**Citizenship in Heaven**

**Philippians and Colossians – #24**

**The Letter to the Colossians, Chapters 2 & 3**

**Christian Life in the world**

*DINNER! – Our end-of-session carry in dinner is Wednesday, May 2, at E91 in the Community Room beginning at 6:30. All are welcome, and we love to see old friends! We’ll sign up for dishes in class and via email the next two weeks. Contact Pam with any questions at 317-727-7917 or nana.10554@yahoo.com.*

**Final Two Classes**

In these last two classes George is presenting, verse by verse, the ancient Greek commentary on Colossians 2-3-4 written by Theodoret of Cyrus (c. 393-c. 457 CE). This translation is by Robert C. Hill and George has edited these notes.

**Colossians 2: The Church Religions of the World**

***2:1*** *“You see, I want you to know how great is the struggle I am making for you, those in Laodicea and all who have not seen me face to face.”*

Then he reveals as well the affection he has for them.

[Paul is saying] I want you to be convinced that I worry a lot about you and about the Laodiceans, and not only about you and about the Laodiceans but also about all who have not yet seen me. That thought ledt to the specific construction of verse 2 ….

***2:2*** “… *so that their hearts may be encouraged.*”

Paul did not say “your” but “their”, that is, those who had not yet seen him. Now, what is the manner of the encouragement?  *“Strengthened in love: so that they may preserve harmony in Christ.”*

***2:3*** *“With a view to recognizing the mystery of the God and Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”*.

He brought out the mystery of the dispensation common to the Father and the Son; and he said all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ, since through him will be revealed to all people in the future life the purpose of the dispensation. He said all this, of course, to heal the ailment affecting them, and to make clear that it is not the Law’s observances but faith in the Lord that brings true salvation. In fact, he went on in this vein.

***2:4*** “*Now, I say this in case anyone should deceive you with plausible arguments*”

Paul has used these expressions to encourage them not to be led astray by deceitful words.

***2:5*** “*After all, even if I am absent in the flesh, I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your regularity and the strength of your faith in Christ*” (verse 5).

Once again he mingles commendation with instruction to win their attention and lay the groundwork for exhortation. In this he indicated once again that he had seen them before writing the letter: just as he said here. After all, even if I am absent in the flesh, I am with you in spirit, so too he wrote to the Corinthians, “*Though absent in body, I am present in spirit*.”

***2:6-7*** *“As, then, you have received the message of Christ Jesus the Lord, conduct yourselves in him,* ***7*** *rooted and built on him and strengthened in the faith as you have been taught, abounding in it with gratitude*”

Paul preserved uncontaminated the teaching you have received, and follow the evangelical counsels, giving evidence of a “firm faith” (the meaning of “rooted”) and contributing as well the acquisition of virtue (the force of built). The phrase “overflowing in faith” means, have it in its maturity, let nothing be lacking to it. Instead, let it flourish and abound in you so that you may sing the praises of the benefactor in everything (the meaning of with gratitude).

**The Deception of Religions**

**2:8** “*Be careful that there be no one to take you captive through philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition in keeping with the elements of the world and not in keeping with Christ.”*

What he called plausible arguments above, he called philosophy here. By “empty deceit” he meant the futile and harmful tradition of human beings, not the Law itself but its untimely observance; and by elements of the world celebrating days, since days and nights come from sun and moon. So he urges them to be watchful and sober, and to shun entirely those endeavouring to strip the faith from them as though separating them from Christ, shackling them with the useless observances of the Law.

***2:9*** “*Because in him all the fullness of divinity dwells in bodily fashion”.*

Some of the doctors (church fathers) claimed that here it is the Church that is given the name Christ, and in it dwells all the fullness of the divinity; but I am not sure if even in bodily fashion such an insight fits into the meaning. So my view is that, since he called Christ head of the Church, it is clear that because in his humanity he is our head, these things are also said of a human being bearing in himself divinity in its entirety. You see, in his wish to indicate the difference between the Law and grace, he contrasted Christ with the poverty of the elements; and wanting to bring out his superiority by way of contrast he added, “*Because in him all the fullness of divinity dwells in bodily fashion, that is, in his own body.*” In other words, he was not in receipt of some particular grace, he is saying, like Moses: a man is God, and this visible being has united to him all the divinity of the Only-begotten. What follows is consistent with this meaning.

