

## Challenges and Opportunities of 2024

### INTRODUCTION:

1. 2024 is here, which is hard for me to process because 2023 feels like it just got here!
2. Yet, there is a certain excitement and hopeful expectation that comes with a new year.
3. And the arrival of 2024 is no different.
  - A. For many of you, this will be the first full year at your new address here in Tennessee and as a member of the church here at Colonial Heights.
  - B. For others, 2024 may be the year to choose to become members of the Colonial Heights family.
  - C. And for others 2024 will be another year for you as a long-term member of this congregation.
4. No matter how you fit into this list, you can rest assured that 2024 will offer new challenges and opportunities for you as a Christian.
5. And today I want to address some of these challenges and opportunities that we will face.
  - A. For, part of being able to deal with challenges properly is to be prepared for their arrival.
  - B. And, when we are prepared, we can use these challenges as opportunities to grow and show the light and glory of Christ in this world and to one another.
  - C. So, let's consider some of the challenges 2024 will likely bring.

### BODY:

#### **I. The challenge of Satan's opposition:**

- A. His names say he will oppose us.
  1. Names:
    - a. Satan – opponent, adversary, one who stands...against the things of God! (1 Chr. 21:1).
    - b. Devil – false accuser, slanderer...of God's people (Rev. 12:10).
  2. These names reflect the fact that he has always fought against God and His purposes.
    - a. He led the very first man and woman to distrust God who had created them and to rebel against Him, bringing the curse of sin upon this world (Gen. 3).
    - b. He led their son Cain to hate his brother and to murder him (Gen. 4).
    - c. The list of Satan's evil works of opposing good goes on in the multitude of sin and rebellion of the people of Noah's day, various servants of God, and the children of Israel!
- B. Satan continually opposes the body of Christ and the local church.
  1. Satan brought sin into the churches of Asia (Rev. 2-3).
    - a. He affected **Ephesus** who had stood strong against false teachers and evil men **but had left their first love** and needed to repent or lose their candlestick.
    - b. **Pergamum** and **Thyatira** were infiltrated by those of Satan who promoted false doctrine and immorality.
    - c. **Sardis** and **Laodicea** were lured into spiritual deadness and lukewarmness.
  2. Satan affected the church at Corinth, causing them to be surprisingly lax against immorality (1 Cor. 5:1-2 – “It is actually reported that there is **immorality among you**, and immorality of such a kind **as does not exist even among the Gentiles**, that someone has his father's wife. <sup>2</sup> **You have become arrogant** and **have not mourned** instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.”).
- C. We here at Colonial Heights, including the eldership, can never let down our guard (1 Pet. 5:8 – “Be of **sober spirit**, be on the **alert**. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”).
  1. We see the seriousness of this in Paul's warning the elders of the church at **Ephesus** (Acts 20:29-30 – “I know that after my departure **savage wolves will come in among you**, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from **among your own selves** men will arise, **speaking perverse things**, to **draw away the disciples after them**. <sup>31</sup> **Therefore be on the alert**, remembering that night and day for a period of three years **I did not cease to admonish each one** with tears.”).
  2. Though the warnings and admonitions were heeded in some areas, we saw that Ephesus was included in the churches of Asia harmed by Satan's attack (Rev. 2:1-7).

3. Because Satan wants to destroy us any way he can, this challenge provides motivation and opportunity for us to grow in our dedication to greater study habits and in prayer so as to defeat Satan's work against us.

## II. The challenge of human opposition:

- A. Though it is Satan that seeks to harm our spiritual wellbeing, he can and will use **people** to oppose us and seek our destruction.
  1. We see this in the false rumors and accusations directed at Paul (Rom. 3:8 – “And why not say (as we are **slanderosly reported** and as **some claim that we say**), “Let us do evil that good may come”? Their condemnation is just.”).
  2. We see it in how Peter's and Paul's work of teaching to gospel to Gentiles was spoken against by Jewish brethren in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1-3; 15:1ff.).
  3. Unfortunately, rumors and accusations against brethren and churches continue today.
    - a. I hear things about churches that are often spread by well-meaning brethren.
    - b. My approach from what I have learned through trials is that:
      - i. There are always at least two sides to a story.
      - ii. I have a responsibility to assure that I and this church stand in truth, which is enough work for me without poking my nose in the business of other churches.
- B. There will be opposition to the work here at Colonial Heights.
  1. We should be prepared for rumors and accusations that question our soundness and dedication to the truth.
  2. We must continue to keep our eyes on the prize and persevere under fire, seeking to do our work faithfully in truth while showing the love of Christ as best we can.
    - a. Our goal **continues to be** the goal set by the Spirit (Heb. 6:9-12 – “But, beloved, we are **convinced of better things** concerning you, and things that **accompany salvation**, though we are speaking in this way. <sup>10</sup> For God is not unjust so as to forget **your work** and the **love which you have shown** toward His name, in **having ministered** and in **still ministering to the saints**. <sup>11</sup> And we desire that each one of you **show the same diligence** so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, <sup>12</sup> so that you will not be sluggish, but **imitators** of those who **through faith and patience inherit the promises**.”).
    - b. So, no matter what others say or do, we must view these challenges as **opportunities** to shine the light of Christ's truth and love in our lives and work here at Colonial Heights.

