.

DO YOU FIT GOD INTO YOUR CONCEPT OF WHAT HE SHOULD BE?

Paul now applies the salvific work of Jesus Christ to the Colossians themselves: "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled" (Colossians 1:21). Before coming to Christ, men are all estranged (alienated) from God, for no man will seek God by himself. This may be a strange thing to say, seeing that there are so many people in the world who seem to believe in some form of god. However, these people seek a god which only fits their concept of what god should be. Without the Holy Spirit's intervention, none of us would seek God on His terms alone. We are not only estranged from Him but are also God's enemies, for our carnal minds have all sinned against God in our thoughts (Romans 8:7), which then leads to us commit wicked deeds. That is how odious sin is to God, how depraved our minds are, that we not only delight in sin but seek after any religion that allows us to continue in sin. How marvelous then is His love for us, that while we were yet so lost in sin, Christ died for you and me, and reconciled us to God! Through the virtue of Christ, God was able to forgive us for all our wicked works, and draw us unto Himself.

Recently I was speaking to a teenager who professed he believed in Christ as his personal Savior, but wanted to lead his own life free from rules, for example he wanted to be able to use foul language as a form of self-expression. He was essentially fitting God into his own concept! This is such a travesty because he is turning his back towards the One who saved him, if he is really saved in the first place. However, we too must also examine ourselves to see if we too are ungrateful: for example, we might rationalize and say that since we have done so much for Christ, then this loving and gracious God should allow us to indulge in certain sins! We who have been reconciled to God by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, ought not to return to the same sin that alienated us in the first place, and grieve Him who has saved us. Instead, let us be thankful and grateful for what Christ did for us in His life and death, and thus strive to please Him instead of pleasing ourselves. Do make sure our minds do not fit God into our concept of who He is, but instead strive to be more like the Son of God each day.

THOUGHT: Do you give excuses for continuing to sin?

PRAYER: May I seek God on His terms alone!

MONDAY, APRIL 22

Colossians 1:22
Memorise Colossians 1:22
"...holy and unblameable and unreproveable..."

ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT LOSING YOUR SALVATION?

In Colossians 1:22, Paul makes clear how completely Jesus Christ reconciled us to God: "In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight." First of all, note we have no part to play at all in this reconciliation process. Even our ability to exercise faith in Christ was also but the result of God's grace. As the previous verse pointed out, we were enemies of God, lost in sin, and the thrice Holy God can hardly receive any reconciliatory efforts stained with sin. It took the Son of God to take on the form of human flesh, and as the sinless Lamb of God to die on our behalf instead. In so doing, Christ presents us unto God, and we can now be reconciled unto Him. Three separate verbs are used to describe how perfect this reconciliation is, and how we are now able to be stand in the sight of the thrice holy God. From filthy sinners immersed in the things of the world, we are now holy, separate unto God; from being stained with sins and full of blemish, we are now unblameable, whereby Satan is no longer able to lay any charge to God's elect; from being worthy of only reproof and judgment from God, we are now unreproveable, no longer facing judgment but eternal glories in heaven!

With such complete reconciliation wrought by Christ for us, we must not give in to our carnal human tendency to completely condemn ourselves. I have encountered several teens and youths in the past who constantly fear that they were going to lose their salvation, for they could not avoid sinning, though they tried very hard to. While all of us should be engaged in a never ending battle against sin (as long as we are in this mortal body), we should remember that the price of our salvation has already been completely paid once and for all. If God Himself has accepted us through the spotless blood of the Lamb, we ourselves likewise need to have the confidence to be assured that our salvation is secure. To otherwise despair is to waver in our faith, and be so full of worry that we become a source of discouragement to all around us.

THOUGHT: What God has cleansed, do not call unclean.

PRAYER: May I trust God that He has completely forgiven all my sins.

Colossians 1:23
Memorise 1 Corinthians 15:58
"...grounded and settled..."

ARE YOU GROUNDED? ARE YOU SETTLED?

In the first part of Colossians 1:23, "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel...", Paul links this verse to the previous verse by the word "if", to point out that there will be some who will waver in their faith. We know that we must never waver, but instead be grounded on Christ the solid foundation, and be settled and steadfast (same Greek word in 1 Corinthians 15:58), building upon this firm foundation. A building that has a rock solid foundation ("grounded") and has pillars that burrow deep into this foundation ("settled"), will not move much when an earthquake occurs, compared to a building which has neither a solid foundation nor deep pillars. We need to know not just the basics of Christianity to be saved, but we need to study God's Word deeply to build upon our knowledge of saving faith. For indeed there will be some will be moved away from the hope of the gospel: the passive voice indicating that it is an external factor that moves them away i.e. false teachers. The gospel brings hope, pointing us to the eternal joys that await true believers. In contrast, the false gospels brought by these false teachers will bring only despair.

We must therefore not allow ourselves to be moved away from hope into despair. We must be crystal clear that our own faith stands in nothing else but Christ Jesus. We must study God's Word to build upon this foundation and ensure that we do not fall prey to the seducing words of these false teachers. For example, if we start to believe the false teachers who say that we must keep the law perfectly otherwise we lose our salvation, then we will not only be continually disappointed in ourselves, but we may also become overly critical of others who do not keep the law perfectly either. I remember one such past teen who thus became so critical of herself and others that it was impossible to hold a casual conversation with her, as she took everything seriously. She had forgotten God's Word that Jesus Christ had already kept the law perfectly on her behalf, and thus succumbed to false teachers who had advocated such a Pharisaical streak. Instead of having the joy of salvation, she sank into the depths of despair, and could never find a church that she could comfortably settle in.

THOUGHT: If I am grounded and settled, I am not easily moved.

PRAYER: May I be both grounded and settled on Christ.

Colossians 1:23
Memorise Matthew 7:16
"...which ye have heard..."

WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A MINISTER?

In the second part of Colossians 1:23, Paul continues: "...which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister." The word "heard" is significant because the faith and hope spoken of in the first part of the verse comes by hearing God's Word, believing in His promises even though we have not seen Him. Remember that if something can be seen, it is no longer faith. For example, we have faith that God has preserved His Word just as He said, even though we have not witnessed the entire process of preservation. The phrase "preached to every creature" does not mean that every creature will hear the gospel, but rather that it is God's will that the gospel is to be preached far and wide to as many as possible (Mark 16:15). Paul goes on to point out that He is a true minister of the gospel called by God Himself, evidenced by the phrase "am made", and thus has a responsibility to God and to the flock to preach God's Word and to be a good example to them. In the faithful discharge of his duty as a minister, Paul is the one who brings the word of truth to every creature, and guides them to have hope, and be rooted and grounded in their faith.

Dear teen, accept who is truly a minister of God, and have a good regard for those who serve the Lord faithfully. If like Paul, they obey their calling and labour to feed God's flock with the Word, the Bible tells us that they are worthy of double honour (1 Timothy 5:18). We must be able to discern between ministers who are only made ministers by God, and those who claim to want to serve the Lord, but are no more than charlatans who are serving for all the wrong reasons. We must not be seduced by false teachers who come in to spoil the flock. Yes they may carry themselves well, spend time with you and seem to care; they may preach attractive engaging messages and enthrall you with testimonies and supposedly true accounts of miracles and healings, but be not deceived. True ministers will preach the Word of God instead of worldly philosophies; this ministry will not just propagate evangelism but will result in believers being grounded and settled in the faith. Is this what you look for in a minister?

THOUGHT: What kind of pastor/teacher do I like, and is this liking biblical?

PRAYER: May I accept and honour those whom God has appointed as pastor/teacher according to His Word.

Colossians 1:24
Memorise Colossians 1:24
"...rejoice in my sufferings for you..."

DO YOU REJOICE IN SUFFERINGS OR FEAR SUFFERINGS?

In Colossians 1:24 Paul testifies that he "now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." In thinking back to his calling and ministry as a servant of the Lord, Paul's thoughts go to the sufferings that he has endured for the gospel sake. What Paul is saying is that by going through these trials and afflictions, he is 'filling up' or fulfilling his allotment of sufferings which he as a Christian knows he ought to endure. But as he goes through it, he does not complain nor dread the process. Rather he rejoices! Why? Because he knows that the church is the body of Christ, and in suffering for the church Paul is in effect suffering for Christ. Indeed what glorifies Christ will in turn also edify the church. For example, when the doctrine of preservation is defended at whatever cost, Christ is glorified, and every church member is confident that the Bible has no mistakes. Paul rejoices in suffering not only because of this, but also in the fact that God can use his weak flesh to bear fruit for Christ.

This is in stark contrast how many of us view suffering: we think of how it affects our weak flesh physically, rather than the fruit it bears for Christ. In that way, we allow Satan to intimidate us, and cause us to fear suffering. Even when I myself am slogging through late nights to write these devotional articles by the deadline, I think more of my own tiredness and lack of time to do other things, rather than rejoice in this opportunity to serve my Savior and you teens. We should not seek out suffering, but when it occurs, we should rejoice that Christ uses us weak vessels to bear fruit for Him the King of kings. We must not wallow in self-pity, thinking that no one else understands what we are going through, or worse, shy away from suffering as we fear our weak bodies cannot handle the physical hardship.

THOUGHT: What causes me to fear suffering?

PRAYER: That I may rejoice in suffering!

FRIDAY, APRIL 26

Colossians 1:24
Memorise Philippians 3:10

"...fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ..."

DO YOU KNOW EVERY SUFFERING IS AN OPPORTUNITY?

Colossians 1:24 contains an interesting phrase: "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh". Enemies of Christ cannot afflict Christ now because He is in heaven out of their reach, so instead they afflict Christians. When we suffer, we are actually suffering on behalf of Christ. Philippians 3:10 states that Christ allows us to enter into the fellowship of His sufferings, granting us the opportunity to glorify Christ in our suffering just as Christ glorified Himself and His heavenly Father in His suffering. In effect, Christ considers our suffering His own! Note that the word "fill up" means supplement. The phrase 'that which is behind' describes a deficiency or lacking – not in the sufferings of Christ but in the amount of sufferings that Paul has experienced for Christ thus far. It is an amazing thing that Paul says, that he sees his troubles as simply something he rejoices to go through, knowing that he is but doing his part, and that through it, he is given an opportunity to glorify Christ. Thus when Paul suffers for the church, it does not mean he suffers to redeem the church, but instead to further edify the redeemed church.

Do you realize therefore that when you suffer, you are given an opportunity to suffer as Christ suffered? When non-believers pour scorn on us for believing in God, remember that they are not mocking you but Christ instead, and rejoice that Christ has given you this opportunity to partake of His sufferings! Consider that from the least to the greatest of sufferings that Christ endured, He never complained. We ought to follow His example and do not grieve in the public humiliation we receive from non-believers, but instead face these mockers squarely with a smile and say yes we do believe in God, and openly share about this belief. Remember that not a few have come to believe in Christ through witnessing the testimony of saints under persecution. The dying thief is one such example who initially mocked Christ, so never assume these mockers will never come to Christ later.

THOUGHT: Do I dare to pray as Paul did in Philippians 3:10?

PRAYER: May I pray the prayer of Paul in Philippians 3:10.

Colossians 1:25
Memorise 1 Corinthians 4:2
"...to fulfill the word of God..."

WHAT IS A MINISTER'S PRIMARY MINISTRY?

Paul now states: "Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God." (Colossians 1:25) This was the second time that Paul states God had made him a minister. The first time he mentioned he was a minister of the gospel, and this time he attested he was a minister to the church. Both these evangelistic and pastoral ministries are important. Now the term dispensation means stewardship. Paul is a steward of the word of God, and he must dispense the word of God to everyone who needs it. Note here that what the minister provides is primarily the word of God, whether in evangelism to the unsaved or to the believers in church. This sense of duty and responsibility of being a minister appointed by God is critical. He must always remember God's commission for him to 'fulfil the word of God', literally to fill up the Word of God. What this refers to is his duty to fully preach and teach the Word of God to the church. Whilst the minister must also be proficient in other areas of ministry in the church, he must first be a specialist in the Bible, to know the Bible, be able to declare unto his flock the whole counsel of God.

It is thus important to realize that as members of the flock, we must not expect our ministers to cater to our physical needs, but instead to provide the spiritual food we need. For in times of ill health, we might look to doctors to treat us, but we must look to God's servants to provide His Word for us to understand His will in allowing these trials to afflict us. The Christian in a hospital cancer ward can smile in the midst of agony, when he is ministered the Word of God. The Christian minister in a hospital cancer ward may be surrounded by death and the dying, but he knows his duty to minister to the saved and evangelize to the unsaved in affliction. Pray for your ministers that God may give more grace to them to minister to those in need. Yes, they have a wonderful gift from God of being able to discern and dispense the Word of God better than we can, but this gift is given to them to fulfill the great spiritual burden given to them, so do not criticize them but empathize with them and pray for them continually.

THOUGHT: Do I understand the burdens of my pastor/s?

PRAYER: That I never forget to pray for my pastors and ministers.

IS CHRIST IN YOU, YOUR HOPE OF GLORY?

Paul now describes the gospel as "the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Colossians 1:26-27) The word "mystery" does not mean something that has to be solved, like working out who committed a crime, but rather something that was hidden or secret in the past but is now revealed by God. The Old Testament saints were not told of all the details of God's plan of redemption, but with the advent of Jesus Christ this mystery was later made clear ("manifest") to all the elect ("his saints") by the Holy Spirit. Paul was one such saint amongst the Jews, and was given the commission to share the rich gift of the gospel to the Gentiles, one body of such Gentiles being the Colossian church itself. Thus the testimony of the Colossian church (that was earlier commended in Colossians 1:3-4) clearly showed that Christ was in the Colossian believers ("Christ in you"), showing their belief in the blessed hope of glory in Christ Jesus amidst the trials and cares of this world. Clearly to the Colossians, the gospel was of utmost importance that it affected their words and actions! This testimony of the Colossian church was thus a fulfillment of the dispensation given to Paul by God.

Dear teen, start realizing that God has revealed to you the mystery of the gospel through ministers that He has sent to you, and has given you this priceless gift of salvation in Christ Jesus. The question is, do you hide this revelation and this salvation from the world, or do you live by this blessed hope? It is very strange when a teen professes to believe in the blessed hope, but does not share this hope with others, and lives a life that clearly trusts in the temporal riches and pleasures of this world instead. You might protest that you are not guilty of this, but ask yourself how often you have chosen to spend more time in perfecting your studies instead of serving God, or how often have you witnessed for Christ to your friends instead of condoning their sinful lifestyle in your desire to be accepted by them. If the gospel is really valuable to you, you will treasure it and live by it.

THOUGHT: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6:21)

PRAYER: May my life show my belief in the hope of the gospel!

Colossians 1:28
Memorise 2 Corinthians 11:2
"...every man perfect in Christ Jesus..."

WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL?

In Colossians 1:28, Paul continues "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." What does the phrase "perfect in Christ Jesus" mean? Remember that on earth only Jesus Christ is perfect. The perfection that man can attain can only come through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. He is the one who grants perfection to all who have repented and believed in Him. The phrase also refers to what happens after salvation, where we strive towards holiness, to become more like Christ each day. This is indeed the purpose of the church – for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12). And so as Paul and other ministers preach, warn and teach every man, the goal is that they may become perfect in Christ. In this way, Christ is our perfect role model. In comparison with Him we can then see our own shortfall in holiness, and pray for God's help to change. Theologians thus distinguish between these two aspects of the Christian's perfection, of positional sanctification (being perfect in Christ before God at the point of salvation) and progressive sanctification (striving towards the holiness of Christ after salvation, which is a lifelong process).

Dear teen, are you saved by believing in the perfection of Jesus Christ? When one does not realize the perfection of Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation, then that person may not have assurance of salvation, for he might think his continued sin after salvation disqualifies him from it. Once we realize that Jesus kept the Law perfectly for our sakes, then we need not fear ever losing salvation once it is obtained, for Christ has completely paid the price for sins past, present and future. If you are saved, though, then is Christ your role model? Do you strive to be more and more like Him each day? Do you learn more about Him each day? Or, do you have other earthly role models instead. It is sad when even Christians idolize certain stars and strive to copy their lifestyle, including their clothes, hairstyle, language etc. It is so sad that Christ has saved you by keeping a perfect life and then dying on the Cross as your perfect sacrifice, and then after He has saved you, you turn your back to Him and follow sinful man instead.

THOUGHT: Who is my role model? Who do I admire? Who comes before Christ?

PRAYER: Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my life.

Colossians 1:28
Memorise Hebrews 4:12
"...whom we preach..."

WHAT IS YOUR REACTION WHEN YOUR PASTOR REBUKES?

