A Message from St Paul to the Early Church - and to Us

In all his travels, Paul never, as far as we know, actually visited Colossae (now Honaz, in Southern Turkey). Today's Epistle is an extract from Paul's letter to the Colossians, which he wrote from a prison cell; he'd heard that the early Christians there were being influenced by false teaching - which included the continuation, and unnecessary extension, of predominantly Jewish practices. He saw the need to nip this in the bud in order for the people to understand the need to focus their worship on Jesus, as the only true personification of God, and the only "way" to God.

Paul clearly cared for the Colossians, and his purpose in writing the letter was two-fold - to:

- Encourage spiritual growth along the right path - living their faith and belief in Jesus, and putting behind them sinful behaviour.
- Address the growing cultural pressures from the Jewish converts to continue to adopt Jewish laws they were used to, and even to potentially introduce some pagan worship practices!

He described sinful behaviour that should be renounced in some detail, especially in terms of not giving in to:

- Impetuous anger or malicious insult
- Rage - temper-tantrums and malicious verbal or physical attack
- Malice - any sort of behaviour that could injure anyone physically, emotionally or socially
- Slander - which might spitefully destroy someone else's reputation in some way
- "Filthy language" - crude expletives and lewd behaviour that might be hurtful, offensive or even, perhaps, hurtful
- Lying - in such a way as to cause suspicion and distrust - that can make those who tell lies untrustworthy, too

Thought for the Week: It's probably true to say that Christians might be seen by others as somewhat hypocritical, in that we continually seek forgiveness for things that we still get tempted to do wrong. We can't help being tempted though; but temptation, in itself, isn't a sin - giving way to temptation is 'the sinful bit'.

The point being that Paul's letter should encourage us, today, as well as encouraging the members of the early church in Colossae twenty centuries ago, that in following Jesus, …." *you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator"*:

In so doing, we can, literally, become new people by 'shedding the old self', and becoming 'the new self' (as God wants us to be); we're certainly not hypocritical when we then continue to praise God by responding to every situation with great care, with love, whilst promoting harmonious and peaceable relationships with everyone else.

Lord, teach me to think Your way - not according to my human instincts; may my thoughts and actions reflect the truth I encounter as I learn about Jesus - <u>who is</u> the Way, the Truth and the life.

Colossians 3:

1 So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth,
3 for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
4 When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.
5 Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry).
6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient.
7 These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life.
8 But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth.
9 Do not lie to one another….