

**“The Way Forward”**  
**Pastor Norwood N. “Woody” Hingle III, Ph.D.**  
**Sunday, January 2, 2022**

Whenever you are about to embark on a trip, it is always important to know the way forward. E.g., last Sunday Randy and I were talking about delivering the Angel Tree gifts to the four families that were not able to pick up their gifts from the church. Before we could go forward, though, I needed to get online to see where each family lived—two were in the 9th ward area, and two in New Orleans East. So as we set out, Randy asked me to give him the exact address where each family lived, and he would look it up on GPS—and I am so very thankful he did that! I was thinking that I knew the way to each house, but his help with the GPS proved even more exact and save us a lot of time. In many ways, that is what life is like. We can look up in general where we want to go, but as we proceed we need to make decisions in a rather exact way, pinpoint decisions, to get us where we want to go. It is like what theologians talk about general revelation, where we know general virtues by which one should live, and special revelation, more precise instruction on what God is like and what He expects of us and how we can be saved—like GPS is to my general Google search for addresses. Where do you and I want to go spiritually in the new year 2022? Our passage this morning provides, I believe, the way forward with special revelation.

READ Colossians 3:12-17 (p. 201)

**CONTEXT:** Paul wrote while in prison in Rome around 60 AD this letter to the Colossians (Colossae is about 100 miles west of Ephesus in Asia Minor) about the new life they have in Christ. They are to put to death the fleshly part of us— like fornication and greed— and put on the new person Christ is making us to be. In that person there is no longer Jew or Greek, circumcised or uncircumcised, no barbarians or even Scythians, slave or free.

READ v 12a. “Paul began his final instructions to the church in Colossae by reminding them who they are! Cf. Romans 8,1,15-16.” Who are you? Who am I? That is one of the most important questions we can ask ourselves. What would you say if someone asked you that? That you are so-and-so’s spouse? That you are a father, mother, lawyer, doctor, academic, pastor, etc.? E.g., I recall the late great John Madden, who passed away this past week, was asked that question— who are you— a coach, sportscaster, or video game entrepreneur? His answer was unequivocal— he is a coach. He said this, interestingly, even though he died at 85 and had not coached since he was 42. I believe I know what he was saying— everything that he did in his life was through the prism of being a coach-- his comments from the booth during a football game as well as his comments in his famous Madden video game. Paul also could know his role in life as a Christian— and this role was the prism through which everything he said and did was conducted. It was all related to his relationship to Jesus as his personal Lord and Savior. Last month, for instance, we went over Romans 8, where Paul begins by saying that believers are no longer under condemnation, and that believers are children of God who cry out to Him through the Holy Spirit, “Abba, Father!” Paul reminds the Colossians the same thing as they wrestle with who they are. Christ defines them. They are the elect of God, specially chosen by Him; they are the holy ones, the saints; and they are beloved of God. That is the

mindset every believer must have. Before we can embark on the trip which is 2022, we need to know who we are and whose we are.

READ vv 12b-15. “The Colossians are to clothe themselves with key traits which are to make them one Body— such traits as humility, patience, forgiveness, love, peace, and thankfulness. Cf. Micah 6:8; Matthew 6:12,14-15; 9:36; 11:28-30; 22:34-40; 1 Corinthians 13:4; Galatians 5:22-23.” All of these traits are to be characteristic of the Christian as we relate to one another in the church, but they are also implied to our relations to those outside the church for we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. The word for humility (ταπεινοπροσώνη) is interesting. F.F. Bruce in his commentary on Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon says that the Romans did not see humility as a virtue, but rather translated the word as “meanness” or “means-spiritedness” (p. 154 n.127). We kind of live like that today, where pride and hubris are more prized than a person with humility. Christian humility does not mean putting ourselves down, but rather knowing how dependent we are on God, just as a child is on a parent. E.g., I recall a rock n’ roll guy, the guitarist for The Cars in his acceptance speech at the rock n’ roll Hall of Fame, credited his Mom for his interest in and pursual of music, and the keyboardist told a story of how his Dad told him that if he continued to learn the piano he would take him to a Beatles concert— which he said he is very glad he accepted! They were not saying they could do all their accomplishments on their own, but rather with the help of family. Christians acknowledge that all their accomplishments are dependent on the grace of their Heavenly Father. If we have humility, then it is easier to be patient with others and forgiving. It is of interest here that Paul reminded the Colossians that they should indeed forgive, for they have been forgiven, as Jesus said in The Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:12. Love is a very important trait of the Christian, as Paul said— it binds all together in perfect harmony. E.g., I recall once going to an event where there was someone I did not