In yesterday's study of Colossians 1:28, we saw that the church has the goal of striving towards both positional and progressive sanctification in Christ Jesus, "whom we preach". This sanctification cannot be legislated or be enforced by law. The church cannot have a police force to lock up members who disobey, or to force members to obey at gunpoint. That is simply not possible! The only way for the church to encourage its members towards sanctification, is through the preaching of the Word of God, for that alone has the power to change lives (Hebrews 4:12). Thus the preaching of the church must have elements of warning and rebuke. This is important because what separates man from God is sin, and unless man is warned about the consequences of sin and believes it, that man has no reason to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior. Remember it is not enough to acknowledge Jesus as God, for the devils also do so, but are not regenerate. The church also has to warn against false teachers who preach a false gospel and so seduce others away from salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

The church must also be "teaching every man in all wisdom". The church has a responsibility of teaching the whole counsel of God, not just certain pet topics that the pastors or congregation prefer. The pastor must not shy away from topics like biblical separation or the realities of hell even though this may give rise to opposition. As long as God's Word teaches it, the church must preach it. Such teachings towards progressive sanctification will be the subject of Colossians chapter 3 & 4, where Paul touches on the relationship between servants and masters, as well as family relations, all with Christ as our perfect example.

Dear teen, may you realize why your Bible believing church takes such a 'hard' stand in warning against sin and not shying away from teaching what the Bible says in any subject. This is what God wants, which is infinitely more important than what sinful man may desire, so thank God for guiding you to such a church, and thank God every time you hear the pastor 'scold'. There are many churches who desire instead to cater to "itching ears" (2 Timothy 4:3), to preach only what man wants to hear. If you are in such a man-centered church, may you seek one that teaches the whole counsel of God instead.

THOUGHT: Is my pastor obeying God or obeying man in his preaching?

PRAYER: May I praise God when my pastor scolds, and then listen, and obey!

Colossians 1:28-29
Memorise 1 Thessalonians 5:11
"...warning every man, and teaching every man..."

WHO DO YOU TALK TO EVERY LORD'S DAY?

In Colossians 1:28, note that there is one phrase repeated three times in verse 28: "every man". This means that every man must be warned and taught, without bias or exception. Paul uses the personal pronoun "we" instead of "I" to point out that this duty to preach, warn and teach is not just for him, but for all believers to engage in. This was the message to the Colossian church, and also to all of us in a local church. Especially if the church is large, all members of the church will have to help the church leaders out in warning and teaching the entire flock, leaving no one out, and not just reaching out to people that you like to reach out to. Many churches have fellowship groups to make sure those in any age group are not neglected. Many churches have a children's ministry, and teachers are trained to reach out to every child in their class, without bias or exception. It is every teacher's hope that every child is saved, and every child taught how to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

What part do you play in warning and teaching others? Just look around at the teens in your church. Is there anyone feeling left out? Do you prefer to stick to your friends every Lord's Day instead of reaching out to others? Your Sunday school teachers are trying hard to teach and reach out to every youth, but there are many that leave church because they feel left out by fellow teens like you, in spite of what your teachers are trying to do. Can you be the one to make a difference? Don't give the excuse that you only have the Lord's Day to meet up with your close Christian friends: in this day and age of mobile devices and social media, we can stay in touch with them every day of the week if we so desire. Don't give the excuse that particular teen is alone because you think that he/she acts in a strange manner or is unfriendly looking. Just because they are different from you does not give you the excuse to shun them or gossip about them openly or on social media. Such behavior is hateful and unloving. Don't give the excuse you do not know what to say to them: as long as you are armed with the Word of God, let the Holy Spirit guide you on what to say to them. Dear teen, remember that God has placed you in your church with the people around you for a reason. You have a God-given responsibility to reach out to every one of them. Are you doing so?

THOUGHT: What is your personal excuse for not reaching out to everyone?

PRAYER: May I use every encounter God gives me to edify one another.

Colossians 1:29
Memorise Philippians 4:13
"...labour, striving..."

ARE YOU LABOURING FOR THE LORD?

Paul concludes the first chapter of Colossians with these words: "Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." Four different Greek words are used in this sentence to describe the idea of labour and strength. The word "labour" in Greek has the sense of working till the point of fatigue, while the word for "striving" is "agonizomai" which has the sense of wrestling or struggling in order to obtain a prize. The words "working" and "worketh" in Greek is where we get the word energy, while the word "mightily" is "dunamis" which refers to miraculous power and which is where we get the word dynamite. Paul is not boasting here of how strong he is, but rather he is attesting through his own testimony that he too is working hard to fulfill the instructions he gave them in the previous verse. Paul did not just take care of one church but oversaw many churches, including this one which he himself never visited (Colossians 2:1). To each of them he laboured to warn (Colossians 2) and teach (Colossians 3), because he wanted to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus". He was willing to work to the point of fatigue because he knew that he was striving towards God's will. He did so because he had the confidence to know that God would give him the strength and grace to complete the tasks well.

Dear teen, may you thank God for every faithful full time servant of the Lord in your church, as they set the example for us all on labouring for Christ and trusting Him to provide. Any time you are given a task for the Lord, before you start to worry about your busyness of lament about your time constraints, think of these full time workers who single-mindedly labour long hours without rest and holiday to fulfill the never ending list of tasks that keep on coming. I myself have been rebuked in the writing of these devotional readings on Colossians, for I tend to look at the enormity of writing three months' worth of readings and think of my own fatigue, rather than pray and trust God to provide strength. The more you complain and snap at others for not understanding how hard you are working, you are literally telling everyone it all depends on you rather than God. May we look upon all who are labouring for the Lord as an example and encouragement to us, that we too will strive to do all we can for the glory of God!

THOUGHT: Should I be doing more for the Lord and complaining less?

PRAYER: May I labour and strive to do Thine will, trusting Thee to provide all I need.

Colossians 2:1
Memorise Ephesians 4:14
"...great conflict I have for you..."

ARE YOU AWARE OF EVERY SPIRITUAL SNARE IN YOUR PATH?

Paul starts the second chapter of Colossians with these words of warning: "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." See here the concern of Paul for fellow believers even though he had never met them! The word "conflict" here is in Greek agon, which is the root word of agonizomai, which was translated as "striving" in the previous verse (Colossians 1:29), carrying the idea of agonizingly struggling to win a prize. Paul was struggling against spiritual forces which are in great conflict with his goal of presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. These forces were not just in the Colossian church, but in the region at large, as the church in Laodicea was also attacked. Paul was warning against false teachers who were teaching a false gospel. As their spiritual mentor, Paul was very concerned for them, and thus wrote this whole epistle to warn them of the spiritual dangers that they were facing. You might ask: how come the Colossians could not see this danger? While the faith of the Colossians was strong, these false teachers were so deceptive that they deceived many, but Paul had the God given spiritual maturity to be able to see through such deception (Ephesians 4:14).

Do you think you can see every spiritual danger in your path? Unless you are spiritually naive or that proud of your own spiritual ability, your answer must be a humble 'no'. We need to heed the warnings of those spiritually stronger than we are and can see such danger coming, and thank God for these faithful watchmen that care for us so much. Unfortunately, there is a strong tendency for teens and youth to think that they know much more than those older than they are, or to think that these pastors and elders are crying wolf far too often to be taken seriously. They desire to have the freedom to make their own mistakes in life. Realize that the pastors and elders are amongst the most spiritually mature members of the flock (1 Peter 5:3), so it is grossly unwise to disregard their warnings. For example, how often have ignored their warnings for you to choose friends carefully in this wicked world, only to later confess that you have been led astray by bad company? Surely it is better to heed such well-meaning warnings, then to later berate circumstances for causing you to sin? If by God's grace you can see spiritual dangers that other teens cannot see, then like Paul, warn them, lest they fall!

THOUGHT: Do you really know more than those older than you are?

PRAYER: May I take every warning from God's watchmen seriously, never lightly.

Colossians 2:2
Memorise Romans 8:28
"...their hearts may be comforted..."

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW FALSE TEACHERS TO SPLIT THE CHURCH?

Paul continues in Colossians 2:2 "That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding...." What is the effect of false teachers on the flock? When people succumb to their deceit, they disrupt the unity of the church. As their false teachings spread, families and friendships will be broken, as brethren become adversaries; many would leave the church, some because of doctrine, others because they cannot tolerate the in-fighting that ensues. Those who remain may feel uncertain about what the truth is, and experience doubt and confusion. Paul thus prayed that these brethren may have their hearts comforted through the right understanding of the Word of God. This comfort comes both from the unity and love shown by the remaining brethren who are not deceived and humbly submit to one another and to God, as well as by the deeper understanding of why God allows such disunity to happen in the church. Indeed the wonderful phrase "all riches of the full assurance of understanding" refers to the strengthened faith that results from a deeper understanding of God's Word brought about by the conflict, and all the riches or benefits of this strengthened faith.

Many of us who have experienced church splits brought about by false teachers within Bible believing churches can attest to the greater spiritual strength of the church after the split. Yes, we are sad that some have left church as a result of being deceived, but the comfort that results from the unity of those remaining who come together to pray together and exhort one another is truly God-sent. We can also attest to a deeper understanding of God and His Word as a result of defending the church against these false teachers. All in all, we realize that truly all things work together for good for those who love God according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). When you encounter problems in the church, do not use worldly wisdom in thinking these conflicts are signs that Christianity is weak, or that Christians tend to be divisive. Do not conclude that just because there are these doctrinal contentions, then there is no absolute truth of God's Word. Neither should we ever blame God for allowing any of these problems to happen. While we do not pray for church splits, when they occur, we must trust God that as long as we defend the faith and stand on the side of the truth, God's Will is always the best.

THOUGHT: What was your reaction the last time some of your friends left church?

PRAYER: May I trust God that His Way is perfect, and He makes no mistakes.

ARE YOU FASCINATED BY HIDDEN MYSTERIES?

Paul continues with "... to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Do recall from our earlier study of Colossians 1:26-27 what the meaning of mystery is. God has now revealed Himself and His salvation plan concerning Christ to everyone, and such attacks against Christ and His Word only seek to make this revelation even clearer to His elect. The word "acknowledgement" implies full recognition and accurate discernment of this revelation by God, so that the elect can defend the faith against false teachers (Ephesians 4:14), to whom this mystery is not revealed.

One such false teaching was Gnosticism, which teaches that salvation is gained by attaining knowledge that is hidden or secret, similar to today's Hindu practice of meditation to discover 'secret' knowledge within one's soul. Paul thus uses the word "hid" to tell us the key to revealing God's redemptive plan is Christ; there is no other hidden knowledge relating to salvation to be discovered, unlike what the Gnostics believe. In contrast, God's knowledge is meant to be revealed. Paul then uses the word "treasures" to remind us of Matthew 13:44, where the knowledge of Christ is likened to a hid treasure which a man would sell all that he has just to acquire. Christ not only brings salvation, which is in itself treasure beyond compare, but He is also the omniscient God who is in heaven, and in whom all wisdom and knowledge dwells, ready to be revealed to all who believe in Christ. We have no true wisdom if we do not know Christ, and why should we desire any other source of spiritual knowledge if we already have Christ?

Today many teens are fascinated by hidden mysteries. Do you look at Gnostic thriller novels by authors like Dan Brown with fascination and interest, but have no desire whatsoever to study biblical prophecy revealed in Christ? Dear teen, do realize you have a treasure storehouse waiting to be revealed to you, which is the absolute truth, compared to these works of fiction that make use of half-truths and falsehoods to weave a tale that is full of "enticing words" (Colossians 2:4). You may wish to argue that you won't be so easily fooled by reading such mystery novels, but then how would you be able to discern truth from error if you have not studied the whole truth in the first place? Do come to "...the acknowledgement of the mystery..." and truly know Christ.

THOUGHT: If you say you want to know Christ, do you understand what this means?

PRAYER: May I come to a full knowledge of Christ.

Colossians 2:4
Memorise Jeremiah 9:3
"...beguile you with enticing words..."

HOW DO YOU REACT TO WARNINGS OF APOSTASY?

Colossians 2:4 reads "And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words." Why does Paul start with the term "and this I say"? He is telling us that the knowledge in Christ he mentions in the previous verses will prevent one from falling into the trap he is going to describe. The word "beguile" means to deceive by false reasoning. False teachers will attempt to fool you by trying to beguile you, not attack directly or argue with you, but instead appear to be on your side, but then twist the truth to their own advantage. They will use enticing words, words you want to hear, rather than offensive words, just like how the serpent tempted Eve by telling her the lie that she could be as wise as God. One of the false teachings the Colossian church was facing, was beguiling men through using rational reasoning, and appealing to their intellectual pride. Had the church been deceived yet? No, but Paul was giving them advanced warning, lest they fall.

This is the role of any vigilant and responsible man of God. He will see the dangers on the horizon and do his part to warn others of it. What is your reaction when you hear your pastor warn of false teachers that may soon infiltrate the flock? Some of you might think, it will never happen to us. Perhaps think it a waste of time talking about all these things, and wish our pastors would preach on something else more practical. Then, when false teachers do appear, and pastors preach against them, we perceive our pastors as being vindictive and judgmental! Especially if these false teachers grew up in the church or are our personal friends, we think our pastors unkind! This is the kind of reasoning that allows so many churches to fall prey to these false teachers. Remember, they will not offend you, but entice you instead, pointing out verses that seem to support their stand, and perhaps appeal to your sense of intellectual pride of knowing something that your apparently old fashioned pastors do not know. Don't you want to be aware of traps awaiting you in the road ahead, or do you prefer to blithely ignore these warning signs raised by your leaders who care for your very souls?

THOUGHT: Do you honestly think you will never be fooled?

PRAYER: May I never ignore warning signs raised by my pastors.

Colossians 2:5
Memorise 1 Corinthians 14:40
"...joying and beholding your order..."

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT HOW YOUR CHURCH IS ORGANIZED?

Colossians 2:5 reads "For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ." Paul was away imprisoned in Rome as he was writing this epistle to them. Though he was absent in the flesh, he was with them in the spirit. He shared with them that what brought him great joy, was the good news of their order and stedfastness in their faith, especially in light of the false teachers that were infiltrating the church. The order in the Colossian church that Paul was referring to was the organization or discipline in the church (1 Corinthians 14:40) to regulate how to worship and serve God. The term "order" in Greek is most often used to describe the battle array, or order of battle, how soldiers are organized against the external enemy. The right order of course, would be a close adherence to the Bible's standards of how churches ought to function. As such, it would be difficult for false teachers to attack them, compared to churches which have little order and regulation. False teachers would easily be able to introduce new and enticing but deadly methods of worship or service in their midst. Paul thus rejoiced to know about this order as reported by their pastor Epaphras to him.

How do you feel about your church's order of worship, the kind of songs that are sung, the Bible version that is read, what kind of ministries there are in your church and who can serve in these ministries? If there is good order, praise God. So many churches today have loose regulations with regards to their worship. They have allowed contemporary Christian music to influence the church from outside, and soon other charismatic influences soon follow. So many churches have tried to attract numbers by having dancing or cooking classes, which soon brings the world into the church. Please don't perceive your church as being old fashioned, run by elderly folk out of touch with the youth! The order in church is meant to protect the body of Christ against external enemies. Don't betray Christ or stumble others by banding up with other youth against the church leadership. This is not only harmful to the church, but will also certainly have a negative influence in your spiritual life! Instead, understand that church order is a commandment of God, for God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), and so "let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

THOUGHT: What negative thoughts have you entertained about your church?

PRAYER: May I realize how critical church order is to protect my church.

Colossians 2:5
Memorise Hebrews 3:14
"...stedfastness of your faith in Christ..."

DO YOU FULLY SUPPORT YOUR CHURCH'S DOCTRINAL STAND?

After commending their church order, Paul also commends the Colossians' "stedfastness of faith". The word for stedfast carries the idea of being strong , stable and firm. It evokes an image of soldiers in a battle array, firmly holding their ground and never yielding to the enemy. A church that has stedfastness of faith is one that holds firm to the truth of God's Word and never compromises. They would be able to stand strong against the false teachers who would try to creep in and introduce damnable heresies. In our modern day set-up of the church, with the many differences and compromises from the truth that abound in Christendom, we have doctrinal statements to protect us from threats of apostasy, and to clearly spell out what we believe and stand for. Every faithful church would have a statement of faith that is entirely in line with the Bible. Those wishing to become members take a membership oath to abide by this stand, and thus any infiltrators can be admonished if they attack this stand. Paul was much heartened when he heard of how the Colossian church stood firm in the faith that they had received, for he knew that it meant they were not succumbing to the false teachers in their midst.

History is replete with so many occasions where churches have ignored such warnings and watered down their doctrinal stand, or no longer stood firm on the doctrines they once held strongly to. I remember once when I was invited to speak at the youth fellowship of an overseas 'daughter' church, and was told on arrival by the ministry leader not to mention certain doctrines because it was too controversial for the youth, even though apparently the church supported these doctrines (!) The preaching topic had nothing to do with these doctrines, but I felt very uneasy about this strange request. Much later that church did an about-turn and now publicly did not support the doctrines in question. The false teachers had taken over. Dear teen, if you later become a ministry leader, remember that you are accountable to God for your actions especially since they affect those members who belong to that ministry, and it is God's will for the church to be steadfast in faith, not to be broken up from within due to your actions. As members in your church, make sure that you support the church's doctrinal stand, and humbly study God's Word and clarify any areas you are doubtful in, lest over time Satan turns that doubt into disbelief.

THOUGHT: The more the doubt, the less the faith.

PRAYER: May I always ensure I support the church stand 100%.

