

## Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, come into our world and bring Your deliverance. Through Your people the Church, confront the powers of evil which seek to destroy families, break up nations, exploit the world and destroy peace. May we not be found wanting in our call to defeat the evils of this world and challenge its powers and authorities with the Word of God. Come, Lord Jesus, come! AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Hope

*Pray for those who have been called to give people hope through a ministry of evangelism, counselling or practical help. Ask the Lord to bless this work and make it fruitful.*

### On-going prayers

- Give thanks for wherever evil is defeated
- Pray for those who do not know how to face life
- Pray for victims of rape, and for justice for the abused

## Meditation

I glory in everything You do for me, Lord Jesus.

You give me courage to endure life's struggles,  
To refuse to be conquered by trouble.

You give me a heart to watch out for the needy,  
Despite all my selfish inclinations.

You give me strength to stand firm in my faith ,  
And apply what I believe to what I do.

You give me love when my heart is sorely tested;  
The ability to forgive when offended:

You give me the power to rise above the ordinary;  
To do what is greater, the best for Your glory!

You give me real hope and a vision for the future  
Your wondrous return in Your Kingdom!

I glory in You, Lord Jesus, for You do Your will through me.

## Bible Study - Colossian 2:16-23

<sup>16</sup> Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or by how you observe festivals, new moon celebrations, or Sabbaths. <sup>17</sup> These are only a faint outline of the future, but the full reality is found in Christ. <sup>18</sup> Let no-one who takes delight in false humility and the worship of angels cheat you by insisting on certain practices because of their own visionary experience. This is the thoughtless arrogance of a natural way of thinking <sup>19</sup> which is unconnected to the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, develops and grows through God.

<sup>20</sup> *If you have died with Christ at the hands of the powers of the universe, why do you live as though you belonged to the world and submit to its regulations:*  
<sup>21</sup> *'Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!'* <sup>22</sup> *All this is about things that perish with use, based on human doctrines and rules.* <sup>23</sup> *These things do indeed have an appearance of wisdom, through rigorous devotion, false humility, and austere standards of living; but they are of no value in controlling earthly desires.*

## Review

Yesterday's passage of Colossians could be considered the high point of Paul's letter, as it explained both the nature of Christ and His work on the Cross. It is entirely typical of Paul's letters that after he explained important details about the Christian faith, he followed this by writing immediately about how that faith should be applied, and this what we find within our passage today. This is indicated by the word 'therefore' at the beginning of our passage (2:16), after which Paul sets out an explanation of what the Colossians should do in the light of the truths of the Gospel. It is characteristic of the letter to the Colossians, however, that even in the midst of these words of advice, we gain further insights into the beliefs and practices against which Paul taught. He was clearly concerned that the church at Colossae was being influenced by those who claimed special revelations (2:18), taught certain rules and regulations about what they should eat or drink (2:16,20,21), and the importance of certain forms of worship at culturally important seasons (2:16)! If all this sounds strange to us, Paul also hints at the worship of angels (2:18) and also certain devotional religious practices (2:23, including the rigours of being harsh on oneself, called 'asceticism').

**Christ and nothing else!** Paul's advice to the Colossians, to put it simply, was to stand firmly against anything that was not directly related to the work of Christ. This point is put across most forcefully by his comment that all these things 'are only a faint outline of the future, but the full reality is found in Christ' (2:17). For the most part, the rest of the passage is then a powerful denunciation of any teaching that might draw a Christian away from Christ alone. Paul attacked what he called 'false humility' several times (2:18,23) because true humility was to be found in Christ alone; he attacked those whose beliefs were merely an expression of their own thinking and revelation (2:18), saying that this was simply 'not connected' to the true revelation of God in Jesus Christ (2:19). He also attacked those who reduced the religious life to a system of rules and regulations, just as Jewish people had done, (2:21-22), and you will even hear within this text the sound of Paul's mocking voice as he castigated his opponents in the church; 'Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!' (2:21).

**How does this affect us?** This astonishing broadside by Paul would have struck home at every point to those who read his letter in the church at Colossae. They knew what lay behind these comments far more accurately than we do. Today we must be careful, for although we can find some connections between what Paul said and our world today, much of this requires careful interpretation. We do indeed have our problems in the church today, and Christians are concerned about what it is right to eat and drink, and how we should celebrate religious festivals. However, we do not have problems with people worshipping angels (although there are some strange beliefs and practices within some more extreme sects that have cut themselves off from the rest of the church).

**Human ways and God's ways** The most intriguing part of what Paul says here is his attack on the process of a 'natural way of thinking' (2:18). In our own times, human thought and reasoning has developed around our understanding of science, technology and commerce; it benefits vast numbers of people, dominates our world, and seems to have little to do with religion! But if we read carefully, then we should perceive that Paul appealed to the truth that in God's world, everything is interconnected, indeed, through

Christ to God (2:19). Unfortunately, few people today are prepared to research how everything we experience must be connected in some way to the God who make the World!

It was Leonardo da Vinci who made the famous observation that any two objects we come across must be connected in some way, even if we do not immediately perceive what those connections are. In its day, it was a significant philosophical comment, and has had a significant impact on the development of what we now call 'universities'. The word 'university did not imply 'knowing everything', but the pursuit of knowledge about how everything is interconnected! What we have lost track of today is that these founding influences upon the intellectual developments of our age are deeply rooted not so much in Leonardo da Vinci's philosophy, but in Paul's words in the Bible, from where Leonardo obtained the idea!

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What 'human rules' do you think have come to dominate the life of the Church of God in our own times?
2. How do we demonstrate that Christ is at the centre of everything we experience in this world?
3. What other religious beliefs attract people away from Christian faith in your own country? How can we deal with this?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*Ever since I was trained as a physicist in the early 1970's I have kept an eye on the development of science and engineering. Many remarkable things are being achieved, but it does not take too much to observe that the moral consequences of the development of technology are hardly considered by most people involved in these fields. Technology such as gaming and entertainment is not introduced on the basis of what is good for people, but on the basis of what will appeal to our senses strong enough to sell and make profit. When will people realise that Christian morality and ethics have an important part to play in technological growth, even though they do not show immediate financial benefit?*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Try to place yourself also in the situation of someone who lives nearby but is not a Christian. Now, think carefully about what you take part in at church and write down a list of the things that are done that someone outside the church might easily observe as giving glory to God, and what might not!*
- *Pray for people today who are trying to engage with the difficult theological and intellectual issues of our day that do not appear on the surface to affect many people, but are still of great importance to God and to our witness as Christians in the world.*

## Final Prayer

Clean us, Heavenly Father, from the dirt and rubbish that accumulates in our lives, often without our even knowing it. Give us the grace to accept Your cleansing, so that we are ready to throw away what needs to go, especially the accumulated debris of living. May we remain true to You Lord God, in the way we live our lives: AMEN