

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy our brother,
To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae:*

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

*We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for
you, having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love you have for all
the saints because of the hope laid up for you in the heavens, of which ...*

"Not so fast, Paul," Curious grumbled. "You're dishing out these morsels too rapidly for me. I need a little digesting time. I know this is similar to the way you began other letters, but I don't remember that bit about love toward the saints being a result of hope laid up in heaven. I need to get my head around that!"

In truth, Curious had been interested in this issue ever since Jesus advised his audience to lay up treasure in heaven and not on earth; and he had wondered just what that treasure consisted of. Later he had decided the treasure must be people—people whom one had helped in this life, a notion that seemed to be born out by Jesus' interpretation of his parable (in Luke's gospel) of the dishonest steward: make friends by worldly means so when such means fail those folks will receive you into their eternal dwellings. Now here Paul came out with something that seemed to support that idea.

"It boils down to love of fellow believers being an investment in heaven," is how Curious put it to himself.

*... of which you heard in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to
you, even as ...*

Once again Curious had to stop. This long, rapid-fire sentence made his head swim.

"Paul says this very thing is in the gospel: it must be the part of the gospel about hope in heaven for believers; but if it applies to what he just said, then more specifically this is hope of meeting fellow believers there—in heaven—which is a given—a treasure already laid up for them—and an incentive to love them here below."

You're pretty good with long sentences yourself, Curious.

"I get it. It sounds good. I like to think about pie in the sky. But which is it: something one needs to produce by loving people? Or is it already laid up in heaven?"

*... even as in all the world it is also bearing fruit and increasing since the day
you heard and knew the grace of God in truth, even as ...*

"I wish you'd be more specific, Paul. I take it that by fruit you mean love, which was first on your list of fruits of the Spirit. Okay, you don't produce fruit: you pick it off the tree then lay it up for later if you want to. But what we have here is the good news about heaven causing the fruit of love to grow among believers and even more so as they realize that such love is automatically laid up for them as a treasure in heaven."

The thing Curious couldn't understand is why Paul breezed over this so quickly. He decided it must be that the great apostle was so far advanced that these matters seemed elementary to him. But to Curious, love in heaven seemed an idyllic thing that would certainly be worthy of being called a treasure. In his experience, love on earth incurred as much trouble as benefit; it was as common and necessary as pizza, just as perishable, and no better than any other leftover when cold. In fact it got thrown out as often as it got warmed over. Presumably love in heaven was imperishable like gold.

"What would it be like to have a friend who would try to understand even half of what I say?" Curious mused. "Or if someone could express whatever they were thinking without trying my patience?" It seemed impossible to him. He shook his head and continued reading.

*... even as you learned of Epaphras, our beloved fellow-servant who is a faithful
minister of Christ on our behalf, who also declared to us your love in the
Spirit.*

“Good for them. The guy must have been a good preacher,” remarked Curious.

Since the day we heard of this we constantly pray that you be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ...

Curious stopped again, this time because it appeared that Paul had put something between the lines. The abrupt departure from commending them for their love seemed to say that Paul was concerned that their emphasis on love was at the expense of spiritual wisdom. “Love alone doesn’t cut it; you need to understand God’s will,” Curious scolded them, and I think he thought he said it better than Paul did, which is doubtful.

... to walk worthily of the Lord to all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, ...

“That’s a masterpiece,” said Curious facetiously. “What in the world did you mean by ‘to all pleasing,’ Paul? I’m not going to try to get my head around that one.”

But he liked the coupling of “bearing fruit” with “increasing in the knowledge of God.” That made so much sense that the two phrases stuck together and he couldn’t think of one without thinking of the other.

... strengthened with all power according to the might of his glory, ...

“Whoa,” said Curious. “That has to be some power. I can see God conferring that kind of power on a star like our sun. And I do understand we’re talking about the spiritual realm here, but even so, such strength would have to manifest in some spectacular way.”

Curious was confused at this point. Paul was concerned that these people were short on spiritual wisdom and needed to be instructed to live life in a worthy manner, in keeping with being a follower of the Lord, which sounded rather minimal. Then suddenly he seemed to see them blazing with spiritual power akin to the true glory of God and prepared for some great accomplishment.

Remember, Curious, when all else fails, keep reading.

... unto all patience and suffering with joy, ...

