

Paul's Letter to the Colossians

Chapter 1

The church at Colossae was not planted by Paul. He hadn't even visited the town of Colossae. Epaphras who was a coworker of Paul's, started the church. He is mentioned by Paul in Colossians 1:7-8 and 4:12-13. Epaphras visited him and brought him a report on the congregation at Colossae. Colossians 4:13 says that Epaphras has a connection to the churches at Laodicea and Hierapolis. *"I vouch for him (Epaphras) that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis."* All three churches were a short distance apart.

We don't know exactly where but Paul was imprisoned and Epaphras came and visited Paul. Many believe that Paul wrote the letter while imprisoned in Rome in 63 A.D. From Colossians 4:13, you can tell that Epaphras was greatly concerned for what the Colossian believers were having to endure. However, the report regarding the believers in Colossae to Paul was a good one.

*1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
2 To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father.*

Paul starts by letting us know who is writing the letter to the church at Colossae. Timothy is present with Paul but there is no indication that Timothy did any writing. In verse 1, Paul calls himself an *"apostle by the will of God"*. He doesn't want to leave any doubt that he is not a self-proclaimed apostle but one chosen by God. We saw that the Corinthians had doubts about Paul being a "true apostle".

In verse 2, Paul says, *"May God our Father give you grace and peace."* This is Paul's standard greeting. He uses this greeting 13 times in his letters to the churches. I believe management training courses say that you need to start off with the positives but I believe that Paul truly wanted *"grace and peace"* for everyone.

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel 6 that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. 7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, 8 and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

In these verses, Paul assures these Christians that he *"gives thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you"*(NASB). It is with a spirit of Thanksgiving that Paul

prays for them. Remember Paul never met most of these Christians but they were on his prayer list. He not only prayed for them but he always prayed for them and when he prayed for them, it was with gratitude that prayed.

In these verses, we learn of the good report given by Epaphras. Verses 3 – 6 tells us that the members of the church:

Have faith in Christ Jesus
Have love for all the saints
Have hope laid up in heaven
Were bearing fruit and increasing
Heard and understood God's grace

Paul starts with praising the faith, love and hope of the Colossian Christians. Paul didn't consider these attributes to be nice to have but he believed that these are foundational for a Christian. In 1 Corinthians 13:13, the Love Chapter, Paul says, *"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."*

"Faith is being persuaded or convinced that something is true and trusting it with your life. This faith is in Jesus Christ." (Anders)

Galatians 5:6b says, *"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."* Hebrews 11:1 says, *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."* In verse 4 in Colossians 1, our faith in Jesus as the Christ, should show up in our love for all believers.

In verse 5, Paul says, they have *"the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven."* Because they have been given the correct Gospel message, then they will understand that our hope comes from Jesus. From this hope, we grow our faith in Jesus and our love for Him and other believers. Without our hope in what is to come, we would have difficulty enduring what is happening today.

"Hope is looking forward with eager anticipation and strong confidence to the sure promises of God." (Anders)

Paul lets these Christians know that the same Gospel message that they were taught is bearing fruit throughout the world as it has in Colossae. He wants them to hang on to the true message that they were taught by Epaphras. It is life-changing and tells us of God's grace for us.

Grace is “God’s riches at Christ’s expense.” It is unmerited favor. With grace we get what we don’t deserve. As sinners we deserve death but with God’s grace we get everlasting life with God. John 3:16 tells us so. It is not what we have done but it comes from His love for us.

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, 10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, 12 and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

In verse 9, Paul said that just as soon as he knew there was a church planted in Colossae, he started praying for them. Paul was in prison or house arrest so he may have had lots of time to pray for this church.

Too often we get in the habit of praying for other believers when things are going bad. Paul reminds us that we are to pray for other believers all of the time. One sure way to know that you are saved is if Satan is attacking us. Jesus never promised us that things would always go well once we are saved. John 16:33 records Jesus saying, “*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*”

Paul prays for this church again. The first prayer at the beginning of this chapter was for thanksgiving. This prayer is Paul speaking to God on behalf of this church. It was a very thorough prayer of intercession. He prayed that:

God would fill them with the knowledge of His will.

They may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way.

Bear fruit in every good work

Grow in the knowledge of God

Be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience,

Give joyful thanks to the Father

Knowing God’s will for you and your church is important but it is more important that you allow God’s will to lead and guide you. Anders says that the will of God in your life should control you. It should make you do more to serve Him than you ever thought of on your own.

“The knowledge and control of God's will comes through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. This is more than simple intelligence. Wisdom refers to the comprehension of truth, while understanding refers to the application of truth. Being controlled by God's will means believers comprehend the principles of Scripture and then put them into practice.”
(Anders)

The following verses contain parts of God's will for our church and lives. Read and fill in God's will. This is not a complete list:

Matthew 22:36-40 – Love God with your heart, soul and mind. Also love others as yourself.

