LIVING THE GODLY LIFE

In All Circumstances

A Study and Devotional Guide in Colossians for Military Personnel

W. Terry Harrison, MA, MA/LS
FORWARD

The Apostle Paul, a prisoner in Rome about the year 60 A.D., heard of the possible spiritual laxities among the Believers in the small country village of Colosse in south central Asia Minor. He expressed his concerns in a letter to them. This letter to the Colossians is a lucidly written argument against a heresy that could destroy the town’s house-church and consequently create a lukewarm (or worse) membership such as was developing in nearby Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-21). Paul proceeds to address other important issues that reflect the society and culture in which they live. In these modern times, Colossians remains relevant; the circumstances are closely the same.

The intent of this study and devotional guide is to provide insights into the context of Paul’s writing of this letter and to help us understand the practical and theological doctrines so necessary to godly living.

Our military services are now the best they have ever been! Officers and enlisted alike are recognized for their intelligence, skills, and leadership capacities. America is wonderfully blessed in this regard. However, for philosophical and spiritual reasons, times may be changing. Society and culture, both of which are reflected in our armed services, continue to challenge both leaders and followers. Yes, this has always been the case, but it is now considerably more difficult to live professional and private lives within the military fully consistent with biblical principles. It is these principles that may often stand in the way. Where “conduct unbecoming an officer” (Art. 133, UCMJ) had substantial meaning in the 1940’s and 1950’s, for example, this regulation may very well have taken on another understanding in this era of the 21st century.

This study and devotional guide is intended to alert military professionals to the environment that is being created and to further an understanding of those forces that would seek the destruction of the Christian’s spiritual life.

The Book of Colossians is Paul’s treatise to Christians, who need to understand the importance of Christian doctrine and practical theology as they live their daily lives in a climate of unbelief and heresy.
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## Introduction
A meditative reading of the Book of Colossians together with a little imagination, like the reading of all other books in the Bible, is to live the times in which it was written; in this case, about the year 60 A.D. What one finds, as he or she reads, is not only the mind of the apostle Paul but also the spiritual environment which his readers were experiencing. Whether doctrine, admonishments on practical living, or statements of hope, Paul’s writings were meant to be taken very seriously and certainly contemporary for us today. How much humor do we find? None! This may have something to do with his personality, but most probably his anticipation of Christ’s soon reappearance and the consequent need for spiritual perfection (cf. I Thess. 4:13-5:11). Paul’s hope for the imminent return of Christ was profound and a daily reality, and he wanted to make his converts attentive to those truths that produced godliness. His attitude was like that of the Apostle John, who knew that a regular and constant anticipation of Christ’s return would produce a purer life (I John 3:1-3).

What was occurring in Colosse in 60-61 AD was a precursor of developments in our own times of the early 21st century. Paul speaks to us today in a clear voice. Only the years and technology have changed, not the substance of spiritual living.

This four part study is based on Colossians 1: 8 and 9. However, as with all biblical studies, the theological and cultural context is crucial to an understanding of what the author was stating. As we delve into Paul’s God-inspired thoughts, we are necessarily reminded that he is speaking to each one of us as well as to the ancient Believers of Colosse.

[Timothy and I] have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.

Paul

The Apostle Paul’s Admonition for Christians
PART I
A Perspective on the Church in Colosse

The Central Lesson: Constant Prayer and Right Decisions Develop a Godly Life

The House-Church in Colosse

The time was in the early sixth decade of the 1st century; most probably 60 or 61 A.D. Nero was the Emperor of Rome and therefore the earthly Sovereign over the entire empire, which ranged from England in the north to North Africa in the south; from Syria in the east to Spain in the west. Nero was about age 24 when Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians. Following somewhat tranquil early years, Nero’s distaste for certain aspects of his empire, in particular the Christians, was becoming unsettling. Just four or so years after Paul wrote his letters to the believers in Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica, Nero performed a bloodlust upon Christians in Rome;¹ and, so it is argued, created over time a terror-stricken mindset among God’s people throughout the near empire of Macedonia, Greece, and Asia Minor.

When Paul wrote to the Christians in Colosse, they were living in relative peace. What happened to them in later years we can only surmise. As far as we know, the next major persecution took place in 95 AD under the despotic Domitian, when John was exiled to the Greek isle of Patmos where he wrote the Book of Revelation. Any apparent divisions within the community of Colosse in 60-61 AD were based on theological and philosophical grounds. It was the battle for the minds and hearts in this small town that the apostle Paul endeavored to resolve. False doctrines were intruding upon this small church, a problem for many churches today, and quite possibly an issue in small Bible study groups. Resolution of these problematic situations has to do with the knowledge and faithfulness of the respective leaders of these groups. Fortunately, Officers Christian Fellowship (OCF) is producing materials and offering guidance to its leadership so that these problem situations do not exist.

Today’s liberalization of doctrine and methodologies in the body of Christ is more than a century old. Two thousand years ago, the Apostle Paul was similarly alert to the problem. He

¹ Exactly who was responsible for Rome’s burning is unknown, but most historians argue that Nero blamed the Christians for his own irrational attack upon his city. The persecution of 64 AD was the first of many over the following four centuries.
wanted no departure from doctrinal truth and a clear understanding of what Christ desired for his people.

“Battle for minds and hearts.” Does this sound familiar? Consider several of the problems, among many others, in the early church: “Quarrels” (I Cor. 1:11), “incest” (I Cor. 5:1), “bad attitudes” (II Cor. 12:20), “doctrinal heresies” (I Tim. 6:3-5, Col. 2:6-8)

In our modern culture, the secular attempt to adulterate the Christian mind is very aggressive and polluting. This was no less a major problem in ancient Colosse. St. Paul wrote to remedy this problem, at the least to warn against it and to offer encouragement. We’ll recall that these early Christians had very few resources to rely on. We do not know who the pastor of the house church in Colosse was, but can safely surmise that Epaphras (1:7) and Archippus (4:17) were principal teachers within the house church. Epaphras was a student of Paul’s and an associate evangelist, and Archippus was an active member. Both were acquainted with the letters Paul wrote to Colosse and Laodicea, and we can assume that the only (scriptural) knowledge these people had were the collected teachings of Paul as they were disseminated by these two men. We can only speculate that this comparatively small group of Christian brothers and sisters grew spiritually through personal experience and any other godly information delivered to them by way of Paul’s friends and co-workers.

Dealing with their pagan and hedonistic culture as they were accustomed to do, the Christians in Colosse did not have very much spiritual guidance as we do today. Written guidance from the Apostle Paul, such as the Letter to the Colossians, verbal instructions from Archippus and Epaphras and other possible teachers that represented the apostle were their sources of spiritual guidance.

And yes, this is where the problem with the house church in Colosse arose: false teaching! It is estimated that a single size Colossians’ house-church numbered no more than 12-15 adults, considering the typical size of homes during that ancient period. However, the estimate becomes larger if several homes were used; say, 50 adults at the most? In any case, Paul considered this

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2 Such letters mentioned in Col. 4: 16, the one(s) from Laodicea never found, were read aloud in the churches.
church worthy of attention; this church along with that in the larger town of Laodicea (Col. 4:16).

What is remarkable is the fact that Paul wrote this letter while a prisoner in Rome to a congregation he had never seen. It has been stated that Paul considered Colosse, Hierapolis, and Laodicea, all towns of the Lycos valley, as his personal parish. Yet his student, Epaphras, a member of the church in Colosse, was the one who delivered the news to the imprisoned Paul that the church was suffering from heresy. It was he who represented Paul as the region’s evangelist (Col. 1:7; 4:12, 13).

Notice on the map in the addendum the location of Colosse relative to transportation routes and to nearby towns. Colosse had, at one time, been a major center for the marketing of goods and for the occasional lodging of Roman military troops. But by the earthquake of 46 AD, Colosse was destroyed. Sixteen years later, the small town having been rebuilt, the Christian church rose from the ashes, but market capabilities and earlier enterprises were virtually lost. Now it was a small agricultural town. It appears that the house-church in Colosse was composed principally of farmers.

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3 H. C. Thiessen in his excellent book, Introduction to the New Testament, presents an excellent overview of Colossians. “Parish” is his description of these towns in Asia Minor.
Paul had done considerable missionary work in this area, but had never visited Colosse. Notice the seven towns on this map mentioned in Revelation chapter 3—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Why Colosse was not mentioned is curious. Is it perhaps because this small town was destroyed by another earthquake (ca. 60AD), and consequently did not exist at the time of John’s writing in 95AD?\(^4\)

**Paul’s Central Concern for the Christians in Colosse**

Saul, as the Apostle Paul was initially known prior to his conversion to Jesus Christ (Acts 8:1-31; 13:9), knew well the pagan and hedonistic mentality of Rome. He knew the universally accepted role of the Emperor Nero, the god-man. Moreover, he was familiar with the gods of the Greeks and the mystery religions of the Middle East, and he knew intimately the Jewish scriptures. He himself remained in the pharisaic intellectualism of his Judaism having been taught by the noted Gamaliel, who was a Pharisee doctor of Jewish law (Acts 22:3). With his conversion to Jesus Christ (Acts 9:1-17), however, Paul soon became well-honed in his new faith; and by his earlier experiences with the street philosophies of the Greek and Roman gods and goddesses and those ideologies of the Eastern religions, he was well prepared to warn anyone of the falsehoods that endeavored to strip away one’s relationship with the one true God.

