Philippians and Colossians

Philippians

The “Sounion” was a WWII Greek ammunition carrier ship that had been outfitted for a passenger boat. It was primitive in the extreme. There were a couple hundred of us onboard, taking every room available.

The Sounion pulled into harbor in northern Greece at a town known today as Kavala. In Paul’s day the city was known as Neapolis. We did not have long to stay there as our goal was to reach the great valley to the north of us wherein stretched an ancient Roman road that once carried travelers from Rome to the west to Istanbul on the east. Straddling the old road were the ruins of the once-great city of Philippi, so named after Prince Philip, the father of Alexander the Great.

It was here that Paul and Silas came 2,000 years ago, the very first to bring the Gospel to Europe. Silas was new to the team, having replaced Barnabas who along with his relative Mark continued ministry on the Island of Cyprus. We know of this journey for it’s faithfully recounted to us by Dr. Luke in the Book of Acts:

Acts 16:9-12  [The Message]

That night Paul had a dream: A Macedonian stood on the far shore and called across the sea (the Aegean Sea), "Come over to Macedonia (northern Greece) and help us!" [10] The dream gave Paul his map. We went to work at once getting things ready to cross over to Macedonia. All the pieces had come together. We knew now for sure that God had called us to preach the good news to the Europeans. [11] Putting out from the harbor at Troas, we made a straight run for Samothrace. The next day we tied up at New City (Neapolis) [12] and walked from there to Philippi, the main city in that part of Macedonia and, even more importantly, a Roman colony. We lingered there several days.

Following a day in which a demon-possessed girl was delivered by the Lord, the “locals” accused Paul and Silas of ruining the business of the men who “owned” her and they were beaten severely and thrown into a dungeon. At midnight, the two ministers began singing praises to the Lord and an earthquake shook the city and broke the prison open.
Before dawn, the jailer and his family had been saved. Earlier, a woman who owned a textile firm in nearby Thyatira, Turkey, (Lydia) had been saved as well. This was the start of the church in Philippi.

Chapter One

Some years later, while awaiting trial before Nero in Rome, Paul wrote this letter to the church in Philippi. It was a letter of encouragement and hope. Philip. 1:6

There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the God who started this great work in you would keep at it and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears.

Now Paul showed what spiritual maturity really is. There he was in a Roman prison, yet giving showing the mind and heart of a true disciple: Philip. 1:12-13 I want to report to you, friends, that my imprisonment here has had the opposite of its intended effect. Instead of being squelched, the Message has actually prospered. [13] All the soldiers here, and everyone else too, found out that I'm in jail because of this Messiah. That piqued their curiosity, and now they've learned all about him.

No sorrow for himself, no grumbling, no self-pity. Paul was willing to take any burden, pay any price, go any number of miles, if in so doing Christ could be preached. He wrote that the present inconveniences and sufferings were not worthy to be compared to the glory that awaited him throughout all eternity. And note carefully his challenge to the Philippians — and to us: Philip. 1:27-30 Meanwhile, live in such a way that you are a credit to the Message of Christ. Let nothing in your conduct hang on whether I come or not. Your conduct must be the same whether I show up to see things for myself or hear of it from a distance. Stand united, singular in vision, contending for people's trust in the Message, the good news, [28] not flinching or dodging in the slightest before the opposition. Your courage and unity will show them what they're up against: defeat for them, victory for you — and both because of God.

Chapter Two

Now Paul wrote an impassioned plea to the church to serve the Lord through unity and humility: Philip. 2:1-4 If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care — [2] then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. [3] Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. [4] Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget
yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

It is going to be fascinating to observe the proceedings at the Judgment Seat of Christ: What motivated our service for Him? Was our service on this earth for Christ's benefit or for our own? I have not seen it in this church for many years, but I have observed it in others: LOVE FOR POSITION.

This next passage is well-known to most scholars of the Word: Philip. 2:5-11 Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. [6] He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. [7] Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! [8] Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion. [9] Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, [10] so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, [11] and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.

A Christian - a follower of Jesus Christ - is a servant. A great church is a serving church.

