



**THE
LETTER OF PAUL
TO THE
COLOSSIANS**

.....
LUTHERE. SCHWARTZKOPF

**LIVING WAY
BIBLE STUDY**

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walk in His Living Way!*

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- 2. SMALL GROUPS** The class meets for an opening and divides into small groups of 8–10 people. The small group leader guides the group through the P.A. questions, encouraging each to share their answers and discuss further as time allows.
- 3. THE MESSAGE** The lecture or message is given by a pastor or layperson who has researched the material and presents the study, giving personal insight and augmenting, but not duplicating, the author's comments.
- 4. THE NARRATIVE** The author's comments or narrative, along with the P.A. questions for the next lesson, are given out at the end of the class. At the next class meeting, before answering the P.A. questions, the small groups may choose to review the author's comments of the last lesson, and share what each has highlighted as meaningful or important.

Each lesson should be stapled together according to the number of the lesson in the right-hand corner of the page. The P.A. questions for the next week should be attached after the author's narrative for the current week, as they will be the home study for the next class session.

The first meeting of the class is an introduction to the study. Since the members of the small groups have no P.A. questions to discuss at the first meeting, they may use the time to get acquainted or to tell what they hope to receive by studying this course. At the first meeting, the lecturer presents background information about the course, using the Introduction lesson as a guide.

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Called to Glory — May 13, 2006

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ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE VARIOUS PEOPLE
MENTIONED IN CLOSING – COLOSSIANS 4:7-17

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SOME THOUGHTS ON SLAVERY

For those of us who have seen the mini-series based on Alex Haley's *Roots* or have done some personal research on the 19th century slave trade, the very word "slavery" stirs up a mix of deep feelings within us. When we consider the brutality with which many of the slaves were treated and the inhumane disregard of the feelings of mothers and fathers, whose children were often taken from them, we feel compassion for the slaves and understand their bitterness toward the slave owners. Very likely we have some pretty strong feelings about this awful system of slavery which fostered such terrible abuses of our fellow human beings.

When we come to a passage like the one in Colossians, chapter 3:22-4:1, in which slaves are directed in God's Name to be submissive to their masters, it can't help but disturb us. We wonder how the apostle Paul, of all people, could even touch on the subject without engaging in a tirade against the abuses of slavery or, for that matter, any system which deprives people of their personal freedom. Why doesn't he simply instruct all of the Christian slave owners to set their slaves free?

We might very well ask that same question of the Scriptures, in general. The fact of the matter is that the Bible in both the Old and the New Testament has regulations and guidelines with regard to slavery, but we can't find anywhere a clear condemnation of the institution of slavery.

In response to this concern, students of the Scripture call attention to certain circumstances which prevailed in those days, particularly in the first century A.D. In those days, slavery was considered a fact of life. People thought of it as just another "station" in life. There are some estimates which say that more than half of the population was made up of slaves. Slaves were the back-bone of the work-force in the Roman culture. As a matter of fact, people we would call "professionals," such as doctors, teachers, artists, and civil servants, were technically slaves.

The reality is that there were very few job opportunities in the "free" world. For Paul to push slave owners to turn their slaves free would have been to bring turmoil and hardship upon those who were given their freedom. With the world as it truly was, it would have been nothing short of disastrous for masters to free their slaves. In most instances, except for those who were in

abusive situations, slaves were generally better off than many free people.

The apostle Paul and his colleague Peter (who dealt with the topic in chapter 2 of his first epistle) never spoke in a manner which would suggest that they *endorsed* the system of slavery. As one commentator suggests, they simply admitted its reality and endeavored to give their readers *a perspective in which to live in an imperfect world*.

If this seems like a compromise and accommodation, consider what they did insist upon. Society gave slave owners the legal right to abuse their slaves by beating them with whips and rods, and even to kill them for minor infractions. The apostles revoked that license. They instructed the masters to treat their slaves “justly and fairly,” and to remember that God, their Master, would hold them personally accountable for this (Colossians 4:1; Ephesians 6:9).

With this clear mandate to the Christian slave owners, the apostle Paul not only was making a positive effort to improve the lot of the slaves, he was also making a powerful statement to the society of that time. Furthermore, the Church gave *full membership rights to slaves*. In the fellowship of the Church, slaves and slave-owners were on the same level (Colossians 3:11). This was a revolutionary idea for that period of history. Without being a direct attack, it nevertheless struck hard at the very roots of slavery. With its emphasis upon spiritual freedom, the New Testament planted seeds that later bore fruit and convicted 19th century society of the evils of its slave trade.

The apostles' way of dealing with social issues sets a pattern for the way in which God works effectively to bring about social change. God measures success the way a certain investment company in our day says it measures success: “One investor at a time.” It is as one Christian at a time makes the decision to invest his/her life and energies in a way of life that pleases God that there will be success in bringing about healthy change and improvement in society. This should be an encouragement for us to be conscientious about wanting to know and to follow God's directives for our daily walk.