“Oh. ... I had the wrong idea about that mighty power: it’s for patience and joy in suffering. ... I see. This does fall in line with everything else I’ve read. I’m a slow learner. Since joy in suffering is unnatural—essentially a miracle—it would take the power of God. But why make it sound like a glorious thing?”

It was not long before Curious remembered that the suffering of Jesus saved the world and is preparing the world for the full revelation of the glory of God on earth.

“Maybe he means those who suffer are being prepared for a glorious future.”

... giving thanks to the Father, who made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, ...

“Okay, I was right: there’s the reason for joy. But explained that way, I don’t see how joy is unnatural: seeing what lies ahead would naturally produce joy.”

On further thought, though, Curious suspected that the reference to light had something to do with it: “Paul says the light is part of the inheritance of being saved. So a person might not see what lies ahead apart from the light.”

Yes, and that puts it back under the power of God to make you fit, through suffering, to bring you to the light. (I think Curious is ignoring me.)

... who delivered us out of the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love, in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins, ...

“I should have known,” said Curious. “It’s the power of Satan that keeps people in the dark. It takes the power of God to overcome it.”

There’s more, Curious.

“‘Translated into the kingdom of the Son of his love.’ That’s poetic, Paul, but what does it mean?”

There's a definite movement in that word "translated," don't you think?

"I get it about shifting from one kingdom to another," said Curious. "But 'Son of his love' ... Could you please expound that, Paul?"

... who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for it was in him that all things were created, ...

"It only gets deeper and deeper!" Curious exclaimed as he stopped to ponder and wonder. He took *"image of the invisible God"* for his starting point. The word "image" had a definite meaning that he could try to apply, and he remembered that way back at the very beginning, Adam's companion was his Maker but more properly would have to be the image of God within the physical realm.

"According to this, it was actually the Son of God who spent time with Adam," Curious observed. "When he went away and came back with a new creature to show Adam it was strong evidence that he was the creator of everything."

Next he contemplated "firstborn" and it occurred to him that "first-created" simply would not work if the Son himself is the creator. "Firstborn" set him outside creation, yet the way it was coupled with creation—firstborn of all creation—erased the clear distinction.

"It's like he did create himself insofar as he provided for that 'back door' by which he appeared within his own creation," Curious said. "Yet coming through that door was more like being born than being created."

When he came to the last phrase, *"in him all things were created,"* Curious gave up. He felt it was pregnant with meaning, but he decided to wait and see what Paul would deliver from it.

... in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers, all things have been created through him, and for him; ...

Curious thought he had almost gotten his head around two out of three of the previous phrases, but now the scope of what Paul was delivering turned out to include things in heaven too.

"It appears there's some kind of close connection between earth and heaven," Curious said. "So he's the Creator of it all."

At the same time Curious realized heaven was a general term for something that had to be more wonderful and complex than the physical universe, and that the invisible things referenced here need not include the entirety of heaven's glory.

"In him, now through him, and for him," said Curious, and he tried to give some respect to each preposition and not consider them quite synonymous. Yet it seemed futile; there wasn't enough context.

... and he is before all things, and in him all things consist.

"Thank you, Paul; now that's helpful," said Curious, and it took him back to his thoughts when he looked at the first chapter of Genesis: *"he is before all things"* fits perfectly, with God designing the universe "before" time as we know it existed.

"Now let me see," said Curious. *"in him all things consist,"* agrees with the concept of his words being the underpinning of existence." He remembered what John had written at the beginning of his gospel: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that has been made."* That went against the simple model whereby the words of creation were simply spoken. Somehow the essence of the Son's being was involved in creation. *"All things were made through him,"* and therefore it was true to say *"in him all things consist."*

"Paul and John are consistent on this," said Curious. "It's mystical, but it must be important."

As he searched his memory for a third witness, what came to mind was Jesus' teaching that God is aware of every detail of creation, not only in its beginning but also as it unfolds in time, even to each sparrow and to the numbering of the hairs on a person's head.

Curious tried to sum it up: "Time is the barrier we struggle to see beyond."

I think he meant that whenever we impose our time on the domain of creation, we get a paradox.

"It's a bridge from created time to the domain of creation."

What bridge do you refer to, Curious?

"*In him all things consist.*' It's a beautiful statement. ... And I see there is more."

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he might have the preeminence.

