

**Paul's Letter to the Colossians**  
**Week 1**  
**Colossians 1:1-20**

**Day One**

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

v. 1 – Paul knew that he was an apostle and felt free to say so. There are some today who are apostles who don't refer to themselves as such and there are those who use the title only because they have a radio program or like the way the title sounds. Then there are some who believe the title apostle only applied to those in the first century who were sent out by Jesus, like Peter and Paul.

The word apostle literally means “one who is dispatched or sent out.” So according to that definition, any person who is dispatched or sent out to build, establish or strengthen a church is on an apostolic mission. Anyone who does this full-time, in my estimation, can legitimately be referred to as an apostle. Now, anyone who is sent out and their only role is to be speak at conferences does not qualify. They are simply professional speakers.

Paul wrote about the life of an apostle in his day. It is not a job description that many would have sought. **After reading this, do you want to be an apostle?**

For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world (1 Corinthians 4:9-13).

v. 2 – Paul was writing to the church at Colosse, a city in Phrygia, which today is Turkey. Paul had not ever visited the church in this region, nor did he founded it. Yet this letter was written while Paul was in prison in Rome to strengthen the church and to address some issues that were causing confusion among the believers there.

Paul opened his letter with a standard greeting; however, it was anything but ordinary. He blessed the church there, wishing them grace and peace from God. I have a list of prayers that I have “lifted” from their biblical context and they are great prayers to pray at any time for any person. I have told people, “If you don't know how to pray for me and you want to pray, pray these prayers!” Paul prayed one such prayer in this verse.

Paul referred to the saints in Colosse as holy and faithful. They were holy – set apart for God through Christ – and faithful – to the head of the Church, Jesus Christ. What a great set of descriptive adjectives to be attributed to anyone – holy and faithful. **Could these words be applied to you? Do you walk in the truth of those words? Do you have the grace and peace of God the Father that Paul bestowed on the brethren? Are you a carrier of grace and peace wherever you go as God’s ambassador?**

## Day Two

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 the saints— 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel 6 that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.

v. 3 – Paul had cause to give thanks to God for the faithful lives of those in this church. What a great testimony! **Is there anyone who is giving thanks to God for the life you are living?** Also, Paul was praying for this church and he had never been there. **For whom are you praying, perhaps even someone or some group you have never encountered?**

v. 4 – Paul specifically noted their faith in Christ and their love for the saints as distinguishing characteristics of this church. Those traits were so significant that people throughout the region were talking about them. A reputation is a good thing if it is positive. People were not gossiping about the church at Colosse, they were simply reporting the facts, and the reports reached Paul’s ears. Paul prayed for the church and then sat down to write them a letter. You can even say that their reputation caught God’s attention, Who then directed His main apostle sit down to write them a Spirit-inspired letter. There are spiritual benefits to having a good name!

A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold (Proverbs 22:1).

v. 5 – This faith and love weren’t simple because the Colossians were nice people. They had had an encounter with God and it changed their lives, with faith and love the result! They were now looking ahead to their heavenly reward and that anticipation impacted their earthly behavior. **Do you look forward to heaven? Are you storing up treasure for yourself there by good deeds here?** You don’t do good deeds to get saved; you do good deeds because you are saved!

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matthew 6:19-20).

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

v. 6 – At that time, the gospel was bearing fruit all over the world, growing and expanding its influence. The gospel is what produced the faith and love in the Colossians' lives. **What effect did the gospel have in your life when you first heard it? Is it still bearing fruit, especially in the areas of love and faith? What more can you do to cooperate with the grace that has come through the gospel? Are you doing the good deeds that you have been assigned? Where have you slacked off in doing those good works?**

### Day Three

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. 9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

vs. 7&8 – It seems like the gospel came to Colosse through a man named Epaphras, who had a relationship with Paul that allowed him to report back on the progress and life of the Colossian church members. Epaphras was ministering on Paul's behalf, so they had some kind of pastoral or apostolic relationship. Paul referred to Epaphras as faithful. There is much to be said for those who are faithful – devoted and dedicated to the work that God has called them to do. I can't think of no higher compliment I can receive than being called "faithful."

I think of what Paul instructed Timothy when I think of what faithful means:

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction (2 Timothy 4:2).

**Are you faithful to perform God's purpose for your life when it's convenient and when it's not? Are you ready to work in season and out of season?** Too many use the excuse, "It's not the right time or season for me to do this or that." It is *always* the right season to do the will of God. **Why would God not want you to learn, grow and prepare for even more fruitfulness as you seek to be productive?** I think many people stop working when they sense the season changes, when it may just be a time of pruning that will lead to more growth.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes[a] so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:1-4).