## III. The challenge of maintaining biblical unity:

- A. In Ephesians 4:1-6 Paul presents two essential elements of biblical unity.
  1. These are **godly attitudes** and the **oneness of the gospel**.
  2. Without both present in God's people and the local church, there can be no biblical unity.
- B. **Element 1:** Godly attitudes toward one another (Eph. 4:1-3 – “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, **implore** you to **walk in a manner worthy of the calling** with which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with **all humility and gentleness**, with **patience, showing tolerance** for one another in **love**, <sup>3</sup> being **diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit** in the bond of **peace**.”).
  1. It is no accident or coincidence that godly attitudes are presented in detail **first** (4:1-2).
    - a. I know brethren often treat **attitudes** as **subordinate to truth**, but they **are truth** and are **vital** to our **walking in a manner worthy of the calling** we have received in Christ!
    - b. So, Paul by the Spirit **implores**, which here likely means **to beg**, all to practice these attitudes as we live among brethren.
  2. These characteristics put the **responsibility on me** and **my expectations** and **treatment** of fellow brethren to help ensure biblical unity (4:2).
    - a. Biblical unity requires **me** to show...
      - i. **Humility** – lowliness of mind (i.e., holding myself in low esteem, not viewing myself as one of importance)
      - ii. **Gentleness** – mildness of disposition, kindness, forbearance
      - iii. **Patience** – forbearance, longsuffering, clemency (the show of mercy)

- iv. **Tolerance** – to put up with, to bear with, to endure patiently
- v. These attitudes are to be practiced **in love** (agape) – kindly concern, devotedness [to the good of another]
- b. Note that acquiring and applying these attitudes is part of our **diligence** (i.e., earnest effort, labor) in **preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace** (4:3).
  - i. So, these attitudes are not optional! These must exist to have the unity of the Spirit!
  - ii. And we cannot ignore that the **bond, the unifying factor**, of godly unity is not heavy-handedness or coercion, but **peace**. Unity is to be held together in **peace**!
  - iii. We all **should know this peace** because we **experience it daily** through **Christ's show of love** and **humility** that brings to us God's **grace, mercy, gentleness, patience, and tolerance** toward **our shortcomings**!
  - iv. God expects us to have the same approach to our brethren that He has shown us!
- 3. Why requires these attitudes except for the fact that they are truly needed!
  - a. We have diverse backgrounds, varying degrees of spiritual knowledge and maturity, as well as varying degrees of wisdom needed to make the proper application of the truth in ours and another's lives?!
  - b. Though everyone **can** and **should** be **on the same page** concerning their **godly desires and goals in the Lord**, everyone is **not at the same place in their journey** toward obtaining these goals.
- C. **Element 2:** Fellowship in the oneness of the gospel (Eph. 4:4-6 – “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”).
  - 1. Though the Spirit is aware of the variety of temperaments and the diverse racial and social backgrounds of God's people, all must focus on the **spiritual realities that unite us**.
    - a. Like proper attitudes, accepting and pursuing these are **vital** to the **unity of the Spirit**!
    - b. We must appreciate the wonders of His plan that takes radically different people and through the gospel brings them together in **one hope**, through **one calling**, **one faith**, and **one baptism**, in the **one body**, while sharing in the work and salvation of the **one Spirit**, the **one Lord Jesus Christ**, and the **one God and Father**.
    - c. And the fact that God can do this through Jesus and the gospel is simply amazing, yet something we are so quick to trample on!
  - 2. To appreciate what God has done in the gospel, it is helpful to consider **the magnitude of what God did in bringing Jews and Gentiles into one body** in Christ!
    - a. **Jews**, who **had the Law** and **believed they knew God**, had spent their lives viewing Gentiles as dirty, disgusting, sinful, immoral, and spiritually ignorant people.
    - b. **Gentiles**, who **lived without the Law**, worshipped **idols**, were **immoral**, and **lived unclean lives** likely saw the Jews as self-righteous and condescending elitists.
    - c. And then all the sudden **in Christ** they are told “There is **neither Jew nor Greek**, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; **for you are all one in Christ Jesus**. <sup>29</sup> And **if you belong to Christ**, then **you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise**” (Gal. 3:28-29).
      - i. The **Jews** cried “Foul!,” Look at these Gentiles, what they **still believe**, and what they **still do**! And now they are **on equal footing** with me? No! **Let them become like me first** and then I will accept them!”
      - ii. Then you have the **Gentiles** who might look at the Jews with smugness and say, “Ha! Look at what your arrogance and condescension has gotten you. **In Christ I am just as good as you**, maybe even better!”
      - iii. And you know what? Both were **wrong**. Neither was obeying the truth! Both were showing improper attitudes. Neither could grow in such an environment! And **biblical unity could not be achieved**.

