

Colossians 1:1-12

Intro: Colossae was one of three cities in the Lycus Valley, an area highly prone to earthquakes. The Lycus River was rich in chalk like our Supai River, resulting in beautiful, mysterious cascades. Laodicea and Hierapolis were in the same valley but were much larger and very wealthy. The valley was known for its fertile sheep pastures and the wool, dye industry, and medicinal hot springs. One particular dye was even called Colossae. Colossae guarded the gateway to the Cadmus mountain range. Herodotus called her a great city of Phrygia, but by the time Paul wrote, it was becoming insignificant. Lightfoot noted that it was one of the least significant cities that Paul addressed. The ruins of the other two cities are clearly visible, but the exact location of Colosae is not even known.

The Colossians had never met Paul, but it was probably evangelized under his direction while he was in Ephesus, 100 miles away. (Acts 19:10) Epaphras was probably the first elder among equals in the Colossae church. Though the valley had many Jewish residents (some estimate as high as 50,000) the church was mostly Gentile. (1:21) Epaphras had brought good news to Paul about the spiritual condition of the Church, but there was also a heresy brewing.

We don't know exactly what it was as we only have clues in the letter from the things Paul emphasized. He focused on the supremacy and total adequacy of Christ, Christ as the instrument of creation, Christ's deity and humanity. He speaks against the "rudiments of the world" which may also be related to an inordinate emphasis on demonic spirits, as if they thought they needed something more than Jesus to be free from them. It had to do with some kind of philosophical deceit. (2:8) The heresy also emphasized special holy days (revived lately in Sedona) and dietary laws perhaps as a way to be free from the evil spirits but at the same time made light of sexual sin. (3:5-8) It had something to do with the worship of angels as intermediaries between man and God, and had an element of pride. That is addressed by Paul's repeated use of "every man". (1:28) Many of those elements appear in Gnosticism, but there are also elements of Judaism. It sounds like a hybrid of the two, or perhaps both separately influencing the believers in Colossae.

Many critical scholars reject Paul as the author. Their main reasons are as follows: There are words and phrases not in his other letters. Gnosticism as a belief system developed after Paul's lifetime. The deity of Christ is clearly emphasized, something those scholars do not believe came into being until some time later.

All of those issues can be answered by the simple fact the basic gnostic ideas were deeply engrained in Greek culture. Paul was addressing a unique situation which would necessitate unique vocabulary. Though the deity of Christ is stated clearly and boldly, it is alluded to in many other Biblical passages written at the time. (1Corinthians 8:6) The need to state it so clearly was because of the challenge in Greek thought that material things are evil and therefore Jesus could not be human and be God. I have no doubt it was written by Paul to the little town of Colossae to stop some major heresies that could have taken Christianity in Asia in devastating direction.

1 Doctrine, even in the address! Paul has not met them but as an Apostle (and that is by the will of God and not man!) he has the authority as God's official ambassador to instruct.

He who walks in aloofness can never be a real servant of Jesus Christ. — Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)

The early letters addressed the church of a city whereas the latter (Romans, Philippians, Ephesians and this letter) are addressed to God's dedicated people.

In Christ first and in a worldly sphere of influence second!

2 Brothers/siblings *adelphoi*

3 -8 The two great attributes of believers, faith and love, when seen, cause us to give thanks that God is at work in the hearts of men. Faith, hope, and love are a recurring theme in Paul's letters, especially to the Thessalonians. 1Thess 5:8 "Faith inspires service, love energizes it, hope perpetuates it." Interpreter's Bible, Volume 11.

Love is a fruit of faith. In other words, love identifies real believers. Galatians 5:6 Laid up for you *apokeimai* – a storage receipt

In all the world – universally the same; everywhere it is spread it produces godly fruit and grows.

Fellow servant *eundolos* – a fellow bondservant/slave of Jesus.

Barclay on vs 2-8: The Gospel is: The good news of God, vs 5 truth, vs 6 universal, productive, tells of grace, vs 7 and is humanly transmitted.

9 This is the key verse of the passage: Paul's team prays they will be able to discern and know the will of God -the spiritual wisdom and understanding to see the ways of God. This is the greatest need of most churches.

spiritual wisdom/sophia - capacity to understand the first principles.

spiritual understanding/synesis - forming sound judgment under another's guidance recognizing the good. 2Chron 1:10ff; James 3:13-17 Notice his prayers aren't like our usual prayers, for health, problems, employment, etc. but for the overarching spiritual need in the church.

10 The goal of that knowledge, wisdom, and understanding is to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord – fully pleasing Him, bearing fruit, and increasing (like a healthy vine) in the knowledge of God.

Here is that balance of works and knowledge - we should never lean completely one way or the other. Knowledge should inspire us to godly works. Godly works should accompany spiritual hunger to know more.

11 Paul prays we are strengthened according to God's glorious might (not human effort) to have: endurance -*hupomone* - while bearing things turning them into glory - being triumphant in the circumstances James 5:7-11

patience - *makrothumia* - not letting people drive you to bitterness or despair or even irritation. Never letting people alter your love. It doesn't lose hope. Our fortitude and patience must be indestructible.

Real Christian joy is rooted in suffering for the believer sees God carry us through all circumstances ever drawing us closer to Him. The most positive attitude toward life! So the Christian prayer is: "Make me, O Lord, victorious over every circumstance; make me patient with every person; and withal give me the joy which no circumstance and no man will ever take from me." Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT).

12 Thankfulness - Psalm 50:23 See the light and dark metaphor in Acts 26:18 - Gentiles are now qualified to share in the inheritance - the promises to Abraham.