

**Nineth meeting on Colossians: MATURITY PRACTISED (2. Holiness in the fellowship)**  
**Remarks concerning the structure and content of this passage**  
**(you can read this before your meeting, after reading the passage in the Bible)**

What is true Christianity all about? It's all about faith in Christ, the Messiah. To receive Him in faith as Saviour and Lord. And to continue in the faith, to keep walking with Him, together with 'all the saints', all the other (diverse) believers in King Jesus. In the first half of the letter Paul has made this very clear; and has also shown how time after time there is the temptation to change true Christianity into other stories, into boasting about special religious experiences or into a set of religious practises. Not that Paul has made this all very clear, in the second half of the letter (starting with Chapter 3), Paul starts to make this all very practical.

When we set our minds on Christ, with Whom we died and rose, on Christ Who is in heaven and will come hence, then we will start to understand that there are practises that must stop in our lives and practises that are to be learnt. Concerning what has to stop, we learnt much last week – some personal inclinations that do not go together with being a Christian. Idolatrous passions and dishonourable speech.

Verse 9 forms the turning point. Here Paul turns away from what we should no longer practise and introduces the difference, the contrast with our new life. Our old life was self-centred and individualistic. The new life in Christ is by nature community-life, fellowship-life. What we should learn is in one word: not to lie to each other (keeping up appearances is also a kind of liar...)

Paul compares the practical Christian life with putting on new clothes. Since, by our death and resurrection with Christ, we became new born people, part of Christ's bride – we should as new people put on 'new clothing'.

In verse 10 Paul makes three remarks concerning the new life:

- It is renewed in knowledge after the image of the Creator. The image of the Creator: remember here that Jesus is the perfect Image of God (1:15), so we are renewed in order to look more like Jesus!
- Old distinction lines disappear in Jesus. Observe how remarkable this verse is!
  - *Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised*: these were perhaps the most distinct cultures visible in those days, seemingly incompatible (extremely different practises, worldviews, cultures!). Of course, they met each other in daily life, but they would never think of living with each other as if they were one family. In Greek eyes the others were 'Jews'. In Jewish eyes the others were 'uncircumcised' – they did essentially not belong to the group, to God's people. But now they have started to believe in Christ, belonging to the group is defined in a completely new way (which took time to get used to!)
  - *Greek (...), barbarian, Scythian*: this has to do with the level of civilisation and education. Society in Colossae was multicultural. But people from the different cultures wouldn't mingle as a family. And had their views on each other. Now they have started to believe in Christ, they must learn to value each other, not on basis of how civilised and educated they were, but on the basis of being accepted both by grace through faith.

- *Slave, free*: this was also an incredible statement made by Paul and perhaps it coheres with the previous: slaves were taken from the peoples that were considered as the 'barbarians' – (do you see how themes like racism and slavery play a role here, problems still not solved). Although slave and free lived in the same house, the distinctions were very clear. Now Paul says, the fellowship in Christ consists of slaves and free, who are in Christ brothers and sisters. So, although one person is working for the other, they should regard each other as of completely equal value. [When you read 4:9 and the letter to Philemon, you will find out that Paul here also paves the way for a very delicate problem that he wants to solve. Probably the letter to Philemon was sent together with the letter to Philemon]
- Christ all in all: Where the old life was characterised by emptiness and individualism, the new life is characterised by fullness and community. It's all about 'Christ in you' (1:27)
- Now Paul makes concrete what he means with the new life.
- 'Chosen ones, holy and beloved':
  - This is the new identity they have received. So: they don't act to become so, they act because they are.
  - Chosen: that you were chosen and elected by God is something you discover after you have come to faith. It was not your merit.
  - These three words are often used to characterise the people of God, Israel. Through faith they are now really part of God's chosen, holy and beloved people, through which it pleases God to make Himself known in the world.
- As in verse 5 and 8 Paul mentions again 5 characteristics. By the way, in these we also see Jesus. And the God of Israel.
- The last word of the five (patience) is elaborated in verse 13. Being part of the fellowship will not always be as being in paradise. We must learn to practise bearing with another and to forgive each other (so: Christians will at times sin against you!)
- Love: see also 1:4 'love for all the saints. Read John 13:33-34! That such diverse people are practising love to each other will impress the world, this was never seen before!
- Harmony & peace: with peace is not meant an inward feeling, but the ability to live and work together in harmony despite such huge differences in background. (compare 1:11!)
- Be thankful, vs. 17: give thanks to God: see also 1:3, 1:12, 2:7: a very important theme for Paul. The deceivers stressed the theme of emptiness, Paul stresses that in Christ we found fullness and reasons to praise and thank God.
- Word of Christ: this doesn't mean a restriction to those words that Jesus spoke (as you find in a 'red letter Bible'). It simply means the whole book that reveals Christ to us, namely: The Bible. 'Dwell in you': it is important not just to read. It is also good to learn parts of Scripture by heart, to learn the practise of memorising (ever tried?). And even

more than memorise: let it come back in your thoughts in all kinds of situations during the day.

