

## **COLOSSIANS 1**

Colossians 1:1-20 – The Person and Work of Jesus Christ

Colossians 1: 21-28– The Treasures Hidden in Jesus

### **Greeting and giving of thanks.**

*Paul greets the Christians in Colosse*

Colossians 1:1-2

*An apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God:* Paul was qualified to write this letter of instruction to the Colossians, though he had never met them personally, because he was *an apostle*.

*To the saints and faithful brethren Who are in Colosse:* The city of Colosse was probably the smallest and least important city that Paul ever wrote to. It might surprise us that Paul would turn his attention to the Christians in **Colosse** at a time when he had so many other concerns. Yet he apparently thought the situation in Colosse was important enough for apostolic attention.

Paul wrote because there were problems among the Christians in Colosse, but the doctrinal problem – sometimes described as “The Colossian Heresy” – is difficult to precisely describe. It probably was a corruption of Christianity with elements of mystical and legalistic Judaism perhaps combined with early Gnosticism.

The first century religious environment was much like our own. It was a time of religious mixing, with people borrowing a little from this religion and a little from that religion. The only difference was that in the first century, one joined a *group* who did the borrowing. In our modern culture one does the borrowing *one's self*.

Whatever the problem was precisely, Paul dwelt on the solution: *a better understanding of Jesus*. Knowing the *real* Jesus helps us to stay away from the counterfeit, no matter how it comes packaged.

*In Colosse:* The city of *Colosse* is not even mentioned in the Book of Acts. All our Biblical information about the church there comes from this letter and a few allusions in the letter to Philemon.

From these sources we learn that Epaphras was responsible for bringing the gospel to the Colossians (Colossians 1:6-7). He was a native of the city (Colossians 4:12), and also got the message out to neighboring towns in the Lycus Valley like Hierapolis and Laodicea (Colossians 4:13).

*Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ:* Paul's greeting was familiar but heartfelt. “Grace is God's unconditioned goodwill toward men and women which is decisively expressed in the saving work of Christ.” (Bruce)

This letter – full of love and concern, written to a church Paul had neither planted nor visited – shows the power of Christian love. Paul didn't need to see or meet or directly know these Christians in order to love them and be concerned for them.

### ***Why Paul was thankful?***

Colossians 1:3-8

*Since we heard:* Paul was thankful for their *faith in Christ Jesus* and their *love for all the saints*. Genuine *faith* in Jesus will always have a true *love* for God's people as a companion.

Because of the hope: Paul was thankful for the hope laid up for them in heaven. He was thankful when he considered the destiny of the Colossian Christians.

We notice the familiar triad of **faith, hope, and love**. These were not merely theological ideas to Paul; they dominated his thinking as a Christian.

1 Corinthians 13:13

*Which you heard before in the word of the truth:* Paul was thankful that their eternal destiny was affected by the *truth of the gospel*, brought by Epaphras (**as you also learned from Epaphras**).

“The doctrine of the Gospel is represented as a *traveller*, whose object it is to visit the whole habitable earth... So rapid is this *traveller* in his course, that he had already gone nearly through the whole of the countries under the Roman dominion, and will travel on until he has proclaimed his message to every people, and kindred, and nation, and tongue.” (Clarke)

### ***Paul petitions God on behalf of the Colossians.***

Colossians 1:9-11

*To ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will:* First, Paul prayed that they would have a *knowledge of His will*, informed by a true *spiritual understanding*. To *know God* and *what He requires of us* is our first responsibility.

“If you read this epistle through, you will observe that Paul frequently alludes to knowledge and wisdom. To the point in which he judged the church to be deficient he turned his prayerful attention. He would not have them ignorant. He knew that spiritual ignorance is the constant source of error, instability, and sorrow; and therefore, he desired that they might be soundly taught in the things of God.”

Hosea 4:6

*That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him:* Second, Paul prayed that they would live according to the same knowledge they received, living out a walk worthy of the Lord.

This is a familiar pattern, repeated over and over again in the New Testament. Our walk is based on our knowledge of God and our understanding of His will.

*Being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.* This is how we can be *fully pleasing* to God and how we can have a *worthy* walk.

*Strengthened with all might:* As we *walk worthy of the Lord*, His strength is there to help us meet all of life's challenges, and to endure and overcome problems with circumstances (*patience*) and people (*longsuffering*) with joy.

### ***Paul's specific thanks to the Father.***

Colossians 1:12-14

*Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us:* In the divine administration, the Father is mentioned in connection with the broad sweep of His plan of redemption. He is the Person of the Trinity who *initiates* the plan of the ages.

*To be partakers of the inheritance of the saints:* It is the Father who qualifies us, not our own works. We gain this as an *inheritance*, instead of earning it as a wage.

c. **He has delivered us from the power of darkness:** Christians have been **delivered** from Satan's domain. The word has the idea of a rescue by a sovereign power.

The **power of darkness** may be seen in its effects, and for those who have been *delivered... from the power of darkness* these effects should be less and less evident in their life.

- The power of darkness lulls us to sleep.
- The power of darkness is skilled at concealment.
- The power of darkness afflicts and depresses people.
- The power of darkness can fascinate us.
- The power of darkness emboldens some people.