Moreover, Paul was particularly interested in the threat of the Judaizing Christians in the Phrygian area because of the warnings that Epaphras (so we can assume) had brought to him following an evangelistic tour to that area (1:7, 8).

Specifically, Paul was very concerned that the Christians of Colosse maintained their faith in the Sovereign God, who was over all powers and principalities (1:15-19) and who had provided redemption by His own personal sacrifice (1:20-23). He advised against the false teachers that had entered Colosse to preach their deceitful philosophies (2:4-15), and admonished these Believers not to fall prey to phony ritualistic practices and not to worship beings other than God Himself (2:16-19).

“Do not deal with persons having idle, theological/philosophical notions which themselves are puffed up, thus cutting themselves off from the one true God.” (2:18, 19, para.). The apostle knew that he had to eradicate potentially damaging ideas from the house-church. He understood

\(^4\) Tacitus writes of an earthquake in 60AD (Annals 14:27), which once again almost destroyed the entire town. We can assume that Paul did not know of this when he wrote his letter due to the problems with news delivery.
what later historians would know: ideas generate events and developments. Wrong and evil ideas must be eradicated!

Paul’s structure of his letter to the people in Colosse is such that it clearly demonstrates that what one believes in his heart and mind plays out in his or her daily life. Colossians reveals the logical thought processes that the apostle went through before setting forth his God-given rational for improving one’s spiritual life and then living in the sanctifying way. Prayer, which was an active part of Paul’s life (I Th. 5:17, Phil. 4:6), was crucial in the process leading to others’ sanctification. The following pictograph illustrates the point:

Step 1. Prayers for the Colossians by Paul and Timothy were crucial (1:9, 10)

2. Sanctification, the process of spiritual growth—knowing God’s will through spiritual wisdom and understanding (1:9)

3. A life pleasing to God is the goal of the Believer (1:10).

Paul’s concerns came from a heart and mind that had been tempered by hard times. Persecution, sometimes severe, had taken a toll on his own life. He well knew and understood personally Christ’s own warnings about this feature of faithful Christian living (Matt. 5:10-12)! Now he was in prison for the second time, the first in Caesarea (Acts 22:22ff); this time in Rome,

5 “Sanctification,” a word Paul uses five times in his letters, is implied here in Colossians. It means the process of the Holy Spirit to bring an individual to moral perfection, as Jesus Christ and Father God are perfect.
which was his first Roman imprisonment. His life was indeed a testimony to the fact that if one expects to be presented “perfect in Christ,” he or she must be faithful in doctrine, firmly established, always hopeful (1:23, 28).

Is it a fair question for us today: Should we as Believers expect to be persecuted in any way simply because we know Christ? What did Paul mean by his statement in II Tim. 3:12?

Paul’s Sense of Urgency

While we do not wish to “read between the lines,” we can nevertheless recognize the urgency with which the apostle sends this message to his fellow-believers. Notice some of his phrasing:

- “We have not stopped praying for you” (1:9). This wording in the koine\(^6\) Greek suggests that Paul and Timothy remained very regular in their prayer efforts even though they did not know personally those believers in Colosse. Their prayers were unceasingly (οὔ πανόμεθα) rendered to God, and suggest an anxiety over the church’s future.
- “Strengthened with all power…so that you have great endurance and patience…(1:11).

The Christians in Rome during this era of the early decades were considered to be (potentially) dangerous revolutionaries; their beliefs were perceived to be superstitious, and their activities were suspect (more on this in Part III). Paul recognized the dangers of living a Christian life in this pagan empire, and wished to prepare his fellow believers for the difficulties ahead. While persecution of the followers of Jesus outside the limits of Rome proper did not begin for some time after the executions of Paul and Peter (67-68 AD), there were relevant tensions throughout Asia Minor, including Phrygia and the neighborhoods of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 3. Warring ideologies challenged the new Christian Faith, the discussion of which is provided in Part III.
- “I labor and struggle with all [Christ’s] energy to present everyone perfect in Christ” (1:28, 29). Paul may have had a premonition of things to come. Not simply was he active so as to guarantee the growth of God’s Kingdom my evangelization, but he wanted those in his parish to live as if Christ’s return was imminent. Certainly Paul, as with all apostles and disciples of the 1st century, thought so and wrote and acted as if he knew so! His second letter to Timothy, written approximately six years later (66-67 AD), soon before his execution, expressed his grave conviction that “all who want to live a godly

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\(^6\) Koine Greek was the language of the commoner such as those in Colosse. The language used by the upper classes was the Attic Greek, a more sophisticated language.
life will suffer persecution” (II Tim. 3:12). Balancing this warning to fellow Believers with his desire that all grow spiritually in spite of future hardships was not easy to counsel. To follow Paul’s lead was to endanger themselves in future years. The subsequent 250 years of Roman history confirm this point!

Indeed, Paul never minced words and actions. While news travelled slowly in those days, word did get out eventually that Paul was executed by decapitation. Peter was crucified about the same time; by tradition, upside down!

Was this the future the Colossians wanted? How sincere was their faith? Did these farmers really want their Christian testimony to be alive and energetic?

Some More Questions to Ponder:

If Paul’s letter to the Colossians is relevant to our modern times, are we ourselves reminded that we are beholden to the Apostle’s instructions and guidance? No matter our profession, do we take seriously his 2000 years-old letter as our own? Let’s consider his advice in the form of questions to ourselves. Do we…

- want earnestly to be filled with a knowledge of God that is guaranteed to provide His wisdom and understanding of things?
- desire to live the kind of life that is pleasing to God, no matter the consequences?
- decline and reject the life of the old nature? (cf. Gal. 5:19-21).
- really want to produce the “fruits” that evidence our relationship to a Holy God? How do we produce these “fruits” and what will they be? (cf. Gal. 5:22, 23).
- see ourselves qualified to share in God’s Kingdom?

These questions focus our minds and hearts on the issues that really matter. Paul’s execution for the Faith he courageously believed in serves today as a model for us as we demonstrate our own beliefs, staying-power, and anticipation of Christ’s return.

Is it a fair question to ask: While we are patriotic to our country and to our service, and as a consequence are placed in harm’s way, do we also have the same mindset when confronted for Christ’s sake? Say…as Paul and Peter did?

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The service mottos:

- Air Force: “Service Before Self” †
- Army: “This We’ll Defend”
- Coast Guard: “Always Ready”
- Marine Corps: “Always Faithful”
- Navy: “Not Self but Country” †
- What is the Christian’s motto? _______

† Tentative, unofficial

7 F. F. Bruce, quoting Eusibius, New Testament History (Doubleday), p. 367
Part II is an overview of Paul’s insights on the dark-side of the Colossians’ experiences and their resolution. His insights provide an inkling of our own dark world of the past and the recovery we Believers enjoy.

Let’s see now what Paul was getting at.

PART II

The Dominion of Darkness Overcome by Jesus Christ

[Christ] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness...Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior...[Therefore], put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature...you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, [so] why do you submit to its rules?

Paul

The Central Lesson: Our Environment Does Not Need to Control Us; and Must Not

The Apostle Paul’s above statements from his letter (Col. 1:13, 21, 2:20, 3:5a) and his continuing statements in 1:15-28, verses which we shall consider in Part III, were quite amazing, given the religious and philosophical belief systems of those ancient times. Not only had Jesus Himself been persecuted, condemned, then executed, but his followers were also repudiated. His immediate disciples were all executed as well within sixty-five years or so of Jesus’ death. This was the work within the “dominion of darkness,” as Paul described, and this evil would become more apparent as the decades wore on. From the evidence of history and by innuendo from the
letter to the Colossians, the Christians in Colosse were very much affected. Several issues were paramount: The…

- increasing tyrannical aspects of the Roman government;
- role of the Greek and Roman religions;
- influence of the mystery religions from the Middle East;
- moral behavior of the neighboring people; and perhaps most significantly,
- the theological heresies of the Hellenistic Judaizers.  

We’ll consider each of the issues briefly, for they comprise the “dark” world of the Empire at this time. They help us understand what the Colossians and regional Christian churches were up against and what Paul was concerned about. Before we deal with these, a brief word about Paul’s own background is in order.

**The Apostle Paul’s Early History.** Born and raised in Tarsus, a large city of approximately 500,000 very close to the south coast of Asia Minor, the bright young lad, Saul (his Jewish name prior to his conversion) became well acquainted with the religions and philosophical ideologies of the era. Its reputable history included, so tradition has it, the settlement of Adam’s son, Seth, in the fourth millennium B.C. and the first memorable meeting of Mark Antony and Cleopatra.

By the time he was born (ca.10AD), Tarsus was already a university town. We can accurately surmise that Saul (his Jewish name) learned considerably from the Hellenic environment of the city. He undoubtedly became absorbed in the syncretistic religions of Greece and Rome, in particular the myths and pagan cultures that these religions produced. Coupled with the mystery religions that the Roman military legionnaires brought into the city over decades of deployment, Saul was well acquainted with the pagan and hedonistic atmosphere common in the Empire.