- d. Yet, through the power of the gospel the day came where the Jews praised God for the salvation by faith of the Gentiles and the Gentiles begged to participate in the fellowship of helping their Jewish brethren! Unity in Christ is an amazing thing!
3. So, the challenge of our diversity provides an opportunity for **all to grow together in the truth** that is **taught and received in love** (Eph. 4:15-16 – “but **speaking the truth in love**, we are **to grow up in all aspects into Him** who is the head, even Christ,<sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what **every joint supplies**, according to the **proper working of each individual part**, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”).
4. With **proper attitudes** and conviction to **the truth of the oneness of the gospel** the challenge of our diversity becomes an opportunity to grow and to grow closer in Christ!

#### IV. The challenge of growth:

- A. Growth tends to promote more growth, which is great and should be welcomed by all!
  1. But growth brings challenges that we need to be aware of and prepared for!
  2. For, with growth comes changes to the dynamics of a congregation in various areas that require that each person adapt in godly fashion for the betterment of all.
- B. The challenge of **talent versus participation**
  1. With the addition of members comes the addition of talent that we are blessed to utilize for the growth and unity to the body (Eph. 4:15-16).
  2. This, however, involves the challenge of balancing the desire for participation (i.e., in worship, teaching, etc.) and assuring that we do what is best for our service to the Lord.
    - a. We must remember that there are only so many public service slots to be filled.
    - b. So, for our own spiritual wellbeing and that of the congregation we must...
      - i. Show humility and adjust our expectations, realizing that there may be others that share the same or even greater talent in a particular area than do we!
      - ii. Understand that the uses of our talents are not limited to public worship or teaching but should be individually utilized with just as much vigor in bringing glory to God.
- C. The challenge of **relationships**
  1. God commands that we love one another as brethren (2 Jn. 4-5 – “I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father.<sup>5</sup> Now I ask you, lady, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that **we love one another**.”).
  2. But, with growth comes the challenges of:
    - a. Differing and even contrasting personalities!
      - i. Sometimes people do not mesh. But, that is not license to be hateful or cold.
      - ii. In this challenge love must rule, with humility, and the intent that as much as depends on **me** I will be **at peace with all people** (Rom. 12:18), especially **my brethren**.
    - b. The growth of new relationships and the lessening of others.
      - i. Growth changes the relationship dynamics of a congregation.
      - ii. There was a time when we could have the whole congregation in our house.
      - iii. Growth, however, changes that, requiring **more individuals here to step up**, to do their **personal duty** of planning and hosting events to show hospitality and love to **help everyone to be welcomed** and to grow in love and appreciation of one another.
- D. Challenge of **growth and worship/edification space**.
  1. The command to “not forsake our own assembling together” (Heb. 10:25) and to edify one another in the word (1 Cor. 14:13-18) requires a place to assemble and edify.
  2. With the blessings of growth comes the challenge of providing space for us to worship and edify, which we have found is best addressed properly by a new building!
    - a. Though this can be exciting, such projects produce difficulties that we must overcome!
    - b. It is most likely that everyone is not going to agree on the design, aesthetics, etc., of the new building.
    - c. The building process will challenge the congregation in areas like:

- i. Scheduling normal events such as gospel meetings, etc.
  - ii. The mess of construction (i.e., nail in a tire, shoes get dirty, etc.), parking space (i.e., “‘My’ parking spot is gone and now I must park way over there!”), etc.
3. So, we must use these challenges to grow in patience, love, and sacrifice of Christ (Phil. 2:3-4 – “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as **more important than yourselves**; <sup>4</sup> do not merely **look out for** your own personal interests, but also for **the interests of others**.”).

CONCLUSION:

1. So, I want to encourage you to take this to heart and be aware of and prepared for the challenges of 2024 that we might use them as opportunities to glorify God and expand His kingdom!
2. If you are not a Christian or have not been faithful to the Lord, the challenge of your sin and the opportunity to come to Christ and receive forgiveness and salvation is before you right now.
3. Will you come to Jesus for salvation in F-R-C-Bp?