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE VARIOUS PEOPLE MENTIONED IN CLOSING

COLOSSIANS 4:7-17

1. Tychicus – Paul calls Tychicus a “beloved brother and fellow servant in the Lord.” He was a native of the Ephesus region and had a long association with Paul, and spent time with him during his imprisonment.
2. Onesimus – the run-away slave, probably met Paul in Rome and was converted to Christianity. Paul calls him “the faithful and beloved brother.” He was to assist Tychicus.
3. Aristarchus – He was a Macedonian from Thessalonica (see Acts 20:4).
4. Mark – This is the same Mark who had deserted Paul on his first missionary trip (Acts 15:38). He is now a man whom Paul trusts. Paul commends him to the Colossians.
5. Jesus (aka Justus) – This is the only time he is mentioned. Jesus (Greek for Joshua) was a common name among the Hebrew people. Christians stopped using it in the second century.
6. Luke – Dr. Luke joined Paul in Troas. He became a Christian and devoted his life to the Gospel ministry along with serving as Paul's physician (Acts 16:10).
7. Demus – Later he deserted the faith (2 Timothy 4:10).

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This letter in the New Testament, which we commonly refer to as “The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians,” isn’t all that long compared to some correspondence which the apostle had with other congregations. It has ninety-five verses and in my personal Bible takes up only about *three pages*, three pages out of two hundred fifty-six. If my math is correct, the letter to the Colossians comprises just barely one percent (1%) of the volume of words in the entire New Testament.

Don’t let its size deceive you. When it comes to a clear presentation of Christology (teachings about the person and work of Jesus) this little letter stands tall! Dr. Martin Franzmann, in his book *The Word of the Lord Grows* writes: “He (God) gave us in Paul’s letter to the Colossians a proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ in unparalleled fullness and depth. The church that in its Credo intones, ‘God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father,’ is indebted not least to this letter.”

We don’t seem to know why the city was called “Colossae.” Maybe they had erected a huge statue like the “Colossus of Rhodes.” Or, perhaps the city fathers wanted to emphasize the importance of their home town as a center of commerce and culture. One thing we can be sure of: the epistle of Paul to the people of Colossae is a “colossal” monument to Christ Jesus, glorifying and memorializing His Person and His Work!

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CITY OF COLOSSAE

The letter is addressed to the Christian congregation at Colossae. When Paul wrote the letter, the city was located in what used to be called Asia Minor. Today, this territory is called Turkey and the site of old Colossae is known as Honaz, according to a 1967 National Geographic map of the area.

Colossae was situated in the beautiful and fertile Lycus River Valley, not far from where the Lycus River joined up with the more well-known Meander River, from which we have our word “meander.” Colossae formed a right triangle with Laodicea and Hierapolis to the north and west. Colossae was actually the oldest of the three cities.

At one time it had also been the most prominent of the three. Almost five centuries before Paul's time, ancient writers had used superlatives to describe the magnificence of the city.

The volcanic soil surrounding the city was very fertile — very likely similar to the way it is in Hawaii. It was ideal pasture for sheep. With a good supply of the sheeps' wool available, the clothing industry developed and thrived providing a good base for the local economy. Another plus for the textile industry was the water from the Lycus River. It contained a chalky substance which enhanced the process of dyeing fabric.

Its strategic location, on the east-west trade route leading from Ephesus on the Aegean Sea to the Euphrates River, was an important factor in bringing Colossae to the position of being one of the most prominent cities of Asia Minor.

A couple of generations before the time of Paul, the city began to go downhill. After the Romans took over the province of Phrygia and made some changes in the trade routes, it appears that Colossae was "left to wither on the vine," while Laodicea and Hierapolis to the north began to flourish. Today, the ruins of Laodicea and Hierapolis are quite impressive; whereas the ruins of Colossae are barely noticeable. According to historian Eusebius, it was soon after the letter from Paul that the city of Colossae was destroyed by an earthquake.

At the time Paul wrote this letter, Colossae was a rather insignificant town, located a little over 100 miles to the east of Ephesus. Paul may very well have passed through Colossae on his third missionary journey, but apparently, for one reason or another, did not engage in missionary activity in the city. In chapter 2:1 he refers to the members as people whom he had never met face to face. This is one of only two of Paul's epistles which were addressed to congregations he had not founded and most of whose members he had never met. The other is Romans.

THE CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION AT COLOSSAE

While the Scripture doesn't give us all the details, it is generally assumed that the congregation had its beginning during the time that the apostle spent three years in Ephesus. Evidently, Epaphras had come to Ephesus

from Colossae to listen to Paul's messages. He became a follower of Christ, and after receiving special training under Paul, he went back to his home town and started a church there, certainly with Paul's blessing (1:7-8). He was very likely God's instrument in bringing the Gospel to Laodicea and Hierapolis as well.

There were many Jewish people in and around the area of Colossae. A colony of Jews was established in the region from as early as the second century B.C. However, all evidence points to the fact that the congregation was composed chiefly of Gentiles. Evidently, Philemon was a member of the group.

THE OCCASION FOR WRITING THE LETTER

The letter was written in response to a visit Paul had from the founding pastor of the congregation. About four or five years after the church was established, Epaphras made the long trip to Rome to consult with his mentor who was in prison in Rome. The trip to Rome was about 1,300 miles — mostly by ship. The effort and cost for such a long trip can certainly give us the idea that Epaphras was a very devoted pastor. It also reflects, to some extent, how deeply concerned he was about the problem which he needed to discuss with the apostle Paul.