Curious suspected that Paul had intended the "firstborn" here to recall the previous "firstborn"—firstborn of all creation (out of nothing), and here firstborn to life out of death. Before we get the answer from Paul, how would you put them together? Let's see if Curious makes the connection.

"Oh, now it's so obvious," said Curious. "When the creation rebelled it was as good as dead, and since '*in him all things consist,*' the firstborn died, but also his resurrection to life was inevitable."

Are you going to leave it like that—as a paradox—Curious?

"I'm thinking if we could step outside of time it would appear to be all one 'first-born'. Maybe Paul will explain it."

For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile all things to himself, ...

"There it is!" said Curious. "Paul steps outside of time and sees them joined together."

I assume Curious referred to the necessity of the firstborn of creation being the firstborn of redemption.

... having made peace through the blood of his cross—whether things upon the earth or things in the heavens.

With profound abstractions occupying his mind, Curious was not prepared for this. It made the whole of heaven and earth depend on the spilled blood of a human body at a point in earthly history darkened by human irony. He was speechless.

Curious had gradually developed a concept of the Creator, *infinite* with respect to the material universe, which allowed him to give perfect attention to every detail of his creation without exceeding its own capacity. But the personhood of God as spoken of in the Scriptures had seemed to him a necessary accommodation to the finite nature of human understanding. He never succeeded in getting his head around the ability of God to not only communicate on a human level through his prophets but also to appear in human form on several occasions, most notably and exceptionally as the man Jesus of Nazareth. Here he had found the key he had been missing.

Yes, it was the key that opened the door to see Jesus Christ for who he was, but the key itself was larger than the entire creation, so how could he make use of it? The Creator somehow compressed his infinity into a point of time and space and walked the earth as a man: he looked like a man, talked like a man, walked like a man, but ... he did things and said things that were beyond what any man could do or say. The key fit Jesus perfectly, yet it fit the whole universe too.

It was absolutely exciting to realize that the universe was constructed in such a way that the Creator himself could be subject to its laws. Curious remembered the analogy: it was like a playwright writing himself into the play and taking up his role in the production of it.

Still, Curious knew he had not gotten his head around this passage. To be the image of the invisible God was turning the universe inside out, like finding within a seed the image of the fruit. So being the firstborn of Creation would be similar to that, bearing within himself all the potential of the Creation.

Curious thought of what he knew of the mechanisms behind all of life and matter and that ultimately there was an arrangement of information within a background that supported the assembly and execution of algorithms: essentially a creation founded upon words. It was evident in the first words John had written: *In the beginning was the Word*. The impact, however, is what mattered: it was tremendously exciting that God had visited this earth as a man and had delivered the second part of creation as the firstborn from the dead and that humanity could follow him! It was incredible that nearly everyone in the world either ignored this or was unaware of it.

The passage spoke of “everything,” and Curious became very excited that by some miracle he was getting his head around it in a way that was satisfying to him. But this was more than he had ever imagined he might be able to understand. This man Jesus was the author not only of the material universe but also of the higher dimensions that hosted the material. Curious liked that. It put a cap on everything and left no place for mysterious orders of intelligence beyond the God of the Bible.

Although Curious had noticed the unfolding of the purpose of God becoming a man, now he found it spelled out explicitly, and he was pleased to find it stated so: a rock-solid declaration that though Jesus Christ was beyond comprehension, he was himself the fullness and no angel or devil or extraterrestrial being had authority over him.

Yes, this was wonderfully complete. One need look nowhere else. But what did it mean in practical terms? His grand view had omitted what Jesus had accomplished.

This whole passage took Curious by surprise. He did not expect to find the answer to his unapproachable question about the origin if everything in merely five verses tucked away in a three-page letter near the end of the Bible. He was very pleased that he had persisted, even though at times he was ready to give up. “Everything” meant something quite different to him now than it did when the mere thought of it frightened him.

You may wonder, as I am wondering, whether Curious is allowing the Bible to speak to him personally or if he is merely being goaded along by his curiosity.

And you, who were alienated and at enmity by your thoughts and evil deeds, he has now reconciled through his death, in the body of his flesh, to present you holy, without blemish, and beyond accusation before him ...

“Truly I didn’t know it,” said Curious. “I probably knew I was alienated from God, but I had no idea that was equivalent to being his enemy. This is what I can’t get my head around: instead of killing his enemy he died for me, but not only that, he intends for me to be beyond accusation—without blemish even, and I’m so far from that!”