Colossians 2:6-7
Memorise Colossians 2:6-7
"...walk ye in him, rooted and built up in him..."

HOW STEADFAST ARE YOU IN THE FAITH?

Colossians 2:6-7 reads "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." Paul uses three metaphors discuss stedfastness or being "stablished" in the faith: walking, being rooted and built up. As Christ has saved you and turned you in the right path in repentance of past sin, to walk in Jesus is to continue in the same path in obedience to your Lord, instead of being swayed by false teachers back into sin. Being rooted in Christ means your faith must stand only in Jesus and His righteousness, instead of being swayed by false teachers into another gospel or doubting your faith. Being built up in Jesus implies knowing more about Christ and becoming more like Him through studying Christ the Living Word as the foundation of faith, instead of being swayed by false teachers to use human wisdom to 'grow' instead. Not being stedfast in the faith will destroy the church because it will turn members back into sin, believing a false gospel and/or promoting human wisdom above holiness. In other words, when a church has problems, often it is because it is not stedfast in the faith.

Dear teen, do examine your own steadfastness in the faith in all three different aspects, as well as recognize any false teachers by their failure in any one aspect. While one might blame false teachers for tempting you to sin, ultimately you yourselves are responsible for your own sin. In terms of walking in Jesus, no true teacher will ever teach you it is alright for you to sin, for Christ did not save you so that you can continue sinning! In terms of being rooted in Christ, no true teacher will ever teach you salvation in any other but Christ alone, for Jesus is the way the truth and the life. In terms of being built up in Christ, no true teacher will ever substitute intellectual thought or quote scholarly opinion in place of God's Word! Our faith stands and can grow only by walking daily with Christ, being rooted and built up in the Word of God. We must constantly check ourselves to see if we truly have a relationship with Him, if we are communing daily with Him and growing in the grace and knowledge of His Word.

THOUGHT: When I perceive salvation is not by faith alone, my faith will be shaken.

PRAYER: May I not be influenced by any false teachers.

DO YOU THANK GOD FOR EVERY TEACHER ASSIGNED TO YOU?

Colossians 2:7 ends off with "...as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." What is the importance of teaching in safeguarding our church? Sound teachers will remind us of our roots in Christ and to walk as Christ walked, to teach us more and more about Christ, and warn us about the errors of these false teachers. Indeed, every sound teacher will speak of Christ and not promote himself. Such sound teaching will then enable us to be more and more ("abound") stedfast in the faith. This is especially needful for believers that are young in the faith, because sound teachers would know more theology and be more aware of what false teaching exists. If we do have such teachers in our midst, we should thank God for this abounding, and give all praise to Him. Thus the response that Paul exhorted the Colossian church to have was to be abounding (increasing and being abundant) in thanksgiving, for they were reminded of the wonderful privilege that they had as Christians, that they had received Christ and were able to walk and grow with Him.

I myself thank God for providing the Far Eastern Bible College, for its teachers have taught me so much more about Christ than I had ever known before, and have exposed so many false teachings around me that I had never been aware of. Through their teachings, I have learnt to trust God more and more each day. Dear teen, do you thank God for your teachers, and do you seek to learn from every teacher assigned to you? Sadly, there is a tendency to compare teachers, and to skip sermons or classes taught by apparently boring teachers. Dear teen, examine yourself why you do so? We should certainly avoid certain teachers if they are false teachers. However, God's Word never tells us to shun teachers just because you find them boring, or dislike teachers that seem to keep harping on the 'same old thing' from God's Word (God's word never gets old!). I remember one lecturer in FEBC that some would hesitate to listen to, but I learnt much from him as long as I was paying careful attention to what he was teaching from the Bible. I knew that as long as the subject matter is the Word of God, it is the most exciting topic for my life and I must pay attention. If God has sent certain teachers over you, thank Him for them, and learn how to learn more about God from every teacher no matter what their teaching style is, for they are bringing to us the precious words of eternal life!

THOUGHT: Ultimately, God is the one who is teaching me!

PRAYER: May I thank God for every teacher of His Word.

Colossians 2:8
Memorise Colossians 2:8
"...philosophy and vain deceit..."

WHAT WISDOM DO WE FOLLOW?

Paul warns in Colossians 2:8 "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". He was very afraid that those false teachers would come with their worldly philosophies and vain deceits, and draw them away from Christ and towards the world. The word philosophy is from the Greek word "philosophia" which literally describes a love of wisdom. We know that here it is certainly not describing godly wisdom, but man's worldly wisdom. It is vain deceit ('empty deception') - men thinking they are wise, but in reality deceiving themselves (1 Corithians 3:18). They do not teach the things of Christ, but derive their understandings from man and the world. Thus Paul was warning them to beware of these things, and not let anyone 'spoil' (meaning to plunder or rob) them of their relationship to God through these things. More specifically, Paul was warning them against the unbiblical teachings of the Judaistic philosophers. They followed Jewish traditions (also Mark 7:8) and religious ceremonies (Colossians 2:16, Galatians 4:1-3, 9). These philosophers added to the salvific work of Christ by making these ceremonies mentioned in Colossians 2:16 compulsory for all Christian believers as well. These Jewish ceremonies like circumcision were observed in the OT, but these are only "rudiments" or logical elements, "a shadow of things to come" (Colossians 2:17). For non-Jews these are no longer necessary because one realizes the full truth of salvation in Christ Jesus.

Today, we also have many worldly philosophies and teachings to be wary of. In school, Christian youths are introduced to a whole range of different teachings. They are also influenced and guided by their friends and peers around them. Through various forms of media (TV, movies, internet, and social media), they are exposed to all sorts of influences. Whilst not all of these teachings and influences are bad, we must also realize that they are often very bad, negative influences. As a Christian, we must beware! Be very watchful and discerning about the types of philosophies and mindsets that the world has, for they can often lead you astray. Studies itself may not be bad, but if they are allowed to become your idol, then it is sin. Likewise many forms of entertainment may seem like just harmless fun, but if we allow them influence our thoughts and actions away from Christ, then it is something we must beware of! The only true source of wisdom in this world is from God and His Word. That alone is our guide in life and the source of all truth.

THOUGHT: Am I that arrogant to think I can handle the philosophies of the world?

PRAYER: May I never look to any other moral guide than the Word of God.

WHERE DO YOU LOOK FOR ANSWERS TO LIFE'S QUESTIONS?

Paul rebuts the need of tradition and ceremony to attain salvation through the next two verses: Colossians 2:9-10 "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power." We do not need such ceremonies and traditions to save us, neither do these bring us closer to Christ. Christ is complete and perfect, and continuing these traditions and ceremonies can imply some imperfection in Christ. Indeed these philosophers often question whether the Son of God actually came "bodily", in the flesh. The philosophy of Jewish tradition and ceremony is imperfect in contrast to Christ, for no amount of keeping these can contrast with Christ who kept the Law perfectly without needing these traditions and ceremonies. Christ alone is sufficient for salvation and perfect in knowledge. We need not seek after any hidden knowledge in Jewish tradition or keep ritualistic ceremonies like the Gnostics did in order to be saved. Indeed, how can anything compare with Christ in whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"? The "vain deceit" or empty deception of philosophy cannot compare with the "fullness" of Christ who thus makes us "complete" in Him, He who is "the head of all principality and power" and has conquered all enemies including sin and death.

Do you yearn for the completeness of Christ or the empty philosophy of the world? Every time I read travel webpages and blogs, I am appalled at the increasing number of people who travel for 'spiritual' purposes, to visit mystical temples and remote sanctuaries and spend days there meditating on the philosophies taught. There seem to be many who are searching for answers in this sin-sick world, but they are all seeking it their own way, finding whichever philosophy and environment gives them the greatest 'peace'. Dear teen, yearn instead for the completeness of Christ, who gives the answer to every problem in this world. Yes, every. Philosophy cannot answer satisfactorily why death and disasters occur, but Christ does. Philosophy cannot answer satisfactorily how to cleanse oneself of sins committed and the punishment deserved, but Christ does. Every question that philosophy tries to answer, Christ already has the answer. You have His Word in your hand. Just search for it, not with indexes or search engines, but through the Holy Spirit.

THOUGHT: Do I have friends who are also searching for answers to life's questions?

PRAYER: May the Holy Spirit guide me to the answers that have always been in His Word.

Colossians 2:11-12
Memorise Colossians 2:12
"...circumcision made without hands..."

DO YOU KNOW YOU ARE CIRCUMCISED?

Paul continues in Colossians 2:11-12 "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." Under the Old Testament law, circumcision was a sign of the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 17:11), whereby it was a sign and seal of the faith that they had in God (Romans 4:11). Physical circumcision also signified the sanctification of the heart (e.g. Deuteronomy 10:16), whereby through it, one is "putting off the body of the sins of the flesh". As they did so, they looked forward to the coming of Christ, where through His blood all their sins would be cleansed forever. Thus it was an ordinance that was only meant for the saints of the Old Testament. However, after the advent of Jesus Christ, some Jewish false teachers still insisted that one must be circumcised in order to be saved. In contrast, Paul tells us that we are circumcised by a different kind of circumcision, which is that of Christ. This is the circumcision of the heart as opposed to only the outward flesh or foreskin. This "circumcision made without hands" happens at the time of salvation, when Christ baptizes us with the Holy Spirit. Our old creature dies ("buried with him"), so that God will raise us up as new creatures sanctified by Christ, just as God first raised Christ. This spiritual baptism must not be confused with water baptism, which happens after salvation and is an outward sign of an inward faith. Water baptism is what Christians in the New Testament do to demonstrate the faith that they have in the Lord, and symbolize the purity that they have through Christ, and it parallels circumcision in the OT.

Dear teen, do you realize you do not have to obey your body's sinful desires and lusts, because Christ has circumcised your heart? While you will not have any physical evidence of this circumcision because it is "made without hands", if you have genuinely believed in Christ as your personal Savior, then by faith you know this circumcision is there. Therefore live your life knowing you are a new creature, no longer a slave to the old nature, and when sin tempts you, remind yourself that Christ has circumcised you. Whilst you may not be physically circumcised, we have been spiritually cleansed by the blood of Christ, and thus we must remind ourselves daily that we are forever His, and must pursue sanctification, to be more like Christ each day.

THOUGHT: How can I remind myself daily I am circumcised by Christ?

PRAYER: May I always remember I am circumcised by Christ.

TUESDAY, MAY 14

Colossians 2:13
Memorise Colossians 2:13

"...you, being dead in your sins...hath he quickened together with him..."

ARE YOU THANKFUL FOR YOUR SANCTIFICATION?

Colossians 2:13 reads "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses." Before our salvation, we were all spiritually dead. This was the result of sin that separated us from God, and condemned us to eternal death. Being dead, there was no way that we could revive ourselves. As uncircumcised Gentiles who knew nothing of the law, Ephesians 2:12 says we were, "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:" But by the grace and mercies of God, we, like the Colossian Christians, have been made alive together with Christ, and have had all our sins forgiven. This is a great privilege, for by ourselves, there was nothing we could have done to contribute to our salvation. Therefore having this new life in Christ, they were told that they should not return to the old Jewish traditions and ceremonies that did not apply to them anyway. They were now "quickened together with Him", made spiritually alive. Even though the Gentiles had never known the law and were living in sin, Christ nonetheless has forgiven all their sins. Uncircumcision is therefore no hindrance to Gentiles becoming Christians, since Christ has forgiven all sins, so these Gentile believers should not seek to be circumcised. Instead, they should seek to be more and more sanctified in Christ, to seek to be alive in Christ, and dead to sin.

We have constant reminders to sanctify yourself: weekly through Lord's Day worship services, daily if your parents are more than nominal Christians, constantly if you are reading His Word regularly. If you however treat all these as boring obligations to endure through, then something is very wrong: all these should remind you that you are now a new creature and you must strive to be more Christ-like each day. Something is very wrong especially if you find worship services boring, because every element of the worship, whether it is corporate prayer, the reading and preaching of God's Word, the singing of hymns based on God's Word etc., all are calling you towards sanctification and pointing you to Christ, and if you are finding all this boring then you are likely not wishing to be sanctified in the first place.

THOUGHT: What is my attitude like towards QT?

PRAYER: May I be thankful and not dismissive for these constant reminders.

Colossians 2:14
Memorise Colossians 2:14
"...blotting out the handwriting of ordinances..."

DO YOU THINK CHRIST GIVES YOU RESTRICTION OR LIBERTY?

Paul goes on in Colossians 2:14 "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." When Christ saved us, one of the effects of that salvation was that we are no longer under the law, but now free to become servants of God. Ordinances (in Greek 'dogma') mean decrees; these ordinances that were against us are all the Jewish rites and ceremonies. Because we could never keep them perfectly, these ordinances are thus burdensome to us. These ordinances were all in writing, the Mosaic Law as a whole having being preserved in handwriting, and this 'black and white' would serve as evidence to convict those who broke the Law. Handwriting in ink can be blotted out through the use of water (e.g. Numbers 5:23), and thus these ordinances can be totally removed by an external force. Christ who kept all these ordinances perfectly for our sakes is the one who "took it out of the way", meaning totally removed it. "Nailing it to his cross" drives home the fact that the obligation to keep such burdensome ordinances ceased with Christ's death for us. As a result, we who could never have kept these ordinances perfectly now need not bear such heavy burden. All this showed another error of the false teachers who argued for the observance of such ordinances.

Do you think Christ gives you restriction or liberty? Do understand that Christ through His life and death has bought you freedom from eternal death and freedom from your previous master, sin. Christ now gives you freedom to do anything within the boundaries of righteousness, for we are now servants of righteousness, able to glorify Him in gratefulness and love for what He has done for you. Previously, all our works were as filthy rags, and there was nothing we could do, but to sin. Now, we are free to not sin, and serve the Lord, and have our works accepted by Him. There are many avenues of service open to you in church, and you do well to seek His will to know which of these avenues you should choose. The Jews had many foods they could not consume; we Christians are only restricted from eating blood and food offered to idols, but are free to consume everything else. Only an ungrateful person would think of such boundaries as restrictions. Are you ungrateful? Worse, are you complaining about Christianity being restrictive because you want to sin? Adam and Eve had so many choices of fruit and herb in the Garden of Eden, but they still desired the one choice of the forbidden fruit; do you desire forbidden fruit?

THOUGHT: Am I yearning to be free to sin?

PRAYER: May I rejoice in Christian liberty.

Colossians 2:15
Memorise Colossians 2:15
"...triumphing over them in it..."

DO YOU KNOW THAT CHRIST HAS TRIUMPHED OVER ALL YOUR ENEMIES?

Paul goes on in Colossians 2:15 "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it." The word spoiled in this verse is from a different Greek word from Colossians 2:8; it means Christ totally destroyed every false teacher and every other enemy. He triumphs over all His enemies openly, just like a victor in his home city victory parade. Indeed the emblem of His victory is the cross, for it is through His death that He gained victory over the grave. See how the greatest tragedy in history turns out to be the greatest victory instead! Paul thus shows in Colossians 2:13-15 what Christ has done for us:

1. He has given us spiritual life;
2. He has forgiven all our trespasses;
3. He has blotted out the ordinances against us; and
4. He has triumphed over all our enemies.

What a wonderful saviour we have!

Truly God's ways are higher than our ways. As long as we are faithful to Him, we too have victory in Christ. Even death is not a victory for our enemies. Just as the death on the cross was His triumph not His downfall, when we die for Christ, we too have the hope of victory over death and the sure hope of our future resurrection. Remember, Christ is already the victor, and has triumphed over all our enemies! Therefore in this life, we too can lead a victorious Christian life, and not fear what man can do to us. I remember one colleague of mine who arranged many meetings with my very busy boss on Sundays to discuss work. When my boss suggested I do so as well, I declined as Sundays were totally for Christ. When he hinted promotion would come faster to my colleague because of that, I replied that I did my best for the company every other day of the week, and if my colleague wanted to do even more by using Sundays, that was his choice, but my Sundays were for my Lord. My colleague did eventually get promoted faster, but I was never unhappy about it; rather, I rejoiced that I did not let God down. All glory to God!

THOUGHT: Faith is the victory that overcomes the world!

PRAYER: May I remember Christ already is the Victor.

Colossians 2:16-17
Memorise Colossians 2:16-17
"...let no man therefore judge you..."

SHOULD YOU CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS?

Colossians 2:16-17 reads "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. " A holyday is an anniversary of one of the various feasts, like the Passover. The new moon is the first day of the month (Numbers 28:11). The Sabbath days include the weekly Jewish Sabbath from Friday dusk to Saturday dusk, and the Sabbath years the 7th year and the 50th year (Leviticus 25). The false Jewish teachers insisted that Christians were to observe these ceremonies, the "rudiments of the world". The problem with meat and drink was that some were abstaining from meat and drink in pretense of holiness, thinking that abstinence is pleasing to God. Since Christ has come, Jewish dietary laws are no longer applicable to Christians. The word "shadow" in Greek is "skia", meaning sketch: these ceremonies and laws are only like an outline but not the "body" or substance of the actual. They were observed to point them forward to Christ, as they looked ahead to the coming of the Messiah who would be their perfect atonement once and for all. But note Christ has already come. By continuing to observe these ceremonies, they were in effect saying that Christ had not yet come. The Passover was a type of Christ, but we believers do not need to keep it for we keep the Lord's Supper instead, looking back at the sacrifice of Christ. Since Christians are freed by Christ from observing these ceremonies as mentioned in verses 16-17, no man has the power to impose such ceremonies as a burden.

