

Murray J. Harris



EXEGETICAL
GUIDE TO THE
GREEK
NEW
TESTAMENT

COLOSSIANS
AND
PHILEMON



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Expanded Paraphrase

1 ¹This letter comes from Paul, the special envoy of Christ Jesus commissioned by the will of God, and from our brother and colleague Timothy, ²to the people of God in Colossae, who are brothers in the fellowship of Christ and faithful to God. May the grace and peace that come from God our heavenly Father be your portion.

³Whenever we pray for you, without fail we give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴because we have heard of your faith as those who are in Christ Jesus and also of the love you show toward all God's people. ⁵Both of these qualities are stimulated by the hope that is reserved for you in heaven. You came to hear about this hope previously when you heard the message that has the stamp of truth on it—the message that is the good news ⁶that has come to you. In the same way this gospel continues to produce throughout the whole world the same kind of harvest and increase it has been yielding in you from the very first day that you heard about and came to appreciate God's undeserved favor for what it truly is. ⁷That was the way you learned it from Epaphras, our dearly loved fellow slave, who has been faithfully serving Christ as our representative. ⁸It was he, in fact, who informed us of your love—love that is produced by God's Spirit.

⁹Because of this encouraging news about you, from the very day we heard it we also have never stopped praying for you. Our request to God is that he may fill you with a knowledge of what his will is by giving you every form of spiritual wisdom and discernment. ¹⁰Once you have this you will lead a life that is worthy of the Lord Jesus and that aims to give him complete satisfaction in every respect. Your life will then be marked by perennial fruit-bearing in every kind of good deed, by continuous growth in your knowledge of God, ¹¹by a constant supply of strength generated by his glorious power for every form of endurance and patience, ¹²and by continual and joyful thanksgiving to God the Father, the one who has entitled you to receive a share in the heritage that belongs to his people in the kingdom of light. ¹³Yes, in the kingdom of light, for he has rescued us from the dominion that is characterized by darkness and has transferred us as free colonists into the kingdom of the Son whom he loves so dearly. ¹⁴In union with this Son we have gained and now enjoy release from bondage, namely the forgiveness of our sins.

¹⁵This one who redeemed us is the exact and visible expression of the God whom no one can see. Being the image of God, he is also the firstborn—prior to all

creation and supreme over it, ¹⁶because it was in his person that all things in heaven and on earth were once created, things that can be seen by the human eye, and those things that cannot be seen, whether they be the angelic occupants of heavenly thrones or supernatural beings who exercise dominion or rule or authority—all these things were created, and now exist, through him and for him. ¹⁷He—and no one else—is before everything in time and rank, and it is in his person and by his agency that all things hold together and are sustained. ¹⁸What is more, he himself is the head of his body, which is the Church. This is because he is its cause and the source of its life, and also because as the firstborn he was the first person to rise from the dead to immortality, and as a result he himself became preeminent and peerless in every realm. ¹⁹All this is true of Jesus because it was God’s choice and pleasure to have all divine attributes and powers reside in Jesus ²⁰and to reconcile the whole universe to himself through him by making peace through the blood Jesus shed on the cross—to reconcile all things through him alone, whether they be things on earth or things in heaven.

²¹This universal reconciliation includes you Colossians, although you were at one time in a state of alienation from God and were his inveterate enemies in thought and attitude because of your evil actions. ²²But as things now stand, God has reconciled you to himself by means of Christ’s death in his physical body. God’s purpose in all this was to present you in his own presence at the End as people who will then be without any sin, without blemish, and beyond accusation. ²³But this will occur only if you continue to exercise faith, the faith in which you were once firmly founded and now should be steadfast, refusing to shift from the hope that is held out to you in the good news which you heard. This good news has been proclaimed to every person beneath heaven’s orb. And I, Paul, have been entrusted with the task of communicating the good news.