It appears from the apostle's response in the letter to the Colossians that Epaphras brought "good news" and "bad news." The young pastor was delighted to share with the apostle the good news of the loyalty and love of his parishioners. He had a lot of good to say about his flock. The Gospel was bearing fruit and the church was growing. However, this isn't what had motivated the long trip to Rome. He could have said all that in a written communication to Paul. The bad news was that all was not well with the church in Colossae.

The anxious young pastor had come to see Paul because he sought his guidance and counsel. Something was going on among his people that he wasn't quite sure how to handle. In fact, it may very well have been that he was having difficulty deciding in his own mind what was wrong with some of the new teachings his people were "buying into." He rightly sensed the reality that ultimately these new ideas, which were infiltrating among many of his parishioners, would undermine the Gospel which he was proclaiming to them.

It probably didn't take the apostle Paul very long to affirm the pastor's suspicions about the insidious nature of the religious ideas which were influencing the people back home. He was a master at getting right to the heart of any notion that threatened to diminish or obscure the pure Gospel and in the process detract from the greatness of Christ and the all-sufficiency of His atonement.

THE "HERESY" IN COLOSSAE

Since the apostle Paul doesn't call the "heresy" by name and in his letter doesn't challenge its validity in an argumentative style, we are left with the task of trying to "put together the pieces" as best we can to get a picture of what it was and how it worked.

The problem seems to have been fundamentally a religion of self-redemption and self-realization. It comes across as an admixture of Greek and Oriental religious ideas, dressed in the garb of Judea-Christian teachings and symbolism.

The new teachings showed a strong interest in Old Testament rituals, regulations, and ceremonies. They actually went beyond the laws of Moses in their demand for harsh treatment of the body. They included a superstitious preoccupation with the spirit world and the worship of angels.

The "bottom line sales pitch" for the promoters of this heresy was that if you bought into it you would have a "higher wisdom," superior to the simple and unsophisticated Gospel which had been brought to them by Paul and Epaphras. They used their "buzz words" like "fullness," "perfection," and "knowledge" to put down the apostle's teaching and promote their own.

What made all this the more insidious was the fact that it was not billed as a substitute for the Gospel, but rather as a way of life and belief which would supplement and enhance the Gospel. It was as if they were telling the Colossians that they shouldn't settle for being just "run-of-the-mill" Christians when it was within their reach to be "the true elite" people of God. This must have held a strong appeal for the people of that time. *It still does today!*

With typical perceptiveness in spiritual matters, Paul saw it precisely for what it was — ultimately it was a satanically

inspired attack upon the Gospel. It denied the completeness of Christ's atoning sacrifice as well as the all-sufficiency of Christ's power to enable believers to live godly lives.

In the letter he composed to combat this combination of heretical notions, Paul takes a rather interesting approach. He doesn't debate them one by one. Rather, he uses the very "buzz words" which the false teachers tossed around and shows that Christ is truly all of these things. He waxes lyrical as he seeks to overwhelm his readers with the full riches of Christ Jesus and His Gospel. His aim was to encourage the people to stick with the simple Gospel which their pastor had taught them. They should not let themselves be intimidated by teachers who claimed to offer something superior!

The result is our wonderful epistle to the Colossians which teaches us that Jesus really is all that we need. Period!

AUTHORSHIP, TIME, AND PLACE OF WRITING

Bible scholars are pretty well united in the position that the apostle Paul was the author of this letter, and that it was written during the apostle's first imprisonment in Rome where he spent two years as a prisoner under "house arrest" (cf. Acts 28:16-31). It was written around A.D. 60, about the same time as the letter to the Ephesians and the letter to Philemon, who was a resident of Colossae. It was carried to Colossae by Paul's friend, Tychicus. Philemon's slave, Onesimus, accompanied Epaphras on the return trip.

In the closing verses of the Colossian correspondence, Paul mentions a letter for the Laodicean congregation and recommends that the Colossians read that letter, too. This letter must have been lost.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

Paul's letter presents perhaps the most complete treatment of Christology found anywhere in the New Testament. "The depth and power of the thought will begin to appear only as we study the epistle itself, verse by verse and almost word by word; for 'every sentence is instinct with life and meaning' (Lightfoot), and does not yield its treasure to a cursory glance." Thus writes Francis W. Beare in *The Interpreter's Bible*.

Let's go to work! There is rich treasure to be found here!

PERSONAL APPLICATION – COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

How fortunate I am, O Lord God, to be part of a group of people who want You to speak to them through Your Word. Through our understanding of the Truth, as it comes across to us in our study and in our discussions, strengthen us in our faith, love, and hope. I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

.....

1. To get the full sweep of the majesty of this epistle to the Colossians, please set aside about 10 minutes or so to read the entire letter *at one sitting*. As you read, make a note of the number of times the three names of our Savior occur. For the name "Christ" put an "X"; for the name "Lord" put an "O"; and for the name "Jesus" put an "I." When you have finished your reading, go back and tally the marks you made, and enter the totals here.

Christ (X) ___ Lord (O) ___ Jesus (I) ___

Can you think of any reason which may have led the apostle Paul to have such a preference for the name he used most often?

