

COLOSSIANS

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Chapter ONE

Colossae was in the province of Phrygia in Asia minor, now Turkey, and ruled by Rome. It was about 120 miles west of the Greek city of Ephesus and Philemon lived in Colossae. The apostle Paul came from an important and cultural city named Tarsus in Cilicia, eleven miles east of Laodicea, also in Asia Minor.

The Colossians were more advanced spiritually than the Galatians

Colossae suffered an earthquake in the 60ADs and was destroyed by the Turks in the 12th century.

The apostle begins his letter to the Colossians by describing himself as an apostle. The word means one sent on a mission, a preacher of the Gospel and advocating moral standards as directed by God, and an advocate and champion of the Gospel and, in Paul's case, the first prominent missionary.

He was an apostle by the will of God who chose him to bear God's name to the Gentiles meaning that people other than Jews can have salvation. Paul was the chosen vessel, Acts 9.15.

The letter is addressed to Timothy and the saints and the faithful in Colossae.

Timothy was a young evangelist and counsellor as well as a helper to Paul in administration in the local churches.

Saints do not exist in stain glass windows. They are sacred, and holy people set apart to God and for God. They are not perfect people which the world unfairly and unexpectedly believes they should be. They are also called faithful brethren. Faithfulness has to do with having faith and employing it. It has to be living and alive. Without faith is impossible to please God and whoever has faith believes who God is and trusts the Lord Jesus for salvation. (Hebrews 11. 6) Faith should be dynamic and strong.

The word brethren gives the message of unity among believers and cooperation but, sadly, this is not always the case and there have been many schisms even among evangelicals who pride themselves on Biblical doctrine. God did not introduce denominations but, as Paul says, We are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3. 28).

However there are many who have interpretations of the Bible and their own doctrines particular to their own group which do not agree with the Bible. They will not endure sound doctrine (1 Timothy 4. 1-3)

Paul begins his salutation with the word Grace which really means Divine attitude and virtue. Others refer to it as Divine and unmerited favour but it has also to do with God's goodness. By grace are ye saved through faith but not of yourselves. It is the gift of God and it emanates from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The next greeting is that of Peace which signifies being complete and sound and this peace is also a gift from God who is the source of peace (Romans 5. 1, Philippians 4. 7)

Paul thanks the Colossians for their faith in Christ Jesus and their love to the brethren. On his part, Paul is praying for the Colossians. There were possible dangers on the horizon for this church and

others. They were new groups in hostile environments and in the Roman Empire which was not kindly disposed to Christians

The apostle speaks of the hope awaiting these believers in Heaven. The word hope has a particular meaning in the Bible. It is not keeping your fingers crossed and waiting for good news and being uncertain. It means to trust in, wait for, or desire something or someone. The Colossians knew this from the Gospel preached to them. It was an assurance not a daydream. The Gospel came to these people as it will in any part of the world and it will bring forth fruit, be successful in its impact and responses it was with them since they heard it and they knew the grace of God in truth. The Gospel was presented to them with the understanding of the grace, that is to say the goodness of God, and it was the truth.

We now encounter Epaphras, a colleague and co worker with Paul who may have been used in the conversion of Epaphras which some surmise may have happened at Ephesus. It is inferred that Epaphras was a native of Colossae and he certainly knew Philemon who lived there. Inspired by the Spirit of God he told the apostle of the devotion of the church there. Paul commends Epaphras, and that is striking in itself and not a usual response, but refers to him as a faithful minister.

Paul is encouraged since he had heard of this and prays for this company of believers and desires that they may know God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. God's will is that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of all the truth (1 Timothy 2.4);

The wisdom of God is not always realised. It refers to his absolute intelligence and exact working as in creation, redemption and providence. Someone has said that God is wise in His heart

Spiritual understanding is valuing the things of the Spirit of God. Regrettably spiritual has many meanings today. It can refer to your spirit or the heathen practice of spiritualism,

Verse 10 is relevant to all believers in that we are to walk this life so that it is worthy and pleasing to God and be successful in our good works and increasing in our knowledge and appreciation of God. The word walk refers to our life. Micah 6 verse 8 tells us what the Lord requires of us is that we are to be just love mercy and to walk, live the life, in a humble way. God resists the proud (James 4. 6).