What about our attitudes? Philip. 2:14 Do everything readily and cheerfully—no bickering, no second-guessing allowed! (Illustration of a member of our church in Sandusky, Ohio)

Have you heard of a man named EPHAPHRODITUS? Paul reported that he was going to send Ephaphroditus to the church in Philippi but he had become ill: Philip. 2:25-30 But for right now, I'm dispatching Ephaphroditus, my good friend and companion in my work. You sent him to help me out; now I'm sending him to help you out. [26] He has been wanting in the worst way to get back with you. Especially since recovering from the illness you heard about, he's been wanting to get back and reassure you that he is just fine. [27] He nearly died, as you know, but God had mercy on him. And not only on him—he had mercy on me, too. His death would have been one huge grief piled on top of all the others. [28] So you can see why I'm so delighted to send him on to you.

Yes, followers of Christ can become ill. Don't get a guilt complex just because you have a physical ailment. You and I live in a sin-cursed planet and death is contagious. One day we will be delivered from this bondage and be caught up forever to be with the Lord.
Chapter Three

Philip. 3:1 And that’s about it, friends. Be glad in God! I don’t mind repeating what I have written in earlier letters, and I hope you don’t mind hearing it again. Better safe than sorry—so here goes.

Apparently Paul was not afraid of repetition. I’m afraid many are today. Like the Athenians in ancient Greece, they exist “to hear some new thing.” It’s still the plain simple Gospel that transforms hearts. I friend of mine sometime ago built the state’s fanciest gourmet restaurant. Magnificent! Every kind of exotic food you could think of was served by tuxedo-clad waiters. Great singers were there “live” such as the Ink Spots and Frank Sinatra, Jr. Within a year the restaurant went belly-up while just across the street the McDonald’s had to expand. The fancy stuff might be OK once in awhile but we live on the plain stuff! The Word of God is “meat and potatoes.”

Was Paul against dogs? Philip. 3:2 Steer clear of the barking dogs, those religious busybodies, all bark and no bite. All they’re interested in is appearances—knife-happy circumcisers, I call them. Well, the 2-legged kind he was. Back to that same old issue: “To be saved,” they barked, “to be a Christian, you must first become a Jew!” Nonsense.

Paul’s goal was powerful: Philip. 3:10-11 I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and go all the way with him to death itself. [11] If there was any way to get in on the resurrection from the dead, I wanted to do it. Much more powerfully stated in the KJV: Philip. 3:10-11 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; [11] If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

Each of those underlined phrases are worthy of your contemplation.

Paul never thought that “he had arrived.” Philip. 3:12-16 I’m not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. [13] Friends, don’t get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I’ve got my eye on the goal, [14] where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back.

[15] So let’s keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you’ll see it yet! [16] Now that
we're on the right track, let's stay on it.

“I press on!” Haven't made it yet! I'm saved, yes, but I have a whole lot more ground to cover!

“One thing I do!” A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. We get side-lined on peripheral issues quite easily, don’t we?

“Forgetting those things which are behind.” Past mistakes, past failures, etc., cannot keep filling your mind.

Then Paul reminds us of the eternities: Philip. 3:20-21 [20] But there's far more to life for us. We're citizens of high heaven! We're waiting the arrival of the Savior, the Master, Jesus Christ, [21] who will transform our earthy bodies into glorious bodies like his own. He'll make us beautiful and whole with the same powerful skill by which he is putting everything as it should be, under and around him.

Oh, good friend, remember that your great goal in life is more than just putting bread on the table, shoes on your family's feet or clothing on their backs. Yes, we must take care of those responsibilities; but I am a citizen of Heaven. I have a position with Christ! Mature Christians feast on the reality of eternity.

Chapter Four

Apparently in the Philippian church there were two women who did not get along so well. We are not told what issue was but Paul was concerned enough he mentioned them: Philip. 4:2-7 I urge Euodia and Syntyche to iron out their differences and make up. God doesn't want his children holding grudges. [3] And, oh, yes, Syzygus, since you're right there to help them work things out, do your best with them. These women worked for the Message hand in hand with Clement and me, and with the other veterans—worked as hard as any of us. Remember, their names are also in the book of life.