2. Who was apparently the one and only pastor of the congregation at Colossae, according to 1:7?

What was his relationship to Paul?

Describe Paul's relationship to the Colossians (2:1)

Colossians 1:1-2

3. Following the custom used for a formal letter, how does Paul identify himself by name and add his credentials? Check a few of his other letters.

What did he want to convey to the people by emphasizing that he held this high position "by the will of God"?

Compare Paul's "Call to Apostleship" with the "Divine Call" of your pastor. List any similarities or differences.

4. Give the favorite term Paul uses when he is referring to believers.

What two blessings does Paul pray for the people at Colossae?

Colossians 1:3-8

5. Before the apostle launches into a discussion of the serious matters which are besetting the church at Colossae, what does he take the time to do?

What did he and Timothy do regularly for them?

How can we use this example when we have problems in our personal relationships?

6. In Paul's complimentary statement about the "saints" at Colossae, what three qualities of life did he mention?

What does Paul say about these in 1 Corinthians 13:13?

What does he call them in 1 Thessalonians 5:8?

How does Paul describe the hope which the Colossians have? (1:5)

What does he imply with this?

7. To what does the apostle point as the source of power for the "faith, love, and hope" which was so evident in their lives? (1:5-6)

Who had brought this to them?

8. Why do you think Paul added the observation that this Word of Truth was growing and bearing fruit in the whole world? (1:6)

Colossians 1:9-14

9. Having acknowledged the wonderful progress which the members of the Colossian congregation had made from the very day that they had grasped the "grace of God in truth," the apostle lets them know that this same dynamic power would be completely adequate to supply them with divine energy in the future. He implies quite strongly that they should not even think about looking elsewhere! The areas in which he was praying that they would continue to grow (1:9-14) should be high on our agenda as God's people of the 21st century. List and comment on how we can apply them in our walk with the Lord.

LESSON 2 COLOSSIANS

COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

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• • •

“...One of the most important truths of the Gospel is that the moment we believe in Christ, and become members of God’s family, we also have a share in ‘the inheritance of the saints in light.’”

• • •

THEME: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PAUL’S GREETING

COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

Anyone who deals with the public knows the importance of the first moments of contact with people. Preschool and Kindergarten teachers are probably prime examples of some of the people who understand how important this is. Watch them at work on the first day of school as they welcome their students. A bad beginning can be disastrous.

The first line of an article in a magazine or newspaper can make the difference between having a person continue reading or turning to something else. Madison Avenue spends billions of dollars studying just about every aspect of how to promote their products in such a way as to get favorable attention of potential customers.

As you study the opening verses of Paul’s correspondence with the church in Colossae, you will be impressed with the carefulness with which the apostle starts the letters. He picks his words and phrases very carefully. He has something very important to share with them. He doesn’t want anything he writes to “turn them off.” Remember, most of the people who will hear or read the letter he is writing had never met the apostle in person. “Paul” was just a “name” to them albeit a name highly respected in their congregation. You can be sure that Epaphras referred often to his mentor.

PAUL’S CREDENTIALS

COLOSSIANS 1:1

Paul begins the letter with a formality that was typical in those days. This establishes the point that this was not just a casual note. It was a

formal letter. He starts with the familiar. They already know him as “The Apostle Paul.” All by itself this would establish his credentials and convey to them a sense of his authority to write this letter to them.

He tailored the statement of his credentials to the circumstances at Colossae and to the problems which he would later address directly. One of the aspects of the heresy he would deal with was the notion that you had to look to the messengers from the world of angels and spirits to bring tidbits of truth to you. While Paul identifies himself as an “apostle” in other letters, it seems to have special significance at the beginning of this letter. It’s like he was saying: “You want a messenger from God? You’ve got one!” Furthermore, Paul elaborates, he was such a messenger of Christ Jesus, because *God had chosen him for this ministry*. It was *God’s decision* for him to become an apostle, not his! He was an apostle of Christ Jesus, *by the will of God!* If they knew the story of Paul’s conversion — and they probably did — they would be reminded of how true Paul’s statement was (Acts 9). Although it was originally against his own will even to be a follower of Jesus, much less a spokesman for the cause of Christ, Paul wholeheartedly affirmed God’s call to be an apostle. He considered it a real honor and privilege.

Paul includes the name of Timothy in the greeting. Recall how Paul usually refers to Timothy as his “son” in the faith. Here he refers to Timothy as “our brother.” This picks up on Timothy’s relationship to the Colossians. They probably knew him personally, since his home town was nearby. Timothy’s identification with the letter could help to “personalize” it for the folks in Colossae.

PAUL’S SALUTATION

COLOSSIANS 1:2

In his opening statement, Paul refers to the congregation as the “saints and faithful brethren in Christ.” He refers to them as “holy ones.” Just as Paul was honored to be an apostle, he wanted them to recognize their *true identity*. They were *already* “saints” — not just “wannabee” holy people of God. Even this term hints at false teachings which were being infiltrated into the congregation, teachings which stressed all kinds of self-realization exercises which they had to perform before they could even begin to think of themselves in such terms as “holy people.”

In some newer versions of the Bible, the term “brethren” is translated with the more inclusive term: “Christians.” The Living Bible paraphrase retains the term “brothers,” but inserts the parenthetical: “God’s people.” This is true to the original intention of the term. Women were included in the term “brethren.”