***2:10*** *“And in him you are filled”*

That is, you were granted grace through him and you received the rays beaming from that source, “*[He] Who is the head of every principality and authority.*” It is clear from this that those words were not referring to the Church but to Christ the Lord himself who, while being our head in his humanity, is lord of angels and archangels in his divine nature. He used “head” here, meaning “principality.” What follows shows that above he was not calling the Church Christ.

**The Significance of Baptism**

***2:11****”In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision not done by human hand, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh through the circumcision of Christ.”*

In other words since, under pressure, they embraced the way of life of the Law, he brings out once again the difference in circumcision: it is not of the flesh (he is saying) but of the spirit; not done by human hand but divine; not a removal of a fragment of flesh but freedom from all corruption. It is not the Law that is responsible for this but Christ the Lord, the giver of the Law. He says, note, “in him also you were circumcised,” and again, through the circumcision of Christ. By putting off the body the sins of the flesh he referred to “saving baptism:” in it we put off the soiled garment of sin. In the life to come, on the other hand, the body, rendered incorruptible and immortal, can no longer be affected by the stain of sin. Now, to the fact that this refers to baptism the sequel *[next verse]* also testifies.

***2:12*** *“Buried with him in baptism.”*

Since he called “saving baptism’ a type of death (implying this in ‘buried’), he gives the good news of resurrection: *in whom you were also raised*. And since we still have a mortal nature, he went on, *through faith* *in the power of God*, *who raised him from the dead*: believing in the power of God we await the resurrection, having the resurrection of Christ the Lord as a pledge.

**2:13** *“And you, dead as you were in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made alive with him, forgiving you all your trespasses.*”

Sin destroyed us all, imposing on us the sentence of death. But the God of all made us sharers in the life of Christ the Lord, and bestowed on us forgiveness of sins. By uncircumcision of the flesh he referred to wickedness, explaining that whereas uncircumcision of the body causes no harm to those in that condition, uncircumcision of the soul harms both body and soul. From this he shows that bodily circumcision is of no benefit to the circumcised; on the other hand, it is removal of wickedness that brings about true salvation.

**The Cross: The Landmark that Directs Us**

***2:14*** “*Erasing the bond against us with its decrees, which was not in our favour, and removing it from notice by attaching it to the cross.”*

Some commentators claimed the bond is the Law: after its curse “the people said,” Scripture says, “We shall do all that the Lord our God has said,” and we shall. But that was the Jews’ bond, not all people’s. So my view is that our body is also called “bond”: through it we commit every unlawful action — with our eyes looking without restraint, with our tongue speaking inappropriately, with our ears taking in harmful teaching, committing theft and greed and homicide by hand. God the Word, therefore, in taking on our nature, kept it free of all sin and erased the record of our debts incurred by us in it to our detriment. By allowing it to be attached to the cross, he cancelled the debt of us all; and by fulfilling the Law he brought it to an end, useful though it proved of old to Jews alone, but in no way suitable for us. Instead, he gave us the evangelical decrees, promising us salvation through observance of them.

***2:15*** *“Despoiling the principalities and the authorities, he boldly held them up to ridicule, triumphing over them through it [the Cross].”*

Since the demons had influence over us through the body’s passions, Jesus by being clad in a body proved superior to sin. He abolished the influence of the adversaries, and made their weakness obvious to all people, granting all of us the victory over them through his own body.