Curious would have been satisfied to be accepted as a friend of God and no longer an enemy, but perfection seemed impossible because he knew he could never attain it.

... if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, not moving away from the hope you heard of in the gospel—which has been preached in all creation under heaven and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

“No explanation of how it happens,” muttered Curious. “Just believe it and it comes to pass. And Paul isn’t taking any responsibility for inventing this.”

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, completing in my flesh that which the afflictions of Christ did not extend to—for his body's sake, which is the church ...

“So this is how Paul was made perfect!”

... of which I was made a minister by the appointment of God which was given to me for your sake, to complete the word of God ...

"The man was essential to the gospel, according to this," said Curious. "His assurance is amazing."

Curious remembered that in addition to his initial commissioning by Jesus Christ Paul claimed to have seen things in heaven.

"Apparently the other apostles did not know what Paul knew."

... which is the mystery that has been hidden for ages and generations but now has been revealed to his saints, to whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: Christ in you, the hope of glory.

"And it remains a mystery to me," said Curious. "But if there is any hope for me to be made perfect, Christ in me would be it."

We proclaim him, admonishing everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor also, striving according to his working, which works in me mightily.

"Paul really believes he has the mandate to see that people become perfect," Curious observed. "That's far out."

He read these several verses again, to make sure he understood every clause and sentence. Now he had to admit he was no master of its meaning, though the words were simple and logical. So he read it again, and again. He sensed power in it that made him feel very small yet unafraid. He thought he would like to memorize it and possess it, but he did not feel right about that: it would not be right to possess it that way. It was "everything" and he was merely a man, not God.

At the first reading he was excited that he had gotten his head around it pretty well. But now he knew that he really hadn't. Yet he was at peace about just knowing that Christ is all in all. It gave him a reverence and love for Jesus Christ.

It was amazing to Curious that Paul knew all this and was able to express it.

I would have you know how earnestly I strive for you and those at Laodicea as well as others I have not met in person, that their hearts be comforted by being knit together in love and enjoying the riches of full understanding ...

This caused Curious to think about the apostle's heart. He tried to imagine himself unable to visit or communicate with fledgling believers in Christ who had no fixed point of reference. How much of what he had taught them did they retain? Paul knew his letter would be read and discussed, but who else was teaching them and what guidance were they getting in his absence? Every word he wrote would have an impact, but how could he be sure it would be understood as he meant it without being there to answer questions? And it had to be carefully worded so as not to assume too much or too little and not to appear less authoritative than other sources.

"That's why he had to let them know he was God's chosen teacher of the gospel for them," said Curious. "He had stiff competition, and he was earnestly striving to win their hearts while imparting truth that was at variance with their culture's spiritual teachings."

Curious was very impressed with Paul like never before.

... that they may know the mystery of God: Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Curious had to stop and think about that sweeping statement. It seemed it was crafted to claim every bit of territory that opposing teachings might stake out for themselves.

I say this that no one beguile you with enchanting words.

This did not surprise Curious. The battle was palpable in Paul's words.

For though I am absent in the flesh, am I with you in the spirit, enjoying and observing your order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

Curious chuckled at Paul's transparent psychological manipulation. The readers would see it as just that—probably. But how could they be sure? Did he really think they were that good? If Paul would be disappointed if he knew how things really were, then what was God's opinion of them?

"That's actually pretty powerful," said Curious.

Therefore as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, also walk in him; be rooted and built up in him; be established in your faith according as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

"That's a four-part prescription to make them immune to enemy attacks," observed Curious. "He has to seal off every approach the enemy might take."

Take heed lest someone capture you by his philosophy and sophistry—after the tradition of men and the rudiments of the world and not after Christ, for in him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily—and in him you are made full—in him who is the head of all principality and power ...

"Okay, now I get it, Paul," said Curious. "You could have said this at the beginning of your letter and saved a lot of words. But you made a big impressive banner of it, and, well, I must admit, I'm glad you did."

... in whom you were also circumcised with a circumcision not by hands putting off the flesh but by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism ...

"Having taken care of the Greeks, he answers the Jews," said Curious. "That's a nice link for them if they accept the replacement that includes Gentiles."

... wherein you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

"But he offers them more personally than circumcision ever did!"

And you, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, ...

What about that, Curious? Are you sure this is aimed at Jews?