In our churches today, controversies have arisen as to whether Christians should celebrate days like Easter and Christmas. In the Bible, the only day of the week we are commanded to observe by assembling in church is the Lord's Day. While no man can judge you therefore if you do not wish to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas or come for the Christmas Praise service, knowing the date of December 25 is not of Christian origin, the fact remains that Christmas is a wonderful opportunity for you to invite unbelieving friends and loved ones to church to listen to God's Word preached about the true meaning of Christmas. You are certainly answerable to Christ if you skip Christmas Praise service in favor of a Christmas party elsewhere, since you are stumbling others who know you are a Christian but yet appears to celebrate Christmas no different from the way the world does.

THOUGHT: Not being answerable to man does not mean not answering to God.

PRAYER: May I glorify God in my choices.

ARE YOU EASILY FOOLED BY FALSE HUMILITY?

Paul specifically attacks the Gnostics in Colossians 2:18 "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind." The Gnostics worshipped angels as they assume angels (being God's messengers) possess hidden knowledge from God, which is what Gnostics seek. They also claim that God is too great to be approached directly for this knowledge, and thus they worship angels for being mediators between them and God. This worship of angels beguiles men by the temptation of being an apparently privileged, superior Christian for possessing this hidden knowledge, and become "vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind", instead of having a spiritual mind that is humbly dependent on the Holy Spirit to give understanding. Desiring such hidden knowledge is tantamount to "intruding" into God's secrets, into things God deliberately ensures man "hath not seen" i.e. not visible to the eye of mortals, compared to what God openly wants you to discover. The words beguile and reward are actually one word in Greek, meaning defrauding of one's prize. Some who are thus beguiled are deprived of salvation, when they believe in a false gospel that hidden knowledge saves rather than Christ alone. The false teachers will use "voluntary humility", or intentional modesty, giving the false impression of great reverence for divine things e.g. that the Great God can only be approached through angels. This false humility will all the more beguile men into believing these false teachers, making these teachers extremely dangerous to the flock.

Are you easily fooled by false humility? Remember that not every one that appears humble is truly humble, for they may be depreciating themselves solely to gain your admiration that such a gifted individual is not puffed up. I remember one such very rich individual who volunteered to serve in the visitation ministry, and condescended to visit various members in spite of the fact that his time was valuable. In so doing he earned admiration from many for his apparent selflessness. It was only later he was revealed as a wolf in sheep's clothing, as someone who only appeared humble in order to gain favour and praise from others. When a problem arose in the church, he had fooled enough members to stand by his side to go against the church!

THOUGHT: Is it surprising that false teachers would put on false humility?

PRAYER: May I learn not to be fooled by false humility.

DO YOU ADMIRE MEGA-CHURCHES?

Paul continues to expose the Gnostics in Colossians 2:19 "And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." "Not holding the Head" means not acknowledging the only mediator between God and man is Christ, the Head of the church. In Him all knowledge resides and it is He who decides what is revealed. If one does not hold the Head, the body as a whole, as well as every part of the body loses nourishment, and the previously spiritually united body very quickly falls apart. Paul warns the church that if they do not acknowledge Christ as the only mediator and head of the church, but instead allows false teachers to introduce the false doctrine of the angels as mediators, then the church will decrease and fall apart. Indeed if false teachings remain unchecked, it will divide churches because it will polarize between those who hold to the truth, and those who fall prey to falsehood.

In the area of church growth, it is God who gives the increase ("increaseth with the increase of God") and He does so only to churches who abide in Christ, and not to those who have a low view of Christ. If such churches seem to prosper, this increase is not from God. The faithful church must place their faith in Christ, and never place faith on man instead. It is so tempting for parts of the body to not acknowledge the Head but rather usurp a superior status! Many mega-churches churches for example show admiration for their charismatic pastors but show little reverence for Christ in contrast. It is the charisma of man that has increased numbers, but this increase is not of God. Thus, never admire such churches for having such large congregations in such huge halls, and never think that so many people can't be wrong in choosing such a church to worship in. No doubt there are many sincere people in such churches, but they are sincerely wrong.

THOUGHT: It is always God who giveth the increase (1 Corinthians 3:17)

PRAYER: May my church always have a high view of Christ.

Colossians 2:20-23
Memorise Matthew 6:16
"...touch not; taste not; handle not..."

ARE YOU TRYING TO PLEASE GOD YOUR OWN WAY?

Many Pharisees fasted not to please God but to gain the admiration of men for such a tortured display of self-denial! Paul ends his warnings to the Colossian church by pointing out that through Christ they should be dead from Jewish ordinances, so they should not live as though they are still subject to them. Paul used the descriptions "Touch not; taste not; handle not" to show how absurd and extreme these ordinances were in the name of self-denial. The meat, drink and other things these ordinances govern will eventually be used up ("perish with the using"), and have nothing to do with the eternal kingdom of God. These ordinances are the product of man, not of God. The plural form of the word "doctrines" is used here to compare against the single doctrine of God. There is only one truth of God, but man cannot agree amongst themselves what is the correct way, hence "doctrines" (also Matthew 15:9, Mark 7:7, 1 Timothy 4:1, Hebrews 13:1). These false teachers ultimately only have an outward show of piety ("shew of wisdom") and worship in their own willful way ("will worship"), practicing worship contrary to what God strictly commands. Extreme self-denial hurts the body, so there is no value ("honour") in such things; it only satisfies man's desire for pride and self-righteousness.

Ultimately this is the problem with such extremism; the person does not really do all this to please God but to please himself or gain admiration from his fellow man instead. To them, Jesus warns: "they have their reward" (e.g. Matthew 6:16). I remember one teen that similarly went to the extreme. She took pride in the fact that she did not watch any TV at all; perchance that she might see something sinful by mistake. She later joined a church that is famous for such extremism. When I talked to her, it was clear she had a certain pride in being able to maintain such a discipline, and was self-righteous in pointing out that others were not as holy as she was. While she appeared holy, she really did all this for herself, assuming that she deserved extra points from God for doing over and above what God calls us to do. In so doing, she was not only stumbling others with her unchristian attitude, but it would be very discouraging to others when they try to follow her and impose such standards on themselves as well. When they realize that it is impossible to achieve such Pharisaical perfection by their own strength, they may just give up and become just nominal Christians and never seek after true holiness and sanctification.

THOUGHT: Do I tend towards one extreme in holiness?

PRAYER: May I follow God's appointed way of worship, not my way.

Colossians 3:1
Memorise Colossians 3:1
"...seek those things which are above..."

HOW OFTEN DO YOU THINK ABOUT HEAVEN?

Having completed his warnings against false teachers in chapter 2, Paul proceeds to teach the Colossian church about progressive sanctification. This is a new section in which he gives the practical applications for all that he has taught them in the first two chapters. Starting with Colossians 3:1, he exhorts them: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." The word 'if" tells us plainly that salvation comes before sanctification: there is no point talking about how to turn over a new leaf if one is not saved in the first place. We who are saved i.e. risen with Christ (see Colossians 2:12), must then strive to become more and more like Christ. We must therefore not just acknowledge Christ as Savior, but also as our Lord, who has risen before us and is now sitting at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. Since our Lord is in heaven, we too must seek Him and His heavenly kingdom, rather than be concerned with the vain and temporal things of this world. We must worship God the way He wants, not the way we desire or man desires of us. Our motive for holiness is not to appear holy before man, but because Christ is our role model. We who one day will rise up to heaven should plan for our heavenly home in eternity, rather than be concerned for our temporal life and abode here.

I wonder how many of us truly seek the kingdom of heaven after we are saved. Before we are saved, we are concerned about whether we have a place in heaven. Yet after knowing that our place there is certain, we then seem to think about heaven less. I am always encouraged by the brethren in our Golden Years Care Group (fellowship group for members in their senior years), for their thoughts are often about heaven. In contrast, I very seldom hear about heaven from those in our Teens ministry. Yes, young people will sometimes talk about Christ and becoming more like Him, but they seem to be far more interesting in things here on Earth. How much do you desire to see the face of Christ your Savior, and to be reunited with all your saved friends and loved ones who have gone before you? How often do you tell your unsaved friends and loved ones about heaven and hell? How often do you think that your days here in this mortal life are numbered, and you look forward instead to eternal life?

THOUGHT: How come I do not think much about heaven?

PRAYER: May I look forward to heaven more and more each day.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 22

Colossians 3:2
Memorise Colossians 3:2
"...set your affection on things above..."

ARE YOU MORE INTERESTED IN HEAVEN OR IN EARTH?

Paul continues on the same theme of heaven in Colossians 3:2 "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." Understand first of all that things above and things on the earth cannot go together. Things above are of God; things on the earth are of men. Things above point us to God; things on the earth point us away from God. Things which are above are eternal; things on the earth will perish. Things above give us hope eternal; things on the earth give us only temporal worry or pleasure. Paul drives home the point with the phrase "set your affection", which is one word in Greek, "phroneo", meaning to intensely be thinking about a certain thing. This intensity implies that there can be only one thing your set your affection upon, either heavenly or earthly, but never both. You can only be planning to lay up treasure in heaven, or gain wealth on earth, but not both. You can only desire to worship God in heaven, or to idolize people or things on earth. Note from previous verses that Paul is not advocating a complete ascetic lifestyle. There is nothing wrong with material comforts, as long as one puts the Kingdom of Heaven first in all things.

So what gets you more excited, church camps which are like a foretaste of heaven, or holidays to places with worldly pleasures? What do you look forward to each week, Sundays for church and worship or just the weekend for fun and recreation? What gets you more concerned, not having served God enough or not having studied enough? What are you more minded about, having a regular QT schedule or having a regular TV schedule? What do you like do online, to encourage your friends from God's Word and listen to an online sermon, or play the latest Facebook games? Dear teen, I hope you realize it really is impossible to be setting your affection on both things above and things below at the same time. You have to decide whether you want to live with eternity's values in view, or live with worldly cares and pleasures in lieu?

THOUGHT: If I mind earthly things, I am no different from non-Christians.

PRAYER: May I see how temporal worldly cares and pleasures truly are.

Colossians 3:3
Memorise Colossians 3:3
"...your life is hid with Christ..."

SHOULD YOU EVER CONTEMPLATE SUICIDE?

Paul gives the reason we should have heavenly affections in Colossians 3:3 "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." As Christians, we are dead to worldly cares and pleasures, unlike how we were before we believed in Christ, when we were before consumed with earthly worries and indulged in sinful desires. Paul thus continues to demonstrate that things above and things below do not mix: we are dead to this world, just as we live in Christ. Paul uses an interesting word "hid", in Greek "krupto", which carries the notion of being concealed, where something valuable is hidden in a secure place. Since Christ is in the presence of God, our eternal life in heaven is thus secure, and nothing can change that status. In times of despair we might think our life worthless to ourselves or to others, but to God it is valuable enough that He gave His only begotten Son to live and die for us, and so we must realize this life of ours is of value. We thus must remember we are ambassadors of this heavenly kingdom, and must live for heaven, and not for ourselves.

The unbelieving student who has failed his exams and imagines his future in tatters might fall into depression. In the depths of his despair, he might even consider suicide. On the other hand, the Christian student in the same situation knows that he always has eternal hope in heaven no matter what happens in this life. He seeks God's will for what to do next, and knows that God is always in control. Remember that your life is hid with Christ. No matter how bad things can get in this life, we always have our heavenly hope secure in Christ. Remember that your life is not yours for you to throw it away in despair any time you want to. No. Your life is precious and belongs to Christ. He has paid the price to redeem you from eternal destruction. Your purpose is life is now to glorify God, and that through your life others will glorify your Father in heaven. Whether you face failure or success in this world, we can always praise God and glorify Him, for He always has a perfect plan for your life, which is secure with Christ in God.

THOUGHT: No disaster in this world can diminish the hope of heaven.

PRAYER: May I realize every day that my life is hid with Christ.

Colossians 3:4
Memorise Colossians 3:4
"...then shall ye also appear with him in glory..."

WHAT HAVE YOU ACCOMPLISHED SO FAR THAT IS ETERNAL?

Colossians 3:4 reads "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." The security of our place in heaven is due to Christ, who is our life i.e. who gives us new life, when before we were spiritually dead. There is nothing we need to do to add to this salvific work. We are hid in Christ, waiting for that day when our hope will turn into reality and our faith will turn to sight. When Christ comes again to judge the world, we shall then appear with Him, and come before His beta judgment seat and be rewarded for those of our works that are eternal and done with heavenly motives. It will be a time of glory, for we will see our Lord in all his glory and splendor, and we ourselves will be given glorified bodies, incorruptible and immortal. This should thus spur us to set our affections on things above, instead of things below.

I thank God for this opportunity to serve Him in writing these daily devotional articles, that wherever I write not for my glory but for the edification of you all, I pray Christ will deem my work as faithful. I pray that if Christ takes you home now, you already have accomplished works of faith even at your tender age. Please don't say to Him you have achieved 10 A1s at O level; it is not what you have accomplished on this earth that counts, for such increase are of the Lord. What is important is to be able to achieve these things in a manner that is glorifying to God and not glorifying to you. Do you study God's Word with even more intensity than you studied your academic books? Do you commit everything to Him in prayer all the time or only during exams? Do you pray for others around you or pray only for yourself? Do you study for selfish motives like desiring admiration from others, feeling good about yourself or even to just get parents off your back, or do you study to increase in wisdom so that you can discover and fulfill God's will for your life?

THOUGHT: Things done in secret shall be made known.

PRAYER: May I be faithful in whatever I do.

Colossians 3:5
Memorise Colossians 3:5
"...mortify therefore your members..."

DO YOU ALLOW YOUR BODY TO BE EXPOSED TO SIN?

The instruction in Colossians 3:5 is to "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth..." What are these earthly members (parts) for you? It is the flesh that engages in all these abominable sins of the world. We are to take strong measures to deal very harshly with sin. The action commanded is for us to mortify, meaning to put to death, to destroy its strength!

The first of these earthly affections, fornication, usually comes through tempting the eyes, and therefore we must shut our eyes to anything that tempts us to sexual sin. I thus advise teens be very careful of your choices in media and entertainment. Don't be foolish to think that mortification is not necessary, that you are strong enough to look at such scenes and not feel tempted to sin! As long as we are in this mortal body, we can be tempted to sin if we allow our members to be exposed to sin. The second of these affections is uncleanness, meaning moral impurity, which covers all other sexual sins, too many to list. The internet today is a minefield of dangerous temptations especially with regards to sexual immorality. I advise teens to always view their computer within eyesight of other family members instead of hiding away from sight. Inordinate affection describes sinful, unnatural passions, and refers to one type of sexual sin specifically mentioned, meaning homosexuality (Romans 1:26). In many single gender secondary schools today, homosexuality rears its ugly head. One should avoid having close physical contact with another member of the same gender behind closed doors, in order to avoid surfacing these unnatural feelings. Evil concupiscence, or longing after forbidden fruit, is often the product of first tasting such fruit. I often advise those considering courtship never to kiss until after marriage, for the passions that are inflamed cannot be easily quenched. Covetousness is the love of money, the idol of so many. This pride of life comes though temptation of the heart, where we lust after what money can bring. While money is not in itself evil, it is the love of money that is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10). We therefore need to guard our ears by not exposing it to the ways of this world and what money can buy: don't become obsessed with always having the latest gadgets or the trendiest fashions, holidaying in the most exotic locations, or enjoying the best luxuries that money can bring you.

In summary, dear teen, deal harshly with yourselves, flee from all temptation! Turn away from evil!

THOUGHT: Why does God's Word specifically speak of youthful lusts?

PRAYER: "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?"

WHO DO YOU ADMIRE?

Colossians 3:6 reads "For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience." Paul tells us all the sins of the preceding verse stems from the rebellious nature of man that cannot help but disobey the laws of God. They are not God's children, and are thus called the children of disobedience. For having such earthly affections, God is angry and will punish these sinners according to His wrath. Paul mentions this judgment to the believing Christians of Colossae as a stern warning to them that they must never turn back to these earthly affections. In effect he is saying, don't admire these worldly lovers of pleasure and do not allow your body to be tempted to follow their ways, for they will one day have to face up to the consequence of their sin. The wrath of God is a fearsome thing, and certainly not something anyone would like to trifle with!

Dear teen, are you sometimes tempted to admire the people of the world, and the apparent freedom that they have to indulge in the pleasures of the flesh? Do we find their dressing 'cool', and their lifestyle choices enviable? With the mass proliferation of social media like Facebook and Instagram we are exposed to so much temptation, even from our friends and peers, to be like the world and less like Christ. Do you sometimes wish that you did not have so many rules and guidelines to follow, just because you are a Christian? Yes, the majority of the world does not know God nor obey His Word. But just because everyone does it, does not make it right, not does it make it acceptable to God. If you fear God, you must never mimic, nor even admire the children of disobedience. Realize that their end, is one that is not enviable at all, for God has promised that He will bring His vengeance on these ungodly people. It is best to mortify your body, and look away if you happen to see any examples of earthly affection, rather than examine the pictures in wonder and allow this to turn to admiration.