Being raised in a faithful Jewish family as Saul was, we can well understand that his training in the Torah and related documents kept him from the distractions familiar to paganism. We should not be surprised to learn that his parents surely trained him in the way he should go (Prov. 22:6). When in his adolescent years and further into his third decade, Saul referred to the Jewish scriptures, speaking from the Hellenic (Greek) translation that he heard in the Synagogue associated with the Diaspora. Moreover, his later religious instructions under the Pharisee Gamaliel (cf. Acts 22:3; also 5:34) allegedly gave Saul a theological cushion on which to carry out his future goal of harassing and persecuting the Christians.

It was this activity against the earliest Believers that took him headlong into the confrontation with Jesus Christ when on the road to Damascus (Acts 8:1-9:2).

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8 Judaizers were Jewish Christians, who insisted on a return to the Torah and related texts, placing law and relevant Jewish mysticism before grace and the freedoms Paul taught.
9 Wayne Meeks, ed. *The Writings of St. Paul* (W.W. Norton & Co.), 1972. The Diaspora began in 70 AD, a year when the Jews fled Jerusalem to other parts of the near-world to escape persecution. Eventually, this movement became a global phenomenon.
**Nero’s Roman Empire.** A concern of all Roman citizens was the gradual development of the Emperor’s view of himself and of those within his sovereignty. The reigns of the various emperors until Domitian’s time (81-96 AD) reflected the belief that the emperor was indeed all-powerful, a “lord” over all people. Emperors were tyrants and ruled as such, some more harshly than others. Nero, in his latter days was such a ruler. His notoriously brutal attacks upon Christians in Rome in 64 AD became known within months throughout the Empire, especially in Asia Minor. While the Colossians did not experience, to our knowledge, such persecutions at this time, they most certainly must have realized the political expectations of servitude under a master ruler and his provincial governors. After all, the Roman military machine, governed by loyal proconsuls in the various provinces, held sway over all, seeing to it that inhabitants paid their taxes, kept the peace, and obeyed the laws of the land.

We do not know with certainty how the Colossians were treated. We do know that many Christians refused to pay homage to the emperor and were expected to worship state gods. Not to worship the god-emperor normally meant the death sentence! Can we safely assume that the Christian in Colosse had second thoughts about whom they were to submit their allegiances?

The developing policy was that of “Dominus et Deus,” Master and God. What did 1st century Christians do? What about the Colossians in particular? What did the young Christian farmer from Colosse commit himself to when he joined the Roman Legionnaires? With a tyrannical overlord in Rome and the true Lord in his heart, what was he to do? These are fair questions for us today.

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**Does personal background in any way dictate the later years? If there is a dark side to growing up, does it necessarily carry through to an older age? The Apostle Paul obviously did a 180 degree turnaround when he was in his late 20’s or early 30’s. What happened to him? What happens to us? (cf. II Cor. 5:17).**

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10 The Colosse Christians were mostly gentiles, so would have been readily eligible for conscription into the Roman army.
Part III deals with this issue. It was a major concern and one that we might heed to in this day and hour.

Christians Among the Pagans of Their Day

Have we wondered about the Roman centurion, the commander of about 80 to 100 soldiers, whose faith was whole and found pleasing to Jesus? (Matt. 5:1-13). He asked Jesus to heal his servant, who was paralyzed and severely suffering from an undetermined ailment. The Lord was astonished at the officer’s faith, saying, “I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.” The servant was healed; the Centurion was rewarded for his faith.

This officer of a Roman Guard, stationed in Capernaum with his troops, was working within a pagan environment in which all the dynamics of such a secular world were in play—a god-Emperor, the forces of strange mystery religions, which were enabled principally by the military, the Greco-Roman myth philosophies, and the Jewish theologies that permeated Palestine. Being a gentile, the Centurion surely had struggled with the Mysteries while considering his own faith.

Then there was the centurion of Caesarea, another officer of the Roman army, who is described as a “righteous and God-fearing man, one who is respected by the Jewish [community]” (Acts 10:22). This officer served under the ultimate command of either Tiberius or Claudius, depending on when this event occurred (35-39AD). In either situation, full honor and respect was given to the emperor, while the question of actual worship of the emperor at this time is in question. Assuming the god-Emperor was not yet a hazard for Christian officers and conscripts, the diverse religious and political atmosphere posed a challenge for the Believers as it did decades following.

We now refer, of course, to the years 60-64 AD, when Paul wrote to the Colossians and when the demoniac Nero was emperor. During this time, Christian military personnel would have had difficulty envisioning the emperor as a god while serving the Lord Jesus Christ. (In Part III, this issue will be considered).

The Mystery religions were popular with the Roman soldiers, having brought with them these mythical ideologies from their deployments to Egypt, the Middle East, and their forays into the lower regions of Europe. From the Mysteries: Cybele, Isis, and Mythra. From the Greek and Roman religions: a plurality of gods that controlled, by their specific roles, the universe and the human emotions therein. From Greek and Roman philosophies: the search for truth as posed by such thinkers as Zeno, Plato, Aristotle, and Pythagoras. And thus was the mysterious foray into the unknown that produced the puzzle for all within the Empire.

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11 Tiberius, the Emperor during the time of Jesus, was not the dominant, god-acting man so characteristic of later emperors such as Caligula, Nero, and Domitian.
Religious belief in 60 AD was a conglomeration of systems. Pick one, choose several, become a Universalist! What is true? What would help the most? How do I secure my own future? Whom do I follow that will help me remain satisfied? These were some of the questions a thoughtful Roman citizen might ask. But the Believers in Colosse? There were other problems.

When we consider the religious dynamics of our current society, how do we react? Think about the current diversity of beliefs, to list a few, many of which are currently represented in the armed services:

- Agnosticism, Atheism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, New Age, Satanism, Spiritualism, Scientism...and so many others!

“The Lord is our rock” (Ps. 18:2). What does this mean? How imbedded is the “rock” in our lives.” Are we easily dissuaded? Do others and/or their beliefs challenge us?

The Moral Climate Within the Region of Colosse

“Living a life worthy of the Lord” (1:10) was Paul’s and Timothy’s prayer to God; that the Christians in Colosse would adhere to Christian principles rooted in the Ten Commandments and parlayed into gracious living and godly, social enterprise.

Anyone with a military background in our common era will understand the civil and moral atmosphere produced by an occupying army whose ranks include men lacking a biblical moral base. The region of Phrygia, which included Colosse, was governed by a Roman proconsul and secured by the military. The immoral social scene we see today was also inherent in Rome and the Empire. Brothels and “fornices”, places of unorganized prostitution, were popular locations, especially when seasonal, competitive games were formed. The larger, nearby town of Laodicea was undoubtedly readily available to citizens from Colosse. When we read Paul’s admonitions to the Christians in that village, we can well understand his personal concerns over this particular issue. He commences his rules for godly living by stating:

Since you have been risen with Christ...put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. (Col. 3:1, 5, 6)

12 Women were not allowed in the Roman army.
Moreover, we realize from Paul’s insights that the Colossians were troubled by other activities that emanated from doubtful or undisciplined living. Here are some of the other concerns:

- Being captive to human traditions and worldly principles rather than on Christ (2:8);
- Understanding what actually happens in the conversion experience (2:11-15);
- Living with clear discernment (2:16-19);
- Being aware of false teachings and not allowing such phony wisdom to impede spiritual growth (2:20-23).

What we know from our personal experiences or from those of others is the simple fact a lustful heart (Paul’s first concern as expressed in his logical manner) is tantamount to fertilizing the heart’s ground to plant bad seeds. These seeds come in numerous varieties. It is no wonder that the 10th Commandment, as stated in Deut. 5:21 (“You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife…”) is fundamental within the Decalogue. To Paul, who we understand knew about such things prior to his conversion in spite of his pharisaical training, the lusting heart was an undisciplined, unregulated heart. It was this seat of the human emotions and intellect that Paul wanted to protect. Listen to what he wrote in this regard:

> “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

Col. 3:1

His word “set” (ζητεῖτε) is an active verb meaning also to search and strive for on a consistent basis. It is a verb that is in the spirit of the Apostle John’s observation that “everyone who has [the hope of Christ’s return] in him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (I John 3:3). In our modern secular world, a post-Christian world it has been termed, we ourselves are called on to heed Paul’s warning—“Because of practicing earthly pleasures, the wrath of God is coming” (3:5, 6).

Once again, Paul’s sense of urgency is substantially real. Without having visited the village of Colosse, Paul knew nevertheless that it was similar to others. Human nature is what it is everywhere. This village had its own array of evil and sin from which Believers needed to protect themselves with God’s help.

We know from Colossians 3:5 (see p. 14) that there were specific moral and ethical issues at work. It would be useful to pause here and ask:

- What moral issues are also at work in our modern military?
- Are there any perceived ethical matters that need to be addressed?
• How active is the “political correct” mindset? Does it matter?
• How might I, as a Christian, address these issues?

The Hellenistic Judaizers and the Challenge of Legalism

The Jews of the 1st century were heavily influenced by the philosophical traditions introduced by the armies of Alexander the Great in 325 BC. They were responsible for the spread of the koine Greek language, associated arts and the philosophical traditions of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, to name the principal writers. The Hebrew Old Testament, fully completed by 277 BC, was translated into the Greek language so as to make it available to those Jews now speaking that language. This Old Testament is known as the Septuagint. By the close of the first millennium, Greek was the lingua franca of all the conquered people; and by the time of Jesus Christ, was becoming well known among the people in Palestine. Although Jesus spoke in Aramaic, the writers of the New Testament all wrote in koine Greek.