Curious quickly discovered that Paul was referring to the figure he made of putting off the sin nature of the flesh—which is actually impossible. Jews knew it was impossible, which is why their tradition mandated repeated substitutionary sacrifices.

... you, he made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us; and he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

"That must have been extremely relevant to Jews in that church," said Curious.

Having been in bondage to their ordinances that were constant reminders of their inability to get out from under condemnation, now the whole thing is superseded by the one sacrifice of Christ.

"Nailing the law to the cross"—that's brilliant, Paul," said Curious.

And having despoiled the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in the cross.

"I suspect Paul could say a lot more about how the defeat of the devil works out now and in the future. It serves notice to the pagan and mystery religions, anyway."

Therefore let no one judge you regarding meat or drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a sabbath day. These are a shadow of the coming things, but the body is of the Christ.

"Hey, that's very interesting, Paul," said Curious. "I know you're being extremely careful here, so why did you say 'shadow of the coming things' and not 'shadow of the things that were to come'? You sound like the Old Testament. Was it a slip? I don't really think so. So these people will have a place again in the future."

Let no one rob you of your prize by teaching vain humility and angel worship, dwelling on things he saw himself, puffed up by his fleshly mind and not holding fast the Head from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, may increase with the increase of God.

We need to have that unpacked, Curious.

“Paul, you’re a master of saying the most with the fewest words.”

The first two lines Curious thought were easy enough. Apparently the robber’s crime was in deriving doctrines that did not stem from Christ and his cross and therefore missed the dynamic of God.

“That metaphor of the church being like a living body organically welded to God through Christ is really fascinating,” said Curious. He had encountered this before in Paul’s writings, but here Paul pushed the metaphor a bit further: as a living body with its many parts increases in wisdom and stature, so the church when firmly connected to the head becomes the body of Christ with all the potential of God himself.

If with Christ you have died to the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to ordinances—handle not, taste not, touch not (things which perish with the using)—after the precepts and doctrines of men? Such things have a semblance of wisdom in developing self control and humility and disciplining the body, but they are of no value against living in the flesh.

“Apparently Greek asceticism was the thing in those days,” said Curious. “Today one could plug into that things like yoga, fasting, and pilgrimages, I suppose.”

If then you were raised together with Christ, diligently seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth.

“This must be doubly important because ‘Set your mind on the things above’ is doubled,” Curious observed. “But it seems impractical—even impossible, I would say.”

For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

“Oh. That’s how it happens. If it’s true, then one’s mind *would* be set on things above.”

Curious meant if one’s mind is tucked away with Christ in God, the focus would have to be on heavenly things. Let’s see if he sticks with that.

“Please explain this, Paul: what do you mean by one’s life being hidden in Christ?”

When Christ, our life, shall appear, then you will appear with him in glory.

“Thank you! Now that makes sense. It’s about Christ returning in glory and bringing with him those who have received life in God by his resurrection.”

Isn’t that about things on earth, Curious? It’s future, but still it’s an earthly focus.

“So it’s not about hiding one’s life in heaven and ignoring earth: it’s about thinking in terms of heaven’s plan for the future and not exclusively about how life is currently going on earth. That I can see. In fact, that’s great advice. I like it!”

Therefore put to death members of your earthly self such as fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil desire, and covetousness (which is idolatry), for these will bring the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience—the same risk you also incurred when you lived in these things.

Curious scratched his head. “I would say this is double talk if I didn’t know Paul. Put this sinful way of life to death, he says in effect.”

(That must have been a shock to those people in the church who had come to abhor their former way of life—and now their spiritual leader seems out of touch with their new life of struggling with obedience.)

“And then he turns around and says they have already done what he just told them to do!”

But now put these away too: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul language in your talk. And do not lie to one another!

"Clever, Paul. Very clever," said Curious. "First you get us to feel satisfied that we are doing well. Then you hit us with this! And this list stinks as bad or worse than the other!"

Seeing that you have put off the old man with his doings ...

"He's not letting up," said Curious. "He has no mercy. If you haven't put off the old nature like a dirty shirt, he's leaving you behind!"

... and have put on the new man who is being renewed in knowledge and becoming the image of him who created him ...

"Oh, I get it. I should have remembered that. One becomes a new creation in Christ and *then* old things pass away. I think you said it better once or twice before, Paul."