**Laws of Diet Don’t Add Anything to the Work of Jesus**

***2:16-17*** *“So let no one judge you in matters of food or drink, or a particular festival or new moon or Sabbath, which are a shadow of what is to come.”*

Here, after having learned that the Law has come to an end, do not in any way be deceived by those endeavouring to sow among you a different seed of the Law’s observances. The phrase “a particular festival” was well put: they were not in a position to celebrate them. I mean, how would it be possible to make your way from Phrygia to Judea three times a year to celebrate the feasts in Jerusalem in accordance with the Law, and especially since Pentecost is close to Easter, when a journey of more than fifty days is involved? By a shadow of things to come he referred to the Law to bring out that the grace of the New Covenant was prefigured in it; he went on to say as much. But the body is Christ’s: in other words, the evangelical way of life fills the role of a body, whereas the Law the role of a shadow. Now, the shadow precedes the body when the light is rising, so that while the Law is a shadow, grace is a body and Christ the Lord is a light.

**The Laws of Religions Disqualify us From Redemption**

***2:18*** *“Let no one disqualify you.”*

They call the judges of the contestants umpires; they give the token of victory to the victors. “Disqualify” means to umpire unfairly. So since those who combined the observances of the Law with the Gospel diverted them from better things to worse, he was right to say, “Let no one disqualify you.” Then he brings out more clearly the resultant harm: Opting for self-abasement and angel worship, following directions beyond their ken, idly puffed up with human opinions. Those who supported the Law encouraged them to worship the angels, claiming in this to respect the Law. This affliction persisted in Phrygia and Pisidia for a long time. Hence a synod that assembled in Laodicea in Phrygia forbade by law praying to the angels; to this very day you can see chapels to Saint Michael among them and their neighbors. Those people, then, were giving that advice — namely, those addicted to self-abasement and claiming that the God of all is beyond sight, reach and comprehension, and that divine benevolence must be secured through the angels (his meaning in self-abasement and angel worship). The phrase “puffed up” is not inconsistent with self-abasement: while making pretence of the latter, they were in fact in the grip of the affliction of arrogance. The phrase, “following directions beyond their ken,” means adopting their own ideas. He went on to say as much …

***2:18-19*** *“Idly puffed up with human opinions, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, supplied and supported by its ligaments and sinews, will grow with a growth that is from God.”*

Again he called Christ the Lord “head,” and the structure of the Church “body,” using all the terms metaphorically: just as in the case of the body the brain is the root of the nerves, and through the nerves the body has the senses, so from Christ the Lord the body of the Church receives both the founts of instruction and the basis of salvation. What sinews are in the body apostles, prophets and teachers are in the structure of the Church. Then he proves from another angle as well that the observance of the Law is in no way relevant to them.

**The Death of Christ Freed Us**

***2:20-22*** *“So if with Christ you died to the elements of the world, why do you submit to regulations as though living in the world? No touching, no tasting, no handling — which are all to do with corruption through use, according to the commands and teachings of human beings.”*

You were buried with Christ in baptism, you became dead to the Law; so how do you put up with those teaching this, and believe some foods are lawful and others unlawful, ignoring the fact that none of this is fit and proper? By commands and teachings he referred not to the Law but to these people’s obsolete instruction.

**2:23** *“All these things have an appearance of wisdom in recommending supposed devotion, self-abasement and rigorous asceticism, but are of no value in checking indulgence of the flesh”.*

He showed them to be invested with appearances, not reality. Supposed devotion suggests as much, meaning, they introduce their own beliefs, they do not subscribe to the Law’s intention, they deceive with specious words, referring to the observance of the Law as self-abasement, and claiming that no liberties should be taken with what is given by God, and that rigorous asceticism involves not being free to enjoy anything. Now, this is obvious servitude and abolition of the dignity given to us: abstinence by free will is required, not as though from loathsome things but as pleasurable.

**Colossians 3: New Life for All: Wives, Husbands, Children, and Slaves**

***3:1-2*** *“If, then, you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.* ***2*** *Have a mind for things above, not for things on earth”*

You shared resurrection with Christ. He is seated over all in the heavens with the Father; so imitate the life above.