- Teaching one another in all wisdom: It is clear here that the teaching is not restricted to the pastor, it is a practise to be learnt by all mature believers; helping each other to grow, to understand Gods Word, to learn to live in a manner worthy of the Lord. In all wisdom: see also 1:9: although all members learn to teach, it must be done in a wise way. Some were willing to teach at Colossae, but what they taught was not very wise. Therefore, it is good for the fellowship to have ministers like Epaphras, struggling that the teaching may serve the growth in knowledge and maturity of the fellowship.
- Singing Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. A lot can be said about this. Three remarks now.
  - First: the singing should reflect the diversity of the church. The Psalms were the Jewish songs. In the church the Jewish songs as well as the new songs also written by non-Jewish hymnwriters (Greek, Scythian?) should be sung. Everyone in the fellowship might have his or her preferences concerning what kind of songs and what kind of music style we like to listen to and sing with. But the choice of what is sung in the fellowship must go beyond these personal preferences; it is not good when only one style is allowed in the fellowship; the singing of diverse songs is an exercise and expression of mutual love and mutually valuing each other, including the music styles and songs of people with other backgrounds than your own.
  - Second: Psalms are not just a hymnbook. The book of Psalms is the hymnbook inspired by the Holy Spirit that is part of the Bible, the Word of God. When we want to praise God, it is good to learn to use and sing those songs that were prepared in Gods Word by the Holy Spirit for God's people to be sung, to sing the songs that Jesus sung when He was on earth, but: as risen King He probably also sings and leads the worship in heaven (as kings were supposed to do in Israel); so when we sing the Psalms, we sing with a large choir, led by Jesus (Romans 15:9, Hebrews 2:12) and in this way we fulfil the prophecy that the (non-Jewish) nations one day would sing (Israel's) Psalms (often in the Psalms we find the idea of 'the nations will praise' – literary: will sing Psalms. Since God has promised that one day God's own old covenant people will turn to the Messiah (Romans 9-11), it is important that they will find the nations singing their book of Psalms! (For those who are interested: 'Singing the songs of Jesus – revisiting the Psalms' – by Michael Lefebvre is a very helpful book in this. For me 'The book of Psalms for worship', edited by Crown and Covenant, is a very wonderful help to sing Psalms daily (there is also an app to learn to sing these Psalms with your smartphone).
  - Third: the singing is mentioned in close relation to 'teaching one another'. Singing is a way to edify ourselves as believers. Therefore it is very important to check that what you sing is biblical and helpful to build your faith.
- Vs. 17: Like vs. 9 was a bridge between two parts, vs. 17 is also a bridge: it ends 3:1-17, but it also introduces the next part of the letter on living as a mature Christian in your daily life at home and at your working place (3:17-4:1).

## Input for the meeting

- **Pray.** Start with a thanksgiving prayer. Also give thanks for the diversity in the fellowship that we are part of; although we have different backgrounds, we share in the same grace, the same Spirit, we believe in the same Lord – who loved us so much. Give thanks for the Word of God, by which the Holy Spirit teaches us; and ask the Holy Spirit to give each one of you ears to hear, eyes to see and a willingness to respond to the Word of God.
- **Read** To remember the part of last time, first read Colossians 3: 1 – 17. Then, read Colossians 3: 9-17.
- **Understand** Take some time (but not too much) to share where you have questions concerning the meaning of the text or where you did exciting discoveries.
- **Read** the passage (3:9-17) for the third time. Agree that immediately after the reading everybody will be silent for three minutes. You will listen to the Holy Spirit: is there one verse in this passage that has special meaning for you at the moment?
- **Share.** Every member of the Life Group shares which word, verse, phrase your attention was drawn to. Tell this. And if you know: tell why this attracted your attention (this says something about the text, but probably also about you and your situation). The leader of the group takes care that everybody gets his or her turn. Avoid discussions here; just listen: you will learn from each other and be built up now!
- **Pray.** Take time for prayer. Thank God for the fellowship and pray. You might do it in this way: everybody prays for the person left of him/her.