The worthy life has a value and purpose. It honours God.

The hymn says,

I am satisfied with Jesus,
He is all in all to me.
But I wonder, as I ask Him,
Is He satisfied with me?

Verse 11 acknowledges the glorious power of God which can strengthen to patience and long suffering. The strengthening is to enable the Colossians to walk worthy of the Lord. The glorious power is the sufficiency of that strength which may be expected of Him who has all power in heaven and earth. It is not human strength here. Patience and long suffering is enduring all things and this is to be with joy which really speaks of comfort.

These are the earnest prayers of Paul.

There should always be thanksgiving to the Father who has made the Colossians meet to inherit eternal life with the saints. that is to say, believers, who are already there. The inheritance is the

right to be children of God, fellow citizens of the saints being brought out of darkness into light and sanctified by the blood of Christ to live soberly and godly in this life.

We should be thankful since, like the Colossians, we have been delivered and translated into the kingdom of God's Son. We have redemption and the forgiveness of sins because of the efficacy of the blood of Christ who is the image of the invisible God by which is meant the spiritual and moral aspects of the Father who is a spirit and, therefore, not a person although that expression is often used.

The Lord is the firstborn of every creature which statement could be misleading. He was God's firstborn and the only begotten Son of the Father but He is also creator and heir of all things (Hebrews 1, 2). The word creature is perhaps not the best word since as He has created us, He cannot be a creature Himself. He is the firstborn of all creation signifies His authority, power and supremacy.

F B Hole refers to the image of the invisible God as being a representative and that the firstborn is the one who takes the supreme place as holding the rights of the firstborn.

In the New Testament the church, the company of all true believers is called the Body of Christ of which the Lord Jesus is the Head (Colossians 181 Corinthians 12).

The whole of creation, visible or invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities and powers were created by the Lord and for Him. We may not know the significance of the thrones, dominions, principalities and powers but God has allowed them. And some therefore blame God for people and some politics being evil and for the evil in the world. But we must recall that God is righteous (Genesis 18 16-33, Exodus 9.27, Psalm 25. 8 Isaiah 53.13, 1 John 2.1 etc). Man has freewill. They are not automations pulled by God's strings as if puppets and men prefer evil, darkness and not light (John 3.19). The whole of creation made beautiful by God has been wrecked by man as one commentator has said.

The Lord is before all things. He is in control and these other people exist in the sense of being allowed to, as we have explained above.

We have dealt with most of verse 18 already but there is another consideration. In all things Christ is to have the preeminence a matter emphasised in Hebrews 1.4.

He is preeminent in creation and the sustainer of life and the universe, in His rightfulness and justice, His mercy and forgiveness, His atoning blood, His faithfulness and love for His own, His willingness that all should be saved and no one perish. His promises as, for example, of His second coming and eternal life.

Even in some places of worship He is not given His rightful place and while this exists in the established churches where ritual and form are so important it happens in modern worship some of which is more akin to a variety show and worldly methods.

Verse 18 concludes a very long sentence.

It pleased the Father that in His beloved Son all the fullness would dwell. The Lord Jesus has made peace through the blood of His cross to reconcile all things to Himself.

The fulness refers to the Lord's dignity, power, authority and moral excellence. To reconcile all things unto Himself may be a little misleading. Does it mean all things in heaven and earth? Not everything is reconciled; that has never been true. Multitudes have been alienated from God and remain so and the meaning of reconciliation must be that it is a plan that if fairly and properly applied, The the blood of Christ would secure entire reconciliation. The reconciliation is that the

Colossians were wicked while they were not Christians and enemies of God until they were reconciled and that was in His body and His death so that in their salvation the believers could be presented holy, unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight.