The apostle’s salutation is loaded with special meaning. Paul was a master at taking ordinary words and giving them new meanings. The common greeting among people of Greek culture back then was the Greek word: “Xaire” which meant “Rejoice!” It would be like the greeting, “Cheers!” It was used like our word “Hello!” Nothing wrong, really, with such an up-beat greeting like “Rejoice!” Paul, however, preferred another word which had a similar sound. It was the word, “Xarin.” Just a slight difference in sound, but what a vast difference in meaning! Xarin is the Greek word for “grace,” and refers to God’s undeserved love which is ours in Christ Jesus. Using “Xarin” as a greeting didn’t take anything away from the usual greeting. Actually, it enhanced it by pointing to God’s grace as the basis for *true rejoicing!*

As Paul included the modified greeting which the people of Greek culture would recognize, he also included in his salutation the Greek translation of the greeting which had been used by the Hebrews for centuries. His greeting was “Grace to you and *peace from God...*” He used the word “Eirene,” which was the translation used in the Septuagint for the familiar “Shalom!” It was a term which referred to the “peace of God which guards and keeps minds and hearts.” It would be pretty hard to improve on such an all inclusive greeting, wouldn’t it?

In summary: Paul takes the conventional greeting format and turns it into a fervent prayer that God the Father will bestow upon his dear readers the *Grace* which is the outflow of His own love and power, and the *Peace* which the world cannot give, an inner peace which comes from the consciousness of sin forgiven.

PAUL’S THANKSGIVING

COLOSSIANS 1:3-8

As the apostle Paul did with the salutation, here in verses 3-8, he does a similar thing with another custom. It was

customary in the Hellenistic (Greek) culture to begin the body of a letter with some kind of affirmation or commendation directed to the recipient of the letter.

Paul follows this custom. He wrote that he and Timothy always included in their prayers a special “Thank you, God!” for all the people who were part of the Colossian fellowship.

Note two things: (1) Paul and Timothy had a routine for prayer, in which they focused upon individual congregations, in all parts of the world of that day. We may not have a personal responsibility for specific churches that is quite as vast as it was for the apostle and his colleague. Yet it would seem that their example of regular and fervent prayer *commends itself to us* as a pattern to follow with regard to our own church or others with which we have some personal acquaintance.

(2) Paul began his letter by focusing sincerely upon the things for which he could offer thanks to God. Before he would get into serious matters which needed to be discussed, he took the time and made the effort to look for all the good he could come up with. Again, this is an important element of any praying that we might do on behalf of our own congregation. It is so easy to see only the problems and the negative things. These have a way of standing out and being highly visible. It may take a little effort to see the good and express our thanks to God for them. Only when we do this will we have the right mind-set to proceed with prayers about things that may not be so good.

What applies to our prayers on behalf of churches certainly could apply just as well to the concerns which arise in all of life’s relationships: Husband/wife; parent/child; employer/employees; pastor/parishioner; neighbor/neighbor, etc., etc. Before you consult with someone about a negative personal matter, spend time thinking about “the positive.” It’s not only good psychology because of the positive effect it could have on the other person, it’s the right thing to do because of the effect it could have on your own self.

In verse 4, Paul is very specific about the items for which he thanked God, when he thought about and prayed about the Colossian Christians. Even before their pastor came to Paul, he had heard about their faith in the Lord Jesus.

Here the term “faith in Christ Jesus” implies more than the acceptance of a set of *beliefs about* Jesus Christ. It focuses more upon the *relationship between the believer and Christ Jesus*. Internalizing these beliefs leads to a vital and empowering relationship with Christ.

The natural expression of such a relationship is the love which characterized the lives of the Colossians. Paul is careful to use the Greek word for God-like love: Agape. This is a love which responds unconditionally to people in need without any thought of obligation or pay back; the way God does. At this point Paul doesn’t go into detail about specific acts of love for which they were known.

They had faith. They had love. They had hope (v. 5). This seems to be the “power-house” combination which generates the energy for true holiness (Romans 5:2-5; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:5-6; 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 5:8; Hebrews 10:22-24). The significant thing about the way the word “hope” is used here is the reference to a hope which is “laid up for you in heaven.” The Greek word for “laid up” is taken from the language of business in that day. It referred to grain stored in a granary, or books stored in a library. It emphasizes that the hope referred to is not wishful thinking. It is a sure thing. It is reserved already! All they had to do was claim it someday. Somehow that hope motivated them to live their lives “in Christ!”

Again, the apostle is setting the stage for later discussions. He wants them to know he thanks God for the reality of their relationship with Christ Jesus which empowers them to live holy lives. Implied is the thought that they don’t need to look to new sources for spiritual power. The evidence is clear. They already have a truly good thing going! They had this truth *before* these peddlers of theosophy and other false ideas came on the scene. It had come to them in the Word of Truth, the Gospel, which had been shared with them by Epaphras years earlier.