The principal educator of the Hellenistic traditions to the Jewish mind was the Alexandrian Philo. Prior to his death about seven years following Christ’s resurrection, he demonstrated considerable influence in the Palestinian area and northward into Asia Minor. Essentially, he sought to synthesize Plato’s philosophy with that of the Divine Word of the Bible; which is to say, the Divine Reason of Plato’s thinking—Ideas are the only reality and are inherent in the Scriptures such as found in the writings of John’s gospel, for example—is the form from which all else derives its being. In other words, the personal God of the Bible does not exist, only eternal ideas which are imaged in life as we comprehend existence. Hellenistic Judaism dealt with the nature of God, reality, ethics, and morality by attending to the thoughts of pagan thinkers.

Taking this thesis as the foundation point, Jewish scholars built a theology that led to a number of heresies, several of which Paul deals with in his letter to the Colossians (1:15-2:23).

As we shall see, Paul’s concerns for the Christians in this village remain concerns for us today. Spiritual and religious doctrines that are antithetical to biblical precepts spiral around us all the time. Do we ever wonder at the divisive theologies and tactics of modern denominations and independent churches? Besides the proliferating and apparent heresies and ignorant belief systems of other “faiths,” are we sometimes being regimented to think only within a particular box? As one pastor said, “Don’t leave this church, for you will not get anything good at another.”

Then, of course, a number did indeed leave in order to learn how other pastors were dealing with doctrines.

If Paul were alive today, still acting as God’s representative, he would tell us simply:

“Let no one deceive you by fine-sounding arguments...I am present with you in spirit, and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

\[13\] John 1: 1, 2, 14)
\[14\] This statement was actually made...
Several Questions to Ponder

- In the same way Saul learned from his Jewish and pagan environment when growing up, we ourselves learned from personal experiences that either damaged our thinking or set us off on the wrong path. What were the positives that built us into strong men and women? Are there any negatives that might be hindering us?
- Our world today is governmentally diverse, not one controlled as it was in the 1st century. However, “political correctness,”15 which is now the *modus operandi* of American society, might make the Christian cringe, even those within the military. How ought Believers to respond in such an environment?
- How is the Christian Faith being attacked today, either by dilution or outright contradiction?
- Are their ethical and morality difficulties that confront our Christian military personnel? What should be the biblical response? What is the actual response?
- What would Paul warn us about in our times so as to prevent corruption to our faith and persons?
- Is there a role the Christian military commander should take as he presents an influence on his troops? Do military policies place a restriction on his or her Christian commitments and activities. What is the Christian obligated, by his faith, to do?

These questions are profoundly rooted in the doctrine concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul’s prayer for the Colossians, that they “live a life worthy of the Lord” (1:10), is ultimately rooted in this doctrine. It is a “categorical imperative,” as stated by George C. Morgan.16

As we ready ourselves for the future, do we see ourselves living by absolute imperatives? To do away with “absolutes” is what the “politically correct” society desires. No standards! Therefore no set rules on morality and ethics. No substantive earmarks to determine honesty and integrity…all those values that Christians hold dear.

How does an individual, such as the military professional locked in to a contracted relationship with the government, respond and never compromise his or her faith?

We come now to Part III. Paul leaves no doubt as to whom our commander is in this earthly life. His warning to the Colossians was gentle but hard-hitting. He was urgent. We might say he

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15 “Political correctness” is defined here as the toleration of all points of view and legitimate activities. The exception is the increasing lack of acceptance of Judeo-Christian principles and practices.
was even nervous as he expressed himself by God’s leading, knowing that his own day of Roman judgment was approaching. (After all, he was human!).

PART III

Our Supreme Commander

“God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [Christ]...He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in his faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. ... [He] has disarmed the powers and authorities... triumphing over them by the cross. “

Paul

Central Lesson: God in Christ has placed Himself above everyone and above all else.

While Part I and II provided overviews of the church in Colosse, Part III endeavors to look at the specifics of Paul’s theology—why it was so crucial to the spiritual growth of the Believers there and to us today. Let us recall that these uneducated Christians were living in the midst of forces that challenged their beliefs and attempted to neutralize their faith.

In our contemporary world, Christians need to be alert to the secular, political forces that would expose Christians to anti-biblical precepts.

Jesus Christ, the One Who Is Our Redeemer and Lord (Col. 1:15-28)

As we notice in the above passage of Col. 1:19-23 and 2:15, the Apostle Paul was direct and emphatic in this letter to the Colossians. He wrote with great confidence, and was justified in doing so. His own experience on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19) was such that he had no alternative but to relinquish his own power and authority and his estimation of himself. (He knew whereof he was saying when he wrote to the Romans: “Do not think of yourself more
highly than you ought, but [consider] yourself with sober thought.” 17 The blinding power of sin and evil was stripped from him in that explosive moment with the Son of the Almighty God. He was profoundly humbled! He was spiritually enlightened, the false learning of years past reduced to nothing. With his authentic conversion to Jesus Christ, he began his own journey under the commanding influence and direction of a new leader. Saul, now called Paul (Acts 13:9), became diametrically opposed to the universe of evil, accepting the gift God had provided, thus taking the passage leading to eternal life (Rom. 6:23).

What Paul desired for the Colossians is what he desires for us today—a dramatic turn-around that evidences a full awareness of the world around us and the rejection of that environment. As he wrote in Colossians, [we] died with Christ to the world’s basic principles (2:20)... whatever we do or say, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus (3:17 para.). Similarly, He wants us “to press on [in this life] toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14)

So it is that Jesus, in these modern times, continues to provide us our own personal salvation—our road to eternal life through sincere faith, which calls for trust and obedience. The tangential benefit is a wonderful hope and, not yet perfection unfortunately, the very nature of God which is insurmountable love. These are the supreme characteristics of coming into relationship with God: faith, hope, and love (I Cor. 13:13).

It is “trust” and obedience” that the Apostle is alluding to when instructing the Colossians on the absolute supremacy of Jesus Christ. His concern, as noted earlier in Part II, is that we take our faith seriously as he wished the Colossians to do. It is little wonder that Paul used the military language to describe the “armor of God” (Eph 6:10-17) that, if used consistently, would successfully ward off the evils that separate us from God.

It is the absoluteness of Christ and His acclaimed sovereignty over all creation that has the world in complete rejection; both in the ancient days and now. Why cannot He be accepted, which Christians know is the reasonable thing to do? We know that it is because the human heart is sinful (Rom. 3:23) and therefore men and women all need to allow God to take off their blinders by their acceptance of His Son, Christ Jesus, as their savior and Lord.

Why is Paul so adamantly confident in the reality of Jesus Christ and the eternal power He has? It is because (1) he met Jesus personally in a very dramatic way (Acts 9:1-17; (2) He knew that his Messiah’s resurrection from the dead was a reality (II Cor. 15:3-8); and (3) having been a good Pharisee prior to his conversion, he trusted the prophets of old, knowing that their claim of a future Messiah was rock solid in truth (Is. 7:14; 53:1-12; Zech. 14, for example).
Just as it was with the ancients in the Roman Empire, so it has always been: People refuse to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. They refuse to believe that a man, claiming to be the Son of God, can save people through his own blood sacrifice. They refuse to acknowledge that sin even exists. On the other hand, people have always been attracted to myths and fables, false religions and superstitions, to appease their own appetites for spiritual security. Thus Cybele, Isis, Mithras and the philosophical systems in the ancient world were acceptable. They were “politically correct,” to use the contemporary term. Those in our modern, global society mentioned in Part II exist to challenge the claims of Jesus Christ, who in the world’s eyes has never been “politically correct” and never will be!

The soldiers in the Roman Army had their diverse beliefs. Their ties to the various myths and legends were not a bother to their professional enterprise just as long as they remained loyal to the Emperor. Roman citizens likewise were expected to remain loyal to the emperor. There was no “freedom of speech” as we know it today in America. Being faithful to their own religious beliefs was okay provided such beliefs did not challenge the authority of the State.

The Apostle Paul was eager to ensure that the Colossians remained faithful in their specific and particular beliefs and did not cater to false teaching that apparently was now creeping into the church in Colosse. Notice again what Paul wrote:

“I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those in Laodicea...My purpose is that [all of you] may be encouraged...and may have the full riches and complete understanding in order that [you] may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine sounding arguments.”

Col. 2:1-4

The Challenge of the Judaizers (Col. 2:6-23)

Paul was curious to think that heresy might very well take its place in this Believers’ church. His rationale was based on two concerns:

• The Judaizers, raised as they were in a Hellenistic environment, would capture the imagination of the church members; and by an intuitive insight...
the thought that the government’s Imperial policy of Emperor worship, decades later to be known as *dominus et deus*, would ultimately endanger the Christians’ profession of faith.