THOUGHT: Who do I admire?

PRAYER: May I be taught to admire the godly only, never the ungodly.

WHOM DO YOU CHOOSE AS FRIENDS?

Paul continues in Colossians 3:7 "In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them." He reminds them that in the past, before they became believers, they used to walk and live like the children of disobedience. They were amongst them in the world, and were no different from them. Their way of thinking, their conduct, their desires and motivations were all selfish and sinful like the world! But that was in the past. Now, it is no longer like that. They walked like them and lived amongst them before, but now they have been saved and cleansed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ! They were new creatures, with new affections and desires that are of things above and not on the earth. The life that they now have, must no longer be affected by the environment around them. They must now distance themselves from all those who continue to live in sin, for the Christian no longer entertains these earthly affections in his life. They must now know how to be separate, to no longer be influenced by these sins, and also the people who so freely indulge in them.

Many times, the friendships that we have are very circumstantial. Whoever we happen to sit close to in class, or be in the same society or sport in, or just through a chance meeting or mutual friendship, we find people whom we can 'click' with, and a friendship is formed. Young people are often very affected by friends: when their friends admire those who dress cross gender, they too feel compelled to go with the flow, even when the Holy Spirit pricks their conscience. When a lifelong friend confesses to you privately he or she is addicted to homosexuality and cannot break away, you compassionately listen and empathize; you do not judge for fear of losing that friendship, and soon you too are tempted into the same inordinate affection. Read Psalm 1:1 and realize that who you keep company with will affect you: their conversation ("counsel"), behavior ("walk") and the places they frequent ("seat"). You know the truth of God's Word; pray for the strength to break off from these worldly friends, and pray for God to teach you how to choose friends wisely, by looking at whether their conversation, behavior and places they frequent is godly or worldly. Better to befriend someone who is socially awkward but otherwise godly, then to be befriended by the worldly who uses the ways of the world to attract you.

THOUGHT: Did I choose my friends or my friends choose me?

PRAYER: May I have the strength to break away from the world and worldly friends.

Colossians 3:8-9
Memorise Ephesians 4:26
"...ye have put off the old man..."

ARE YOU ANGRY WITH YOUR PARENTS?

Colossians 3:8-9 tells us "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds." The clear message here is that it is not enough for Christians to only put away the grievous earthly affections listed previously. We must strive towards progressive sanctification, with Christ as our role model. These are therefore some sins that also need to be put away. These are sins of the passion that must be dealt with within the heart of every believer. We must realize that they are indeed sins that are wrong, and pray that the Lord will help you to overcome them. It is therefore a command given, that we are to put off, to lay aside all these sins.

Do note that all these passions are easily interlinked, and depending on the situation, one passion can easily lead to another. One turns anger turn into the fierceness of wrath by constantly thinking about the anger (Ephesians 4:26) instead of forgiving the person. As teens, I know that one source of anger and resentment is often in your relationship with your parents. Do you easily forgive your parents, or do you harbor resentment against them for never seeming to understand you? Anger can also turn into malice when we want to get back at those who made us angry in the first place. Do you give snide or sarcastic replies to parents, or do you always reply them with due respect no matter what? Anger can turn into blasphemy when we get angry with God for our circumstances, and we start to profane the name of God. Do you blame or curse God for giving you such parents who always seem to want to know what you are up to, or do you always thank God for your parents in spite of their faults? Anger can turn into filthy language when you feel you need to express exactly how unhappy you are to those around you. Have you ever used swear words against parents, or used such language when complaining about parents to your friends? Anger can finally tempt you to lie to others. Have you ever lied to parents just so that they will stop bothering you, or do you tell them the truth no matter what your punishment will be? How you think of parents is just one example of the danger of letting passions run riot over your life.

THOUGHT: I must put these passions away before my Christian testimony is destroyed.

PRAYER: May I be more like Christ, and less of myself.

Colossians 3:10
Memorise Philippians 3:14
"...renewed in knowledge..."

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU ARE GROWING SPIRITUALLY?

Paul exhorts in Colossians 3:10 "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." Paul uses the phrase "put on" to contrast with the "put off" in the previous verse, as well as "new man" to contrast with the "old man". The tense used for the word 'put on' is the same as 'put off' in verse 8 to shows that the new man we have is put on once and for all, and the old man should no longer be with us anymore. The most interesting phrase here though is "renewed in knowledge": the charismatics would perhaps expect 'renewed in spirit' as the process of sanctification, but it is renewal in knowledge instead. In Greek, the word for knowledge here is "epignosis", describing experiential knowledge. Sanctification therefore involves knowing more and more about Christ each day through our walk with him. Christ is "the image of him that created him", the image of God who created the new man. Paul deliberately uses this phrase to once again point out the error of the Gnostics in Chapter 2 that they should be seeking this knowledge rather than the hidden knowledge they claim must be sought. Finally, note that the word for "new" in Greek here is "neos", meaning new in time, while the word for "renewed" in Greek here is the compound of the word "kainos", meaning new in quality. The point is that this is a new man must still undergo renewal and growth to someone better.

Are you spiritually growing? You know you are spiritually growing if you are becoming more and more like Christ in terms of experiential knowledge, and less and less of your old man. When I started attending Calvary Pandan, I had opposition from my non-Christian parents, which reached its peak when I refused to attend university revision classes that were held on Sundays. I soon learnt that by so honoring God, He would deliver me through trial. When my exam results showed improvement even though I did not attend these Sunday revisions, my parents stopped opposing my attending church. Christ always honored His Father, and so I am still learning more and more in knowledge and experience about how I should honor my Father, patterned after how Christ did so.

THOUGHT: Am I more like Christ or more like my old man?

PRAYER: May I press toward the mark of the high calling in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 3:11
Memorise Acts 4:13
"...Christ is all, and in all..."

DO YOU LOOK DOWN ON PEOPLE AROUND YOU?

Colossians 3:11 reads "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all." Still pointing out the error of the false teachers, this time in their advocating observance of ceremonies, Paul points out that Christian sanctification and perfection does not require such Jewish ceremonies whether one is a Jew or not, and whether one is circumcised as the Jews are or not. These ceremonies do not apply whether one is uncultured, whether one is from as far away lands as the Scythians were, or whether one was a servant or a free man. Christ alone kept the law perfectly for all man ("is all") and once any man is saved Christ dwells in him ("in all") and we are thus all equal, sinners saved by grace. Just in case some misunderstand from the previous verse that Christianity favors those who are knowledgeable, Paul deliberately uses the examples of Barbarians and Scythians to point out that saving knowledge is given by the grace of God to whomever He elects. The Jews in Acts 4:13 perceived Peter and John to be unlearned and ignorant, but God used both to be His witnesses in Judaea and to become writers of Holy Scripture. God is no respecter of persons, and chooses His elect irrespective of background.

There is a tendency for teens who study in elite schools to look down on those from neighborhood schools and in general to those who are not as intelligent as they are. I remember when I was in the army, there was a fellow soldier who had only O level qualifications, but he was a spiritual giant in Christ compared to me, knowing so much more about Christ experientially that I was ashamed. Don't laugh at teens in church just because they cannot spell words like 'circumcision', and never be ashamed to call him brother. May you realize that we are all are equal before God, and so do not envy those who are more intelligent and think they will be more knowledgeable than you are. Remember spiritual growth is in experiential knowledge, not head knowledge, and indeed there are some who grow only in the head and not in the spirit.

THOUGHT: Instead of comparing with others, may I encourage them to grow as well.

PRAYER: May I remember we are all sinners saved by grace.

Colossians 3:12
Memorise Acts 10:34
"...as the elect of God..."

HOW WELL DO YOU TREAT FELLOW TEENS IN CHURCH?

Paul exhorts in Colossians 3:12 "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering." Just as in Colossians 3:10, Paul again uses the phrase "put on", and listed out certain attributes that all believers must have in their relationships one with another. After all, we are all the elect of God, holy and beloved of Him. We have not done anything to earn this salvation we have, but God has nonetheless showered his mercy and grace so abundantly upon us. He thus calls us to show this same love, one to another.

"Bowels of mercies" means showing others bountiful mercies from deep down within oneself, and this is the most fundamental virtue for all the other virtues that Paul lists. Sincerity is critical: we must not just 'put on' a show of mercy, but it must be from our heart. Do you treat fellow teens with such mercy? Your friends may sometimes say or do wrong against you, yet we must be very merciful to one another instead of being vengeful at every wrong we suffer. In showing compassion, we must weep with them who weep in despair, and be ready to be there for them, rather than selfishly think we do not have the time to spare. "Kindness" has the connation of gentleness; instead of being harsh and critical like other teens in this world, we must be kind and gentle towards fellow Christians, especially those who are neglected. Paul uses the phrase "Humbleness of mind" to contrast with the "voluntary humility" he spoke of earlier. This humbleness must come from our mind, not something we pretend to show outwardly. To deal with others in "meekness" is to bite one's tongue and not get angry when others falsely accuse you or goad you, knowing God will right your wrong. When your friends or classmates tease you, do you snap at them, or do you quietly smile and respond in meekness? To have "longsuffering" towards others is to endure the faults of others. Do you avoid relating with those who are socially awkward, who are temperamental or have other quirks or idiosyncrasies that tend to alienate others? Again, remember that all believers are equal, sinners saved by grace, and we should not treat some worse than others, just as God is no respecter of persons.

THOUGHT: Should I wait for other teens to treat me well before I do so?

PRAYER: May I treat other teens as God wants me to, not as I feel I should.

SATURDAY, JUNE 1

Colossians 3:13
Memorise Ephesians 4:31-32
"...forbearing one another..."

ARE YOU ALWAYS PREPARED TO FORGIVE?

Paul continues exhorting how to treat Christian brethren in Colossians 3:13 "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." This exhortation applies for any one of us who has a quarrel or grievance against another brother. The word "forgiving" in Greek is "charizomai", which has the root word "charis", meaning grace, unmerited favour. To forgive is to show grace to others. That is why Paul says that just as you are sinners forgiven by grace, we need to forgive others by grace as well. We do not deserve to be forgiven by Christ, and thus we need to be prepared to forgive those who do not deserve forgiveness, otherwise we show we do not understand the meaning of grace in the first place. Even if our grievance against our brother stems from extreme hurt, we must be prepared to forgive our brother, since Christ forgave us for a far greater hurt against Himself. Note that this verse does not call us to forgive others when there is no repentance, just as Christ does not forgive sinners who do not repent. What this verse exhorts us to do is to freely forgive when the offending party acknowledges that he is wrong, and to always be prepared in our heart to forgive. If we do not do so, we risk allowing a spirit of bitterness to fester in our hearts (Ephesians 4:31-32).

The word "forbearing" in Greek has the connotation of holding up oneself against, to put up with someone difficult. We must learn tolerate the offensive behaviors of others, even though it can be very hard to do so. We must also not be so easily offended by other brethren, nor quickly retaliate against those who offend us, thus minimizing the chance of having grievances against others. Yet we must realize that all this only applies to personal disputes, and not to attacks on God's Name. Paul condemns the forbearing of false teachers in 2 Corinthians 11:4, using the same Greek word in a negative sense. We should not think our church leaders harsh when they vigorously defend God's Name when attacked. On the other hand, our own name is not worth anything in comparison to God's Name. So often the reason why we do not forbear or forgive is because we think our own 'valuable' name has been sullied. We must realize our sin of pride, and humbly realize all of us are the same: sinners saved by grace.

THOUGHT: Am I that proud to think my name is valuable?

PRAYER: May I have the spirit of forbearance and not be petty

ARE YOU A CHARITABLE PERSON?

Colossians 3:14 exhorts: "And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." This is the last of the three 'put ons' that Paul exhorts all to do: unlike the first in verse 10 which was in the past tense indicating we already have it, the latter two are in the present tense, meaning we must continually do it. The phrase "above all" does not indicate importance, but rather the logical order, that charity (meaning love in action) applies to every one of these virtues listed in the preceding two verses. Love is the bond that binds all the virtues together, like the hub of a bicycle wheel that binds all the spokes together which makes the entire wheel perfect and complete. Our goal of positional and progressive sanctification ("perfectness") requires charity to bind everything we do. This is why the greatest commandment can be summarized in the command to love God and our neighbours (Matthew 22:37-40). It is not possible to forgive without love, to show kindness without love, or to practice any true Christian virtue at all, without love. If we try to do so, it will come off as being very half-hearted and insincere. Charity is the mark of every true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, that we must all put on charity, for Jesus says by it, shall all man know that ye are my disciples (John 13:35). In fact, relate the definition of charity in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 to these virtues in Colossians 3:12-13 and you find much in common. For example, charity suffereth long (longsuffering); charity is kind (kindness); charity is not puffed up (humbleness of mind); charity beareth all things (forbearing).

Dear teen, examine yourself to see if you have charity in everything you do with fellow brethren. Remember to use the definition of charity in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 as your yardstick, not your own. When you show kindness to another teen, do you have any ulterior motive for doing so? If so, then you do not really have charity, for charity does not seek her own. When you show meekness to someone who falsely accuses you, in your heart do you still resent him and bear a grudge against him? If so, remember that charity thinketh no evil. Please don't think that forbearing means excusing others who are sinning, for charity rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth instead.

THOUGHT: Do I have true charity towards others?

PRAYER: May I use God's understanding of charity, not my own

MONDAY, JUNE 3

Colossians 3:15
Memorise Philippians 4:6-7
"...the peace of God rule in your hearts..."

DO YOU THANK GOD FOR PEACE IN YOUR CHURCH?

Paul exhorts the Colossians to "let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful". He instructs them on how they ought to relate to the brethren in the church, that the peace of God ought to be the guiding factor in all of their relationships. This world seeks to achieve world peace, but often by means that require spiritual compromise. For example, many seek peace by treating all religions as one, and thus attempt to eradicate religion as a source of conflict. However we know that there is only one God, and that it is certainly not Buddha or Krishna. No, the peace mentioned here is the peace of God that only believers possess (Romans 5:1), the peace that stems not only from knowing that we are reconciled to God, but the peace that comes from allowing the Holy Spirit to rule in every heart. It is thus an amazing peace that "passeth all understanding" (Philippians 4:7), because it causes very different individuals from all walks of life to be able to come together as a church "in one accord" (Acts 2:46). Thus as believers, we are now all one body in Christ, and there ought to be perfect unity between one another. Yes there may be disagreements and differences, but as we now all worship the same God, and called into the same body, we ought to then exist together in peace. Do also see that each believer is called to a specific church, just as Paul reminded the Colossian believers "which also ye are called in one body", and thus we should not leave church as the first option when we disagree with other brethren, but pray that the Holy Spirit may rule in every heart to resolve these differences.

Dear teen, how do you react when you have disagreement with other brethren? When I have had such disagreement with others, I find that after a time of corporate prayer, our differences can then be resolved. I testify that allowing the Holy Spirit to rule in our hearts will bring the peace of God to enable us to be one body in Christ. The problem is, do you rather rule your own heart? In which case, you are not allowing the peace of God to resolve this disagreement, and no godly outcome can result. Do you thank God for your church, and for the ministries that you are a part of? Do realize it is only by the Holy Spirit that individuals with different temperaments and gifts can come together as one body in Christ, for your spiritual benefit, so be thankful for this peace and unity in your church.

THOUGHT: Do you allow the peace of God to rule your heart?

PRAYER: I thank thee Lord for this church that thou has called me to.

Colossians 3:16
Memorise 2 Timothy 3:16
"...teaching and admonishing one another..."

DO THE SONGS THAT YOU SING TEACH AND ADMONISH YOU?

Colossians 3:16 is oft-quoted: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Paul exhorts us to let God's Word dwell in us; to inhabit us and reside in us.

The focus here is not only on the spoken Word, but also the Word expressed in song. It is human nature to sing, and the more our songs also reflect the Word, then surely the Word will stay in us all the more, leading us to wisdom in spiritual matters. There are three types of songs we can sing. Jewish Christians after conversion would still love to sing the 150 Psalms, and thus are not forbidden from doing so at all though no longer a Jew. Hymns are songs of praise to God that are meant for public worship. In contrast, spiritual songs are meant to be sung in private, not directly praising God but rather encouraging us Christians spiritually, but like hymns every lyric reflects God's Word. The purpose of such songs are to teach (doctrine, instruction in righteousness) and admonish (reproof, correction), just as 2 Timothy 3:16 states the function of the Word of God is, as shown in parenthesis. Songs can only perform these functions if they are sung to profit others (one another... singing with grace), and if they are sung both in tongue as well as in thought, and if they are sung to the Lord. If for example songs are sung to glorify the singer, the audience is not taught but is instead only entertained. If songs are only mouthed but not meant, they can hardly teach or admonish the singer.

