

## A STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

### Part One

#### Introduction

“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. 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” (**Colossians 1:1-8**).

1. These verses acquaint us with the author of the epistle, the recipients, and some of the reasons why it was written. But before we examine these verses, let us acquaint ourselves with the city of Colosse.



- a. Colosse was a city of Phrygia in Asia Minor; it was about 450 to 500 miles North West from Jerusalem. There is no biblical record of Paul ever going to Colosse and yet he worked for three years with the church at Ephesus which was also located in Asia Minor, which was one hundred miles to the west of Colosse.
- b. The soil in the area was very fertile and suitable for sheep rearing. Colosse experienced great prosperity as a wool and weaving centre. In fact, the garment industry flourished in all three cities – Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. However, by the time the church was founded, Colosse was a small and insignificant town. At some point there had been a change in the road system, and it was this that spelt disaster for trade. But Laodicea and Hierapolis benefited from the change and flourished. The valley in which these three cities were located suffered a devastating earthquake in A.D. 61. Today nothing remains of Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis.
- c. According to Josephus, there was a large settlement of Jews in Phrygia by the end of the third century B.C., or early in the second century B.C. Antiochus III had sent 2000 Jewish families into the region from Mesopotamia and Babylon as military settlers. The evidence suggests that a large population of Jews continued in this region into the first century.
- d. Laodicea was eleven miles south of Colosse. Hierapolis was thirteen miles from Colosse and six miles from Laodicea. Paul, a prisoner in Rome during the years A.D. 60 to 62 wrote the letter to the church in Colosse in A.D. 62.

2. The church at Colosse:

- a. We do not know for certain when the church in Colosse was established; it is not mentioned in the book of Acts. However, Luke does say that among those that came to Jerusalem for Pentecost and heard the apostles preaching were from Phrygia (**Acts 2:10**), which raises the possibility that some were converted at that time and established a church upon their return.
- b. The church was made up mainly of Gentiles but very large Jewish population of the region makes it likely that some Jews also made up the church.
- c. Paul had many good things to say about the church, but, nevertheless, they faced a serious threat: “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (**Colossians 2:8**). This epistle, then, was written primarily as a defence of the faith against this serious threat of the faith of the Colossians.

**Greeting – Verses 1-3**

In order to be an apostle one had to be chosen by the Lord, have witnessed His resurrection, and be baptised in the Holy Spirit. We can see, then, that no man today can qualify to be an apostle.

**I. PAUL’S AUTHORITY AS AN APOSTLE**

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother” (Colossians 1:1).

1. The name Paul means “small” (Thayer), “whereas Saul (his Hebr. name) means “asked for” (CWSD). There is no necessary implication in the name that he was actually a small man.
2. Paul begins by identifying himself as “an apostle of Jesus Christ”. When he addressed congregations that were troubled with error and sin, it was necessary to set forth his authority.
  - a. The word *apostle* means “one sent” (on a mission). Paul professes the fact that he became an apostle of Christ Jesus “by the will of God”. In his epistle to the Galatians he emphasises that he was appointed by Christ Himself and that the gospel he preached came by revelation of Christ (Galatians 1:1, 11-24).
  - b. An apostle was one selected by Jesus to be His ambassador and a witness of His resurrection (Luke 6:12-16; John 15:26-27; Acts 1:21-22; cp. Acts 4:33). Paul was chosen by Jesus after His ascension. Paul’s conversion and appointment is recorded in Acts 9:1-18; 22:1-16; 26:12-18.
  - c. All the apostles were baptised in the Holy Spirit and, through the Spirit, showed many signs and wonders (Acts 2:1-4, 43). It was only through the laying on of the hands of an apostle that another received a miraculous gift of the Spirit (Acts 8:14-18).
3. Paul also includes Timothy in his greeting to the Colossians.
  - a. Timothy was a young man when Paul first met him. Timothy’s family lived in Lystra so he was a Galatian. His father was a Greek, but we don’t know anything about him. Timothy’s mother and grandmother were faithful Jewish women who taught him the Old Testament scriptures (Acts 16:1; 2 Timothy 1:5). When Paul came back to Lystra a couple of years later on his second journey, Paul invited Timothy to travel with him.
  - b. Timothy helped Paul to establish churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (Acts 16:1–17:14). When Paul left Berea to go to Athens he left Timothy and Silas behind, but later sent word for them to join him (Acts 17:13-15). Timothy was sent to Thessalonica to strengthen the faith of believers there (1 Thessalonians 3:1-2).
  - c. Timothy was a trustworthy friend who carried money collected by the Philippian church to care for Paul’s needs in Corinth. During the three years Paul was in Ephesus, Timothy was there, too. When Paul was imprisoned in Rome for two years, Timothy was with him much of the time taking care of his needs. By now, Timothy was a young man of about 30 who had been mentored by Paul for at least 13 years. Paul thought of Timothy, not only as a very faithful friend, but also as his spiritual son.