It would be interesting to know what these ladies were upset about. Paul continued: [6] Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. [7] Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.
Let me go back to verse 4: (KJV) Philip. 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.

Evangelist Jack Shuler wrote years ago that there are three ways to deal with today’s problems:

1. You can resent!
2. You can resign! (As in “resign yourself to your fate.”)
3. You can rejoice!

The first two choices are totally non-productive.

Paul touched on our thought life: Philip. 4:8-9 Summing it all up, friends, I’d say you’ll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. [9] Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.

Paul had earlier warned the people in the church in Corinth to “bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Jesus Christ.” What are the thoughts you allow room in your brain? Are they of God? Satan? Self? Other people?

Finally Paul thanked the Philippians for their generosity for a gift they had sent him. And he added, Philip. 4:10-20 [11] Actually, I don't have a sense of needing anything personally. I've learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. [12] I'm just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I've found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty. [13] Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am. [14] I don't mean that your help didn't mean a lot to me—it did. It was a beautiful thing that you came alongside me in my troubles. [15] You Philippians well know, and you can be sure I'll never forget it, that when I first left Macedonia province, venturing out with the Message, not one church helped out in the give-and-take of this work except you. You were the only one. [16] Even while I was in Thessalonica, you helped out—and not only once, but twice. [17] Not that I'm looking for handouts, but I do want you to experience the blessing that issues from generosity. [18] And now I have it all—and keep getting more! The gifts you sent with Epaphroditus were more than enough, like a sweet-smelling sacrifice roasting on the altar, filling the air with fragrance, pleasing God no end. [19] You can be sure that God will take care of everything you need, his generosity exceeding even yours in the glory that pours from Jesus. [20] Our God and Father abounds in glory that
just pours out into eternity. I closed over 850 Revivaltime broadcasts with Paul's words as we read them in the King James Version: Philip. 4:13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. Amen!

COLOSSIANS

It is a tribute to the Apostle Paul and others that the country of Turkey (Asia Minor in Scripture) was greatly evangelized as recorded in the Book of Acts. In Revelation chapters 2 and 3, Jesus referred to the "seven churches in Asia" - Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Smyrna (present-day Izmir), Ephesus, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Though not referred to in Revelation 2 and 3 with the other 7 churches, Colosse (located some 100 miles directly east of Ephesus) was also evangelized largely as a result of the spread of the Gospel during Paul's exceptional ministry in Ephesus. Acts 19:10 And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. We don't have any evidence that Paul himself ever spent time in Colosse, we know that he maintained contact with the believers there through Epaphras, one of his converts and associates from Colosse.

At the back of these notes are two pages taken from the Internet showing a map of the Christian churches in Turkey in New Testament days. They will be helpful in your understanding of the work of Paul and others as recorded in the Book of Acts.

The occasion for this letter was the appearance of false teaching that threatened the spiritual future of the church. The false teaching was undermining the centrality of Christ and contained a mixture of Christian teaching PLUS extrabiblical Jewish traditions and pagan philosophy. This letter affirms Christ's full deity.

Chapter One

Paul writes this letter to address cultish teachings in the church at Colosse; however, he does not open this letter with a broadside. He could have for the believers there should have known better than to get involved with such a cult. But Paul instead lauds them for their good attributes: Col. 1:3-8 [The Message] Our prayers for you are always spilling over into thanksgivings. We can't quit thanking God our Father and Jesus our Messiah for you! [4] We keep getting reports on your steady faith in Christ, our Jesus, and the love you continuously extend to all Christians. [5] The lines of purpose in your lives never grow slack, tightly tied as they are to your future in heaven, kept taut by hope. The Message is as true among you today as when you first heard it. It doesn't diminish or weaken over time. [6] It's the same all over the
world. The Message bears fruit and gets larger and stronger, just as it has in you. From the very first day you heard and recognized the truth of what God is doing, you've been hungry for more. [7] It's as vigorous in you now as when you learned it from our friend and close associate Epaphras. He is one reliable worker for Christ! I could always depend on him. [8] He's the one who told us how thoroughly love had been worked into your lives by the Spirit. As bad as the situation there might have been, Paul first courted the blessings of the church.