I wonder whether you can honestly say that the songs that you sing teach and admonish you. Certainly secular songs almost never admonish us, for the world that buys such songs do not want to be admonished, for they love the darkness of sin. Secular songs seldom teach us: whatever little there is in the song that resembles Christian doctrine is drowned in a pool of worldliness and desire. I would rather let myself be taught and admonished by the hymn "I wonder, have I done my best for Jesus", then to let my heart be fed with lustful lyrics. I rather meditate upon the spiritual song "The Lord is My Shepherd", that through singing it teaches me even more about the words of Psalm 23 that I knew before, than to tap in rhythm to a seductive drum beat heralding ungodly lyrics. I would rather join in a wholehearted congregational singing of praises to Almighty God, than to marvel at gifted individuals for having gifted voices that croon worldly songs.

THOUGHT: Am I deluding myself by desiring both the secular and spiritual equally?

PRAYER: May my songs reflect my desire to walk worthy of the Lord.

Colossians 3:17
Memorise 1 Corinthians 10:31
"...do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..."

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE TO DO EVERYTHING IN THE NAME OF JESUS?

"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17) Having given various rules for holy living, rather than to give a long list rules for every possible decision, Paul gives a simple golden rule. This golden rule covers all aspects of our lives, whether it is in our studies, our relationships, our jobs, our recreation, etc. It covers everything that we do in life, the places we go, the things we do, the words we say, and even the thoughts that we have. The rule is to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. This means, first and foremost, to glorify Him in whatsoever we do, similar to the injunction in 1 Corinthians 10:31. It also means to do everything in His authority and His power (Philippians 2:10, Matthew 18:20), rather than in our own name or through our own wisdom. It also means that in everything we do, we are representing Christ, and bearing the title of Christian, and thus we must be always doing what Christ wants us to do as a testimony to the world (2 Timothy 2:19). When we end our prayers by invoking the name of Jesus, we are humbling ourselves in acknowledgment that the Lord Jesus alone is our Mediator; we cannot approach God directly except through Jesus Christ. We are also reminding ourselves to pray only for what the Lord Jesus wants to give us, for prayers in the will of God will certainly be answered. Finally, it also means to be thankful to God through Christ Jesus in everything that we do (Romans 1:8), for it is only by His grace that we can do anything at all.

I can imagine some of you thinking, do I even have to choose what food to order from the hawker center in the name of the Lord Jesus? Remember the injunction in 1 Corinthians 10:31 covers food and drink, so the answer is yes. Since we are representing Christ, we should not be eating blood. We should not be harming our body by over-indulgence in certain foods we crave. We should give thanks to God for the food, acknowledging all blessings ultimately came from God and we give Him the glory. Even if the food tastes ordinary, we should be grateful for the food He has provided for us and not complain, for if we cannot even accept bad tasting food, how can we endure greater trials for His Name's sake? While we need not spend so much time in making such decisions, our willingness to commit even such decisions to the glory of God reveals how much we care about the glory of God in our lives.

THOUGHT: How much of your life are you prepared to do in the name of Jesus?

PRAYER: May I understand fully what it means to do all in the name of Jesus.

DO YOU REALIZE HOW GOOD GOD'S LAW IS?

Paul now addresses particular groups, starting with Colossians 3:18-19 "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." As we can see even today, the problem with wives in this world is that they will struggle for authority with their husbands, even if they love these husbands. Paul reminds Christian wives that they must be different from the world, and willingly submit to their husbands, as long as it does not go against God's law. This is the order that we see between Christ and the Church, and every godly family that follows this law becomes a picture or illustration or that relationship. This also ensures order in the Christian family, and also puts pressure on the Christian husband to have good understanding of the law in order to lead. Similarly, the problem with husbands is their capacity to love more than one woman at a time, so Paul reminds them to love their wives. There is an added exhortation to not be bitter against wives, not to abuse their authority and order their wives around, but rather to appeal to God's law in a gentle, loving manner so that together these Christian parents can run the family in a godly manner.

Dear teen, do you realize that God's law is good? There is a tendency for teens to rebel against laws, thinking that they 'cramp your style', with many teens wishing they did not have to obey their parents. When Christian husbands and wives follow the injunctions above, virtually all the marital problems we see in the world today would no longer occur. God's law is good, and it will be best for you to follow it in all circumstances. For now, boys must make sure they study God's Word, for it must be their only source of authority to make decisions upon marriage. Girls must also study God's Word to be able to discern which young man has this moral authority and maturity that they can willingly submit to as husbands, for the only reason why she should submit is because God's Word says so. It is never too early to prepare for marriage, and know what are the God given roles within a family relationship. If we follow the law and abide by its commandments, we will never go wrong. Dear teen, submit to God, and His law, for He knows what is best for you.

THOUGHT: How much do I submit to God?

PRAYER: May I learn that God's law is always good.

DO YOU WANT TO PLEASE YOUR LORD?

Paul now addresses the children in Colossians 3:20-21: "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." Once again, God's law is good: families are problematic when children rebel. Thus Paul reminds children to obey parents, both father and mother, in all things (all lawful things, read Ephesians 6:1). This is to further maintain the order in the family: children obey their parents, the wife obeys her husband, and the husband obeys the Lord. Paul adds an incentive here: that such obedience by children is well pleasing to God. While disobedience to God's law brings all sorts of family issues, obedience will bring much blessing. Some might argue that their parents are too difficult, or feel that their parents don't understand them. Yet we must realize that God chose these parents to be authorities over us. Understand that we must obey parents not just because we love them but that in obeying them, we please God. With respect to fathers in this world, there is a tendency for them to provoke their children to wrath by the same authoritative manner that they use with wives, so Paul reminds Christian fathers to watch out for such provocative words or deeds, for that might discourage their Christian children, who may desire to obey their father's wishes but cannot handle the provocative manner in which he commands them around. The father that always makes unreasonable demands will soon drive the child to rebel in anger and despair. Conversely, the wise father will encourage the child and lovingly instruct him in the Word of God.

This is also an implied reminder to you teens that what most easily gets you to disobey is provocation, and thus you need to recognize exactly what provokes you and pray for temperance. For example, some teens are very sensitive to rebuke, without realizing that God's Word tells us submission to rebuke is essential (e.g. Proverbs 13:1). If your parents keep nagging at you to study, it is likely that you have not been doing so sufficiently (I hardly see a parent nagging a hardworking child to study, for fear of driving the child too hard). Some teens are sensitive to parents issuing orders to them, thinking that their poorly educated parents have no business doing so, and must be reminded of their sin of pride. You might argue that you normally do obey parents, but remember that the verse says "in all things" i.e. not just sometimes, when you feel like it, or when it is easy or convenient to, but in all things!

THOUGHT: Do you only sometimes or always obey your parents? Why?

PRAYER: May I please God by my continual obedience to parents.

Colossians 3:22
Memorise Colossians 3:22
"...not with eyeservice, as menpleasers..."

DO I TRY TO PLEASE MY TEACHER?

Paul now switches to servants in Colossians 3:22 "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers..." The word "servants" here refers not just to slaves or workers, but to those subject to forms of authority over them, apart from authorities in the family which have already been dealt with in the previous verses. For example, we all serve the country of which we are citizens of, and are subject to the authority of the government. Teens, realize that even though you may not yet be working for wages, at school you are subject to the authority of teachers and the law of the headmaster.

We are to obey our masters in all things according to the flesh. Note obedience is not in every area of your life, for there are limits to the power which these authorities have over you. For example, your school teacher has no right to dictate what your religion is, and cannot require you to stay overnight in school without getting permission from your parents. We are never to obey if that causes us to sin or compromise in the faith. However, when your school teacher gives you copious amounts of homework, you must do your best to complete it, even if it means giving up your leisure time. It is never right to do things like to be defiant to teachers, copying homework or cheating in exams. Your teachers are an authority that the Lord has placed over you, and therefore we must do the best we can to obey them in the Lord.

Next, we should never obey with eyeservice, as menpleasers do. This refers to those who seem to work extra hard and do whatever the master wants when the master is around, but refrain from doing so when he is not around to notice. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with pleasing masters, but what God frowns on are those who place pleasing masters as their principal focus, as if all future reward are decided by how much one pleases these masters alone. These people are hypocrites, and obey for their own selfish causes. Thus, do not envy those who strive to be teacher's pets, or those who pretend to work hard only when people notice. More importantly, do not be like these worldly students, for others will then question whether you truly treat Jesus as your Lord, when you focus so much on your worldly master instead.

THOUGHT: What instances in my life have I been a 'teacher pleaser'?

PRAYER: May others see Jesus as my ultimate Master.

HOW DO YOU REGARD YOUR HOMEWORK?

Paul continues his exhortation to servants: "...but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." (Colossians 3:22c-23) Perhaps the greatest disservice the servant can do to their masters is to have mixed motives: apart from the motive of 'currying favor' as mentioned earlier, employees sometimes work only the bare minimum, or use working time mainly for their own pleasure. Is it not hypocritical to take a whole day's wage, when one has spent most of the day on personal pursuits? These hypocrites do so thinking that no one notices, but the Christian worker knows that his omniscient God notices him, and he fears God. The Christian must be different from the world. Even if the boss is a bad boss, the Christian will do his best. The Christian does so not because he has to, but because he wants to, as he realizes his ultimate master is the Lord, not man. Thus he puts God first in his work: his primary motive in work is to willingly and happily serve God in his work, rather than to please others or himself. When his boss sets him an assignment, no matter how difficult, he will endeavor to cheerfully complete the task well, just as if it is God Himself who has set the assignment and given him an opportunity to serve. In completing this task, he gives glory to God for the strength necessary to do so. Even if the assignment ends in failure, no one can fault the employee for lack of effort or willingness. Even if the boss then treats the employee badly, the employee knows God has counted his effort. This is what it means to serve with a singleness of heart, motivated by his love and fear of the Lord.

Thus, when your teacher gives you homework, no matter how much homework you already have or how difficult this homework is, don't murmur and complain, for that is not doing it heartily. Realize that God has allowed all this to happen to you for a purpose, so rejoice in trials, and endeavor always to put God first. Remember that God is watching, so do it to the best of your abilities. If you do not know how to do parts of it, ask for help, and never resort to copying or plagiarizing. After you hand in the homework, if you have done all the above, don't be overly concerned about what grades you will get from it, or how you compare with other students. Rather, if you can honestly say that God is pleased with how you handled all aspects of the trial, be content, and thank God.

THOUGHT: If I put leisure before holiday homework, am I pleasing God or myself?

PRAYER: May I do all things as to the Lord, even if assigned by man.

Colossians 3:24
Memorise Colossians 3:24
"...for ye serve the Lord Christ..."

DO YOU SEE GOOD GRADES AS A REWARD?

Paul continues in Colossians 3:24 "Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." The reason why Christians do not have to be men-pleasers is because he is confident that the Lord is the one that rewards, not man. Christ is our Lord, and if we do all things for the Lord's sake, then the Lord knows and He will surely reward. Both the sureness and eternal value of this reward is described by the word inheritance: one will surely receive this compensation because it comes from God our Father to us His adopted sons. This reward is received in heaven where such rewards will never wilt. The Christian therefore does not worry if his boss is ungrateful or does not keep his promises, or if his boss is displeased with him and is unlikely ever to reward him, for he has faith that His Lord knows what he has done. The Christian does not worry about whether he will get promoted or whether he will keep his job, because he knows God will provide for those who serve Him heartily and with singleness of mind. It is not a difficult concept to understand: think of Christ as the righteous and just 'chairman' who has ultimate authority over everyone. The chairman can and will override this boss under Him to ensure we will get our just reward for serving Him. Consider that He has already given us the gift of eternal life in heaven; what other reward can ever compare with that?

Do you treat high academic scores as reward? Often I see in prayer lists teens praying for good results. When I ask teens why they desire good results, often their answer is that this will get parents off their back. Surely this is men-pleasing? If high scores are always a reward, then those Christian students not gifted academically who try their best and yet cannot obtain good grades would wonder why they are not getting this reward. Dear teen, please understand that studies are a means for us to glorify God in heaven. The process is far more important than the final result. If we study to the best of our abilities, this is our service to the Lord. Whatever results we receive is His gracious gift to us, and we know that that is always the best. We must not see these results the way the world sees it, but instead to look at them with our spiritual eyes. Strive to serve the Lord in your studies, but don't treat only high scores as your reward; for doing all things unto the Lord, your reward is reserved for you in heaven.

THOUGHT: If high scores should not be a reward, should I then not bother with scores?

PRAYER: May I never strive to have good grades just for personal selfish reasons.

Colossians 3:25
Memorise Romans 12:9
"...there is no respect of persons..."

WHAT IF I THEN IGNORE MY STUDIES?

Colossians 3:25 "But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons." The Christian employee can look forward to God's eternal rewards when he does all things unto the Lord in his work here on earth. However, if the employee commits a criminal offence in his work, he must not expect God to protect him, but instead he must pay the penalty for his crime. God is no respecter of persons: whether one is a Christian or not, they must both be punished as determined by the law. In the same way, the Christian will be chastised by God for sins that do not amount to crime (as mentioned before) or crimes that are not found out, for God is just. This applies the same way to the Christian master who ill-treats his workers (whether Christian or not), or commits crimes against his workers like making false deductions off their pay; God is just. However the Christian worker working under an unjust master can be rest assured that vengeance is the Lord's.

In the same way, the Christian student who does not do his best unto the Lord in his studies, even if he does so in ignorance or decides to be plain lazy, he will be chastised by God. The most obvious chastisement for the academically more gifted student who decides to be lazy will be lower than expected academic scores. Although high scores should not be treated as a reward, lower scores could serve as a good wake-up call for the academically capable student (and will incur the wrath of his parents who can see he has been slacking off). The less capable student who does not try hard enough will likewise also suffer lower than usual scores, and may then drive both himself and his parents to despair, having only himself to blame. Another lesson is that one should not try to be lazy over the work year and then start to pray for God's help when exams approach! However we must also realize that God may use low scores to guide us away from our current path and towards what He wants us to do, so do not always interpret low scores obtained as chastisement, if you know in your heart you have been faithful.

THOUGHT: How often have I been tempted to be lazy?

PRAYER: May the Lord always find me faithful in everything I do.

DO I EVER FEEL MY TEACHER IS UNFAIR?

Paul ends this section on exhorting particular groups with instructions to masters in Colossians 4:1 "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven." The focus now shifts from those under authority, to those who have the power over others. All Christians who have authority over others must compensate them justly and treat them equally. They do so because they know they are accountable to God in heaven who is their ultimate Master, who will see and judge unjust compensation and unequal treatment. This just Master will see the injustice felt by workers when this supposedly Christian master treats everyone badly, or glosses over the mistakes made by those he favours and comes down hard on mistakes made by those he does not. This just Master will also see the injustice done to the Christian worker who is compensated less than the norm by his Christian master who takes advantage of his brethren's meekness and longsuffering. This is the same just Master who saw the injustice meted to Joseph for a crime he did not commit and later providentially promoted longsuffering Joseph to a higher position than he had before he suffered the injustice. This just Master is our gracious God who cares for us, and knows of all our woes.

Have you ever felt that your teacher is unfair? Or have you felt your teacher is unjustly 'marking' you i.e. singling you out for the worst duties? How do you react to all this injustice? The Christian student who knows his teacher is unjust in allocating marks, or otherwise ill-treating or tormenting him, should not murmur or complain, but instead rest in the knowledge that God allows this to happen to us, so we should instead rejoice in trials and take heart like Joseph knowing that our just God will eventually right all wrong. At the same time, if we have a Christian teacher over us, do not desire or expect that teacher to ever treat us preferentially over others, or worse, demand it; for how can you cause your teacher to sin against the just God?

THOUGHT: How often have you despaired over injustice you have received?

PRAYER: May I always leave vengeance to God instead of leaving it in my heart.

"...CONTINUE IN PRAYER, AND WATCH..."

Paul returns to general exhortations to the entire church in Colossians 4:2 "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." Watch and Pray. This was the exhortation given by Christ to the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:41), but sadly they failed in this regard. The word 'continue' in Greek means to persevere; we need to persevere in prayer, and never neglect to pray. Whether we are a husband, wife, child, servant or master, we need to continually pray that we be aligned to His will, to pray for strength to do His will, and to always be thankful for this grace. Here Paul also exhorts to watch in the same, and be alert to danger. The word watch in Greek has the meaning of keeping awake. We need to be continually on our guard, for if we let our guard down and stop praying, we will so easily fall prey to the world and to worldly wisdom. Watching requires diligent studying of God's Word, and then actively applying it in our lives. It requires active discernment in all matters in life, to ensure that we never fall prey to the wiles of the devil. No matter how busy we are, we must always pray, and we must always watch!

As Christian students, you too need to watch and pray. If you do not keep watch, you will so easily be influenced by your friends who apply worldly methods to improve their studies. Some may swear by self-esteem workshops, or by miracle working tuition teachers who only have time on Sundays, or to take life easy and not study so hard! Make sure you always use your sword of the spirit, which is God's Word, to teach you to guard against the world and worldly wisdom. Continually commune with God through prayer; seeking to know His will, seeking to fulfill His will in your study life. Without prayer, receiving one low academic score will suddenly cause great uncertainty in your mind, for you have not been seeking His will, but following your own heart instead. With prayer, the same low academic score will prompt you to continue seeking His will, over time the path for your life that He wills you to take becoming clearer and clearer to you.