***3:3-4*** *“After all, you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* ***4*** *When Christ, your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed in glory with him*”

You became dead to the present life, being buried in baptism with Christ and receiving the hope of resurrection — the meaning of your life is hidden with Christ in God. After all, with his rising all were raised. But we do not see the outcome in reality: the mystery of our resurrection is hidden in him. When he comes a second time, therefore, then we shall attain resurrection and enjoy immortal life. Now, it was very apposite *[apt in the circumstances]* for him to say also in reference to Christ, “he is revealed”: he is not seen even by us and is completely unknown by the unbelievers. He said it also in reference to us, you will be revealed in glory: in hope we have the promises of the good things; what is now unknown will then be revealed.

Since he had rejected the observances of the Law, however, he was obliged, in case they thought they had free rein in sinning, to make wise regulation about their duties in this regard as well.

***3:5*** “*So put your limbs to death to the things on earth — fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, which is idolatry”.*

By limbs he meant those of the body, since it is through it they are put into action. Hence he made a distinction, not saying our limbs, and instead adding the things on earth, that is, the tendency of the mind to the worst, as if to say, let the body no longer be involved in sin. He called idolatry greed; of course, since the Savior gave mammon the name of “master” to emphasize that the person in thrall to the passion of greed esteems wealth like a god.

***3:6-7*** *“On account of these the wrath of God is coming upon the children of disobedience”.*

He necessarily added as well the threat of punishment. *“In them you also were once involved when you were living in them”* (verse 7). He spoke this way also in writing to the Corinthians, “*And this is what some of you were, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified,*” and so on.

***3:8-9*** “*Now, however, set aside all these things yourselves*”.

He then says what they are: rage, anger, vice, slander, shameful talk from your mouth. “*Do not lie to one another”* (verse 9). Having thus explained what he referred to as the body’s limbs, he gives attention also to the body itself, of which these are the limbs: Putting off the old self with its practices. By “old self” he referred to the former way of life; in them you also were once involved when you were living in them, remember. This is what you put off in baptism.

***3:10*** “*And putting on the new self, renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator”*

The God of all created us in the beginning, and stamped on us more precisely the features of the divine image which sin destroyed. He said this also in the letter to the Romans, “*Whom he foreknew and predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son,*”(8:29) and in the letter to the Philippians, “*Who will transform the body of our*

*lowliness so that it be conformed to the body of his.”* (3:21)

**No Class in the Church**

***3:11*** *“Where there is no Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; instead, Christ is all and in all*”.

He shifts the focus from type to archetype: discoursing of all-holy baptism, he explains to us the way of living in the future life. It does, in fact, not allow for differences of this kind; rather, with sin at an end, the divine will is accomplished in all. He said as much, note, “*Christ is all and in all.*” Likewise also in the letter to the Corinthians, “*So that God may be all in all*.” In that life, then, we put on in perfect fashion the new self: in that life we are freed from corruption and clad in incorruption. In baptism we fully live out the type of that life.

***3:12-13*** *“As God’s elect, then, holy and beloved, put on the feelings of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, longsuffering,* ***13*** *bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another”.*

Then he confirms the exhortation with an example: As the Lord also has forgiven you, so do you likewise: have regard to the Lord’s loving-kindness; of how many sins he has granted you forgiveness. So imitate the Lord, and let each one make allowances for the faults committed against them by their brother.

***3:14*** *“And above all have love, which is the bond of perfection”*

Love is also the guardian and assistant of all the commandments; and just as the joists hold the building together, so love is the source of perfection and connects the body’s limbs.

***3:15*** “*Let the peace of Christ preside in your hearts: to it you were also called in one body*”

Having called us, God made of us all one body; do not divide it, therefore. Instead, if someone experiences trouble at another’s hands, let them have peace in their heart, for it will judge in their favor and award the prize and bring about the harmony that is dear to God. And be thankful; give thanks to the Lord even in what happens.