In verses 9-18 Paul reminded the believers that the church was constantly in his prayers. He was able to pray healthy prayers because his own attitude was healthy.

Now Paul deals with the great gap that was spanned by the love of Christ manifested on Calvary. Col. 1:19-23 So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. [20] Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the Cross. [21] You yourselves are a case study of what he does. At one time you all had your backs turned to God, thinking rebellious thoughts of him, giving him trouble every chance you got. [22] But now, by giving himself completely at the Cross, actually dying for you, Christ brought you over to God's side and put your lives together, whole and holy in his presence. [23] You don't walk away from a gift like that! You stay grounded and steady in that bond of trust, constantly tuned in to the Message, careful not to be distracted or diverted. There is no other Message—just this one. Every creature under heaven gets this same Message. I, Paul, am a messenger of this Message.

One of my favorite commentators on Scripture was William Barclay. This is from page 127 on his book about Colossians: The fact is that the only thing in this world which is for every man is Christ. It is not every man who can be a thinker. There are gifts that are not granted to every man. Now every man an master every craft or even every game. There are those who are color blind and to whom the loveliness of art means nothing. There are those who are tone deaf and for whom the glory of music does not exist. Not every man can be a writer or a student or a preacher or a singer. Even human love at its highest is not granted to all men. These are gifts a man will never possess. But to every man there is open the good news of the gospel, the love of God in Christ Jesus and the transforming power which can bring holiness into life.

Chapter Two

Col. 2:1-10 I want you to realize that I continue to work as hard as I know how
for you, and also for the Christians over at Laodicea. Not many of you have met me face-to-face, but that doesn't make any difference. Know that I'm on your side, right alongside you. You're not in this alone.  [2] I want you woven into a tapestry of love, in touch with everything there is to know of God. Then you will have minds confident and at rest, focused on Christ, God's great mystery. [3] All the richest treasures of wisdom and knowledge are embedded in that mystery and nowhere else. And we've been shown the mystery! [4] I'm telling you this because I don't want anyone leading you off on some wild-goose chase, after other so-called mysteries, or "the Secret." [5] I'm a long way off, true, and you may never lay eyes on me, but believe me, I'm on your side, right beside you. I am delighted to hear of the careful and orderly ways you conduct your affairs, and impressed with the solid substance of your faith in Christ.  [6] My counsel for you is simple and straightforward: Just go ahead with what you've been given. You received Christ Jesus, the Master; now live him. [7] You're deeply rooted in him. You're well constructed upon him. You know your way around the faith. Now do what you've been taught. School's out; quit studying the subject and start living it! And let your living spill over into thanksgiving. [8] Watch out for people who try to dazzle you with big words and intellectual double-talk. They want to drag you off into endless arguments that never amount to anything. They spread their ideas through the empty traditions of human beings and the empty superstitions of spirit beings. But that's not the way of Christ. [9] Everything of God gets expressed in him, so you can see and hear him clearly. You don't need a telescope, a microscope, or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ, and the emptiness of the universe without him. [10] When you come to him, that fullness comes together for you, too. His power extends over everything.

Paul had never met these people yet he felt a burden for them. That's where missions begins. It is the weight of those you will never meet that causes you and me to pray for and financially support global evangelism.