Micah 6:8 – Act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Ephesians 4:15 – Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become the mature body of Christ

Acts 3:19 – Repent and turn to God

1 Corinthians 6:18 – Flee from sexual immorality and all other sins a person commits are outside the body.

Too often we only go to God when we or our friends are having problems or going through trials. We don't think to go to God with prayers for spiritual growth or in defense against Satan when things are going well. If we don't feel Satan attacking us or those in our church, it is just a loll. He is getting ready to attack and we need prayer more than ever.

God wants us to grow spiritually. It is such a subtle attack and others may not even see it. We make small steps away from God. We stop staying for Sunday School, we read His Word less. Others may not see the changes but the next thing you know, your spiritual growth is gone.

The next part of this prayer is for them to please God. What pleases God? As a parent, you want for your child what God wants for us. We want our children to please us by growing to live independently and to be successful, however that looks to you. God wants us to have spiritual growth and to bear fruit for Him. Look once again at the list in #14. Aren't these things that you would want for your children and Christian friends too?

As a parent, we want our children to grow in the knowledge that will help them in the future, so we send to college or some type of higher learning. God wants us to do the same with His Word. The more time that we are learning from His Word, the more we understand Him. His Word helps us to develop a personal relationship with Him. I hope that is why you stay for Sunday School and come to Bible Studies.

Additionally from Paul's prayer (#14), he prays that the members of the church at Colossae grow in endurance and patience. He is not talking about self-reliance. Early Christians were treated horribly by Romans, Jews and Gentiles. The type of endurance and patience that Paul is speaking about can only come from the power of God.

In Evans' Overcomer study, we learned that power to resist Satan can only come from God. On our own, we will fail. It all goes back to godliness. Evans said, "Godliness is the hallmark of the Christian life, and your personal spiritual power, contentment, and satisfaction." In 1 Timothy 6:11, Paul tells Timothy and us, "*Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness.*" (NLT)

In the Overcomer study, we spent a whole chapter on "Choosing to access God's power against Satan". The attributes that Paul wanted for the Colossian church is what he wanted for all believers.

The final thing that Paul wants from them is that they recognize that every good and perfect gift comes from God. (James 1:17). Since they don't come from ourselves, we must learn to thank God for them. When we become full of ourselves and claim our victories as our hard work, we are falling right into Satan's trap. In His testing by Satan, Jesus resisted Satan with Scripture. The one that sticks with me the most is "*Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*" Give credit where credit is due. Don't claim it for yourself. Give thanks to God.

"*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us*" (Hebrews 12:1 NLT). In Colossians 1, Paul is an encourager. He is watching from the bleachers and encouraging the believers in this church to run harder, run longer and do more for God. He is in a different position than most of the churches that he planted. If there are bad things going on, he doesn't see them because he was relying on Epaphras.

"With the goodness of God to desire our highest welfare, the wisdom of God to plan it, and the power of God to achieve it, what do we lack? Surely we are the most favored of all creatures." (A. W. Tozer)

Verses 13 and 14 say that Jesus' work on the cross "*rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son*". We have been redeemed, our ticket to heaven was paid for in full by Jesus.

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Verse 15 says that “*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*” The word translated as ‘image’ is ‘eikon’. This word has two meanings. The first is ‘likeness’ but we were created in the likeness of God. The second meaning is ‘manifestation’ which means that Jesus is the embodiment of God or Jesus is God in human form. Jesus is fully human and fully God, not a god.

Paul says that Jesus is the “*firstborn over all creation*”. There is none like Jesus. He is God’s only begotten Son. He is not created. He is not lower than God but equal. Paul wrote about Jesus in Philippians 2:6, “*who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.*”

“The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and the Son: not made nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. God exists in Himself and of Himself. His being He owes to no one.” (A. W. Tozer)

In the first century, the first born was given privileges above the other siblings. They were expected to step in as the father should the father pass. There was no splitting everything equally. There was but one heir, the first born son. Jesus is that first born son but He has the authority now. When He was on this earth, He told His disciples “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*” (Matthew 28:18)

John 1:2-3 says, “*2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*” Paul is echoing that thought here in his letter to the Colossians. “*16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.*” Jesus wasn’t an afterthought by God to bring salvation to a dying world. He was the plan all along.

Verse 18 says that Jesus is the head. This verse points my thoughts to the wedding supper of the lamb in Revelation 19:7-10. Jesus is the bridegroom and His church is the bride. As the husband, then Jesus is the head. We are to celebrate because we belong to Jesus.

Read Ephesians 5:25-33. How much does it say a husband should love his wife? “*Just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*” Verse 33 of this text says that the husband should love his wife as much as he loves himself. Jesus loved us more, He was willing to give up His life for us.

Verse 18 says that Jesus is “*the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.*” Other people have died and come back to life but they were “revived”. Jesus was the first and only one to be resurrected. He is “*the firstborn from among the dead*”. Being the firstborn gives Him *supremacy* above all.

