

## Colossians 1

### Getting it Right

The book of Colossians is about getting the correct doctrine and then really living it out. It is not about memorizing bible verses and just living them out selectively and casually; as you see fit. To get to that high calling we need to set our hearts on the correct target. It's called holiness because it is different. It is about going deeper in your faith. There is much more that God wants to reveal to us. Our evangelism and discipleship efforts really focus on getting a good foundation. We tend to neglect transformation after salvation. Paul is committed to develop the saints to their God-given potential. That upgrade also results in more service and value to others. We tend to worry about our plans more than how well we can serve others.

The opposing popular culture in Colossae was *Epicurean*. The Epicureans were skeptics about anything that was spiritual. Nothing was considered to be a sin. There are supposedly no ill consequences for bad behavior. *If it feels good, you should do it.* They were all about materialism, and just living in the moment. They believed that death has no sensation; and that there's no heaven, hell or judgement. If going further in the faith involves sacrifice and public service; it conflicts head on with the popular Epicurean beliefs.

**Read Colossians 1:1-4:** Paul begins this letter (epistle) by distinguishing himself from other voices that are attempting to provide direction to the church. That era and culture had various self-appointed *experts* and *spokesmen* from all kinds of opinions pushing various religious causes. It is not unlike our social media; with ignorant people desiring recognition. They should not have an opportunity to address the masses, get so much *microphone time*. There seemed to be a flood of tolerated philosophical nonsense and make-believe religions popping up.

Paul begins by reminding them that he is a *certified apostle of Christ*. That means that he saw Jesus, and that he was appointed by God to give the genuine message. In other words, this is not Paul's idea or his opinion. If people want to argue with a biblical message, their argument should be with God; not with my artistic flare. Our spiritual enemy tries to *dilute* the gospel amidst a flood of *similar-sounding alternatives*. The main goal of the enemy is to keep us from being saved. His second choice is to make us ineffective. A **cult** is a popularized movement that sells its merits for some *common good* or *compelling quality*. There are Christian-like groups who have many followers, using some *Christian* values as their point of departure. These are *intellectually dishonest* attempts to appeal to our sensibilities to do things men's way. The **occult** is outrightly demonic, and unapologetically so. Both cults and the occult are pure poison to the mind. One sells *a different Jesus*; and the other *marginalizes Jesus*.

False teachers can have differing motivations. For some, it is just a quest for recognition and personal glory. They want to be in charge or to be an authority on a matter. For others, it is a financial opportunity to use commonality to bypass *normal checks and balances*. Still others may be bandwagon enthusiasts who are sincere but misguided. Regardless of their motivation,

all of these false narratives were really messing up the churches. Paul's letters were filled with teachings and beliefs in need of repair or replacement.

## Engaging Two Cultures

Paul begins with *the positives* in his letters, to engage and encourage the listener. He gives a report card of good points, as well as things to work on. He commends their faith in Christ and their love for their brothers.

The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew. The New Testament was written in Greek. Paul respectfully addresses both Hebrew and Gentile audiences. Paul begins his letters to the various churches with the same greeting: "*Grace and Peace*".

Grace (G5485 /charis) is the common public greeting among the Greeks and Gentiles. It is a gesture that you are wishing and extending delight, goodwill, and strengthening towards someone. Grace (a bonus) is getting more than we deserve.

Peace (G1515 / eirene) is the Greek translation of a common Hebrew public greeting. It is based on the Hebrew word *shalom*. The Hebrews greet each other by saying shalom. That Greek word means tranquility, exemption from rage, harmony and to be in a blessed state. Peace ultimately only comes from salvation.

## Prayer Support

Paul was consumed with all of these churches. They all had a lot of problems. It must have seemed to him like they were all broken and in disrepair. The church at Colossae would have been one of the healthier churches.

There were doctrinal challenges going on constantly. There was also harassment and martyrdom taking place. There were out-of-bounds behaviors, that were consistent with local traditions. This all required a lot of prayer time for Paul, just to even address these things.

*...besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:28)*

We wonder why Paul was in jail. One reason is to create the *necessity of these letters* to be written. Without Paul's incarceration, we would have no New Testament. These were hand-carried letters. We also can see how Paul was forced to *raise up spiritual brothers* and sons to deliver and enforce these messages. Another possible contributing reason for prison and isolation is that there was just a lot of stuff *to pray about*. Most of Paul's work was on his knees. Praying for Paul's churches could have been a full-time job. Perhaps if Paul had the freedom for more hands on work, the prayer time availability would have diminished. Besides this, it showed Paul and the church that God was the one building his church. Paul was essentially helpless.

*"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)*

**Read Colossians 1:5-8:** Having a sweet spirit happens organically in us by the Holy Spirit. It is a *change of heart* and emerging *better desires* and more wholesome pleasures. The Colossian church has their hopes and aspirations based on the heavenly promises found in God's word and its promises. Having this expectation of blessings is important. We will migrate towards our deep convictions and hopes. That is one reason that false doctrine (lost hope) is so harmful. This hope of heaven produces blessings in our lives.

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-25)*

These character traits are not based on logic or a cost/benefit analysis. They *well up* naturally as God's Spirit moves in us and transforms us. A Christian will yield something personally beneficial to keep from disappointing the Holy Spirit. We act more loving because God's heart and thoughts are put within us. If God is our main reward; the sacrifices to follow him will seem less significant.

