

CROSSING THE BORDER

An Expositional Study of Colossians

by GUY H. KING

CHRISTIAN LITERATURE CRUSADE Fort Washington, Pennsylvania

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CHAPTER 11

HIS KIND REGARDS 4:15-18

IT IS a common practice, isn't it, to finish our letters with some such wishes as "My love to So and So," or "Kind remembrances to the family". Well, Paul does something of the sort here. There are certain people in the Colossian area that are known to him, to whom he sends his kind regards. I think that three words will summarise this concluding paragraph.

DEFICIENCY is possible

The church of the Laodiceans. It is not for nothing that Paul calls them "**brethren**," 15 . We often use the term for our fellow Christians in a merely formal manner, with little meaning attaching to it; but in the Early Church it was a reality. The special relationship between believers is illustrated in such a passage as Galatians 6:10, "**As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith**".

A mutual care for members of the Family was noteworthy in those early days. "**See how these Christians love one another**" was the observation of lookers-on. The same words are sometimes used about us to-day, but spoken with a cynical twist.

We see how, in fact, deficiency is possible within a church, a body of CHRIST, wherein "**the members should have the same care one for another**," I Corinthians 12:25. Indeed, for the mutual relationships of all members, however different their characters, and their gifts, and their functions, it would be immensely profitable for us to study afresh that whole Corinthian chapter. The harmony of the whole is not to be disturbed by the wrongful attitude of anyone member toward another.

I suppose that, in our bodies, the eye is the most delicate, and most important, of our outward organs; and it would appear that the hand is the most homely - but there is no reason for the former to look down disparagingly upon its more handy neighbour. "**The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee**"; verse 21. Neither is there to be any stupid envy or self-pity, "**If the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?**" verse 16.

No fancied superiority; no feelings of envy; no individual squabbles, like they had in the church at Philippi - "**I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the**

Lord," Philippians 4:2; nothing to mar the peace of the body in CHRIST. How greatly helped to this end would be these two neighbouring churches, the Colossian, and the Laodicean, by their perusal of their respective epistles (16).

So far as our Epistle is concerned, being the inspired Word, no church can know real peace, real blessing, real fruit, unless it is built upon the Word of GOD.

The church which is in his house. We don't know who he was; but we do know what he was, a real believer, or he would not have thrown open his house for the assembly of GOD's people. It is interesting to note that in these days, in some of the new housing estates, when there is as yet no hall, the church meets in somebody's house - a little company for gathering here for worship. After all, the church is not the building, but the people. In the closing stages of the last war, after a bombing incident, it was said that our church in Beckenham had been destroyed. Don't you believe it. From the early hours of the next morning it was plainly evident that the church was very much alive.

"Ye . . . are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices," I Peter 2:5.

The church later on. This became, of course, as it grew, and developed, more organised; but, alas, not necessarily more healthy. We have only to recall the condition of the very church of the Laodiceans, that we have been thinking of, to see how gravely deterioration can set in, and deficiency become apparent.

The sad record is in Revelation 3:14-22.

- There was no spirit of enthusiasm - "**neither cold, nor hot**": tepid!
- There was no sense of need - "**I have need of nothing**"; blatant self-sufficiency.
- There were many who had no spiritual relationship to CHRIST - "**if any man. .. open the door, I will come in**"; they had entered in the door of the visible church, but kept closed the door to the church's Lord.

What a state of church life is here revealed. It only serves to emphasize how watchful our church, and its members, should be, lest "**the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful,**" Mark 4:19.

EFFICIENCY is required

"Take heed to the ministry," 17. This is, as you see, a special, personal message to Archippus. I wonder who he was. Perhaps he was taking the place of Epaphras - *inter regnum*, as we should say - while the latter was away in Rome, consulting with Paul. Our apostle would have him be careful to fulfil the obligation, and the responsibilities, which would now, in the absence of his leader, devolve upon him.

We stay to ask whether any kind of ministry has been laid upon us. Archippus, as we suppose, acted and spoke in Epaphras' stead. Paul has something of that when he says, in II Corinthians

5:20, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God".

