

General Study Of Colossians – Part 1

Colossae was a relatively small city in the Lycus valley.

Situated about 100 miles east of Ephesus and was grouped with the other cities, Laodicea and Herapolis, both of which were more flourishing than Colossae.

In all three centres Christian churches had been established, [Colossians 4:13]. It would appear that Paul had **not** personally visited them, [Colossians 1:4; Colossians 2:1].

Paul mentions Epaphras as one from whom the Colossians had learned Paul's need [Colossians 1:7-8] and it seems reasonable to conjecture that he was the founder of the church at Colossae.

Paul's connection with these Christians is second-hand, yet nonetheless real. As Gentiles Paul regarded them as coming within the sphere of his personal responsibility, and speaks of Epaphras as acting as his representative. There is no definitive knowledge as to what earlier contact Epaphras had with Paul.

Nowhere in this letter does the apostle Paul specifically state the situation which caused him to write the letter, but this may be inferred from the contents with a fair degree of detail.

Epaphras seems to have given Paul a favourable report, [Colossians 1:8] but from various references to some who were trying to persuade the Colossians to pursue devious teachings it appears certain that false teachers of some kind were active in the area, and it was important for the apostle Paul to fortify the Christians against this threat.

Colossians 1:1-2 [New King James] *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

As in most of his letters Paul introduces himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. This is no formal title, but a claim to be a God-given authority, which is supported by the further praise *“by the will of God.”*

This reflects the deep awareness of his high calling, that goes back to the experience of his calling by Jesus Christ, [Acts 22:1-21; Galatians 1:11-18] and taught personally by Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:3-8 [New King James] *“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.”*

Paul follows the usual pattern of giving thanks for his readers, full of spiritual reminders, which were calculated to inspire his readers.

“You have heard before” refers to the knowledge they gained of the Christian hope at the time of their conversion. **This was before they heard any false teaching.**

The twofold description of what they had heard is significant, for it identifies the gospel with *“the word of truth”* and is probably intended to contrast with what the false teachers were saying.

The descriptions of Epaphras, servant and minister, that is bond-slave [Grek *“dōulōs”*] and minister, [Greek *“diakōnōs”*] meaning attendant, aid who is there to serve their master.

Servant and minister were words that Paul delighted to use of himself and wherever possible to use of others.

Colossians 1:9-12 [New King James] *“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.”*

The prayers of Paul are a rewarding study; not only do they tell us much about Paul’s desire for the churches in his care but provide a valuable pattern for the prayer life of a believer, especially as in this example, when we pray for people we have never met.

- 1) That they will understand God’s will for them.
- 2) That they will gain spiritual wisdom and understanding.
- 3) That they will seek to please and honour the Eternal Creator God.
- 4) That they will be fruitful in both their physical and spiritual life.
- 5) Grow in the knowledge of the character of the Eternal God.
- 6) Be filled with the Holy Spirit that is God’s strength within us.
- 7) Learn to be constant in patience and endure all suffering with an attitude of joy because it can bring with it maturity, [**Hebrews 5:7-10; Hebrews 12:1-2**].
- 8) Give thanks to God for all things, physical and spiritual.

Colossians 1:12-14 [New King James] *“giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”*

Paul then gives five benefits that all believes receive from our Eternal Creator God, through Jesus Christ.

- 1) We share the inheritance with Jesus Christ of all things, [**Romans 8:16-17; Revelation 21:7**]
- 2) Rescued us from the darkness of Satan’s deception and domination, [**2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19**] and made us His created children.
- 3) Made us part of God’s Kingdom, His created family who will receive the gift of eternal life, [**Ephesians 1:5**].
- 4) Redeemed us from the penalty of death that our sins have earned, [**Romans 6:23; Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8**].

Colossians 1:15 [New King James] *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.”*

This description of Jesus Christ follows Paul’s reference to *“the son of his love.”* This will indicate an understanding of *“image”* [Greek *“eikōn”*] in the sense of personal relationship.

A parallel scripture comes to mind, **Genesis 1:26-27**. [*“image”* Hebrew *“tselem”* meaning outward form].

Humans were made in the “*image*” of God which relates to our physical nature, therefore it was possible for God to become human.

In this way the invisible becomes visible to other humans.

This is difficult to understand except against the background of the pre-existence of Jesus Christ.

John 1:1-5, 14 [New King James] *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” ... “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

Jesus Christ was the **only** person who could make this transformation, [verse 18].

Colossians 1:15 [NIV] *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.”*

The context makes it clear that “*firstborn*” refers to being supreme over all that He created, not a part of it.