Consider the first concern: What the Colossians must faithfully believe. The role of Jesus Christ in eternity and in history is fundamental to all decisions made relative to what is held to be true and what is false. Listen again to what Paul wrote (1: 15-20):

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“Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation...by Him were all things created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning from the first-born from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things.
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These verses are pivotal to Christian belief. They provide the narrow focus by which any heresy, any strange doctrine, or any opposing idea that would contradict the supremacy of Christ could be judged. So it was with the Colossians as it is today!

It is recognized with confidence that these verses identify Jesus Christ as absolutely supreme over all creation. And this, of course, is true (cf. Hebrews 1). But the verb “might,” in the Greek γένηται, suggests that there is also a perspective on Christ’s role that is the secular world’s perspective. We know that there are indeed two general worldviews by which things are known: The Biblical view and the non-believers’ view. In the above passage, Paul seems to be raising the question: “Okay, which is it to be—the fact that Jesus Christ is indeed supreme over all creation or He isn’t? Where do you stand, you Christians of Colosse?

And for us today, where do we stand? Which worldview is it to be? Among the Christians in the military, who really is supreme? Is it the Lord Almighty or the Commander in Chief?

In the ensuing scriptures, Paul makes it very clear where he himself stands, and he gave his own life for his belief some six or seven years later. He knew with great assurance that Jesus Christ is in fact the Supreme Head over all creation. Paul himself was given a new birth, became a new creation, and was now God’s ambassador (II Cor. 5:17-21). Again we are reminded that he gave his life for his belief in Christ Jesus.

Paul gained a totally new worldview (II Cor. 5:16) by his conversion. His was a true and positive enlightenment! His own personal experience enabled him to say to fellow Believers, in
this case the Ephesians, that he prayed that the “eyes of their heart(s) may be enlightened,” the first step in gaining the understanding that only Christ can give (Eph. 1: 17-18; cf. Col. 1:9). He now desired that the Christians in Colosse consistently reflect their own Christian worldview and not be distracted by the whims and challenges confronting them.

To what extent are we Christians in our era distracted by unhealthy, even capricious, influences. Do we fall prey to them? If so, how is our spiritual life affected?

The Jewish people, so it is thought, had a representative presence in Phrygia since the sixth century B.C., well before the diaspora. As previously noticed, Greek philosophy had been well spread within the area by the first century, including the region around Colosse. These veins of philosophical thought, merged as they were with the mysteries of the occult, Middle Eastern mysticism, and so on, produced a Judaism which in essence gave rise to another approach to legalism. This was confronted by Paul when he stood against the Apostle Peter in Antioch (Gal. 2:11-21).

Essentially, the Judaizers, themselves professing Believers who were supposedly converted to Christ out of the Jewish faith, sought to attract the gentiles in the church at Colosse to the customs of Judaism, i.e., circumcision, maintaining the laws of Moses, and ignoring the gospel of grace (Eph. 2:8, 9); it included works as a necessary element of salvation and godly living. While Paul does not attack the Judaizers as he did in his letter to the Galatians, he is clear in this letter to the Colossians:

- True circumcision is performed by Jesus Christ at one’s conversion to Him—buried with Him in baptism by the Holy Spirit, and raised with Him by faith in the power of God (2:11, 12);
- God has cancelled the Mosaic code, now a relic of the past, eliminating therefore the old regulations such as Leviticus and Deuteronomy (2:14);¹⁹
- Give no attention to the “puffed up minds” that try to seduce real Believers into thinking they must…
  ➢ Follow religious laws for drinking and eating (2:16);
  ➢ Worship on particular days of festivities (2:16);
  ➢ Worship angels (2:18)

In other words, Paul wants his fellow Christians to be discerners of the truth and not be tricked by “unspiritual minds that are puffed up with idle notions” (2:18). These individuals who

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¹⁹ These Old Testament books, like all of the Old Testament remain God’s inspired word for our understanding of His precepts (Ps. 119) and his sovereign methods of dealing with His people.
are seeking to destroy the church have “lost connection with the Head,” who is Jesus Christ (2:19).

Paul goes on to wonder with some astonishment why these people submit to worldly rules that reflect ungodly thought and are characterized by phony worship practices such as masochistic behavior. He says that these representatives of erroneous, apostate ideas live in false humility; none of their teachings provide any value whatsoever in the ability to restrain sensuality and related matters (2:20-23).

Perhaps in our contemporary times, we ourselves have had to deal with issues that are contradictory to the Bible or to situations that test our faith. Let’s ask a few questions that the Apostle Paul might be concerned about today.

Several Questions to Ponder:

• What does it say about the Christians in Colosse that they could be swayed to think differently about the gospel? Is this relevant to Christians today?
• Was Paul concerned about their salvation? Did his concern reflect the concern of the writer of Hebrews who questioned the sincerity of faith and the possible loss of faith? (Hebrews 6:4-6)
• Are Believers confronted today by false teachings in the church? If so, what criteria should be used? What should be done about it? How does Paul’s letter to the Colossians help us in this regard?
• What criteria are Christians within the military to follow when confronted with confrontational philosophical, moral and ethical teachings?
• “[God’s] eyes are everywhere (Prov. 15:2)...The Lord weighs the heart” (Prov. 21:2). What might He say now relative to the integrity of our own personal faith?

Thinking Professionally: Who Ultimately is the Supreme Commander?

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men...It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

Paul

These valuable verses of Col. 3:23, 25 indicate to us specifically to whom we submit ourselves. This can be confusing, since Paul also instructs us to “submit to the governing authorities” (Rom. 13:1ff). On the surface of our understanding, it appears that the apostle may be suggesting that there is a dichotomy between our spiritual lives and that of our professional life; that the two do not mix. But as can be seen, this is not the case!

Recall that Jesus told his disciples (and therefore to us) that we “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (Matt. 22:21). Of course, He was speaking in the context of
the payment of taxes, a vital and hot issue of that day…and this! But do we comprehend the broader concept of this principle? Consider this observation:20

“If one is to submit to the civil authority without succumbing to statism and emperor worship, he must be enslaved to the one true God…Only by worshipping God alone can one obey Caesar without becoming his slave.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul was writing about the place of Christ Jesus relative to His role in their lives and the consequent nature of the godly life. But he was stating broadly the role of the Savior as Lord of all or not Lord at all. The supremacy of Jesus Christ, the precise image of God the Father, includes all phases of our earthly existence; for both the 1st century Christians in Colosse and for us Believers in these modern times.

Some interpreters of this passage from Matthew suggest that Caesar’s image on the coin was blasphemous. Be that as it may, Jesus was adamant that what belongs to God is His and only His. Christians therefore need to be on the alert, to be fully discerning about ideas and decisions which fail to come from God’s wisdom and that which could impair our relationship with Him. Sometimes the issues have to do with character. Consider this actual conversation that took place in the barracks area of an advanced training post:

Spoken by a company commander: “Lt. _____, I want you to have a good time this weekend. You need to hang out with some guys who will show you a good time; you know, mix it up with some drinks, women, maybe do some gambling. You’re not going to make it in this outfit unless you broaden yourself. You’re a good officer, but you can be a whole lot better so that your men can better relate to you.”

“Captain, thank you for your advice, but I believe you are wrong. What you suggest is unhealthy and unprofessional to my way of thinking, and is inconsistent with my faith.”

At times, it may have to do with one’s personal testimony:

From a Battalion Exec to a new 2nd Lt. on duty for less than one year: “LT, wise up. Take it easy on your personal beliefs. You irritate people when you talk like that. It makes us feel like we should be guilty or something. Lay off the Jesus stuff.”

When a command rather than advice is given, how does the junior officer or enlisted (sometimes instantaneously) process the command to determine if it is legitimate in God’s sight? Does he or she wonder if it is consistent with the UCMJ?

So then, how are Christians in the military to act? What do the non-believers expect? What does our living Lord expect? What is expected when Believers work within a hierarchy where orders are given and obeyed, when expectations flow downward from the fundamental approval of the Commander-in-Chief to the lowest ranking NCO. Fortunately for American military personnel, the long-standing tradition of integrity is noble, remains dignified, and has as its center Judeo-Christian ethics and moral precepts. The UCMJ is rooted in these precepts, still popular and accepted in the time it was published.

Since 1950, when Secretary of State James Forrestal, with an entirely civilian committee, brought together a unified system of military justice to a unified military command, the UMCJ has reflected the ethics and morality of those times. Over the years, amendments have been added to reflect the changing times. “Political Correctness,” the attempt to level the playing field by altering standards of conduct and expectations, is having an influence on the military. Under consideration at this time, for example, is the relevancy and permissibility of homosexuality and adultery within the regimen of the UCMJ.

Just as was required of the Christian within the Roman military ranks, so it is today: It is expected that trust and obedience take priority over everything else. That young man from the Colosse church, the one who attempted to join the Legionnaires, what did he agree to do? What would he have given up in order to be a faithful soldier in the Roman army?

As it was, if we understand his situation correctly, he was discouraged from joining or otherwise rejected because he was a monotheist. For the same reason Jews were not permitted to enlist. Both faithful Christians and Jews would not bow and scrape to the god-Emperor. In the Christian’s case, the violence perpetuated by warfare was suspect relative to Christ’s teaching of love, peace, forgiveness, and “doing to others what you would have them do to you.” In this first century, pacifism was generally accepted by Christians; but as the centuries progressed, armed might was increasingly practiced among professing Christians as a means of protecting the home or defending against tyranny.