“Beloved, we still are tempted by Satan, but we are not under his power; we have to fight with him, but we are not his slaves. He is not our king; he has no rights over us; we do not obey him; we will not listen to his temptations.” (Spurgeon)

*And conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love:* According to Barclay, the word we translate *conveyed* had a special significance in the ancient world. When one empire conquered another, the custom was to take the population of the defeated empire and transfer it completely to the conqueror's land. It is in this sense that Paul says we have been *conveyed* into God's kingdom. Everything we have and everything we are now belongs to Him.

*In whom we have redemption through His blood:* *Redemption* has the idea of release by a legal ransom. The price for our release was paid by the blood of Jesus.

This is one reason why pleading the blood of Jesus – in the right sense, not in a magical or superstitious sense – has such great significance in spiritual warfare. It shows the “receipt” of our lawful purchase as redeemed people.

*The forgiveness of sins:* The word translated *forgiveness* is the ancient Greek word *aphesis*, most literally rendered “a sending away.” Our sin and guilt is *sent away* because of what Jesus did on the cross for us.

“It thus speaks of the removal of our sins from us, so that they are no longer barriers that separate us from God.” (Vaughan)

***Paul's meditation on the person and work of Jesus.***

Colossians 1:15-20

**He is the image of the invisible God:** The word translated *image* (the ancient Greek word *eikon*) expressed two ideas.

- *Likeness*, as in the image on a coin or the reflection in a mirror.
- *Manifestation*, with the sense that God is fully revealed in Jesus.

“God is invisible, which does not merely mean that He cannot be seen by our bodily eye, but that He is unknowable. In the exalted Christ the unknowable God becomes known.” (Peake)

*The firstborn over all creation:* In no way does the title *firstborn* indicate that Jesus is less than God. In fact, the ancient Rabbis called Yahweh Himself “Firstborn of the World” (Rabbi Bechai, cited in Lightfoot). Ancient rabbis used *firstborn* as a Messianic title: “God said, As I made Jacob a first-born ([Exodus 4:22](#)), so also will I make king Messiah a first-born ([Psalm 89:27](#)).”

*For by Him all things were created:* There is no doubt that Jesus is the author of *all* creation. He Himself is not a created being. When we behold the wonder and the glory of the world Jesus *created*, we worship and honor Him all the more.

According to Greek scholar A.T. Robertson, *all things were created* has the idea of “stand created” or “remain created.” Robertson adds: “The permanence of the universe rests, then, on Christ far more than on gravity. It is a Christ-centric universe.”

*He is before all things... who is the beginning:* Paul rightly understood and insisted that Jesus *is before all things* and is Himself *the beginning*.

John 1:1-4

*In Him all things consist:* The idea that Jesus is both the unifying principle and the personal sustainer of all creation.

*Head of the body, the church:* This describes Jesus’ relationship to the church. Here, head refers to Jesus’ role as source of the church, even as we refer to the head of a river.

*For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell:* The ancient Greek word for *dwell* is here used in the sense of a *permanent dwelling*. There is an entirely different word used for the sense of a *temporary* dwelling place. Paul wanted to emphasize the idea that Jesus was not *temporarily* God but is *permanently* God.

The fullness is in Jesus Christ. Not in a church; not in a priesthood; not in a building; not in a sacrament; not in the saints; not in a method or a program, but in Jesus Christ Himself. It is in Him as a “distribution point” – so that those who wanted more of God and all that He is can find it in Jesus Christ.

*Through the blood of the cross:* Again we notice where the peace was made. We don’t make our own peace with God, but Jesus made peace for us through His work on the cross.

The *blood of the cross* speaks to us of the real, physical death of Jesus Christ in our place, on our behalf, before God. *That literal death in our place, and the literal judgment He bore on our behalf, is what saves us.*

***How the greatness of Jesus’ work touches the lives of the Colossians.***

Colossians 1:21-23

*Who once were alienated:* The ancient Greek word translated *alienated* (*apellotriomenous*) is literally “transferred to another owner.” This transfer of ownership, from God to Satan and self, affected us in both *mind* and *behavior*.

*Once were alienated:* This means that in Jesus we are *no longer alienated*. The difference between a believer and a non-believer isn't merely forgiveness; there is a complete change of status.

*Yet now He has reconciled:* God's answer to the problem of *alienation* is *reconciliation*, initiated by His work on the cross (*reconciled in the body of His flesh through death*). In the work of reconciliation, God didn't meet us halfway. God meets us all the way and invites us to accept it.

One may use two different ways of understanding human need and God's salvation.

· We can see God as the judge, and we are guilty before Him. Therefore, we need forgiveness and justification.

· We can see God as our friend, and we have damaged our relationship with Him. Therefore, we need reconciliation.

Both of these are true; neither should one be promoted at the expense of the other.

**To present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight:** This is the result of God's work of reconciliation. Taken together, these words show that in Jesus we are pure and can't even be justly accused of impurity.

*If indeed you continue in the faith:* Those truly reconciled must truly persevere. Paul's main focus is continuing in the *truth of the gospel* (continue in the faith... not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard). It is important for Christians to continue in godly conduct, but we are not saved by our godly conduct. So it is even more important for Christians to continue in the truth of the gospel because we are saved by grace through faith.