It is a truly blessed thing to be approved by the Saviour.

But there is a warning that the believers had to continue in the faith and not be moved away but be settled and retain the assurance of the Gospel which they have heard and accepted. The Gospel which was to be preached to every one in the world, every one under heaven, whereof Paul says he is a minister.

Paul implies that he is suffering but rejoicing in the afflictions which are for the sake of Christ and His body which is the church of which Paul is a minister according to the dispensation of God given to him to fulfil the word of God. Some have referred to this as his second ministry.

It is sad when 'Christians' move away from the truth suggesting that the faith had no roots. Some people do abandon the Gospel as in Galatians 5.7 Ye did run well but who did hinder you that ye believe not the truth?

It is probably true that we have all encountered people like this.

In verse 27 we read of a mystery. In Biblical terms a mystery is not something that is a mystery or a puzzle but something that is hidden and secret. Here it is a matter between Christ and his church unknown for ages but now made known and that is that the Gentiles are to be brought into the church. Paul is working to this end with the desire that every man may be presented in Christ Jesus.

This was to be Paul's labour of love and spiritual striving and in accordance with Divine working.

Chapter TWO

The apostle Paul refers to the great conflict he has for the Colossians and for those at Laodicea and for all who had not met Paul and seen him face to face. He refers to all believers being knit together in unity and love with the full understanding and assurance as well as the acknowledgement of the mystery of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who possesses all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Paul is concerned about men with beguiling words which could undermine their faith and, of course, Paul is absent although with them in spirit appreciating their love and steadfast faith.

The Colossians are to walk (live) in Christ by a life that honours Him and be rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith that they have been taught abounding in thanksgiving but to be aware of any one who seeks to damage their faith by philosophy and deceit after the standards of the world and not the standards of Christ.

We are saved by the grace of God. Salvation is not of human means but of the goodness of God. Salvation is God's gift.

Paul not only laboured in preaching but in his prayers and even more so now that he was in prison. He proclaims that Divine love must reign among the believers. Today the church is divided and men have beguiling words which they use even to trouble Christians. Some Pentecostals were abrasive and said that a friend was not saved because she had not spoken in tongues and did not dance before the Lord.

The apostle is concerned that evil and false teaching may take over. The best preventative against evil is to progress in the right direction. Having received Christ as Saviour they were to put into practice what they know of Him and His goodness.

Paul was in prison for disturbing the city of Philippi teaching them things it was unlawful for them as Romans to accept (Acts 16. 20-23) and, later, the Jews called him a pestilent fellow, an agitator and ringleader of the sect known as the Nazarenes (Acts 24. 5), Earlier, he was arrested in the Temple (Acts 21. 16). He arrived in Rome (Acts 28. 14-16) and was placed under house arrest for two years, then imprisoned and executed in AD66 being in his early 60s.

Verse 9 repeats that in Christ dwells all the fullness of dignity, power and authority and He is the bodily form of the Godhead. The Father and the Holy Spirit do not have bodies being spirits and not persons. The Christian is someone who has Christ within him and the Lord is the head of all principality and power. The Christian is circumcised not in a bodily form made by hands but in the removal of sins. Baptism is a burial service as set out in Romans 6 and is baptism in water in which the body is very briefly submerged. The emergence from the water speaks of being raised in newness of life and refers to God raising the Lord Jesus from death.

Of course, many churches have a different interpretation of baptism, which do not tally with New Testament teaching.

God quickens men and woman to new life in Christ who are now dead to sins and have had forgiveness of sin. taking away all the ordinances of sin that was against them and these matters are now nailed to His Cross. We are now justified by faith says Romans 5. 1.

The Lord has dealt with principalities and powers spoiling them in defeat and triumphed over them.

No one is to judge or criticise you in what you eat or drink or of holydays and the new moon or of the sabbath day.