The central issue here is not the debate between pacifism and legalized, military aggression, but the matter of the ultimate commander. Just who is the Supreme Commander?

In the event that primary orders which contradict biblical precepts are given by the supreme head of government, what is the Christian officer and/or enlisted to do? We live at a time when the motives of government are seriously and aggressively questioned. While this issue is not a focus of this study and devotional, it does beg the question. American citizens and their military have had no problem over two hundred years of their blessed history with this.

We might wonder what the German Christians must have thought when Adolph Hitler showed his true mettle. We know what millions of citizens did: they remained either oblivious

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21 This writer is a veteran and insists on the right of the citizenry to protect his or her home and homeland.
(often intentionally) to Nazi activities or otherwise willingly allowed him to force anti-biblical practices upon both citizenry and military. How did Christians within the German military get along with the Nazi regime? We know that General Claus von Stauffenburg, a committed Catholic dedicated to Jesus Christ, was profoundly opposed to the Nazi regime, and sought to have Hitler deposed with the assistance of an assassination team. Along with others, he was executed by the Gestapo.

The German General Helmuth von Moltke, descendant of famous military leaders, also possessed a very strong Christian commitment, and opposed Hitler. Based on fraudulent charges, he was consequently executed by the Gestapo, taking to the end his knowledge of Christ’s supremacy and his love for the Christian faith.

Thinking of these two examples of Christian commitment among others, Erwin Lutzer writes:

“We must support our government, but we must be ready to criticize it or even defy it when necessary. Patriotism is commendable when it is for a just cause...if the German church has taught us the dangers of blind obedience to government, we must eschew the mindless philosophy “My country, right or wrong.”

Lutzer’s comment reflects his concern about the American populace generally. But what about the military? To what extent, how far into the future, do citizen and professional soldiers of the Faith follow a future Commander-in-Chief, whose values and ethics are suspect, some would argue anti-Christian?

It is apparent that Paul’s instruction to the Colossians relative to the sovereignty of Jesus Christ (1:15-23) was both a theological and political statement. His marvelous identity of the living Christ is applicable in every situation.

The Matter of Submission (Col. 1:17, 18)

In his letter to the Believers in Rome, Paul states that governments are established by God, and must therefore be submitted to; otherwise those who do not submit will be viewed as rebels against God and can expect to be appropriately judged (13:2). The writer of Hebrews also states that Believers are to “obey their leaders and submit to their authority (Heb. 13:1). However, notice the context in which these statements are made:

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In the context of these admonitions, the governmental authorities are innocent, and seek the betterment of their citizen’s conditions. Paul almost seems to be speaking idealistically, but in the context of world history, on the other hand, we know that Christians have paid a dreadful price because the governments were not at all innocent.

Thoughtful Christian civilians and military alike wonder about these important verses. They may ask: “Is there a time to seriously question national leadership and to challenge such leadership. The electoral system in America makes matters relatively easy, of course. We have elections stipulated by our governing documents; weak and philosophically-wrong leadership can be taken to task. Approved governance over our constitutional republic steps in and takes charge, gratis the electoral system.

Men and women in the military services are restricted by their allegiance to the governing powers; and rightly so! But should commands contradict biblical precepts, what then?

Again, the Apostle Paul makes it very clear to the Colossians who the supreme leader is. He is Almighty God. By clear insinuation, it is not the State. We can ask, “to whom did the Colossian Christians bow when the persecution period began in 64 A.D.? Or did they, for other reasons, become as the nearby Laodiceans, who are described in Revelation 3 as “lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, to be spewed out of [God’s] mouth”?

The question of civil disobedience relative to Rom. 13, Heb. 13, and I Peter 2:13:ff and the role of the Christian in the military is a study for another occasion. But certainly regarding our personal lives, Paul is lucid and frank—Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior.

Some further questions based on Colossians:

- Would the Apostle Paul have been able to belong to the Roman military establishment? If not, why not?
- At what point in one’s professional, military service does Christ’s sovereignty come into conflict with military advice or orders, if at all?
• Does “political correctness” challenge the faith of the Believer in the armed services? If so, how and to what extent?
• Can there be any compromise of one’s Christian’s faith and trust while pursuing his or her commitment to military expectations and its resultant environment?
• What is the role of the Christian in the military profession?

America is most fortunate to have had over 230 years an active military establishment that has recognized and held with dignity the fundamental concepts of biblical morality and ethics. And for almost the same period of time, the Constitution has been respected and protected. Are changes in the wind? If so, what is expected of Christians, if anything? Are Christians actually affected?

Part IV, a final perspective on Colossians, provides insights on the moral and ethical behavior Paul was concerned about. These same issues reflect on the home environment in our modern society. Perhaps because of the hugely popular and universal nature of the many distractions, Paul’s letter is considerably more crucial as history wends its way through the final days of history.  

**PART IV.**

**HOLY LIVING WITHIN THE MILITARY ENVIRONMENT**

“Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things...Put to death, therefore whatever belongs to your earthly nature...Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...Be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...Whatever you do, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

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23 This author believes that...
Central Lesson: Holy living is one of personal discipline, consistent trust and obedience, together demonstrating love, joy, and peace, all of which evidence hope.

The Most Difficult Thing To Do? (Col. 3:1-14)

We learn in the above passage of Col. 3:1-17, that Apostle Paul, by God’s inspiration, set very high standards for the people in the church at Colosse. Knowing as we do the nature of holiness, we gather our breath and wonder if we can actually live this way. At the same time, we know that it is God Himself speaking through Paul (II Tim. 3:16). Should we not be listening?

Perhaps, on the other hand, we individually may ask ourselves the question: “Do I really want to live a holy life?” Or, “can it possibly be that I can live such a life if I wish to?” Or the question: “Is perfection in this earthly life a possibility? Considering the regimen of Christian military personnel within the secular environment, is a reasonably pure life actually possible?

Four steps would greatly help to establish the life God would approve:

• Having a daily regimen of Bible meditation and prayer no matter how brief;
• If married, practicing complete faithfulness to one’s spouse and children; if not married, being faithful to sexual purity and the lust-less life;
• Paying careful and loyal attention to duty, honor, and country; and
• Living a joyous and charitable life among colleagues and neighbors.

Several questions we might ask:

• Of these four suggestions, which is the easiest to fulfill?
• Which in God’s sight is the most crucial?
• Do they all mesh so as to satisfy the process of sanctification—increasing perfection over one’s lifespan as he or she prepares for eternity?
• What is the order of interest in these matters as far as the military is concerned?
• Then what is the order of interest as far as the secular world is concerned?
• In reality, what should be the order of interest for the Christian?

Would it not interest us to learn of Paul’s attitude toward these matters? Or Peter’s? Timothy’s perhaps? Or more pertinently to this study: What might have been the consensus of the Christian Roman officers of the 1st century, if indeed there were any?

However we answer these questions, one thing is certain: the Apostle Paul was insistent in 60 A.D. as his letter remains today—we are to set our hearts and minds on things above and not on anything that would distract us from our supreme Lord, the Commander-in-Chief.

The wording he used is very important. Notice his primary word:

“Set” is a verb that also means “seek” or “pursue” in this context, and is continuous, indicating that the action is non-stop. Obviously, Paul was so insistent on his own attitude of trust, obedience, and endeavoring to obtain God’s righteousness that it would eventually take him to his own execution.

Our Old Nature vs. Our New (3:1-17)

Paul’s concerns reflect a very clear understanding of human nature. They can be categorized in two areas: (1) Those inherent, behavioral aspects that reflect the physical nature and (2) those aspects of the sinful nature that define our character and personality. Each of these categories, Paul says, must be eliminated, completely gotten rid of, by an act of the personal will. Notice again his emphatic words (3:5-9):

“Put to death...whatever belongs to your sinful nature...Rid yourselves of all such things as these...Do not lie to each other...

Paul desires the Colossians and us today to be devoted no longer to our old nature, putting it to death as the Greek language suggests. It is a willful action of the Christian’s heart and mind. In other words, once an individual sincerely accepts Christ as his or her savior, it is expected that the correct decisions about one’s moral and ethical actions will commence.

The issues suggested by these categories well describe the old nature of all men and women and remind us of what we all used to be in one way or another. Here is a personal inventory that Paul might suggest:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Self (3:5-9)</th>
<th>New Self (3:12-17)</th>
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24 Hebrew 6:4-6 suggests that one’s insincere acceptance of Christ is grounds for separation from God.
• Did I practice sexual immorality? If so, …………….. have I stopped such practices?
• Was my heart and mind filled with lust, evil desires, and greed? ……………………….. Have I really changed?
• Did I exhibit anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy talk, and other evil things coming from the heart…………. Am I a loving and compassionate person? Am I humble and gentle? Do I have patience? Do I forgive? Am I a kind person?

The Apostle Paul would never have claimed to have reached perfection. Well on the way in the sanctifying process, yes, but never to the point of complete holiness. When he wrote Colossians, he was also writing to himself, we can be sure. The warning he gave to the Colossians and now to us today (“Because of [evil and sin], the wrath of God is coming,” as he wrote in 3:6), he meant for himself as well. We can be grateful that we Believers also have this warning! Does it remind us of John’s statement (I Jn 3: 3) that…

“Everyone who has [the hope of Christ’s imminent return] will purify himself, just as he is pure.”