- A ministry of song;
- a ministry of healing;
- a ministry of comfort;
- a ministry of prayer;
- a ministry of testimony;
- a ministry of preaching;
- a ministry of household duty;
- a ministry of holy living

What, do you surmise, is your appointed ministry? Let us "take heed" to it, and see that, by GOD's grace, we use it to the help of others, and to the glory of GOD. How wonderful if we could say, "And they glorified God in me," Galatians 1:24.

"Which thou hast received." It was not following upon his own initiative. GOD gave it to him, GOD sent him forth to do it. What strength that imparts to a man's call and commission, since if He sends, He must be held responsible for supplies. "Come now, therefore, and I will send thee" Exodus 3:10 - and to the reluctant Moses He gives the twofold assurance, "I will be with thee," Exodus 3:12; "I will be with thy mouth," Exodus 4:12. Again, "Go in this thy might . . . have not I sent thee?" Judges 6:14 - and the hesitant Gideon goes forth in reliance upon GOD's provision. He Who bids you onward go, will not fail the way to show."

"In the Lord." We must first be "in" Him before we can work "for" Him. Every real Christian is, by His mercy, in Him, as we have reminded each other in an earlier study. Are we then working for Him, in our several ministries, as instanced above?

Paul has another proposition, which he uses to enhearten the worker: the word "with" - "we are labourers together with God" I Corinthians 3:9. What a difference the little word makes.

How much better a gardener works when his master works with him. Let the servant of CHRIST covet to have the Master working alongside, providing incentive, encouragement, and wherewithal. So -:

SUFFICIENCY is guaranteed

The apostle has now signed the letter - rather clumsily, on account of his "bonds" by the wrist to his military guard. See our first Study. One word remains, to round off his Kind Regards - a word that, as a matter of fact holds the secret spring of all hope of Full Salvation - "Grace be with you".

Almost all of Paul's letters begin and end with it - Romans Just ends with it. Is Hebrews by him? Anyhow, It bears his ending, this "Grace".

GOD's grace, which signifies His attitude, and His aid, is a constant wonder and theme of the apostle. Both aspects of it are vividly presented in this - "By the grace of God I am what I am;

and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly than they all. Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me," I Corinthians 15:10.

We find that Peter joins Paul in magnifying the grace of GOD. There is an interesting Greek word, *poikdos*, which occurs several times in the New Testament, and which Peter uses twice, both in his First Epistle, and which is translated "**manifold**":

- (a) "**Ye are in heaviness, through manifold temptations,**" 1:6.
- (b) "**Good stewards of the manifold grace of GOD,**" 4:10.

Put those two things together.

On the one hand, let the five digits, all so different in character, from the thumb to the little finger, stand for the "**manifold**" trials and testings of life. On the other hand, let the five digits stand for the "**manifold**" grace. Now put the right hand over the left, and observe how the fingers of the "**grace**" hand exactly correspond to those of the "**temptations**" hand.

Only an illustration; but an illustration of a beautiful fact - that whatever may be the need, there is at hand just the very grace to meet it. So these two grand apostles, so deeply acquainted with the hazards of life, join together in bearing testimony, out of their own wide and deep experience, to the all-sufficiency of this boon of GOD, available for all emergencies.

As GOD Himself said to Paul, at a time when he was in distress, on account of his "**thorn in the flesh**" - "**My grace is sufficient for thee,**" II Corinthians 12:9.

Our Epistle suggests many situations in which that provision for our "**manifold**" needs may be tested. Take out one or two, at random.

To make progress in the Christian life. "**As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him,**" 2:6. We all recognise that this is essential to the healthiness, and happiness, and, indeed, the helpfulness of the Christian life. Probably, we shall all, whether in greater or less degree, desire to grow.

Our problem is not What, but How? The answer is, Grace: GOD's supply for man's situation - by faith and obedience, keep clear and clean the pipeline, that the oil of grace may flow into our need uninterruptedly. "**Grow in grace,**" II Peter 3:18.

To stand up successfully to false teachings. "**Beware lest any man spoil you . . . Let no man beguile you,**" 2:8, 18.

Just as in our day, so in Paul's day, "**the faith which was once delivered unto the saints,**" Jude 3, was constantly assailed with intellectual problems, as well as moral perils.