Curious went on to realize that "*being renewed in knowledge*" is put down here as a prerequisite, and that's something to think about.

"He makes it sound so simple: how does one become renewed in knowledge?"

That's what this letter is for, Curious.

... where there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, foreigner, Scythian, bondman and freeman; but Christ is all and in all.

"Maybe that's what he meant," said Curious. "All these divisions are old knowledge; the renewed knowledge doesn't know categories like that."

So as holy and beloved choice-ones of God, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humble-mindedness, meekness, and long-suffering: forbearing one another and forgiving each other. If anyone has a complaint against anyone, then even as the Lord forgave you, you do so too.

"So if this is the new man's outfit, without it he would be naked, and that would be embarrassing indeed," said Curious.

It would be obvious to everyone because things like that really show.

"Amazing that they're called holy and first class even before they learn this."

Over all these things is love, which unifies them perfectly.

"I get the idea, Paul. It all comes under the umbrella of love."

Did you mean to say all these things are manifestations of love?

"Love is like the hat that tops the whole outfit," suggested Curious. "No, that's not right. Love is like the belt that binds things together. No, the belt isn't over everything. Oh, I get it: every item in the list has love written all over it."

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts ...

"That's nice, Paul. But realistically Well, what do I know about it? Not much. ... On second thought, I'm not even sure what he meant."

Come on, Curious, I thought you were getting through this pretty well.

"I'm not even sure if he meant to just let it happen, or if he's telling them to make it happen."

... to this end also you were called to be in one body.

"Okay, so it's neither—or both; either they have peace or they haven't put on the new man. The testing that comes of diversity in the body guarantees that!"

But Paul said "*peace of Christ*." What do you make of that, Curious?

"However, '*peace of Christ*' complicates it. So I really don't know what he means."

When all else fails, keep reading, Curious.

And be thankful.

"Be thankful to Christ, I guess," said Curious. "I can see that trading complaints for thanks would be a move toward peace. But that doesn't really fit *peace of Christ*. There must be more to it than that."

Fine, but keep reading, Curious.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another ...

"I can see that if one remembers words that Christ spoke, they would give one peace—but only if wisely understood, which is what Paul meant by 'the word dwelling in wisdom.' But the rest ... I don't know."

Explain yourself, Curious.

"*Teaching and admonishing one another*' sounds like a recipe for conflict—arguments and defensive reactions."

Keep reading, Curious.

... with psalms, hymns, spiritual songs—singing to God with grace in your hearts.

"That's teaching and admonishing one another?"

Curious was puzzled and took up the challenge to get his head around it.

"Well, there's plenty to think about in those Psalms," Curious reasoned. "So one could recite a Psalm to make a point. But I don't think Paul had that in mind because he's prescribing singing *to God*. If they all sing together, that would be a unifying thing. Throw in grace, and I can see that it could go quite well."

And in everything you do, in word or in deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

"Maybe I'm too much of a rank novice to appreciate that, Paul."

How do you think his readers would take it?

"It sounds super-pious, like one would have to go around continually referencing Jesus in every move."

Maybe he didn't mean it quite that way, Curious. Keep reading.

Wives, be subject to your own husbands as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives without any bitterness. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord well. Fathers, do not vex your children: keep them from becoming discouraged. Servants, obey your masters (according to the flesh) in all things—not just to please people but with a whole heart, fearing the Lord.

"I see. This is what he means by '*in everything you do*.'"

Paul is very practical in his advice.

"Yes, I think if I did something in his name and thanked him for the privilege of doing it, then the thing would turn out quite different than it does when I do it for my own name and credit."

In whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance, for you are serving the Lord Christ. Likewise, he who does wrong will be paid for the wrong he has done, and there is no favoritism.

"This is serious business," said Curious. "One's future is at stake. It's like trying out for the team! Some make it and some don't."

Masters, render to your servants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

"This is out of order," Curious noticed. He thought it should have followed immediately after the admonition to servants.

"Paul, I know you better than that," he added after a pause. "I suspect you did this on purpose."

And our curious reader did identify Paul's reason:

"First you threw out something to prepare the minds of the masters to accept responsibility for being just and fair. *Then* you let them have it. Now I think you're going to put a quick stop to any objection."

Continue steadfastly in prayer, watching therein with thanksgiving.

"So he wants them to pray. Great. And that's where the thanksgiving comes out, of course. But how does one watch in prayer?"