In verse six, Paul introduces another thought, apparently to counter some of the false notions which Epaphras had told him were being promulgated back home. Evidently, one of the claims which false teachers were making was that the religion which Epaphras was teaching was too provincial. What they were offering was a more universal

God's power was available for them and would strengthen them so that they would be able to successfully meet all of the challenges of life with endurance, patience, joy, and thanksgiving.

and cosmic approach to the mysteries of God and the holy life. Such a notion would have great appeal to the people of Greek culture. Don't listen to this, Paul says. The same Word of Truth which came to you and produced such great results, is doing the same thing *all over the world!*

Furthermore, the apostle tells them, it's such a dynamic force there was no incubation period — no waiting at all! The power began to show itself from the very “day you heard and understood the grace of God in truth” (Colossians 1:6).

In closing his section on “Thanksgiving,” Paul expresses his gratitude to God for their faithful pastor, Epaphras. He honors him as a “fellow slave” in the Gospel ministry and tells them to think of him as a personal representative of the apostle himself as he ministers to them (v. 8).

PAUL'S PRAYER

COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

In verses 9-10, Paul shows sensitivity for feelings of the people who seemed to be taken in by some of the themes of the so-called superior religious ideas. One of these was the claim that the Christians would obtain special insights into the will of God, and that they would also be lifted to a higher level of spirituality. Paul didn't scold them for being interested in something like this. He validated that desire as commendable on their part. He said that is exactly what he and Timothy had been praying for on their behalf.

In verses 11-14, he reinforces the idea that such a quest for spiritual wisdom and understanding is what the Christian life is really all about! However, they don't have to turn to non-Christian religious ideas to have it happen in their lives. God's power was available for them and would strengthen them so that they would be able to successfully meet all of the challenges of life with endurance, patience, joy, and thanksgiving.

Paul closes the prayer with a reminder that one of the most important truths of the Gospel is that the moment we believe in Christ, and become members of God's family, we also have a share in “the inheritance of the saints in light.” It's not because of what *we do*. God “qualifies” us. He accomplished this on our behalf. In fact, He has *already* “delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved son” (v. 13). All the rituals and ceremonies and self-abasement exercises being recommended are a waste of time, divert attention away from our real source of power, and rob us of the peace and joy we have in Christ Jesus.



PERSONAL APPLICATION – COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

Holy Spirit, open my heart to receive the truths You would have me learn from Paul's letter to the Colossians. Please don't let my inability to fully comprehend them keep me from accepting them in faith. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

.....
Colossians 1:15-23

1. In the opening verses of this letter Paul expressed concern for his readers to remain loyal in their faith. According to verse 11, to what should they look for strength to persevere?

What mistake do we tend to make in this regard?

How can we get this power?

2. What attitude does Paul say should accompany our patience in times of trials? (v. 11)

What can you do to add this quality of joy to your patient endurance of a personal trial?

How is Jesus a good example in this? (James 1:2-3, Hebrews 12:1-3)

3. In verse 15, Paul strives to show the exalted character of the person of Jesus. The term "image of God" also occurs in Genesis 1:26-27 with reference to the creation of mankind. What does the term "image of God" mean in each verse?

4. According to verse 16, in what great act of God did Jesus play a "lead" role?

How does the evangelist John (John 1:3) express the same truth?

How many times in verses 15-23 does Paul use the word "all" or its equivalent? In light of the problems at Colossae, why do you think Paul was making such a "big deal" about this?

5. Included in Christ's dominion over "all things," Paul lists the various ranks of angels and the "spirit beings." How does Hebrews 1:1-8 agree?
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6. One false notion that was possibly “floating around” Colossae at that time was an early form of gnosticism which was based on the philosophy of *dualism*. Dualism taught that the *spiritual is good* and that the *material and physical are evil*. Without dealing directly with this heresy, how does Paul’s declaration about “creation” knock down this notion?

How does Genesis 1:31 *support* what Paul is saying?

What might this say to us regarding our own personal attitude with respect to the “natural world” around us?

7. What other remarkable “creation” did Christ bring about, according to verse 18?

What role does He *continue* to have with respect to this new creation?

8. Take another look at verses 15-18. God said Moses should tell Pharaoh that he came in the name of *Yahweh*, which means “*I am*.” When Jesus spoke about His true “identity,” He often used a similar term. How did He describe Himself in John 8:58?

Jesus used the equivalent of the original Hebrew *Yahweh*, meaning *I am*, many times. How does Paul (using the third person) pick up on this concept with reference to Christ (4 times in 1:5-18)?

9. What great truth about Jesus does Paul proclaim in verse 19?

Why is it so important for you to believe that the man Jesus also is *True God*?

10. How does Paul endeavor to take the idea of reconciliation between God and man out of the realm of theory and speculation? To what historical event does he point in verse 22?

11. After Paul tells the people in Colossae that all is well between them and God, he reminds them there was something they needed to do. What was this (v. 23)?

How does this also apply to us?

LESSON 3 COLOSSIANS

COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

WHO JESUS REALLY IS – COLOSSIANS 1:15-18	15
WHAT JESUS HAS DONE – COLOSSIANS 1:19-23	16
PERSONAL APPLICATION – COLOSSIANS 1:24-2:5	18

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“There are things we need to do to guard against being influenced or drawn away from the Gospel. We need to be sure that every thought, idea, and behavior is evaluated on the basis of how it might affect our faith. This is a touchstone which we should be ready to apply in every instance.”