As it was with Paul, who recalled his own evil days (Gal. 1:13-24), so it is with us and undoubtedly with the Christians in Colosse: “Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 15:57). Indeed, sin does not enslave us as we trust and obey Him!

**Christ’s Peace Comes With Godliness (Col. 3:15-17)**

Can anyone outside the family of God possibly experience the peace that only Christ Jesus can afford? Paul knew that the people in the church of Colosse were members of the body of Christ (3:12). He knew them to be folks that knew who their supreme authority was. He recognized their faithfulness and their orderly attention to matters of faith (2:5). He also knew that they needed encouragement and to give regular attention to the fundamental doctrines of the Faith (2:6-23).

Can we not picture the Apostle Paul kneeling before his executioner, waiting for the sharpened blade to strike? Steady, unshakeable, praying for his judges and the one about to deliver the blow! And Stephen? Crying out to God, energized by the Holy Spirit, forgiving those who were stoning him (Acts 7: 54-60). Godly men both! Is this not what the sanctifying Spirit of God prepares Believers for? To live holy lives for His glory, allowing circumstances to rest in God’s divine will?
We cannot be certain what transpired with the church at Colosse as alluded to earlier. What we can be quite certain about was the future of Phrygia, the region in which we find this church. In 54 A.D., according to Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, the disciple Philip was executed in Heliopolis, a town near Colosse. Moreover, the emperor Domitian, commenced with the persecutions of Christians in 81 A.D. in that area. We might safely assume that Colosse was caught in this entanglement of political evil. We can definitely say, however, that another nearby church in the town of Laodicea was unfaithful by the year 96 A.D., also alluded to earlier. Were Christians in these towns intimidated by political power while at the same time allured to materialism?

The “peace” that Paul referred to (3:15), according to the Greek language, was both a tranquility of mind and a sense of harmony among the brethren. So therefore Paul wrote in this passage:

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Paul may have been writing with the Old Testament in mind. Recall God’s attitude toward “divisiveness,” for example (Prov. 6:16) or His desire for unity in mind and thought (Ezekiel 11:19, 20). Paul mentioned to the people in Corinth that God was the “author of peace, not confusion” (I Cor. 14:33). He also had uncomfortable memories, for theological reasons, of the temporary disunity between himself and Peter (Gal. 2:11ff). The crucial importance of Believers’ unity in the faith during this ancient time was not only to acknowledge harmoniously the doctrinal truth mentioned in Chapter I but also to present a solid front of Belief to the world around them.

The church, the body of Christ, was to have a united, undivided presence in this land of paganism, the Empire that was about to create the formal policy “Dominus et Deus.” So it was for the Christians in Colosse as it is or us Christians today. As Christians mature, so does godliness. As godliness increases within in the soul, the Believer moves closer to the cross of Christ.
(A parenthetical question might be considered here: With the horrendous, global economy such as it is and the threat of an emerging fascism as Scriptures portend for the last days,\textsuperscript{25} how is the Christian in the professional military to prepare?)

Doctrine and the works of the gospel, within the unity of Believers, mesh to form a church that can withstand whatever the world has to offer. This is why Paul began his letter about basic doctrine, then moved to the necessary practicalities of the Faith, and finally pressed on to the nature and character of holy living.

Time was of the essence then. Is it not so today!

**Several More Questions to Think About**

- While serving in the military, have I noticed an improvement in my spiritual life?
- If so, in what areas have such improvements occurred?
- Do the men and women I work with notice Christ-like characteristics?
- Do these characteristics perturb any colleagues?
- What are the essential characteristics necessary to be termed a fine officer or NCO?
- Are these characteristics essentially Christian?
- Am I at peace?
- Do I sense a harmony among my Christian brothers and sisters? As a fellowship group of Believers, are we influential and effective in our witness?
- How do I define my personal witness?

Having posed important issues to the church in Colosse, Paul goes on in his letter (3:18-4:6) to express concerns relative to intimate relationships—Wives and husbands, children and parents, fathers and children, slaves and their masters.

**Paul’s Concern About the Family (3:18-4:1)**

Throughout the Bible, family relationships are basic to a sound, healthy society. The family began with Adam and Eve who were to form a relationship that was to be productive and sensitive to what God had provided them. The two failed miserably, creating a world of humankind which itself was to fail due to sin and the sinful nature (Rom. 5:12-17). However, the principle of the marriage relationship—to provide godly off-spring for the Creator’s glory—is implicit throughout Holy Scripture, yet so often defiled by the adulterous nature of humankind. Malachi warned against unfaithfulness (Mal. 2:11-16). The Apostle Paul, understanding Scripture as he certainly did, spoke against such immorality harshly (Gal. 5:19 and Col 3:5, for

\textsuperscript{25} The Bible is explicit relative to the final days of history. Joel Rosenberg’s *Epicenter* (Tyndale House, 2008) is a good starting point to get a broad view on what is occurring in the Middle East/
example); but at this point in his letter, he took a positive stance, building up the household of the family.

One thing Paul would remind us of as we consider how we deal with each other:

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Eph. 5:21)

In the following diagram, the thinking of Paul takes clear shape as he provides his instructions to the Colossians. (By the way, Paul was, to our knowledge, never married. His observations came from outside of marriage, harnessing his thoughts from observable experience, from the Old Testament, and from the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit).

**Dealing with Family (Col. 3:18-4:1)**

Father: takes final responsibility for decisions, and assumes spiritual leadership

With Christ’s love (agape), constantly demonstrate affection, benevolence, and endearment, respecting and listening to the wife.

Mother: be the suitable helper for the husband

With agape love, follow the lead of the husband, always providing positive support for the children, thoughtfully providing the legitimate needs of the husband.

Children: obey the parents and follow their guidance

Children learn from the parents. They reflect their parents. They will honor and obey their parents when they fully respect them.

**Slaves:** Slavery was an acceptable and even crucial element of the Roman Empire. Slaves were often considered as bone fide members of the family. In the wealthier Christian households, slaves were often loved (agape) and frequently considered friends. Their futures

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26 The Old Testament was the body of Scriptures available to Paul. The New Testament, most of which is composed of Paul’s writings, was not canonized until the late 3rd century.

27 Other references to family life are helpful:

28 Genesis 2:20, 21.
were secure, provided they performed their master’s will. Paul warns the Christian master, however, to remember who he himself is—one who one day will be accountable to God (Col. 4:1).

Paul’s concern for family reflects a concern that all Christians must have had during that era. For centuries, the father was sole possessor of total authority, to the extent that he was justified in executing one or all of his children should the occasion deem it necessary. The mother too often was more interested in the way she dressed and how she performed with her neighbors and friends than with rearing children. These young people were frequently presided over by the lowest slaves in the household.

But as history approached Paul’s time, the sense of pietus bore in to the family circle; “affectionate devotion” was something to be mastered. And so it was for Paul. However, such devotion (possibly interpreted as phileo—brotherly love) was for the Believer a shortcoming; love needed to be undergirded by the power of Jesus Christ. Agape was the term—God’s own love within the hearts of the family. That was the secret to a happy, successful family! And this is what the apostle was getting at when writing the Christians in Colosse.

It is doubtful that the church in Colosse was a moneyed church, that the men had households of slaves and that the women regularly prettied up in fine regalia. There is little evidence that nobility characterized Colosse. But the principle that Paul was seeking to set before the Christians there was one of godly simplicity. That is to say, “agape love” should be the key element in all demonstrations of human transactions, whether in-family relationships, expressions of character in normal daily activities (3:12-14), or in matters dealing with fellow church members (3:15-17).

“Over every virtue, put on [agape] love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

(3:14)

**Prayer and Conversation (4:2-6)**

We will recall how vitally important prayer was to Paul and his close followers as he began his letter (1:3, 9, 10, 12). How often did he pray? By his own testimony, we know he was in constant prayer, “praying in the spirit on all occasions” (Eph. 6:18), “praying continuously” (1 Thess. 5:17), and “in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Phil 4:6).

Notice his instruction to the Colossians: “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful” (4:2). As with the instruction of Jesus to his disciples (Luke 18:1-5), so it is with Paul:
be very persistent in praying while at the same time remaining watchful and thankful. Colosse church members were to remain both “watchful” and “thankful.”

Paul also recognized his own need of Believers’ prayers for him personally. He knew his vulnerabilities and indicated as much—a possible lack of articulation when preaching the gospel (4:4), his inability to reach the unsaved without God’s help, especially so since being in prison (4:3).

Well before he wrote Colossians, Paul was struck by something that cautioned him to be and remain humble (II Cor. 12:7). He said it was Satan’s messenger to torment him—a “thorn in his body” of some sort. Something that God allowed by His permissive will. Thus when he wrote to the Colossians, he was at peace with all his weaknesses including his failure to avoid hardships, being liable for persecution, and experiencing a myriad of difficulties (II Cor. 12:9, 10). He expressed these issues, for he wanted the Christians in Colosse also to be humble and forward looking to Christ, never to feel sorry for themselves.