**Are you being pruned but interpreted it to mean that this wasn't the time for action?**

v. 9 – **What did Paul pray on behalf of the Colossians?** He prayed that they would be filled with the knowledge of God's will in wisdom and understanding. Wow, that's another great prayer. **Who can you pray this prayer for today? How about praying it for yourself?** This verse contains the reason why I have so diligently studied the book of Proverbs – because its goal is to give me wisdom and understanding, which is the goal that Paul had for the Colossians and for all those under his care. **Do you study Proverbs?** If not, would not this be a good day to start.

#### Day Four

10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may 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, and joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you[d] to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

v. 10 – In the following verses, I believe Paul indicated what a life worthy of and pleasing to the Lord would entail. Paul's prayers had purpose – to see God's people effective in a life of purpose and holiness. The first characteristic of pleasing the Lord was to ***bear fruit in every good work***. **What does fruit involve?** Some believe it is internal traits of holiness, such as love, joy, peace and patience. Others believe it is tangible acts of compassion and care, such as visiting hospitals and compassion ministries. I believe it isn't either/or, but rather both. We are to bear fruit that represents holy living along with good deeds that men can see.

The second trait that pleases God is ***growing the knowledge of God***. **Are you growing in your knowledge of God and of some of the basic doctrines of the Christian faith? How are you accomplishing this? By reading? Studying? Classes? Church programs? And how do you know that you are growing in the knowledge of God? What measure can you use that is relevant and not self-deceiving?**

v. 11 – The third practice is ***being strengthened with all power***. **What is the result of this power? Is it to raise the dead and see miracles of healing?** While there would be nothing wrong with those activities, the result of the power that Paul referred to here is great endurance and patience. Yet I don't believe that this patience is to be exercised where doing God's will is concerned, for you are to aggressively seek and then do God's will. This patience is in regards to your own personal comfort, reputation and relationships.

We recently had a funeral in our family and everyone came home for the event. At times it was hard being together, although we love one another and enjoyed our time. Everyone had to overlook slights, ignore things said (or not said) and put aside their personal wishes and desires for the good of the family. My wife woke up one morning

and said, “God reminded me that it’s about the cross; the cross is the only way we can all relate to one another.” Remember what Jesus said:

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:34-35).

v. 12 – The fourth trait that pleases God is *joyfully giving thanks to the Father*. God has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in His kingdom. He provides for us and protects us. We have an inheritance in heaven with all the saints. If you know that and don’t give thanks to God on a regular basis, then you don’t fully understand what God has done for you! Thank You, Lord! If you don’t have joy in abundance, then perhaps you need to meditate on God’s goodness for a bit.

So there you have the four practices that please God: *bear fruit in every good work, growing the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power and joyfully giving thanks to the Father*. **Where do you stand with these four traits? Where can you improve?**

### Day Five

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. 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

v. 13 – God mounted a rescue mission, for you and I were bound and held prisoner in the kingdom of darkness. What’s more, we often didn’t even realize we were prisoners, and actually learned to enjoy our bondage to and the passing pleasures of sin. God didn’t just rescue us and then leave us to fend for ourselves. He transferred our citizenship from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light! That kingdom was founded and is ruled by King Jesus, the Son whom God loves.

There are some who say, “I really wasn’t that bad. I don’t have a dramatic testimony, for I never did drugs or got into trouble.” I would say in response, “Then you don’t understand sin!” You may not have engaged in serious expressions of sin simply because you were afraid or didn’t have the opportunity, but sin was lurking at your door, waiting to pounce. If you are honest, you will admit that you were a slave to selfishness if not to overt sin. That is just as serious as any public and dramatic expression of sin.

Notice that Paul referred to “us” and not just ‘you.’ Paul realized that he also had been a captive, even though he was a Jew of impeccable credentials. His religious zeal was not able to save him from himself or his sins. God had to do that and Paul then traveled to offer the same help to other bound people. **Are you offering the same transaction that God gave you to others? Do you see the need for all men to repent and come to the knowledge of the truth? Do you see that you have been forgiven much, even if you**

**never committed what you consider a “serious” sin? Do you realize that God did not have to give you a second chance after your very first sin?**

Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little” (Luke 7:47).

**Do you love much realizing that you have been forgiven much?**

v. 14 – It is in Jesus that we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins. All Paul’s epistles focus on Jesus. In Philippians, Paul mentioned Jesus’ name eleven times in the first eighteen verses! It wasn’t about Paul’s ministry or his favorite topics when he wrote; it was always about Jesus. Jesus was supreme and central in all Paul’s work and ministry. **Is that true of you as well?** I realized many years ago that I had preached whole sermons and never mentioned or lifted up the name of Jesus! I have attempted, with God’s help, to correct that shortcoming.

There is only one means through which mankind can have sins forgiven and that is through the name of Jesus! So anyone who realizes that he or she is a sinner has only one course to God and that is through Jesus. This is why it is so urgent that we proclaim the good news, for there is no other name under heaven by which men can be saved. **Are you doing all you can to proclaim and to help others proclaim the name of Jesus?**

v. 15 – Paul then began a wonderful explanation of Jesus supremacy in all creation. Paul wrote that Jesus is the image of God. When a disciple asked Jesus how they could see the Father, Jesus responded,

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?'" (John 14:9).