***3:16*** *“Let the word of God dwell in you in abundance. In all wisdom teach and admonish one another, with psalms and hymns and spiritual canticles singing with gratitude in your hearts to the Lord*”.

Even the old Law recommends constant attention to the divine sayings:

“*Pondering them within you when seated and when getting up, when at rest and when traveling on the way.”* The divine apostle also urges this, that we always carry around the teaching of Christ in our soul, sing his praises and sanctify the tongue with spiritual songs; by the phrase in your hearts he means not only in your mouths.

***3:17*** *“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to the God and Father through him.”*

Since those people, remember, ordered the worship of angels, he urges the opposite, that they adorn both their words and their deeds with the memory of Christ the Lord. Offer thanks to the God and Father through him, he is saying, not through the angels. Following this law and wishing to cure that ancient malady, the synod in Laodicea legislated against praying to angels and passing over our Lord Jesus Christ.

At this point Paul proceeds to offer exhortation for each class of person.

***3:18*** *“Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as is fitting, in the Lord*”

Since it happened that godly wives were married to ungodly husbands, he had to make the distinction, saying, in the Lord, that is, as the law of the Lord recommends.

***3:19*** *“Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them”*

He required submission of wives and love of husbands, urging them to behave gently with them as with their own limbs.

***3:20 “****Children, obey your parents in everything: this is pleasing to the Lord*”.

God, remember, ordered this in giving laws.

**3:21** “Fathers, do not provoke your children lest they be come disheartened”

You must also beware of distressing your children, and instead give them proper attention.

**3:22-25** “*Slaves, obey your masters in the flesh in everything*”.

He showed the soul to be free, the body alone being subject to slavery. Not giving eye service to please human beings, but with simplicity of heart out of fear of God: pay heed to your masters with due regard, free of all malice. Commenting on the phrase not giving eye service, he went on,

***23*** “*Whatever you do, do from the heart”.*

And with the intention of making them more enthusiastic, he added, as to the Lord, not to human beings: a reward is laid up for you in this. The sequel indicates this,

***24*** *“Aware that from the Lord you will receive the reward of your inheritance: you serve Christ the Lord*”.

 Sufficient consolation, for those in service to know they are serving not human beings but the Lord. And since it happens that masters are unjust, he had to add,

***25*** *“The unjust man will be repaid with his injustice, and there is no respecting of persons.”*

And so, he is saying, even if you do not receive good things in payment from your masters, there is a righteous judge who knows no difference between servant and master, and instead passes the just verdict.

**Letter from Philemon**

On Colossians 3:14, *“And above all have love, which is the bond of perfection”*

Brother George,

Joy in the love of Jesus,

How is it that love that is rooted in freedom is a bond and that bond is perfection? This is not hard if we graft our love in freedom so that freedom becomes the ground on which the tree of love grows. It is not hard if freedom becomes also the fruit of love as all trees get their nourishment and even water from the ground.

It is not hard if we are convinced that the cross is the true bond of freedom, for by his death our Lord freed us from being slaves to lusts. Moslems love their slavery because their sins abolish their freedom and when freedom of choice is lost, they look for the chains of the Law, just like the Judaizers in the time of St. Paul. So, the cross is the bond that has two hands, one for loving of friends, the second for loving those who don’t love us. It was not accidental, that the Lord forgave those who crucified him because they were also included in God’s love. Now, let us bind ourselves to our cross, and follow Jesus for this is the road to “perfection” that is our “resurrection’ that will make us “perfect.” From the Lord I learn and his love is my eternal book, so to speak.

Have peace in Christ and love Him so that you can, by loving Jesus, be master of yourself, in bond with Jesus who is total freedom. Don’t take Jesus without love or without freedom of love because you will never know Jesus outside love and freedom.

Pray for me a sinner

Philemon

No date 1968

***Pope’s Notes***

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