The Gnostics

The adversary of the church in Colosse were those known as Gnostics. They fomented a very strange and lethal gospel:

1. They wanted to make the gospel difficult with elaborate systems of pseudo-philosophical thought. They didn't like the thought of keeping it simple.
2. They introduced astrology to the church. What a silly and profoundly devious concept astrology is! Yet we know people who are bound to it.
3. The gnostics wanted to add circumcision to salvation. Works again.
How did Paul respond? Col. 2:13 When you were stuck in your old sin-dead life, you were incapable of responding to God. God brought you alive—right along with Christ! Think of it! All sins forgiven, And he added: Col. 2:16-20 So don’t put up with anyone pressuring you in details of diet, worship services, or holy days. [17] All those things are mere shadows cast before what was to come; the substance is Christ. [18] Don’t tolerate people who try to run your life, ordering you to bow and scrape, insisting that you join their obsession with angels and that you seek out visions. They’re a lot of hot air, that’s all they are. [19] They’re completely out of touch with the source of life, Christ, who puts us together in one piece, whose very breath and blood flow through us. He is the Head and we are the body. We can grow up healthy in God only as he nourishes us. [20] So, then, if with Christ you’ve put all that pretentious and infantile religion behind you, why do you let yourselves be bullied by it?

Chapter Three

This chapter deals with carnality - the preoccupation of anything characteristic of the world system. Col. 3:1 KJV If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. (Simply illustrated: if you can breathe in the fresh crisp air of a mountain top, why would you breathe in the smog of a polluted city?) Or as my teacher and friend Leonard Ravenhill used to put it:

ARE THE THINGS YOU’RE LIVING FOR WORTH CHRIST’S DYING FOR?

In verse 5 Paul gets specific: Col. 3:5 [The Message] And that means killing off everything connected with that way of death: sexual promiscuity, impurity, lust, doing whatever you feel like whenever you feel like it, and grabbing whatever attracts your fancy. That’s a life shaped by things and feelings instead of by God.

The fact that you and I have been saved and filled with the Holy Spirit does not preclude our interest in sexual matters. Outside of hunger there is no greater physical drive than the sexual one. To think that we are never tempted, never have an impure thought, is simply immature thinking. Over and over in the Gospels and in the Epistles we are warned of sexual sin.

Now Paul shows what we SHOULD be thinking: Col. 3:12-17 So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. [13] Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. [14] And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your
basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it. [15] Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. [16] Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! [17] Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.

Now Paul teaches that the Gospel MUST WORK IN THE HOME if it is to be valid anywhere: Col. 3:18-21 Wives, understand and support your husbands by submitting to them in ways that honor the Master. [19] Husbands, go all out in love for your wives. Don't take advantage of them. [20] Children, do what your parents tell you. This delights the Master no end. [21] Parents, don't come down too hard on your children or you'll crush their spirits.

Chapter 4

Paul concludes this delightful letter by reminding the believers of beautiful Christian graces: Col. 4:2-6 Pray diligently. Stay alert, with your eyes wide open in gratitude. [3] Don't forget to pray for us, that God will open doors for telling the mystery of Christ, even while I'm locked up in this jail. [4] Pray that every time I open my mouth I'll be able to make Christ plain as day to them. [5] Use your heads as you live and work among outsiders. Don't miss a trick. Make the most of every opportunity. “Redeem the time!” KJV [6] Be gracious in your speech. The goal is to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, not cut them out.

Be gracious, Paul advised. There are no laws in Scripture that a follower of Christ has to be dull or dumb. There is to be charm in the Christian.

In the final verses, Paul lauds those who worked with him:

1. Tychicus .... Was the one who hand carried the letter to the Ephesian church. He was also chosen as a representative of his church in Rome to carry the offering to the suffering saints in Jerusalem.

2. Onesimus .... Was a runaway slave who had reached Rome. Paul led him to the Lord and told him to return to his master, Philemon. And Paul also asked Philemon to no longer treat him as a slave, but as a brother.
3. Aristarchus .... We don’t know much about this Macedonian except he was a good man to have with you when things got tough. For example: he was in the arena at Ephesus where the Ephesian followers of Diana went crazy for two hours.

4. Mark .... Earlier Mark left Paul and Barnabas on their first missions journey as they left Cyprus for Turkey. Paul had little use for him until Mark redeemed himself.

5. Ephaphras .... was probably the pastor of the Colossian church.


Isn’t it interesting how many different characters make up the work of God? We come from varying backgrounds and interests yet God uses us all in the common purpose of establishing His Kingdom. We are bound together by CHRIST HIMSELF!