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THEME: “YOU CAN TRUST JESUS COMPLETELY BECAUSE OF WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE HAS DONE FOR YOU!”

Did you know that it wasn't until the fourth century of the Christian era that the Christian Church began to celebrate Jesus' birthday? This wasn't just an oversight on the part of the Church. Influential church fathers, like Origen, who lived early in the 200's, actually discouraged any church festival marking Christ's birth. Celebrating birthdays, he contended, was like honoring earthly leaders, such as Egyptian pharaohs, and “was beneath the dignity of the good Christians.”

We have to admit that there certainly are some aspects of the manner in which people celebrate Christmas in our day which are deplorable. Nevertheless, when we think of all the wonderful music that is associated with Christmas, we can't help but be glad that somehow the zeal and enthusiasm of the people prevailed over the opinion of these early church fathers.

All over the world at Christmas, familiar carols proclaim some truly great theology! Stanza three of “Silent Night,” the most popular of all carols, declares about this child whose birth is being celebrated that He is “Son of God, love's pure light!”

Or, look at the profound theology which is the essence of verse 2 of “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.”

“Christ, by highest heav’n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord...

Veiled in flesh the God-head see!

Hail, the incarnate deity! ...

Jesus, our Emmanuell!”

This is but a sample from the vast storehouse of great music which has been generated over the years in connection with the celebration of the birth of Jesus. I don’t know about Origen, but I think the apostle Paul would be delighted! The truths about Jesus which they proclaim in joyful song is what the apostle Paul became quite lyrical about in verses 15-23 of the first chapter of Colossians.

WHO JESUS REALLY IS

COLOSSIANS 1:15-18

First of all, the apostle declares (v. 15) that Jesus “is the image of the invisible God.” Keep in mind the problem in Colossae which Paul was addressing. The people were being led astray by false notions about the need for special intermediaries from the spiritual realm, as they sought to approach God. Paul wants them to know that all of this is so unnecessary! When you go to Jesus, you are going “right to the top!” He is God!

Note that Paul says Jesus *is* the image of the invisible God. This is in contrast to the language God used in Genesis 1:26 when He said, “Let us *make* man in our image.” Jesus wasn’t *made* in God’s image. He is of the very essence of God and has been so through all eternity. The Nicene Creed picks up on this truth when it declares about Jesus that He “was *begotten*, not made, being of one substance with the Father.”

In His humanity, Jesus is a “walking reflection” of God. The only way we can even begin to see and understand what God is like is through God’s incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. He shows us in “human terms” the reality of the invisible God (cp. John 1:18; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Hebrews 1:3).

Along the same line Paul adds that Jesus is the “firstborn of all creation.” The term “firstborn” was likely chosen by Paul to emphasize for the Colossians the supremacy of Christ in all things. Being the firstborn brought with it certain privileges and rights. Recall the ideas surrounding the mention of “birthright” in biblical times. (See Genesis

25:29-34, 27:1-41; Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9)

“Do you know what?” Paul goes on to say in v. 16, “all these high ranking intermediaries in the spirit world which some people are saying are so important in your spiritual life — well, those that really exist were brought into being by Jesus. And they exist ‘in Him...*through* Him...and *for* Him.’ He is the supreme ruler of the whole creation — both visible and invisible.”

Not only that, Paul explains, even the *continued* existence of all created things depends upon Jesus who is in charge of the whole universe — the cosmos: “in Him all things hold together” (cp. Hebrews 1:3). The implication is that if Jesus for one moment withdraws His power, the whole universe will collapse. I have been told that the Greek word which Paul used for “holds together” is the same word Greek scientists use to describe atomic energy.

As Paul attests to this great truth, he gives *us* something to think about, too. The Jesus whom we worship isn’t only one deity among many. He is truly “King of kings and Lord of lords,” not only of the spiritual realm, but also of the physical — the cosmos! This was important for the people of Colossae to remember, as they worked through the basics of their faith.

In verse 18 Paul carries the idea of Christ’s supremacy and preeminence even further. He was responsible for bringing into being another creation—the creation of a new humanity: His Church — His body on earth! In His resurrection from the dead Jesus was “the beginning” for this new strain of human beings who would live with God eternally. He was the “firstborn from the dead.” (Although others like Lazarus and the youth of Nain were raised from the dead, theirs was a different kind of resurrection. They lived a few more years and then went to the grave again. Not so Jesus). See Romans 1:4.

As with the first creation, Paul says, the same Jesus who brought His Church into being continues to sustain it as the “Head” of His body of believers. After His ascension into heaven, He didn’t go into retirement. He continues to be involved in its growth and development. It is from the head that the human body receives its power for growth. There

is a tiny gland at the base of the human brain called the pituitary gland, which regulates growth. Continued well-being of the human body depends upon the human brain.

The June 1995 issue of the National Geographic features an article on the human brain. Research on Alzheimer's disease indicates that as the disease progresses, neurons die relentlessly and mental capacity deteriorates. "Death comes when the brain can no longer direct the body." So it is with the body of Christ. There is no true life for the Church without Jesus as its living Head! Christ is preeminent in the creation and preservation of this new creation — His body of believers — His Church on earth.