Yet there is a sense that Jesus Christ the Son of God did become a part of what He created and was sovereign over.

Colossians 1:16-17 [New King James] *“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him **and for Him**. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”*

All the physical universe was created by Jesus Christ, including all the spirit beings. Note the words “*and for Him*.”

All of this physical and spiritual universe continue to exist because of Jesus Christ, [verse 17].

Colossians 1:18 [New King James] *“And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence.”*

Paul now deals with Jesus Christ’s relationship with the true Christian Church.

This expression brings out the supreme importance of Jesus Christ to His Church. No member of the body can exist without or at least function without contact to the head.

The figure of the body is also valuable in stressing the oneness of the true Church.

The word translated “*beginning*” [Greek “*archē*”] has a variety of possible meanings. Supremacy in rank, precedence in time or creative initiative, principle or rule. **In view of the following statement that Jesus Christ is “*firstborn from the dead*” precedence in time, seems the best interpretation, since others will rise from the dead, [1 Corinthians 15:20, 50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20:11-13].**

Jesus Christ, in His human form, was raised from the dead and His resurrection proves His Lordship over the material world.

All who have faith and trust in His resurrection will also defeat death and rise again to live eternally with Him.

Colossians 1:19-20 [New King James] *“For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”*

Paul’s thoughts now turn to the idea of a reconciliation to God.

Paul recognises that in spite of what he has said about all things holding together in Jesus Christ, there is considerable disharmony in all creation, both physical and human.

The necessity for this reconciliation is obvious, but the means for the needed reconciliation needs stressing.

“By Him” points to Jesus Christ as the exclusive agent for such reconciling work.

There is no denying that Paul is thinking of the work of Jesus Christ in sacrificial terms. The importance of this for the apostle is evident from the many other occasions when he speaks of the blood of Jesus Christ, [Romans 3:25; Romans 5:9; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Ephesians 1:7].

“Having made peace through the blood of Jesus Christ” sums up the effective meaning of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the removal of all obstacles between creature and Creator, [Isaiah 59:1-4, 7-8].

Colossians 1:21-22 [New King James] *“And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight,”*

Reconciliation involves a change of attitude on the part of the offending party, as stated in these verses. Paul describes the former state of these Colossian Christians in terms of thought as well as deed.

“Body of His flesh” – there was probably a good reason for Paul to express himself in this rather full manner. The word *“flesh”* may be added to distinguish *“body”* from its metaphorical use in **verse 18**.

Colossians 1:23 [New King James] *“if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.”*

Conditions needed for stability in the Church.

A firmness of faith will be evidence of the reality of the reconciliation **not** shifting from the hope that the gospel message of what Jesus Christ has done for all humanity, through His life, death and resurrection.

This faith is a challenge to any false teacher, they cannot break through such faith with their false ideas.

“Preached to every creature under heaven” shows that Paul is dwelling on goals ahead, not just the present condition.

Such a vision for the future of Christ’s Second Coming this time as Ruler of all humanity.

Colossians 1:24-27 [New King James] *“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”*

The hardships that Paul had to endure as a result of preaching the gospel was a reflection of what Jesus Christ endured to make this good news possible for all humanity. A hidden mystery to the Gentiles and an ignored message by the Jews, [**John 1:11-13**].

Colossians 1:28-29 [New King James] *“Him we **preach, warning** every man and **teaching** every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labour, striving **according to His working which works in me mightily.**”*

Paul’s aim was to present every person mature in Jesus Christ.

Three activities are designed to produce this maturity.

1) **Preaching** – of the gospel message of salvation from eternal death through faith in what Jesus Christ has done for all humanity through His life, death and resurrection.

2) **Warning** – all who have been called at this time, [**John 6:44**] against the false teaching of Satan’s ministers, [**2 Corinthians 11:14-15**].

3) **Teaching** – the very words of Jesus Christ, [**James 3:17; 1 Corinthians 1:24; 1 Corinthians 2:6-7; Colossians 3:16**].

Paul makes it clear that he does not rely on his own strength and ability for he recognises that the real source of power is the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the active Holy Spirit in him, [Romans 8:9].

Colossians 2:1 [New King James] *“For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,”*

The words *“for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh”* – should be regarded as including the Laodicean Christians, a Church that is mentioned again in **Revelation 3:14-22**.

Colossians 2:2-3 [New King James] *“that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”*

The apostle ends this section of his letter with a definition of his purpose, again expressed in a deeply spiritual manner. It involves encouragement towards brotherly love.