We shall not be afraid to think out our theological, and spiritual, position, but we shall be assiduously on our guard against the "**vain**" vapourings of untruth. in other words, we shall be wise to seek the grace of diligence in the study of the Word - "**Study to shew thyself approved**

unto GOD, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth," II Timothy 2:15. Through the Word of Holy Scripture, the HOLY SPIRIT will "**guide you into all truth,**" John 16:13.

So shall there be given to us the Grace of Smell. Does that phrase surprise you? But remember that when Paul is illustrating the various gifts of the Body of CHRIST'S Church, he indicates the necessity of this function of spiritual quality - "**where were the smelling?**" I Corinthians 12:17.

In view of the prevalence of false teaching, it is a good thing to have what a friend of mine calls "a spiritual sense of smell" - to be so instructed in the Word as to be able, almost instinctively, to detect the false. We dealt with this in our third Study.

Do you know that bit in Isaiah 11:3, "**And shall make him of quick understanding**"? in the margin of that verse it says that the Hebrew word translated understanding means scent, or smell, so that the One referred to shall be made by the Spirit a Person of keen scent, quickly discerning between the false and the true. This, too, is a gift of Grace.

To be the best in all home relationships. "Wives, husbands; children, fathers; servants, masters," 3:18-4:1.

Happy the household where there is mutual understanding and co-operation - each for all, all for each. "**Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it,**" I Corinthians 12:26. Because the rest of the family know us so well, and because we are there often off our guard, home is often the hardest place in which to witness, and shine, for our Lord. But here again grace comes to our assistance - GOD's aid for the godly.

Is it fair to say that the Saviour spent thirty years in the home training for three years in the ministry? Was it not the observation and experience of His way in the home that enabled Mary to say with such confidence to others in their problem, "**Whatever He saith unto you, do it,**" John 2:5. Yes, home is a great testing place, and a fine training ground - to pass the test, and to profit from the training calls for the daily Grace of GOD.

To give Him the first place in everything. "**That in all things He might have the pre-eminence,**" 1:18. What a picture and promise of the life of Full Salvation. With Him in the first place, all else will fall into its right place.

In the far-off days, when the ladies wore long gloves on going to a party, a small girl was struggling with the inscrutable problem of where to put the unending series of buttons, when her mother explained, "It's really simple. Get the top one in the top button-hole, and all the others will follow right, to the last one". That truly is the case in the spiritual life: give Him the first place, and all will follow right.

But, of course, the trouble is that wretched thing Self. How subtly it enters even into our spiritual service: why are we so busy in the work? Is it with a single eye to GOD's glory, or does there enter into it any vestige of unworthy motive, any seeking after our own glory? Let us constantly beware even "**the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes,**" Song of

Solomon 2:15.

Self-control is of great importance, if He is to have the pre-eminence; but even this control is a gift of Grace, for we are not left to exercise it by our strong will and determination, for "**the fruit of the Spirit is . . . self-control,**" Galatians 5:23, margin. It is He, not we, to do it, if only we will look to Him for it. So it shall be "**Not I, but Christ,**" Galatians 2:20, which is the very essence of Grace's accomplishment in us of Full Salvation.

To continue true, without backsliding. Our eyes stray back to the group photograph, to the figure of Demas. And as we contemplate his sad decline, we recall the words of the famous old preacher, John Bradford, as he watched a poor prisoner handcuffed to a policeman, "**There goes John Bradford, but for the grace of GOD**". He will, if we will. Thus we have all the power of GOD Himself to keep us on the road. Let Philip Doddridge close our meditation -

"'Twas grace that wrote my name in life's eternal book;
'Twas grace that gave me to the Lamb, Who all my sorrows took.

Grace taught my wandering feet To tread the heavenly road;
And new supplies each hour I meet While pressing on to GOD.

Grace taught my soul to pray, And made my eyes o'erflow;
'Tis grace has kept me to this day, And will not let me go.

Grace all the work shall crown Through everlasting days;
It lays in heaven the topmost stone, And well deserves the praise.

Oh, let that grace inspire My soul with strength divine!
May all my powers to Thee aspire And all my days be Thine."

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