In closing this section, note how Paul used the verb "He *is*." Very likely he wanted to pick up on the very name for God: Yahweh (*I am*). Jesus associated Himself with that Name with His many "*I am*" statements (See John 8:58).

WHAT JESUS HAS DONE

COLOSSIANS 1:19-23

As was indicated in the introductory lesson, Paul's strategy was to not attack heresies head on, but to take some of the false ideas and fill them with new meaning. Verse 19 is a good example of just how he did this. Paul here uses the Greek word for fullness: *pleroma*. This was a "buzz" word in the jargon of the Gnostic system. It was a pseudo-philosophical term which referred to the whole body of divine emanations. The teachers who were apparently having some influence among the Colossians may have imagined the various attributes of God as having been distributed among the "elemental spirits of the universe." Paul uses the term to describe how it is with Jesus. For Paul, "fullness" meant the totality of God with all of His powers and he goes on to say that God has no attributes or qualities which Jesus doesn't possess. In chapter 2:9, he repeats that thought by writing about Jesus "in Him the whole fullness (*pleroma*) of deity dwells bodily."

All of this was done for a very important purpose, Paul points out in verse 20. It wasn't just a "dress parade" to honor Jesus. *This is what it was going to take* for God to accomplish the redemption of the world. Through Jesus, who was God in human flesh, the work of reconciling the whole world to Himself would be accomplished. Paul emphasizes that it wouldn't only be human beings who benefit from this,

but "all things!" In Romans 8, Paul refers to all of creation "groaning in travail" and waiting "with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God" (v. 19-22).

Epaphras must have reported to Paul that the opponents of the true Gospel in Colossae talked a lot about people "living in harmony" with God and making every effort to remove any barriers in their lives which would tend to separate them from such a relationship with God. They pushed the idea that the people could use various rituals and schemes to accomplish this. This gave Paul a good opening to remind them of the wonderful truth that the basis of their reconciliation with God *was an accomplished fact already!* (v. 20)

It was through Jesus as God and Man that this was accomplished. Specifically, through His sacrificial death and the shedding of His blood on Calvary: "making peace by the blood of his cross." Had Jesus been merely a human being — even though a perfect human being, His death would have been only enough to save Himself. In order for His death to have cosmic significance, *He had to be God as well.*

In saying what He does here, Paul may also have been subtly hinting at another aspect of how they were being misled. In complete contrast to the exercise in futility into which the Colossians were being drawn, with their intellectual speculation and philosophizing, Paul hereby refers to things that actually happened in human history by which God accomplished this reconciliation. We can point to a time and place — Calvary's cross on Good Friday says it all!

In an inspired manner, the apostle Paul proceeds to take this great truth out of the realm of speculation and just "talk." Now that He has very carefully and clearly nailed down the fundamental truths of salvation, he turns to make this very personal for each person at Colossae who hears or reads the letter. In verse 21, Paul gently reminds them that this story of salvation didn't just happen "out there somewhere." They themselves had experienced its power! If they would just think back to their lives a few years earlier, they would recall that there was a time when they were "estranged and hostile in their minds." Not only were they *not living in harmony with God; then* they actually had

a *hostile* attitude toward Him. That bad attitude showed up in their personal behavior, and they were “doing evil things.” They probably remembered, all right!

That was the *bad news!* The *good news* was that they had listened to the Gospel and responded in faith. What Paul was speaking about in a general way had happened to them personally and individually. They had been “reconciled” through the sacrificial death of the Son of God. They had experienced the “atonement” with God.

The personal implications of this were pretty exciting, according to Paul. In case they had forgotten, it meant that they already had full salvation through their acceptance of the Gospel by faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. He would “present you holy and blameless...before Him” (v. 22). Again, Paul was trying to get them to see that they shouldn’t listen to those who were teaching that somehow there was more to be done by them, if they hoped to be right with God.

As a caring minister of the Gospel, Paul found it necessary to remind them of their responsibility in this matter of their relationship with God. He had to put up a big “Caution” sign. He said all of this could and would happen for them, if they would “continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the Gospel which you heard.” For them and for us, the apostle makes it clear that it is the Gospel itself which is a Means of Grace to bring us and keep us in faith.

The terms “stable and steadfast” appear to be terms taken from the construction trade. The Greek word for “stable” is the same word from which their word “foundation” comes. The word translated “steadfast” might better be translated “firmly secured.” Current building codes for buildings in tornado and earthquake prone areas illustrate this concept. Not only is it essential to have foundations that are poured on solid ground, but the various components of the superstructure must be secured to the foundations and the roofs with heavy metal straps to keep them from shifting from the base. There are things we need to do to guard against being influenced or drawn away from the Gospel. We need to be sure that every thought, idea, and behavior is evaluated on the basis of how it might affect our faith. This is a touchstone which we should be ready to apply in every instance.

Paul closes this portion of his “encouraging word” for the Colossian Christians by reminding them that they really *don’t need to look for any new ideas*, nor should they be careless about opening their ears to notions which do not square with the Gospel. They can be assured that throughout the world of that day — it’s the same old Gospel which is being proclaimed. And for what it might mean to them, Paul makes the point that it is to this Gospel, in all its simplicity, that He is proud to devote his life.