²⁴Now, when I recognize the privilege of my apostolic vocation, I rejoice even in the midst of all that I am suffering for your sake. In fact, through this personal suffering of mine I am making my distinctive contribution toward filling up whatever remains to be endured of “the afflictions of Christ.” All this is for the sake of his body, the universal Church, ²⁵whose servant I have become as a result of the commission entrusted to me by God with regard to you, the task of fully proclaiming to you Gentiles the message of God. ²⁶This message is none other than the sacred secret of God’s plan of salvation that was hidden during all the past ages and generations but has now been disclosed to the new and holy people of God. ²⁷For in his eternal counsel God had chosen to divulge this mystery to his people in all its glory and richness displayed in the Gentile mission. What is this mystery or sacred secret? Christ indwelling you Gentiles (and all believers), which is your assurance of a share in his glory. ²⁸And this is the Christ we proclaim when we warn every unbeliever and teach every believer with all possible wisdom, our aim being to present every believer mature and perfect as a member of Christ’s body who is in personal union with Christ. ²⁹In my eager desire to achieve all this, I toil and earnestly strive, energized by the power of the indwelling Christ that is so mightily at work in my life.

2 ¹Indeed, I want you to be fully aware of my ongoing and intense wrestling in prayer for the spiritual welfare of you and the Laodicean believers and all others in the Lycus Valley who have yet to meet me in person. ²The aim of this spiritual wrestling of mine is multiple: that they all may be welded together and established in mutual love and that their hearts and yours may be encouraged and strengthened; that they may gain assured conviction in its full richness, a conviction that comes from spiritual insight and an understanding mind, and may have an enriched appreciation and knowledge of God's mystery, which is nothing other than Christ himself. ³For it is in Christ—and Christ alone—that the full treasury of God's wisdom and knowledge is stored up.

⁴My aim in telling you all this is that none of the false teachers talk you into error and delude you by the use of persuasive language or plausible argument. ⁵For even if I may be absent from you in body, I am certainly present with you in spirit, and I am delighted to see how orderly your Christian life is and how solid and stable your faith in Christ. ⁶You personally embraced the Christian tradition that recognizes the Messiah to be Jesus the Lord. So then, continue living in him, ⁷for at the time of your conversion you were first rooted in him and remain so but now you need to be progressively built up on him and established in the faith, in keeping with the instruction that you have received from Epaphras and others. Also see to it that you always overflow with gratitude. ⁸Maintain a constant watch lest anyone take you captive through a seductive type of "philosophy" that is hollow and deceptive and that comes from mere human tradition and whose focus is on the elemental spirits of the universe and not on the one source of divine revelation and depository of divine truth—Christ himself.

⁹For it is in Christ, and Christ alone, that all the fullness of God's being now has its permanent abode in bodily form. ¹⁰And therefore it is in him who is completely God that you have come to completeness, the satisfaction of every spiritual need—in Christ, who is the sovereign head over every cosmic power and authority, whether conceivable or real. ¹¹Furthermore, it is also in Christ that you were circumcised, but this circumcision was no external rite performed by human hands on actual flesh. Rather, it involved the stripping off of your fleshly nature in a heart-circumcision characteristic of the followers of Christ. ¹²This heart-circumcision took place at the time of your baptism, when you were identified with Christ not only in burial but also in resurrection, for you were spiritually raised with him through your faith in the powerful activity of God, the God who demonstrated that power by raising Jesus from the dead. ¹³Indeed! For when you were spiritually dead because of your trespasses and because you were rank pagans without knowledge of the true God, God raised you to spiritual life in union with Christ whom he raised. And not only so: At that time he also forgave us all our trespasses; ¹⁴he completely cancelled the certificate of indebtedness—broken decrees and all—that stood as a testimony against us and was an ominous threat to us; in fact he has removed it altogether from sight by nailing it to the cross; ¹⁵what is more, after he had rendered the powers and authorities helpless, he boldly exposed them to public

display when, through Christ's death, he led them in his triumphal procession as his enemy captives.