**II. THE COLOSSIANS’ POSITION IN CHRIST**

“To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse” (Colossians 1:2a).

1. Saints. The word “saints” is used 63 times in reference to Christians; whereas the term “Christian” is only used 3 times (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16), and “disciple” 31 times.
  - a. The word “saints” is from the Greek word *hagios*, which means *set apart, separate, holy*. “Its fundamental idea is separation, consecration, devotion to the service of Deity, sharing in God’s purity and abstaining from earth’s defilement” (CWSD).
  - b. When a person obeys the gospel, he is sanctified, i.e., made holy because his sins have been washed away by the blood of Christ; he has been separated from the world to become a dedicated servant of God.
  - c. While it is true that we have been set apart, it is also true that we ought to increase in sanctification or holiness as we grow and mature spiritually. Hence, we are told to pursue holiness (Hebrews 12:14).

2. Faithful. Paul also addresses the recipients as “faithful brethren”. The term *faithful* is probably meant both objectively, i.e., trustworthy, and subjectively, i.e., trustful. In view of the errors and divisions that were threatening them as a church, they were living faithfully, walking by faith, and were themselves faithful or trustworthy. It is essential to remain faithful unto death (**Revelation 2:10**).
3. Brethren. “Brethren” refers to both males and females in a local congregation. All Christians have been born again into the family of God and are, therefore, brethren or brothers and sisters. This spiritual relationship we have is of far greater value than fleshly relationships.
4. In Christ. Paul also refers to the Christians as those who are “in Christ”. It is essential to understand how one comes to be “in Christ”. Paul says, “For as many of you as were **immersed into Christ** have put on Christ.” Indeed all spiritual blessings are in Christ (**Ephesians 1:3-14**).

### Applications

1. Many challenged Paul’s authority and, indeed, the legitimacy of his apostleship, and he often had to defend it (see **2 Corinthians 10:1-13; Galatians 1:11-24**). Today, too, there are those claiming to be Christians that deny the apostleship of Paul!<sup>1</sup> To deny Paul’s apostleship is to render most of the New Testament redundant! Let ensure we are ready to answer those “Christians” that deny Paul’s apostleship.
2. While the church in Colosse faced a serious threat, Paul had good things to say about these Christians: they were saints, they were faithful, and they were in Christ. Paul did not say these things to simply flatter them or ingratiate himself with them... what he said was true, and so he acknowledges their position in Christ. We, too, ought to be ready to acknowledge what is true about our brethren.
3. The brethren at Colosse were “saints”, which is a term that applies to all Christians. The New Testament nowhere teaches of two classes of saints, i.e., “saints” as it applies to all Christians and “Saints” as it applies to Christians that have been so honored for their extraordinary works.
4. Paul refers to brethren as being “in Christ”, which appears 85 times in the New Testament. Reading through these verses, it becomes clear that one cannot be a Christian and be in possession of any spiritual blessing unless he is “in Christ” (**Ephesians 1:3-14**). The question naturally arises, “How do I get into Christ?” Paul says, “For as many of you as were **immersed into Christ** have put on Christ” (**Galatians 3:27**).
5. Paul says, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (**Colossians 1:2**). Barnes, commenting on the same expression in Romans 1:7, says, “The expression here is equivalent to a prayer that God the Father would bestow grace and peace on the Romans.” What Paul desires for his brethren, even those he had not personally met, reveals the content of his heart. Do we ever pray that God the Father would bestow grace and peace on the brethren we do know? Solomon wrote, “As in water face reflects face, so a man's heart reveals the man” (**Proverbs 27:19**).

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://jesuswordsonly.com/books/478-was-paul-a-true-apostle-of-jesus-christ.html>