Jesus is also the firstborn over all creation. That means that any and all of creation that is redeemed and born again has Jesus to thank, for He was the One who was born so that creation could be redeemed. This does not imply, however, that Jesus was a created being, for He is the One by which all creation came into being.

"The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began. When there were no oceans, I was given birth, when there were no springs abounding with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, before he made the earth or its fields or any of the dust of the world. I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind (Proverbs 8:22-31).

## Day Six

16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by 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.

v. 16 – Paul identified Jesus as the Creator of all things and indicated that all things were created for Him. I suppose that is what it means that He is all in all. If this doesn't testify to the divinity of Jesus and His equality with God, I don't know what does. As I write this, we had just finished the study in Matthew a few weeks ago. There we saw that some people responded to Jesus with worship and He did not prevent them from so doing. That means He knew who He was and that He was worthy of worship.

Also, Jesus is supreme to any spiritual being and Paul listed four here: thrones, powers, rulers and authorities. While this points to some kind of heavenly hierarchy among spiritual beings, it would be foolish for us to spend any time trying to figure out what that hierarchy actually is. It is sufficient that Jesus is superior to them all!

What's more, the Father gave Jesus all authority (see Matthew 28:19-20). So Christ is indeed all in all and the ultimate focus for the Church named for Him. It is irreverent and idolatrous to attribute to any other being or god the majesty and honor due Him and Him alone. **Are you single-minded in your worship of Jesus? Is He central to all that you do?** Don't just say "yes" because you know it's the right answer. Make sure you are both saying and living it consistently.

v. 17 – I watched the other day as churches around the U.S. applauded the president elect of the United States. I don't think Paul would have done something like that. He was too consumed with the supremacy of Jesus, as indicated in these verses. Paul was eloquent and articulate in his description of Jesus. There must have been some confusion or controversy in the Colossian church over the position and authority of Jesus and Paul was addressing this issue in the beginning of his epistle.

Paul was also careful to address the fact that Jesus was pre-existent to creation. There was never a time when Jesus "was not." Some heresies over the centuries insisted that Jesus was a created being, who had a definite beginning. They were and are wrong. Jesus has the power to be our Redeemer because He is the Creator of all things. Anyone powerful enough to create what we see is also powerful enough to set the captives free! Hey, that rhymes!

v. 18 – Jesus is also Head of the Church, where He is the firstborn among the dead. There is too much emphasis, in my opinion, on the men and some women who are heads of the Church today. Jesus is the Head, Supreme Ruler and Chief Shepherd. We should honor Him as such and do nothing to distort that Headship. There was a time when I

gave more honor to my leaders than to my God. That will never happen again. Forgive me, Lord!

### Day Seven

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.

v. 19 – There is nothing lacking in Jesus or His role as a mediator between God and man. In Him, all fullness dwells. **How much is all?** Why it's all, everything, totality! How can there be any power to save, heal or deliver in anyone else, when it is *all* in Jesus. There were other gods in Colosse when Paul wrote this, so if there were other ways to God at that time, Paul would or could have told us. Yet Paul is firm and clear in his perspective, inspired by the Spirit, that everything man needs, everything that God is, is in Jesus Christ.

This is so critical for today's world, since many are convinced that sincerity is good enough in serving and seeking God. Modern man also believes that there are many ways to God, with Jesus being one way. Jesus Himself, however, refuted this claim when He said;

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

That statement plus Paul's writings clearly show that there are no other options to God. Jesus is the one way. **Does this offend you or your modern sensitivities?** *Lord, help us to find ways to declare your majesty and supremacy to a world that doesn't want to hear that and grant us the help of Your Spirit as we do.*

v. 20 – God was pleased to reconcile mankind to Himself through Christ. It wasn't a duty; it was a joy for Him to do so. God is not nearly as angry as some portray Him to be. His wrath was appeased through the sacrifice of His Son and now the way to God is clear for any and every sinner.

I am sure I don't appreciate what it means to be reconciled to God, since I don't really have a proper perspective on my sin and how God views it. I don't want to take God's grace for granted, however, so I want to confess my sins but not wallow in them. I want to be sin-conscious only to the extent that it helps me receive and appreciate God's grace.

**How often do you come and apply the blood of Jesus to your life by confessing your sins and shortcomings to God? Do you appreciate God's grace that was made available through Jesus' death?**

Notice also that Paul said the cross brought peace between God and heavenly things. Some have taken this to mean that fallen angels somehow benefited from Christ's death.

That is a position that is impossible to prove or maintain. It is true, however, that there were cosmic ramifications to Jesus' death; something shifted not just on earth but also in heaven when Christ died for our sins. All creation was the beneficiary of that act! Thank you, Lord!