As we have said before, Jesus is fully human but fully God. Paul says that Jesus has the fullness of God in Him. Back to John 1 verse 1 says, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” Regardless of how well we can understand the Trinity, we can know that Jesus and God the Father are one, how much fuller could Jesus be?

“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. (Guzik)

Verse 20 says that God reconciled us to Himself through Jesus work on the cross. We are all sinners. Paul said in Romans 3:10, “*There is no one righteous, not even one.*” And Romans 3:23 says, “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*”. We owe a debt that we cannot pay and Jesus paid a debt that He did not owe. God’s grace reconciled or paid our debt with the life of His only begotten son. We can never work hard enough or be good enough to reconcile yourself to God.

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

In verse 21, Paul says that before they claimed Jesus as their Savior, they were “*alienated from God and were enemies*”. Wait, I was still a good person, right? As we said earlier, goodness is a relative term. Think about it, we are told that God cannot be in the presence of sin, so any sin keeps us from being good in God’s eyes.

Ok, maybe not good but enemies? We can never be righteous without the imputed righteousness of Jesus. Without claiming Jesus as our Savior, God sees our sin when He looks at us after we claim Jesus, He sees Jesus' work on the cross.

In verse 22, Paul brings up the idea of being reconciled through the cross. We had a sin debt but Jesus paid it for us. As the hymn says, "Jesus paid it all, All to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow." Throughout Revelation, it says that the saints were wearing white. As it says here in Colossians, we were "*without blemish and free from accusation*". We cannot do this on our own, it required Jesus to die that horrible death on the cross and then it required us to accept it and claim Him as our Savior.

In verse 23, Paul tells them and us that we need to persevere in our faith. Read Romans 5:1-5. Because we have put faith in Jesus, then we can have "peace with God" and we can have joy and hope for what is to come. We can also have joy in our suffering because it builds our ability to persevere. The NLT calls it endurance. Perseverance build character and character builds hope.

"If the gospel teaches the final perseverance of the saints, it teaches at the same time that the saints are those who finally persevere — in Christ. Continuance is the test of reality." (Bruce)

I am sure that we have talked about this sometime in our Sunday School classes. The best example of this idea is the gold smelting processes. When gold is purified, it is melted. The impurities float to the top and is skimmed off. When we face trials, things can heat up. In the trials, our self-reliance can be reduced or eliminated. We can learn to rely on God and our focus can be on God. We can learn to trust Him and our endurance for such trials is improved.

²⁴ Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. ²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— ²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Anders says that the main idea of these verses is that "Ministry is the hard work of bringing all believers to maturity in Christ." I have always felt that as we grow as Christians, we are to reach down and pull others up with us. I am not saying that I am better than anyone else. I am saying it requires a group effort and we are all to participate.

One example of this idea is the old adage, "It takes a village (church) to raise a child." I had a rowdy group of junior high boys in Sunday School years ago. They were very trying. The girls

would not stay because of them. I have seen these boys as men and am happy for the men that they have become and glad to have been a part of their lives.

This is what Paul is saying in these verses. He is saying that he was chosen by God to influence all of the churches to endure hardship and suffering and grow in faithfulness to God. When it comes to suffering, Paul bragged about what God had brought him through in 2 Corinthians 11:16-33. It is a long list.

In John 15:18-20, Jesus told his disciples, *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. 20 Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”* Jesus’ suffering was enough for our salvation. Paul is not saying that it wasn’t enough. Jesus’ work on the cross was enough to pay for our salvation.

Paul is saying that it will take endurance to finish the race, to get through this life with your beliefs intact. In order to grow and confirm your faith, you will face trials. These trials will help you rely on God and build your relationship with Him.

So what is *“the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations”*? Read Ephesians 3:1-6. The mystery is that the Gentiles can be children of Abraham and children of God. Isaiah 49:6 says, *“He says, ‘You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me. I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.’”* This was a mystery because the Jews were God’s chosen people and somehow overlooked verses like these. Paul points out to them and us that as a Christian we have Christ living in us. Doesn’t seem like that big of a secret to us today. But to a newly planted church in the first century, it was a big secret. We have been taught this since early VBS and Sunday School. Not only does Jesus live in us, He is our only hope of eternal life and glory.

²⁸ He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

In the final verses of this chapter, Paul tells them what the will of God is for their lives. He lays out what we are to be doing with our lives, from the newest to the oldest believer. We are to tell others about Jesus and then teaching them how Jesus wants them to live, developing a personal relationship with Him.

In the last verse, he reminds us and tells them that we cannot do it on our own. We must not be self-reliant but reliant on the mighty power of Jesus. We are to tell them but we cannot change their lives or cause them to accept what we have told them. We can only share the message of

Jesus, the rest is up to God. If they reject the message, they are not rejecting you. They are rejecting Jesus.