¹⁶In the light of all this, do not allow anyone to take you to task about what you eat and what you drink, or in the matter of observing yearly religious festivals or monthly new moons or weekly sabbaths. ¹⁷These things are merely a shadow cast by a reality to come; now that reality has in fact arrived, and it is none other than the gospel of Christ. ¹⁸Do not allow anyone who indulges and delights in self-abasement and the cultic worship of angels to declare you disqualified because you do not share his experiences, thus robbing you of your prize of the benefits of salvation. Such a person goes into great detail about his visionary experiences, and his fleshly thought and outlook have filled him with futile ideas and conceit. ¹⁹Moreover, he fails to adhere to Christ, the head, although it is in dependence on him alone that the whole body experiences growth that is stimulated by God, as it is nourished and fitted together into one by means of its joints and ligaments.

²⁰When you died with Christ you were freed from the control of the elemental spirits of the universe. Why, then, do you live as if you still belonged to the world and were not citizens of heaven? And why do you allow yourselves to be subjected to pointless regulations such as ²¹“Do not handle this thing here!” “Do not taste that food there!” “Do not even touch that item!”? ²²Purely material things, such as food and drink, are all destined to pass out of existence as they are used! In any case, why should you be bound by merely human precepts and instructions? ²³What is more, although these regulations at first glance might appear to be wise and beneficial with their self-imposed devotion, their affected humility, and their ascetic ill-treatment of the body, they are in fact without any value at all in the very area of their apparent value, namely, in curbing sensual indulgence.

3 ¹In your baptism, then, you came to share in Christ's resurrection. In light of this, always seek whatever belongs to that heavenly realm above, where the risen Christ now reigns, seated at God's right hand in the place of unrivaled honor and authority. ²Focus your attention and your thoughts exclusively and constantly on the heavenly realm above, not on the earthly realm below. ³This is appropriate and necessary, for in baptism you died with Christ to sin and the world and now your new spiritual life, enjoyed in union with Christ, is concealed in the safekeeping of God in heaven. ⁴Although your life is now hidden, when this Christ, who is your very Life, appears at his second Advent and his glory is manifested, then you too will fully share in his appearance and in the open display of his glory.

⁵So then, give evidence of your death to the world: regard your bodily limbs as completely dead with respect to their former earthly actions—immorality and impurity of any and every type, sensual craving and debased passion, and especially covetousness, which makes the desire to get and to have into a god. ⁶Never forget that it is these very sins that bring God's wrath. ⁷There was a time when you yourselves also indulged in these sins, when your life was given over to such action. ⁸But as things now stand, you must put off all sins of any kind, including chronic anger, sudden rage, malicious spite, slanderous talk, and foul-mouthed language. ⁹Do not lie to one another in either word or deed; remember that you have stripped

off forever the old Adamic nature, the old humanity, together with the actions that expressed it,¹⁰ and have put on the new nature you have in Christ, the new humanity, which is being renewed day by day in conformity with Christ, who is the image of the God who created this new nature, until it finally attains full knowledge of God and his will. ¹¹In this new humanity, the Church, all personal distinctions are eradicated—between Greek and Jew, the circumcised and the uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, the slave and the freeman. On the contrary, Christ himself amounts to everything and he is in all of you.

¹²So then, since you are God's chosen people, his elect, dedicated to his service and the objects of his special love, clothe yourselves appropriately— with tenderhearted compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness of spirit, and patient endurance. ¹³You must patiently bear with one another and readily forgive one another if anyone has a complaint against his neighbor. The Lord readily forgave you; so you, for your part, ought to follow his example and readily forgive. ¹⁴And in addition to all these garments just mentioned, clothe yourselves with the robe of love, for when this final, outer garment is put on, it binds together and perfects all the other virtues. ¹⁵And let the preservation of the peace that Christ gives be the determinative factor in your decision-making, for in reality your Christian calling as fellow members of the one body of Christ is to share in that peace. And always remember to be grateful. ¹⁶Let the message of Christ be operative in your hearts and in your midst and enrich you with all its wealth through your teaching and admonishing one another with all possible wisdom, as you sing to God with thanksgiving and with your whole heart—not simply with your lips—using psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. ¹⁷To sum up: whatever you are doing, whether it be speech or action, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, at the same time giving thanks to God the Father on the basis of the mediatorial work of Christ.