I think you've asked that same question before, Curious.

"There must be something to watch for, so what would it be in this case?"

Will Curious get it? What do you think? What does Paul want them to watch for in prayer? By the way, how *does* one watch for something in prayer?

"Someday the team selection will be announced," said Curious. "If I had tried out for the team, that's what I'd be watching for."

Did he get it right? What Curious referred to as "the team" is what Paul called "the inheritance" when he wrote, "*from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance, for you serve the Lord Christ.*" This definitely is not the reward of going to heaven when you die, for that is not a reward, it's a gift. So what is this that some in the family of God receive and some don't receive?

"But what is the inheritance?" Curious asked rhetorically. "The clue is right there: '*for you serve the Lord Christ.*' It's inheriting a job assignment in his kingdom!"

It does make perfect sense that some believers lack what is required today, but why would it continue to be that way in heaven? Apparently Curious wasn't concerned about that, probably because he had been over it many times before. Let me see if I can get his attention.

Why can't heaven level the playing ground so everyone can be on the team, Curious?

"Don't ask me why everyone can't be made suitable for the inheritance. All I know is that Paul has been urging believers to get their act together before it's too late. So I assume this life has that as a purpose!"

Pray for us also, that God may open for us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ (for doing which I am in bonds), that I may make it clear and obvious, as befitting the occasion.

"What I like about Paul is he has no doubt that he's speaking for God under the authority of God, and that he knows better than anyone about the mystery of Christ." said Curious.

Then why is he in prison? And why does he ask for prayer to open the door for the word? (Notice Paul calls it "the" word like we call Scripture "the" Word and there is no difference in the two in the Greek text which uses no capital letters.)

"It doesn't bother him that he's in prison and has to ask for prayer."

Does it bother you?

"This has puzzled me before. Every servant of God prayed for help. Even Jesus prayed."

It's like God has his hands tied until someone prays.

"I've thought before that since God often waits to be asked, there must be a good reason for it."

The devil is in there somewhere.

"If Satan owns the territory"

Yes, and Satan has such power?

"Satan had to ask permission of God to put a hand on Job."

Job and his estate belonged to God, apparently.

"So if God has to get permission to overrule Satan in Satan's territory—that would make sense to me."

Who other than Satan could give God permission to interfere in Satan's territory?

"It could be someone belonging to God who is in Satan's territory—like the Roman empire. Or maybe several voices would be needed—like signatures on a petition."

Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

"This is exactly what Paul was asking them to pray for on his behalf," Curious said. Do you think he would like to multiply himself?

"But he has to assume they have learned enough from him so that they'll know how to answer each one."

There's more to his prescription than that.

"I don't know which part would be more difficult to follow: never making a foolish misstep or talking gracefully yet with that Pauline spice."

Do you think he wasn't quite serious?

"Paul set's high standards."

Or maybe God does.

"Or maybe God does."

So is Paul not so practical after all?

"A good Christian needs to read and reread Paul and learn to imitate him as he advised his readers—I think I read that somewhere. I'm near the end of this letter. What else could he possibly have to add?"

Tychicus will describe all my affairs to you. He is the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our situation and that he may comfort your hearts—together with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother who is one of you. They will tell you everything.

"There's a pair that apparently learned well from Paul, and now are acting as his courier. It was wise of him to not entrust this gem of a letter to a solo carrier."

Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, salutes you.

"I wonder if they shared the same space in prison—he doesn't waste words on such incidentals like I do."

Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you received instructions), if he come to you, receive him, and Jesus whom we call Justus. Of the circumcision, only these are my fellow workers for the kingdom of God. They are men who have been a comfort unto me.

"Apparently many Jews thought he had abandoned them. It pained him greatly."

Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, salutes you. He always strives for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. I bear him witness, that he labors much for you, for those in Laodicea, and for those in Hierapolis.

"There's a glimpse of a man of prayer. He must believe he's making significant headway against Satan from within Satan's territory."

That's enough, Curious. We're almost out of space on this page.

Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas salute you.

Salute the brethren in Laodicea and Nymphas and the church that meets in their houses.

And when this letter has been read among you, have it also be read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you also read the letter from Laodicea.

And say to Archippus, "Give your attention to the ministry you have received in the Lord, that you fulfill your calling."

The salutation of me, Paul, with my own hand:

Παῦλος

Remember my bonds.

Grace be with you.