These matters were under the law where certain meats were not to be eaten. Certain holy days such as the sabbath and the new moon no longer applied to one's relationship with God. Relationship did not depend on keeping holy days. By these things made under the law I cannot become more righteous, The sabbath was a Jewish festival

As to the sabbath and other holy days, they were but foreshadows of things to come. The real substance was in the Lord Jesus Christ. To some, what day we worship may not be that important. The sabbath was to show God's rest for His people and Sunday is the day of resurrection, or the Lord's day, which is not always acknowledged but Christians have this day as their day of worship. The text goes on to say that no one should beguile you in a type of humility to worship angels, for example. Such people are puffed up and proud (verse 18).

We are to hold on to Christ and receive strength and knowledge from Him and those who preach the truth.

Christ is to be our sole teacher and guide. The time will come and, in fact has come, when people will not endure sound doctrine (2 Timothy 4.3) and have teachers of their own choice turning people away from the truth.

The Scriptures do not say that you are not saved until you speak in tongues. Nor does it say that we are to worship angels.

Verse 19 is somewhat awkward. It speaks of losing connection with Head, but if that connection is not lost the whole body is joined and held together by every supporting ligament, knit together which results in the increase of the knowledge of God (Ephesians 4. 16). It may also refer to the increase of the members of the Body of Christ.

If you are dead with Christ in the spiritual sense you are free from the rudiments of this world though you are living in the world.

Restrictions in worship are mentioned in verse 23, what not to touch, taste or handle which are the commands of men, Do not do this. There may be some appearance of wisdom for this self-imposed worship, their false humility and harsh treatment of the body but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. But some were promoting a self-made religion with their own rules. No one is to beguile you with false humility and doctrines which are not Biblical.

Down through the centuries the truth has been subject to many changes by men which are additions from the truth which additions are forbidden in Revelation 22.19. God's word is sacred. and must not be infiltrated or added to.

Some dismiss the Trinity, the Deity of Christ as the Son of God, Jesus could not be both human and divine, if you are not healed of an illness it is because you do not have faith, you are not saved unless you speak in tongues and baptism is the christening of an infant and so on.

It seems a pity to mention such things.

Chapter THREE

If ye be risen with Christ, which the Colossians were, that they should seek things that are above, heavenly things, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. Their affections should be on spiritual things not on earthly things they are dead to this world and their lives are hid in Christ in God. This has to do with the resurrection of Christ and the believers connect to it which merits a response. The Lord is risen from the dead and sits at the right hand of God which position often speaks of power and authority. It says that they were raised with Him (2.12) which speaks of baptism. We are raised from the water to newness of life (Romans 6.4).

To the Christian, Christ is our life and when He shall appear we shall appear with Him in glory. This refers to the second part of Christ's coming. The first part is at the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4. 13 ff) and after the seven years of tribulation on the earth, the Lord will come to the earth and set up His millennial reign and all the redeemed will come with Him in glory as an army (Revelation 1., 11ff). Christians who appear with Him in glory will assist in the ruling of the nations It has been asked, Where do the believers get their blessings? From above or on the earth? Salvation from sins and its dreadful consequences and Divine grace and forgiveness because of the shed and precious blood of Christ is linked with baptism, newness of life and the glory of His appearing with the saints.. all features of the Gospel. Mortify is a somewhat archaic word. It means to put to death and there are the things to be put to death

fornication is voluntary sex with someone you are not married to

uncleanness, that which is morally impure

inordinate affection, unnatural and degrading desire

evil concupiscence, strong and vehement desire

covetousness, the desire for something that is not yours

And these things make up idolatry which is the worship of a physical object as a god or an immoderate attachment or devotion to something.

God's anger will be on these matters performed by the children of disobedience.

In times past the Colossians committed such things when they lived among such people who indulged in these matters.

There are other things that must go

anger, strong displeasure

wrath, strong and vengeful anger and indignation

malice, designed to cause pain, injury and distress to people without legal justification

blasphemy, act of strong contempt and irreverence shown to God or the Lord Jesus

filthy communication out of the mouth, dirty talk, foul language.