like, and I was upset with him about something he did, and I did not know how I would react when I saw him, so I prayed about it, and I could sense the Holy Spirit telling me to love this person, and leave the rest to Him. And yes, this was the perfect answer! We are also to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts— or be the judge who gives awards, the arbitrator; this verb βραβεύετω, is used only once in the New Testament. The idea is that we are to let the peace of Christ reign over, give a prize to, adjudicate in the situation of conflict with believers, as much as it depends on us. When there is no peace, there is a noticeable tension all around. E.g., I recall when Elena and I got in an argument when our children were little, or even today, they want to see it resolved— they don't really care who is right or who is wrong. The quicker we got to a peace in our relationship, the better it was for the family. The church is like this as well. Believers need to let the peace of Christ reign, even when there is conflict; that does not mean ignoring the conflict, but it means working to resolve it in a way that honors Christ and is not dependent on our pride or “winning”. The idea of thankfulness— to God it is implied— protects the heart of the Christian from one of greatest weapons Satan has— bitterness. We need to carry the attitude of thankfulness to God with us constantly. Interestingly, all these traits are what comprise the character of Jesus, don't they?

READ vv 16-17. “How can such a work be done in the rebellious human heart? It depends on what people allow to indwell them! ‘The NT does not contain a detailed code of rules for the Christian. Codes of rules, as Paul explains elsewhere [Galatians 3:23-4:7], are suited to the period of immaturity when the children of God are still under guardians; but children who have come to years of responsibility know their father's will without having to be provided a long list of “Do's' and Don't's.” What the NT does provide is those basic principles of Christian living which may be applied to varying situations of life as they arise”

(F.F. Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians*, p. 160). Cf. Philippians 4:8-9.”

There are admittedly gray areas for Christians we have seen over the years— should Christians work on Sundays, play cards, dance, drink liquor, infant baptism, etc. But there are many areas that are clear for the Christian, like what types of movies to watch and not watch, TV shows to watch and not watch, that abortion is wrong, marriage is between a man and a woman, and so on. A big one also is that I have noticed, even among pastors, a certain liberty in using four-letter words or similar type of language. E.g., I recall a pastor telling me one-on-one after a talk he gave to other pastors— a very good, inspiring talk— that a mutual friend of ours who was having trouble needed to get the “s\*\*\*” out and work on his problems at home. I was taken aback not only by his using this language, but also by how freely and unapologetically he did so. I like what Paul said in Philippians 4:8-9, “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things”. Many people want to know what God’s will is for their lives, but if we follow Paul here about letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly— as also Psalm 37:4 says we should delight ourselves in the Lord and He will give us the desire of our hearts— we shall start thinking His thoughts and prioritizing life in His way.

“As we approach the fork in the road which is 2022, which will be our way forward?” My hope and prayer is that we will take out from time to time this “GPS” of Colossians 3:12-17 and have the Holy Spirit guide us in the way forward. I encourage us to use this passage to remind ourselves who we are— and thus whose we are— and how we are to treat one another. The latter flows from the former, just as we are to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, minds, and

souls, and then our neighbor as ourselves. If we carry in our hearts this passage in 2022, we will know the way forward.