THOUGHT: Is it possible to know God's will for my life without prayer?

PRAYER: Thank you Lord for wanting to show me the way through this dark world.

Colossians 4:3
Memorise Colossians 1:9
"...God would open unto us a door..."

DO YOU PRAY FOR YOUR PHYSICAL OR YOUR SPIRITUAL NEEDS?

Paul gives a prayer request in Colossians 4:3 "Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds." Paul knew the great importance of prayer and therefore humbly asked the church to pray for him. Note he does not pray for his personal needs to be satisfied, but rather that God's will be made clear. Throughout Scripture, the pattern of prayer is always to pray for the spiritual, not the physical. Paul prayed that God will open doors for him to preach the gospel to those who have not heard it, especially since he is not free to go where he wishes, being a prisoner in Rome. Paul did not presume that in order that he may continue preaching the gospel, God must cause him to be released from prison; for there were many that believed in Christ when Paul preached to them under house arrest. Thus he does not pray to be physically released from prison (like most of us fearful for our own safety might!) but prays instead that God will grant opportunities for him to preach the gospel. Through the contents of his prayers, we can see the heart of Paul, as one who always sought to do God's Will and glory Him, rather than to see comforts and pleasures for himself.

As Christian students, what do we often pray for? Instead of just praying for good grades, pray that God will give you opportunities to glorify Him through your studies. As a student, we must always remember what God's calling for you is. God certainly did not send His Son to die on the cross so that you do well for your studies and glorify yourself. Instead, our purpose is always to be a witness and testimony for Him. When you demonstrate the life of a Christian through your actions, the people around you will notice that your behavior is clearly different from others in being Christ-like. When you have examinations pending, instead of praying for physical needs like easy examination questions, pray for spiritual strength to handle temptations such as the temptation to fear or to murmur about how difficult the paper is. When examination results are going to be released, pray for wisdom on how to discern God's Will for you. In contrast, to pray for high marks might be to presume that God will aid you in pursuing the path you desire, not considering that God may close that door to you.

THOUGHT: What other examples of a student's presumptuous prayer can you think of?

PRAYER: May I pray for the spiritual rather than the physical from now on.

DO YOU DESIRE MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO PREACH THE GOSPEL?

Colossians 4:4 is a short verse, but full of spiritual importance: "That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak." The word manifest means to make appear, which is in contrast to the word mystery in the previous verse. In the past, the full extent of the gospel was not fully revealed, but now through Christ all is revealed. However, it requires us to speak this truth unto others who did not see before. If the person preached to be God's elect, then the Holy Spirit will reveal this truth to him. If the person preached to be not, then no revelation takes place, but the preacher has done his duty in making the gospel truth plain to him. Paul knew that his duty was simply to preach the truth of the gospel, to make it plain and clear to all. From his salvation, his simple but earnest desire was that he may be able to preach Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). He saw the plenteous harvest, and prayed that God may send him to reap this harvest.

This short verse has shamed me. For unlike Paul, I am often reluctant to speak about Christ to unbelievers, giving all sorts of excuses. I know I should have Paul's single-minded desire to preach the gospel no matter how difficult it is. However, often times I think of the difficulties, and thus hold back from doing so. I am not in bonds like Paul and am free to go where I wish, yet I do not use this freedom to preach. Paul saw the plenteous harvest, but I of little faith can only see a few stubborn stalks around. Unlike Paul, I do not pray as much as I should for more opportunities to preach the gospel to those who are perishing, but I selfishly pray more for my own needs instead. I ought to speak; and now, I sincerely pray that I will. How about you, dear teen?

THOUGHT: What other excuses do I give for not preaching the gospel?

PRAYER: O God, give me more opportunities to speak for Thee.

HOW DO YOU RELATE TO UNBELIEVERS?

Colossians 4:5 "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time." This verse refers to how we should relate to unbelievers ("them that are without"), such that they by our testimony may be attracted to Christ. Our witness for Christ is not just in the message that we preach, but also from the life that we live. Our testimony must always be congruent with the gospel that we preach. Our duty must never be only to preach the gospel; we are not salesmen selling a product we do not use! Therefore Paul tells us to walk in wisdom toward them: we need to think of how our testimony can effectively witness to them as well and not just through our words alone. Remember the word 'walk' refers to behavior or conduct. The worst case scenario of failing to walk in wisdom is to instead fall into the same sin that unbelievers enjoy, which ruins both our testimony and our evangelism. Paul also adds the phrase "redeeming the time": because we only have a limited time window with any of these unbelievers, we must not foolishly conclude that we have all the time in the world to reach out to them.

There are many who come to Christ during their teenage years. In secondary school, most of you only have four years of contact with your school mates. Do not ruin these years of opportunity by indulging in worldly activities like dating or smoking that unbelievers crave. Instead, wisely consider how you should relate to those unbelievers. Going around verbally condemning them, or turning your nose up when they pass by, will most likely cause them to hate Christ more, and is not wise. Instead, do all you can to show Christ in you: live a life that is different from the world, a life clearly guided by God; then when they are attracted to your Christian character, lovingly share the gospel to them. There is no point if the smoker breaks the smoking addiction by sheer determination or the counsel of others but does not find Christ, for he is still dead in sin. In contrast, the smoker that finds Christ will both find salvation and freedom from the bondage of sin and addiction. Help them see that Christ alone is the answer; share your own testimony of how Christ saved you from sin, and pray for them that they may be able to realize their need to be saved from their sin.

THOUGHT: Is your life a lie? Will it surprise unbelievers to find out you are a Christian?

PRAYER: May I always pray for wisdom on relating to every unbeliever.

Colossians 4:6
Memorise Colossians 4:6
"...alway with grace, seasoned with salt..."

HOW DO YOU TALK TO UNBELIEVERS?

Paul continues in Colossians 4:6 "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." In the previous verse Paul talked about the Christian's conduct towards unbelievers; now he focusses on the Christian's conversation ("speech") with them. In our conversation, we must always remember we are sinners saved by grace, compared to the holier than thou attitude favored by the Pharisees. To have your conversation seasoned with salt is to have a conversation that is different from the world, yet profitable to the listener. Salt in those days (as it is now) was an important additive to food to make it flavorful and palatable. Without salt, many foods would be tasteless and people would not want to eat it. Speech seasoned with salt is one that is useful and brings benefit to the hearer. The greatest benefit one can bring to an unbeliever is Christ. The unbeliever may pose questions, and the Christian must answer in a manner that points the unbeliever to Christ as the answer. To give such 'salty' answers thus requires the Christian both to know God's Word well, as well as have the wisdom to apply it to the specific question and situation asked.

That is why it is not enough to have good Christian conduct; we must pray for God to give us the opportunity to share the gospel, and when the opportunity emerges, to do so with grace and profit. I remember one teen some years ago whose salvation I had been praying for, and was waiting upon the Lord to give me the opportunity to share the gospel with her. We had conversed before on other day to day topics, so she already did feel comfortable talking to me, but we had not yet talked about the gospel. Then one Lord's Day God caused her to sit next to me in the sanctuary, and while we were listening to the message I noticed she was silently shedding tears. I silently prayed for wisdom. I waited till the end of the service, and then gently asked if she would like to talk to me. She said yes, and then shared that the message had pricked her and made her realize she was unsaved. I shared with her that I had been praying for God's timing, and shared with her the gospel, and clarified her doubts. She accepted Christ as her personal Savior that hour; all praise and glory to Him.

THOUGHT: Is my conversation filled with words of grace or graceless words?

PRAYER: May I learn to speak with grace and to the profit of others.

AM I A FELLOW SERVANT WITH GOD'S SERVANTS?

Paul now mentions certain individuals, beginning with Colossians 4:7 "All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord." Remember Paul was under arrest in Rome at the time of writing, and he was grateful for all these brethren who stood by him while he was in bonds. That is why Paul first describes Tychicus as "beloved brother". Tychicus had been one of his companions during the return leg of Paul's third missionary journey from Macedona back to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). It was an important journey because Paul needed companions like Tychicus to help him carry the offerings collected for the poor brethren in Jerusalem. Despite Paul's impending arrest, Tychicus stayed in touch with him, and was with him in Rome. He was then sent by Paul to bear this epistle to the Colossians as well as the epistle to the nearby Ephesians (Ephesians 6:21-22). Thus Paul also describes him as a faithful minister, well versed in mission work and trustworthy with funds. He also calls him a fellow servant in the Lord, for he served the Lord without being distracted by the cares of the world, and endured a life of suffering because of it. Tychicus would later stay with Paul until the very end, for he was mentioned in Paul's last letter as having been sent to Ephesus (2 Timothy 4:12). Paul remembered those like Tychicus, not because he wanted to lavish praise on him, but because he was grateful to God for sending such faithful brethren to co-labour with him.

Are you a fellow servant of God's servants? Like Paul, our pastors need faithful servants to assist in their ministry. Obviously our pastors do not ask for personal servants, but rather they invite all brethren to serve the King of kings and Lord of lords together with them, to be "fellow servants in the Lord". There is so much to be done, so many brethren to minister to, so many areas of need in the church. You might think, what can I do as a mere teenager; and the answer is, quite a lot. When God gives the opportunity, you can speak a word of encouragement to our pastors. When you see brethren neglected, you can befriend them and reach out to them, instead of leaving it to our over-worked pastors. Your Christian conduct and life of service can exhort the adults to be one body in Christ, by serving together with fellow teens in the youth choir or in church events. All this will warm the hearts of our pastors, to know they do not labour alone in the Lord's vineyard.

THOUGHT: Do I care more about my needs or the needs of others?

PRAYER: That God will open my eyes to the many needs in church.

Colossians 4:8
Memorise Romans 12:5

"...he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts..."

HOW DO YOU RELATE TO YOUR BRETHREN OVERSEAS?

Paul expands about the role he gave Tychicus in Colossians 4:7a, 8 "All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you...Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts." There were two reasons why Paul sent Tychicus to the Colossae. The first was to let the Colossians know how Paul was faring under house arrest in Rome. Certainly the Colossians would have been concerned and perhaps even discouraged to know that Paul was in bonds, and the news that Tychicus brought about Paul would comfort their hearts. Evidently Tychicus would verbally share more about Paul's situation than Paul's letter would share. The second reason was to get first-hand information from them about how the church was coping with the attack of the false teachers that Paul was concerned about in Colossians 2:1. Thus we see that Paul did not simply exhort or give instructions from a distance, but sent a trusted minister Tychicus to help out the church as well. Here we can see the love that Paul had for the flock, for even though he was hundreds of miles away with many other churches to care for, he was still greatly concerned for them. Tychicus would have been very helpful to him in his need, yet Paul cared more for the brethren at Colossae and thought it more beneficial that he be sent to them. Such was the love and care that Paul had for his flock.

Dear teen, there will inevitably be some brethren your age who are leaving or have left for overseas studies or other reasons. Although you personally have several cares of your own, and there are friends locally who occupy your time, do you still strive to keep in touch with those brethren overseas? Unbelievers will keep in touch chatting on trivial matters, like new experiences or common interests. Believers should be concerned about the spiritual well-being of those overseas, while those overseas will be seeking for news on what is happening in their church back home. When I was overseas for a year, I received the church bulletin weekly that kept me updated; but that was nothing compared to the short visits brethren paid to me, or the personal letters I received. As there was no BP church where I was then, such visits and letters encouraged me greatly in the faith and also warned me of the dangers around me that I was unaware of. Speaking from this experience, I pray that you will keep in touch with overseas brethren, not just on trivial matters, but on the spiritual, that they may be encouraged knowing that while they are physically 'apart', they are still spiritually 'a part' of this body of Christ together with us.

THOUGHT: Who have I neglected to keep in touch with?

PRAYER: That I start keeping in touch again with overseas brethren I have neglected.

Colossians 4:9
Memorise Psalm 133:1
"...who is one of you..."

ARE YOU AFRAID OF MEDIATING BETWEEN BRETHREN IN CONFLICT?

Paul continues his mention of individuals with Colossians 4:9 "With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here." Notice the terms he uses for Onesimus are common with Tychicus: they are both faithful and beloved brethren. Paul deliberately used these similar terms to tell the Colossian Christians, of whom Onesimus was "one of you", to treat him just as well as they would treat Tychicus. We can read from the book of Philemon that Onesimus was previously a servant of Philemon, but had fled from his master. He had found his way to Rome, where under the ministry of Paul he became a believer. Paul wrote the letter to Philemon (borne by Onesimus in person) to ask the latter to receive Onesimus again, to forgive him of his crime and take him back as a Christian brother. In the epistle to the Colossians, he similarly asked the Colossian church to receive him as one of their brethren. Paul stated that both Onesimus and Tychicus would be able to testify to the ministry of Paul in Rome, further making the case that Onesimus should no longer be thought of as a runaway slave but from henceforth as a faithful and useful brother in Christ.

There will be instances that disputes break out between brethren. Usually one party realizes his or her mistake and wants to apologize, but fears the wronged party will not accept the apology. This is especially so when we are afraid of provoking even further conflict. Like Paul, there is a place for us as the third party to mediate between both. We can carry the message to the wronged party that the other party is genuinely apologetic and wants to be reconciled. When we have persuaded the wronged party to receive the other, we then bring the other party to come and apologize and mutually be reconciled to one another. Initially we might still have to bear some of the wrath of either party that we approach, but surely this minor inconvenience is worth it, if as a result of our mediation, both brethren are reconciled to one another. Such peace and unity between Christian brethren surely is cause for rejoicing, just as much as continued conflict between brethren is cause for grief. Therefore, dear teen, notice if and when such situations happen in your fellowship, and with much prayer, wisdom and tact, be a mediator to bring conflicting brethren together.

THOUGHT: Have there been past situations that I have been reluctant to step in?

PRAYER: May I do my part to bring unity between brethren in cases of personal dispute.

ARE YOU AFRAID OF MENTIONING THE NAME OF YOUR CHURCH?

Paul continues with Colossians 4:10a "Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you...". So often in reading the last chapter of any epistle we are invariably tempted to gloss over all these salutations from and to individuals. However we must realize that it was the Holy Spirit that moved the prophets and apostles to write every jot and tittle of Scripture (2 Peter 1:21). Paul could so easily have asked messengers like Tychicus and Onesimus to convey such salutations by word of mouth instead. So why did the Holy Spirit include this salutation as Holy writ? Aristarchus was a "Macedonian of Thessalonica" (Acts 27:2). He is first mentioned as one of "Paul's companions in travels" (Acts 19:29) who were being seized by the mad crowd rioting in Ephesus. He then accompanied Paul on the same return leg of Paul's third missionary journey from Macedona back to Jerusalem that Tychicus was on (Acts 20:4), and continued with them on the fateful journey to Rome (Acts 27:2), suffering the same shipwreck. He is now called Paul's "fellowprisoner", evidently under house arrest together with Paul. Aristarchus was clearly a person that stood by Paul through thick and thin, never afraid of being labeled a fellow captive together with Paul, or of sharing the same bonds with Paul for the sake of Christ. He lived up to 2 Timothy 1:8 "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God".

Are you afraid of being associated with your church? Even now when I tell my Christian colleagues which church I belong to, they would raise their eyebrows and exclaim "oh, that church", in a rather disdainful manner. This because the church is known for taking the God-honoring stance of biblical separation, and is unafraid to point out errors of other denominations. Thus churches from these denominations often have choice words to describe my church pastors and those who worship there. Some teens from my church are therefore are ashamed of their church, and would rather not tell their friends about it for fear of being labeled as a result of worshipping there. Dear teen, I commend to you the example of Aristarchus: be not ashamed of the name of your church or her leaders. Rather, stand with those who stand for the faith once delivered unto the saints, and be proud to invite them to your church to learn the truth of God's Word.

THOUGHT: What happens when I am ashamed of my church?

PRAYER: May I never gloss quickly over any portion of scripture.

Colossians 4:10
Memorise Isaiah 43:25
"...receive him..."

HAVE YOU TRULY FORGIVEN THOSE YOU SAY YOU HAVE FORGIVEN?

Colossians 4:10 continues with "...and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him)." Marcus is another name for John Mark, who is a relative of Barnabas, Paul's close friend and companion. Paul and Barnabas took John Mark on their first missionary journey, but the latter left them in Perga (capital of Pamphylia) to return to Jerusalem instead of continuing with the work (Acts 13:13). When the time came to begin the second missionary journey, Barnabas wanted again to take John Mark, but Paul disagreed, for he remembered John Mark's earlier reversal. The resulting conflict was so sharp that Paul and Barnabas separated. However, in the years that followed, John Mark proved to be true to Christ after all, and was later reconciled to Paul, so Paul here commended him to the Colossians. Since Perga was only 100 odd miles away from Colossae, the Colossians had most likely heard of John Mark's earlier defection, so Paul gave specific instructions: if he comes, receive him (i.e. don't reject him). Later, Paul commends John Mark for being profitable to him in his ministry (2 Timothy 4:11). This is true forgiveness: not only has Paul forgiven John Mark for forsaking the ministry earlier, but he has forgotten it as well, for he made no mention at all of it, but simply exhorted them to receive him. Note that forgetting it does not mean Paul has somehow erased his own memory banks about the incident, but it simply means that Paul does not hold it any more against John Mark. In the same way, Christ will not remember our sins any longer once they have been forgiven (Isaiah 43:25).