When next we meet: I and II Thessalonians
Introduction to the Seven Churches of Revelation

My interest in the Seven Churches of Revelation was stimulated by two visits I made to the seven sites a few years ago. I realised that I was visiting a country where the Early Church first grew in importance until it spread throughout the world. The names of some of these churches and others around them appear frequently in the Scriptures.

In the New Testament the seven Churches in Revelation are shown on the map below as a loop of cities in the Western part of Turkey (known in the Bible as Asia Minor). Patmos where the Apostle John was banished to is seen below the island of Samos. On the mainland Ephesus is seen above Miletus on the coast and travelling Northwards is Smyrna (now Izmir) then up to Pergamum then down to Thyatira and Sardis then across to Philadelphia then down through Hierapolis to Laodicea. Each of the seven churches are marked with a + sign.

Of the seven Churches of Revelation Ephesus is mentioned seventeen times in the New Testament including an Epistle written to those living in the area, and is overwhelmingly the most quoted city in Asia. Paul visited there on both his second and third missionary journeys. The other Churches are mentioned briefly and mainly in the Book of Acts and Revelation. Smyrna is mentioned twice, Pergamum [Pergamos] twice, Thyatira four times, Sardis three times, Philadelphia twice, Laodicea five times. Hierapolis once, Miletus three times, Acts.

Local tradition emanating from the Greek Orthodox Church states that the Apostle John went to Ephesus together with the Virgin Mary to oversee the seven Churches in the Western part of Turkey. In the cave at Patmos where it is believed John received his
revelation, the Church has built a chapel. There is a cleft in the roof of the cave and a priest told me that the three part rupture at the entrance is like holding the thumb and first two fingers together. It forms a Y shape. He continued that it was not perhaps incidental that from the first century Greek Orthodox believers put their fingers together in that way every time they cross themselves thereby indicating the Revelation of Jesus Christ to John. He told me that no other part of the Christian Church do this.

Asia Minor [now Turkey] was of great importance to the Early Church. Paul was born in the South coastal town of Tarsus (Acts 21:39). He wrote an Epistle to the Ephesians, Epistle to Colossians. 1st Epistle to Timothy and Galatians were written from Turkey and writing about Philémon who was living in one of the Churches of Revelation towns, namely Colosse which today is a discarded mount waiting to be excavated.

It is likely that Paul founded the Ephesian Church. He stayed the longest period of time here than at any other church ministering for nearly three years. (Acts 20:31). Timothy was sent there and it is speculated that he became the first bishop or overseer. The names of Aquila, Pricilla and Apollos are found there (Acts 18:18, 24, 16). In his later years there is recorded the emotional farewell to the Ephesians elders at Miletus (Acts 20:17-38). It is thought he wanted the meeting in Miletus because the harbour at Ephesus was already silted up and made docking difficult at certain times of the year and he wanted to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost.

The sea is now many miles away with the remains of the harbour stranded inland in both Ephesus and Miletus.

In Hierapolis near Laodicea is to be found a 6th century church dedicated to St. Philip who had four virgin deaconesses who prophesied (Acts 21:9). Local history confirms that the graveyard in the valley once contained the bodies of these women but due to the Moslem wars the graves were desecrated although the actual stones that made up the tombs remain to this day.

If a Christian wants to understand the history of the first century Christian Church they have to go to Turkey and examine the Seven Churches of Revelation for themselves.

Why only write to the seven churches?

We know that there were other churches in this region. For instance there was a church at Troas, (Acts 16:8, 11; 20:5, 6; 2 Cor 2:12; 2 Tim 4:13). Hierapolis (Col 4:17) and Colosse. See the whole book of Colossians specially written for them. There was also a church at Miletus, (Acts 20:15, 17; 2 Tim 4:20).

It is probable that these seven churches were the mainstay of the Christian witness in that part of Turkey. The others would be what we call today satellite churches grouped round one of these leading churches. Possibly the others could have been church plants from the main churches. The Apostle John would know that his letter would be circulated to these churches as this was common practice at this time. This is how the New Testament was circulated particularly those letters of Paul.