The old man before conversion is dead and as Christians we must not lie to each other. You are a new being and being renewed to be in the moral image of the Creator.

There is no division or racism. Whether Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, Barbarian or Scythian bond or free they are all the same to the Lord. It is a disgraceful thing that in politics particularly left wing politics there is antisemitism

Bowels of mercy (verse 12) is somewhat archaic. It means the inmost being. Christians are the elect, the chosen of God, holy and beloved, full of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meek and long suffering. The Lord's people are to be

holy, devoted entirely to the Lord, having a God like quality

beloved, close to the heart

merciful, treating people with respect

kindness, showing courtesy and care

humbleness of mind, not proud or puffed up.

humility is not underestimating yourself, it's forgetting yourself.

meek, enduring injury with patience and without resentment

long suffering, very patient in difficult times without complaining.

We have to forbear with each other and forgive others. If you have a quarrel, forgive the other party just as the Lord forgave you. And above all put on charity, that means love, which is the bond and means of perfection. To forbear is to be at a distance and endure certain things.

What should rule in the hearts of Christians is peace which is the result of being in the body of Christ for which believers should be thankful.

The words of Christ is to dwell richly in Christians and they are to be wise teaching and admonishing as necessary each other with singing psalms and spiritual songs with grace in you heart. This is the ministry of encouragement.

What ever Christians do or say it is to be in the Name of the Lord Jesus and giving God the thanks though His son. No work or service for the Lord should be half hearted or a mere token. What is done for the Lord should be with all one's might and dedication.

The final verses deal with relationships. A wife is to submit herself to her husband and a husband must truly love his wife. The word submit will not be popular today but it means to be subject to him since he is responsible for her. 1 Timothy 3.11 reminds us that a wife should always be sober, serious, not a slanderer or gossip, and faithful in all things but, in common parlance, she is not to be a doormat. The husband must never be bitter towards his wife and children must obey their parents for that pleases God. Fathers are not to wind up their children and cause them distress for that may discourage them.

Compare this with Ephesians 5.22 to 6.7

Servants, be obedient to your masters not as men pleasers but in singleness of heart and therefore please God. Whatever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord and not to men. The Lord will reward you for faithful service but whoever does wrong shall receive for the wrong he has done.

Chapter FOUR

Paul continues with the matter of masters giving their servants their due reminding them that they have a Master in heaven.

The Colossians are to continue in prayer with thanksgiving and with a prayer for Paul that he may be given opportunities to preach the mystery of the Gospel but Paul reminds them of his bonds and that if he is speak that God would give him what to say.

Some good advice follows to this new church and it is to be addressed to those outside of Christ that any approach to the outsiders should be profitable and not a waste of time. Speech must always be with grace and 'seasoned with salt ' and the believers may know how to answer every man.

The apostle then speaks about his companions in Rome.

Paul is going to send Tychius to the Colossians with news of himself and he will return to Rome with news of the Christians at Colossae. Paul speaks well of Tychius, a fellow servant and brother who will bring comfort to this new church. Onesimus is a faithful and beloved brother who is one of you at Colossae and he too will make known the situation Paul has in Rome

Another prisoner in Rome is Aristarchus who sends his greetings to you as does Marcus, Barnabas's sister's son and there is Jesus called Justus a circumcised Jew These were Paul's fellow labourers and a comfort to him. There is also Epaphras, who is one of you and is a fellow worker and he is also praying for you that you may be complete in Christ and perfect. He has a great regard for you and those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Paul says that the beloved Luke, the doctor, is with him, as is Demas who was later to forsake Paul loving the present world. Paul requests that greetings be conveyed to Laodicea and Nypmas and the

church in his house. When the epistle is read, says Paul, make sure it is read in the church at Laodicea and with the letter I have written to them

The epistle to Laodicea is lost.

Paul's message to Archippus is that he takes care in this ministry received from the Lord that he fulfills it

This letter is in Paul's hand and he says, Remember my bonds and leaves grace with them.

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