Do you truly forgive and forget? There was a past teen that had let me down badly years ago while he was still in Teens. He subsequently apologized to me, and I had verbally forgiven him. Recently, he was asked by a brother to serve in another ministry, and I found I had great trouble in my mind trying not to consider his past mistake years ago. This showed that I forgave, but I did not forget. Thankfully I did not mention it to that other brother, so it did not affect the decision to use that past teen in the ministry or not. However, I was ashamed of myself that in spite of it being so many years ago, I still held the mistake against this brother. Dear teen, I pray that for those you have forgiven for their wrongdoing against you, you do not hold this wrongdoing against them any longer.

THOUGHT: What happens if I do not forget?

PRAYER: May I always forgive and forget, as Christ has done so to me.

DO I BELIEVE SOMETHING TO BE TRUE BECAUSE EVERYONE SAYS SO?

In Colossians 4:11, Paul goes on "And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me." Justus, like Aristarchus and John Mark in the previous verse, are "of the circumcision" i.e. converted Jews. All three are commended as being both Paul's fellow workers to advance the kingdom of God, as well as being a source of comfort to Paul by their continuing presence at his side, especially as he was under house arrest in Rome. Of course Paul had more than three fellow workers with him; the word "only" speaks of only these three converted Jews being in Rome with Paul, for in contrast there were many Jews that opposed Paul throughout his entire missionary work. The other companions of Paul in Rome at this time were all Gentiles.

The Roman Catholic Church believes their founder to be the apostle Peter, based not only on an incorrect interpretation of Matthew 16:18, but also by their belief that Peter was in Rome to do so, some believing that Peter was the Bishop of Rome for 25 years! If that were the case, it is rather strange if Paul left out the Apostle Peter's name from this list of converted Jews in Rome. More significantly, Peter's name is not mentioned in the epistle to the Romans (Rom 16) either. It was not that Paul never mentioned Peter in his epistles, for he did so in Galatians 2:11-16, but that placed Peter in Antioch, not Rome. What is far more likely is that Peter was never in Rome, and thus could not have founded the church in Rome. Thus the Scriptures mentioned this fact of these three brethren alone being of the circumcision in Rome with Paul, to indicate to us that the Roman Catholic Church is false.

Dear teen, understand that all that is purported to be true must be tested by the absolute truth of God's Word to see if it in fact is true. If a purported fact contradicts Scripture, it must be false, no matter how many people say it is true. We must be like the Berean Christians, who searched the Scriptures daily to discern truth from error, instead of simply accepting certain facts to be true just because an established major institution like the Roman Catholic Church states it to be fact. There is only one source of absolute trth, and that is the Word of God!

THOUGHT: How quick am I to believe something to be true.

PRAYER: May I search the Scriptures daily, that I may not be fooled one day.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU PRAY FOR OTHERS TOGETHER WITH OTHERS?

In Colossians 4:12, Paul now turns to "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." As you recall from Colossians 1:7, Epaphras was sent by Paul to pastor the Colossian church, being ordained a minister. He then reported back to Paul about the good testimony of the Colossians. Colossians 4:12 now informs us that Epaphras was originally from Colossae ("one of you") just as Onesimus was. Although Epaphras was physically in Rome with Paul, his heart was with the church in prayer. The words "laboring fervently" describe how intense his prayers for the flock were, as one that is striving intensely in his supplications for them. His prayers were not just one-off short term prayers, for these words are preceded by the term "always". Also note that what Epaphras prayed for was the same as what Paul desired for the flock, that the congregation strive towards Christian maturity (compare the rest of Colossians 4:12 with Colossians 1:28). How wonderful it is when both the pastor and supervisory pastor of a congregation are of the same mind and of the same spirit! How wonderful is corporate prayer when everyone prays for the same thing in the Lord, and such united prayer ascends to God above!

Once a year, the teens in Calvary Pandan who come to the Teens Camp in church will attend the Tuesday night prayer meeting. When it comes to the time of corporate prayer, some teens cannot stomach the length of the 45 minute prayer session, and like the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, they fall asleep instead of heeding the call to watch and pray. There is a blessing to wrestle in prayer, to agonize over the many needs in church and in the lives of our brethren, instead of giving in to the desire to nap. There is a blessing to come every Tuesday night, week after week, year after year, to labour in prayer. There is a blessing most of all to understand what to pray for in each ministry: like Paul and Epaphras, we do not just simply pray for our own needs and concerns, but in prayer meeting we pray specifically for various individuals, matters, ministries, and missions of the church. That is why the prayer list is so long, because it states what the needs of each ministry are, so that our prayers are truly united in the Lord. If it is possible, make it a point to come and join in your church's prayer meeting, and be united in prayer.

THOUGHT: Do I know the specific needs of each ministry if I stay at home instead?

PRAYER: May I join in corporate prayer more often as much as I am able.

Colossians 4:13
Memorise Romans 8:28
"...he hath a great zeal for you..."

DO YOU WONDER WHY YOUR LEADERS MAKE CERTAIN DECISIONS?

Paul testifies of Epaphras in Colossians 4:13 "For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis." All three churches in Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis, are a short distance from one another, all in the province of Phrygia. From Paul's description, Epaphras was most likely the pastor of all three churches. There was perhaps a possibility that some Colossians felt that Epaphras did not care for them anymore, for he was with the 'great' Apostle Paul, far away in Rome. Paul testified that nothing could be further from the truth. The word zeal in Greek is one used to describe the good sort of jealousy one has in desiring good for someone else, like the godly jealousy Paul had when he desired to present the church to Christ as His spotless Bride in 2 Corinthians 11:2. Ephaphras' zeal for the church was evident in the prayers he made for them (Colossians 4:12), and he was zealous to protect the church from false teachers. Epaphras most certainly had a desire to be there, but was content that God's will be done when Paul decided to send Tychicus and Onesimus instead. Paul's words in this verse are enough to convey the unsaid message: Epaphras really wanted to come. We do not know the reason why Epaphras was not sent instead, but suffice to say, it must have been God's will, and God's will is always the best for us.

There will be times that your church leadership will make certain decisions, but their rationale for it is not known to us. For example, if the church leadership decides block a certain speaker from preaching at your church, this decision may only be made known to the ministry leaders, and the rationale for this decision is not shared. There is wisdom in such a practice. Sometimes these restrictions are only temporary while the speaker is being monitored, and when the speaker realizes his error and repents, the restriction is then quietly lifted. There are many other possible situations, but suffice to say, you can trust that the church leadership would have good reasons doing things in a certain way. In the Presbyterian form of government, there must be unanimity amongst all elders in order for any decision to be binding at the church level. It is only when every elder is convinced that it is God's will and fully in line with Scriptures, that a decision is made. If these elders are indeed godly men that fulfill the Biblical criteria set forth in passages like Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3, then we can certainly have confidence in their decisions.

THOUGHT: Why do you wish you knew the rationale for every decision?

PRAYER: That I may learn submission to lawful authority placed over me.

Colossians 4:14
Memorise Luke 8:14
"...Luke, the beloved..."

WILL YOU EVER LEAVE CHRIST?

Colossians 4:14 reads "Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you." Luke is well known to us, but Demas not so. Demas is included here as one of Paul's companions in Rome, and is also similarly included in the letter to Philemon (Philemon 24) which was written at the same time as the epistle to Colossae. However, many years later, when Paul writes his last epistle of 2 Timothy, the circumstances have changed, "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica..." (2 Timothy 4:10). There could be various reasons why Demas left. It could have been due to some care in this world, or temptation by pleasure, or fear of persecution. However what is certain is that he loved the world far more than he loved Christ. Paul takes Demas' desertion hard, as shown by his plaintive cry in the next verse in 2 Timothy: "Only Luke is with me..." (2 Timothy 4:11). How sad this is: the two men who were once named and commended together, both having so much promise in the ministry, were now in completely opposite states. Demas may have started well, but he ended very badly. Perhaps, he was never really zealous for the Lord in the first place. It is significant that amongst all the companions of Paul listed in colossians 4, Demas is the only one without a specific commendation. The only thing one could say about him, was that Demas was there. He was present: that was it.

Dear teen, you might be sad that as each year goes by, you start to see some of your peers dropping out of church. You might feel sad when you look back at class photos of yesteryear, and many classmates are no longer around. You might wonder, after all those years of being in Sunday school together learning about God, why do they then decide to stop coming. Like Demas, they were once physically present, but that was actually the limit of their involvement, for their hearts were not present. Pretty soon, like Demas, the cares or pleasures of this world would choke their hearts, and they would be lost to the world. Dear teen, how about you? Have you ever looked at the world with envy in your hearts, and wish you could be like one of them? Will you one day become a Demas yourself, and having loved this present world, leave the Lord whom you now profess to love? May we take the example of Demas as a stern warning to us, that we must never allow a love for the world to draw us away from Christ! Instead, emulate the example of Luke, who remained steadfast till the very end.

THOUGHT: We must not just start well, but also finish well.

PRAYER: May I rejoice in every Luke, rather than be depressed with every Demas.

Colossians 4:15
Memorise Romans 12:1-2
"...and the church which is in his house..."

HAS YOUR LOVE FOR THE LORD GROWN COLD?

Paul goes on in Colossians 4:15 "Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house." Paul asks the Colossian church to acknowledge those in the nearby Laodicean church, and then singles out this man Nymphas who has allowed his house to be used as a house church there. In the early church, there were many such house churches (e.g. Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19 and Philemon 2), especially during the periods of Roman persecution where it was unsafe to congregate in the open. These who loved the Lord acknowledged all good gifts came from Him, and thus were only too happy to let their houses be used for the Lord's work, in spite of the danger and inconvenience to them and their household. Some of you who have had guests over before, would know the many little chores that one would have to do in order for everything to run smoothly. It would only be their love for Christ that would outweigh all such inconveniences, and motivate them to sacrifice for the Lord.

Do you acknowledge that all that you have comes from God, and thus to be used for Him? Those of you who stay in relatively large homes can ask your parents if they can offer the use of these homes for cottage meetings. More importantly, all of you have been given talents in some areas by God, so if you know what these talents are, then use them to serve God in the relevant ministry. If you do not know what these talents are, then go and find out: pray for God to reveal them, and give various ministries a try to explore what your talents may be. Remember, the more you have been given by God, the more is expected of you. Also, don't give excuses. Service to God will always involve sacrifice; but if you truly love God, you would realize that such sacrifices are nothing compared to what Christ has done for us. The harvest is plenteous, but the labourers are few, perhaps because too many sit on the sidelines watching the labourers instead of labouring for the Lord! If you truly love the Lord, you would do all you can to live your life in service to Him!

THOUGHT: Are you a labourer or a bystander?

PRAYER: May I use all that Thine hast given me for Thee, because I love Thee.

DO YOU THANK GOD FOR LIKE-MINDED CHURCHES?

Colossians 4:16 says "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea." There is no need to speculate what this epistle from Laodicea is. What is more important is that Paul had earlier mentioned that both churches were facing the same danger from false teachers (Colossians 1:2), so both churches would benefit from reading each other's epistles. When they do so, both churches will benefit from facing this impending threat together, praying for one another, and studying God's Word together, for iron sharpeneth iron. Although Paul addressed specific audiences in his epistles, he also exhorts every Christian to read all Scripture, for "all scripture...is profitable..." (2 Timothy 3:16). In 1 Thessalonians 5:27, Paul says "I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren" i.e. he was not limiting this to the Thessalonian brethren alone. Also note that Paul indicated the epistle be "read among you"; in other words, the entire church, not just the leaders must read and understand these words. By God's grace we have studied this book over the past 3 months and can appreciate that this book is at times difficult to understand. Yet the command is that this epistle be read to the entire congregation. Every Christian, even the youngest child, must read and study God's Word.

And so we today must also read this epistle, for though we are not the Colossian church, nevertheless we do face similar threats from false teachers today. As a church, we also desire to progress towards spiritual maturity. Though the many epistles in the Bible may be addressed to another church of another age, they still have relevance for us in some way today. God's Word is always the same, the doctrines are the same, and the adversary the devil is the same. Likewise, we should also stand with other churches who stand for the faith once delivered unto the saints, pray for these other churches, and study God's Word together. Thank God for pastors and preachers from these other churches who are invited to preach at our pulpit, fellowship groups and camps. Thank God for institutions like the Far Eastern Bible College who were set up by like-minded brethren from various churches to equip men and women with God's Word for full-time ministry, for they saw the common threat posed by so-called Bible colleges who no longer stood for the faith but continued to offer bible students degrees in theology.

THOUGHT: Do you thank God for this bond between churches, or take it for granted?

PRAYER: Thank Thee for this fellowship amongst churches who stand for the faith.

CAN WE HELP OUR TEACHERS TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE?

Paul goes on in Colossians 4:17 "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it." Archippus is also mentioned in Philemon as "Archippus our fellowsoldier" (Phlm 2). Here in the epistle to the Colossian church, we have the unexpected command "say to Archippus". We would expect Paul to write directly to this minister, as he would write to those like Timothy directly, but we see here Paul tells the congregation to inform Archippus instead. Archippus was probably the minister in the church, perhaps in place of Epaphras. We know it is not that Archippus does not have the gifts for being a minister, for Paul states that he had been called by God. The phrase "take heed" in Greek has the sense of beholding or watching out. Archippus needs to be watchful, to make sure he fulfills this ministry he has been given. Note that Paul is not saying Archippus has failed, but perhaps he has not been watchful enough to the threat of the false teachers, or perhaps he is not doing enough to exhort the church towards Christian maturity. Paul is telling the congregation to do its part to excite their minister; perhaps by sharing with him how real the threat of the false teachers are, or by sharing with him the obstacles they face as they strive towards Christian maturity. Although a minister may be called by God, members of the congregation can and should give the minister such information so as to improve his ministry. Note we are not talking about feedback surveys as that potentially turns preachers into man-pleasers, but rather about sharings of the spiritual battles they face so that the preacher is more aware of them.

Dear teen, sometimes you may find that one of your Sunday school teachers are not very effective. The teacher may be called to the ministry, but perhaps he or she lacks zeal, or maybe cannot connect with your age group. Instead of complaining to one another that the teacher is out of touch, or worse, skipping class altogether, find an opportunity to privately share with the teacher about certain problems that you face and request for help and prayer. I for one can testify that although I am three times the age of those I teach, I am grateful to the many teens who continually ask me questions face to face or over text messages or email, for each new sharing makes me more aware of the needs of this teenage age group, that I may improve my teaching.

THOUGHT: My teacher is part of the body of Christ, as I am, and I should help him.

PRAYER: May I not be so proud as to think I do not need spiritual help from teachers.

Colossians 4:18
Memorise Ephesians 4:1
"...remember my bonds..."

WHAT ARE YOU PREPARED TO ENDURE FOR THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD?

Paul ends the book of Colossians with "The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen. Written from Rome to the Colossians by Tychicus and Onesimus. " (Colossians 4:18) Though the rest of this epistle was dictated by Paul to those appointed to be his writers, Paul now ends off the epistle with his personal handwriting, to authenticate the epistle as his. This makes the next phrase all the more significant, being written in his own hand: "Remember my bonds." In effect Paul is saying that all that he has spoken of is true: the words of this epistle are not mere words, but are the very words of God, and Paul is willing to suffer being in bonds as a result of believing these words. This is in contrast with the false teachers who delight in using their credentials to persuade men, but are never willing to suffer for their false beliefs, nor suffer for the flock they pretend to be concerned about. Paul is also exhorting the Colossians to follow his example, to not fear suffering as a consequence of believing in Christ, and thus he also prays that "grace be with you" to endure such suffering. He has already asked for prayer for himself for being in bonds in Colossians 4:3; this is similar to what the writer of Hebrews alludes to: "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body." (Hebrews 13:3) Paul is not asking the Colossians to pity him, but rather rallying them to the cause of Christ.

Dear teen, are you willing to suffer even the ignominy of imprisonment for what you believe in, the truth of God's Word? Only then can you truly walk worthy of the Lord, to be prepared to endure suffering just like Christ endured all suffering for our sakes. How can you call yourself a Christian and bear the name of Christ, if you are not willing to suffer for believing in the truth of what Christ said? God may not call you to suffer imprisonment, but perhaps call you to suffer in smaller ways such as being mocked by your friends for being so 'religious'. When that happens, will you be tempted to compromise on your faith and deny Christ? Elsewhere Paul wrote "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Ephesians 4:1). Paul walked worthy of the Lord. Will you?

THOUGHT: Am I willing to suffer imprisonment for my faith?

PRAYER: May I truly walk worthy of the Lord.

Notes

Notes

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