In his final instruction (4:6), the Apostle encourages everyone to speak and act with God’s grace, tempering everything, words and actions, with a flavoring of gracious love and with a touch of the eternal. Yes, Paul was speaking of those things that are meant to reflect eternal values. This is to say…

Several Questions:

• Do I deal with my family fairly? Do I really love my spouse and children?
• Am I a satisfying conversationalist with friends, an individual who pleases God?
• Do I allow Ego to get in the way or to control my life?
• Is God satisfied with me? Why or why not?

Numerous verses define this need to be watchful: Neh. 4:9, Mk. 13:33, and I Pet. 4:7, for example.
Close Friends and What They Can Mean (Col. 4:7-18)

Paul surrounded himself with the right friends. That was not his history in his earlier days, apparently. Having been an expert in the Torah and the Old Testament in his youth, he must have been aware of the importance of having the right comrades. After all, Saul was surely aware of the biblical advice on maintaining good counsel:

- The choosing of capable men (Ex. 18:15-27);
- Refusing to walk in the counsel of the ungodly (Ps. 1:1);
- The eternal counsel of the Lord (Ps. 33:11);
- Counsels of the wicked are deceit (Prov. 12:5);
- “They followed the stubborn inclinations of the evil hearts. They went backwards...” (Jer. 7:24)

The pharisaical blood in his body prior to his conversion rendered him spiritually impotent. He was blind to Truth. He certainly had no friends that could guide him the right way. Whoever they were, they failed to provide him godly advice. Thus Saul prepared himself for doing what he thought was God’s work—the persecution of Christ’s disciples.

On the other hand, perhaps he was a loner. (We picture him possibly standing all by himself out on the periphery of Stephen’s execution site). In any event, Saul eventually found himself among friends following his conversion. He gained the disciples’ friendship in Antioch (Acts 11:25), even had friends among some Roman officials (Acts 19:31), and other friends in Sidon (Acts 27:3). There was a wonderfully kindred spirit among his Christian friends. He also was now a member of the family of God (Rom. 8:15, 16).

But don’t we also know that his conversion to Christ brought him hateful enemies? Eventually, the entire Roman government came down on his head. The point here is the dichotomy that exists between Christian friends and those of the world. According to Paul in this letter, those who may be friends but not believers are “outsiders” (4:5), and conversations with them should nevertheless be full of grace. And pertaining to Believers, deeds and words should always flow with grace; everything is to be truthful, positive, constructive, and admonishing when necessary.

A Christian’s words and deeds, reflecting God’s grace, must always confront evil. Paul’s own life demonstrated a confrontational life in grace: (1) Proclaiming the mystery of the gospel (4:4); (2) admonishing fellow believers (1:28); (3) warning against the practice of evil and sin (3:5-10); rejecting anyone who places himself or herself above Christ...
We can assume that Paul’s definition of “friendship” entailed a willingness to protect his brother or sister in Christ from wrong-doing, at least to warn them of the circumstances. It appears his converted life was full of the hope that maintains a vision of eternity, that his instructions, admonishments, and reason for being were anchored in his vital hope for an eternity with his Savior and Lord. Recall, for example, that he mentioned to the Corinthians of his confidence in the guarantee of eternal life (II Cor. 5:1-10).

Is this what Paul also had in mind when he encouraged the Colossians to be consistent in their godly relations with others?

Men and women in the military have lives often punctuated with dangers, frustrations, doubts, and concerns, even worries. These are reasons to be surrounded by Christian friends. In the best of worlds, the good spouse is the best friend, the children are becoming very good friends with their parents and with each other, and friends outside the family hopefully are also dedicated to lives that reflect a genuine love and concern for the other.

It can take many years before husbands determine that their wives are actually their best friends. Normally, the golfing and/or fishing buddy and several others of like-mind (or some such compadres) are considered the real and best friends. As for the wives, perhaps their bridge partners or very close friends they can be intimate with. But in the long run, it is the faithful husband and wife who have proven their mettle to each other. They are the ones who really do stand by loyally in all the good times as well as the worst.

In the military experience, husbands and wives witness life differently. They confront regular moves of their families, are frequently stressed out by warfare and the dangers thereof, and their responsibilities are frequently shifted because of promotions and transfers. In the whole of a career, a senior officer or non-com, man or woman, may have experienced a multitude of professional obligations that proved quite difficult. It takes grace, patience, understanding, and maturing love on the part of either spouse for the relationship to evolve into the “best friend” category. Isn’t it not true that the Apostle Paul would be very pleased with such marriage relationships?

Numerous marriages emphasize the husband’s “authority” and the wife’s “submissiveness” and forget the crucial notion of “grace” in Paul’s theology. Practice of the fruits of the Spirit with grace within the family will keep that family “in step with God’s spirit.” (Gal. 5:22-25).

Hopefully, the Christian couple that makes its way over the years through the maze of experiences can become “best friends.” It is no wonder that a married couple that stays together
through thick and thin and have submitted themselves to each other during these years are most likely the happiest they have ever been. Is not this a characteristic of parents who have become “best friends”?

But generally, a scenario for a family’s godly living in the evil world might look like this:

Paul had good friends. As the successful family is surrounded by comforting and encouraging friends, so Paul had his friends and associates who surrounded him with care. Look how he identified those we know about:

- Tychicus: reliable, a dear brother in Christ, faithful to the Lord, encourager (4:7);
- Onesimus: faithful, a dear brother, member of the Colosse church, also reliable (4:9);
• Aristarchus: a prisoner with Paul, a travelling companion (4:10, Acts. 19:29);
• Mark: a man whom Paul trusted (4:10);
• Justus: a friend, who stayed behind with Paul (4:11);

All of the above were Jews converted to Christ, and all were classified as Paul’s fellow workers (4:11).

Among the gentiles in the faith,

• Epaphras: A member of the church in Colosse, one who “wrestles in prayer” concentrating on the Colossians’ faithfulness. A hard-working missionary who also performed mission efforts in the towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:12, 13);
• Luke: Another dear friend, a doctor who possibly was caring for Paul (4:14);
• Demas: like Luke, sent greetings to the Colossians (4:14);
• Nympha: a woman who hosted church in her home (4:15);
• Numerous friends and acquaintances Paul had in the church in Laodicea (4:15).

Archippus, another gentile in Christ, is mentioned to the Colossians as one who needs to be encouraged in his work in Colosse and perhaps in Laodicea (4:17). The salient feature of this collective group was their faith and Paul’s trust in them. One gets the impression that they were not phony friends of Paul, but people who wished to be helpful for the cause of Jesus Christ.

**Several Final Thoughts**

Throughout Colossians, like his other letters, the Apostle Paul has in the back of his mind the fact of free choice as the over-riding factor in an individual’s decision-making process: What to believe regarding the doctrine of Christ? How to dissuade false theology and its destructive powers? Do I have the will to avoid temptations and distractions that tear at the Soul? Do I make the type of choices that are truly best for my family? Are my friends the kind that will nurture in me a Christ-like spirit? These are all personal decisions and choices which will characterize an individual’s life.

Succinctly we may ask of ourselves: Which side of the line do I stand? Is not this the real issue at the heart of Paul’s letter? What decision would God’s wisdom and knowledge lead us to?

Christian men and women in the military profession have additional issues with which to deal:

• Can a firm stance on the Christian’s faith in the military have the potential for hurting the reputation of an otherwise fine soldier?
• At what point will a potential threat to one’s career be realized, if at all?
• How does one maintain his witness in the military without compromising his faith?
In the armies of tyrants, such as those in Rome and Nazi Germany, soldiers are not allowed to express themselves, depending on the issues involved; everything is keyed on the one in charge. The matter of First Amendment rights in America relative to “political correctness” is currently an issue. Does it affect the military? Does it deny the Christian’s ability to represent his or her faith, either in words or in deeds?

Colossians identifies us—who we are, what we do, who we submit ourselves to, and where our true loyalties lie. While we Believers are restricted on the one hand to morals and ethics and to right and wrong, we nevertheless are free on the other. No longer enslaved to the old way of life, which inhibits us within the framework of sin, we are free to make our choices because true Christians are no longer under the jurisdiction of Law and the condemning spirit, but under God’s divine mercy and grace.30

To follow Paul’s instructions of Colossians is to place ourselves in the position of opposing evil. Believers make the right choice, to begin with, by their conversion experience. They become ones who are “qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light,” having been “rescued from the kingdom of darkness” (Col. 1:12, 13).

In closing this study guide, it may be wise to consider recent comments by Franklin Graham, son of the noted Rev. Billy Graham, whose invitation to speak at the Pentagon’s National Prayer Breakfast in 2010 was rescinded. Among other observations, he warned that anti-Christian activists are seeking to eradicate all influence of the Christian faith from the military. Moreover, he added, this controversy is “absolutely” part of a pattern of hostility toward Christians within the federal government.31 Whether Graham is right or wrong, accurate or inaccurate, the case remains that the absolute truth of Christ’s role is very clear: He is the one whom we follow for our eternal precepts and our daily guidance; for our decision-making and our relationships. He is the one we rely on for our professionalism.

So our attention is redrawn to the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ and to His glory and majesty. Every Christians in all professions may very well have to decide, as did the Colossians, “whose side am I on?”.

30 The Apostle Paul’s Galatians, Chapter 3, is clear on this point.
31 Newsmax.com May 4, 2010
Addendum A