We should want to become better decision makers as we mature. It is hard to see around the corner into the future. Life has so many twists and turns. Putting our lives in God's hands is the only way to navigate the unknowable future. God wants us to have supernatural wisdom and be supernaturally helpful to our neighbor.

*Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (James 3:13-18)*

Let's look at the other side of this concept. What if I am a sincere believer who is trying to be a good soldier. Let's say that I am carrying anxiety, and I have a lot on my mind, that has nothing to do with the Kingdom. How do I magically increase my desire to *bless my brothers* in Christ? How do I start caring more about the welfare of my fellow man? Religious duty and traditional expectations can certainly create the pressure to do the right thing. But what if I am not feeling it? Love is not necessarily going to include desirable feelings. Paul wrestled with the two forces that were pulling him apart. The truth of the matter is that we cannot want to be good Christians badly enough to walk according to our heavenly calling. It is like forcing yourself to eat a casserole that you hate and pretending to like it. You might be gracious, but

this is not how God works. God is going to have to do it for us. He is going to have to give us *another heart* and *another mind* and new taste buds that enjoy and thrive on being loving and godlier. We just have to come near and obey God to be transformed.

*I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. (Romans 7:21-25)*

*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:1-8)*

Where am I failing if *I want to walk in the Spirit*; but my mind is obsessing over daily issues and pressures? You cannot just make yourself stop. We were built to get out of high-pressure situations. Stress moves us to forced prayer and action, but it is not healthy.

*Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression (Proverbs 12:25)*

*For a dream comes through much activity, (Ecclesiastes 5: 3)*

The answer is to fill our minds with something else. Read your Bible before you open today's e-mails. Once you open that door you will have competing thoughts. Involve yourself directly in Kingdom activities and fill your mind with what is wholesome, and there won't be so much competition for contrary thoughts. The Kingdom is *caught* as much as it is *taught*.

*I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Galatians 5:16-18)*

**Read Colossians 1:9-14:** The Colossians had a solid start. They were known to be fruitful. Now Paul wants them to grow even more.

Let's talk about what spiritual growth is, and what it is not. The Pharisees and religious leaders had redefined the Bible with their *Mishna* (their manmade laws). The word Pharisee means *one*

*who is set apart.* The Mishna was *a manmade fence* that they built around the bible; so that nobody would accidentally break the biblical Law. Unfortunately, when you add anything to God's word it brings a curse. Jesus always said: *You have heard...but I tell you...* because he was telling them that the Mishna was what was discussed in the synagogue more than scripture. The religious leaders were anxious to qualify as righteous, while not being considered violators of the Law. They missed God's intentions altogether. The result was that they developed a system where they were considered righteous; but nobody else was. God *wants* everybody to become righteous. He takes no pleasure in punishing the wicked.

*But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice. ' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. " (Matthew 9:13)*

Some Pharisees spoke about all they had done. They measured growth in observable goals and objectives—fasting twice a week and giving tithes of all he received. We can do this too. We emphasize the number of times we completed “quiet times” this week, the number of times we passed Christian literature to others, or how often we shared the gospel. We can fall into the *performance trap*, thinking that spiritual growth and discipleship look like good performance and success. When this happens our sense of growth and worth become wrongly tied up with our “stats.”

Another thing that often misguides Christians when it comes to growth is the tendency to judge our well-being by comparing ourselves to others.

To the contrary, Paul emphasizes the knowledge of God's will, not just the memorization of God's word. The Pharisees and Joseph Stalin and the devil have memorized God's word. God's word is a means to an end. It is designed to lead us to God's fellowship and presence.

*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. (John 5:39-40)*

Paul states that the knowledge of God should add to our spiritual understanding. This enlightenment and bible memorization is not an end unto itself. It is supposed to show us how to walk with Him and please him. Getting close and personal with God rubs off on us. We will begin to reflect a little of his nature. That is where fruit is produced. It is not about us trying to *create evidence* of our salvation.

*Can two walk together, unless they are agreed? (Amos 3: 3)*

A big developmental tool that God uses is patience. Sacrifice and not obtaining immediate satisfaction forces us to reprioritize. We will have to pitch some things that we had our hearts set on. There is no commitment or love required to take the easy choices that offer immediate satisfaction. Paul speaks of *being qualified to be a partaker*. The difference between a dead-looking seed and a fruitful tree is the seed needs to be buried in its *little grave* first. The old ways have to be pushed out of the way; so that a better way of life can emerge.

**Read Colossians 1:15-18:** This is a portrait of Christ. He is the visible aspect to an invisible God. He is the exact likeness.

*And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1: 3)*

*yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. (1 Corinthians 8:6)*

He is the highest ranking over all creation. Jesus is the creator of all things, (except the Father). Jesus made the universe and everything in it. He made the devil and his demons.

*there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way. And suddenly they cried out, saying, “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?” (Matthew 8:28-29)*

He made the angels. Not only is Jesus the creator, but he is also the sustainer. He keeps the atoms from colliding or wandering away.

Jesus is the head of the church; and the first one to rise from the dead. He is above all things physical and spiritual.

**Read Colossians 1:19-29:** We started our lives as enemies of God. Our thinking is the opposite of what is godly. Spiritual transformation is a massive *sea change* for our minds. Many believers never really make that change. Paul is identifying his own lacking feature. He says that he needs to suffer more to ripen and be transformed more fully as well. The more he was attacked and rejected by the Jews, the more he learned about the church and Gentile salvation.