¹⁸You wives, submit yourselves to the leadership of your husbands, for this is fitting behavior for those who belong to the Lord. ¹⁹You husbands, show love to your wives constantly—never be harsh with them or foster bitter feelings against them. ²⁰You children, be obedient to your parents in every respect, for such behavior pleases the Lord and befits those who belong to him. ²¹You fathers, avoid exasperating your children by overcorrecting them or scorning their efforts; for if you do provoke them, they will become disheartened and sullen. ²²You slaves, be totally obedient to your earthly masters. Serve them well, but not with concern only for external appearances, as though it were your responsibility simply to serve humans. Rather, serve them with heartfelt sincerity and out of your reverent fear of the Lord. ²³Perform any task you may have enthusiastically and as a service rendered to the Lord and not to humans, ²⁴since you well know that it is from this same Lord and Master that you will receive the glorious inheritance of believers as your full recompense, whatever dues you may or may not now receive from humans. So then, Christ is the heavenly Master whose slaves you must be. ²⁵For everyone who does not serve the Lord Christ but engages in wrongdoing will be duly required for all the wrong he has done, and this Master shows no favoritism in dispensing rewards and punishments or in treating masters and slaves.

4 ¹And finally, you masters, give your slaves just and even-handed treatment, since you are well aware that you, like your slaves, have a Master in heaven—a heavenly employer to whom you are accountable.

²Always maintain the practice of prayer, and while you pray be alert in mind and heart. Also let thanksgiving always be a part of your prayer. ³At the same time intercede for us too—that God may provide us with a wide, open door for the preaching of our message, so that we may proclaim Christ as God’s open secret. It is, in fact, because of this open secret that I am now a prisoner in chains. ⁴Pray, then, that I may declare this message openly and boldly, which is the way I ought to proclaim it. ⁵Be tactful and wise in all your relations with unbelievers; buy up every possible opportunity to influence them for the kingdom of God. ⁶Let your conversation always be graciously winsome and seasoned with the salt of wit and pungency, so that you may know how you should give an answer suitable for each occasion and each need to each separate individual.

⁷You will be told all the news about me by Tychicus, our dearly loved brother who has been a trustworthy helper and loyal fellow slave in the Lord’s service. ⁸There is a particular reason I am sending him to you: that you may find out how matters stand with us and have your hearts encouraged by the news he brings. ⁹Along with him I am sending Onesimus, that trustworthy and dearly loved brother who is one of your own number. These two brothers will tell you everything that has been happening here in Rome.

¹⁰I pass on greetings from Aristarchus, a fellow prisoner of Christ; from Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (let me remind you of the directions you have already received about him—“if he pays you a visit, you are to give him a warm, hospitable welcome”); ¹¹and from Jesus, who is known as Justus. All three are Jewish converts and at present they are the only Jewish coworkers I have in the task of spreading the kingdom of God. These men have been a source of real comfort to me. ¹²Greetings also from Epaphras, one of your own number, a devoted bond-slave of Christ Jesus who is always praying for you with great intensity that you may stand firm in every aspect of God’s will as mature and convinced Christians. ¹³For I can certainly testify how strenuously he toils for you in intercessory prayer—for you and for Christians at Laodicea and Hierapolis. ¹⁴Greetings, too, from our dear friend, Luke the physician, and from Demas. ¹⁵Please convey my own greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church that meets in her home. ¹⁶When this present letter has been read at your gathering, ensure that it is read in the church of the Laodiceans as well and that in turn you read the letter that I have sent to Laodicea, which you will get from them. ¹⁷Finally, give Archippus this message from me: “Pay special attention to the responsibility you have received and undertaken as a servant of the Lord, so that you may discharge it to the full.” ¹⁸And now I add this final greeting in my own handwriting—from me, PAUL. Remember the chains I wear. (I am writing with a manacled hand!) May the grace of Jesus Christ continue to be your portion.