

Studies in Colossians: Lesson One

Introduction and Chapter 1

I. Introductory Information

A. Background on the Church

1. Paul's letter to the brethren here is different from some of his other epistles, in that like the letter to the Romans, Paul did not play a role in establishing this congregation: In fact, it would appear from chapter 2:1 that Paul had not met the brethren there at all, including them with groups of Christians who has never seen his face:
2. Paul did have a strong connection with the worker who did establish the congregation, a fellow laborer named **Epaphras**:
 - a) **Epaphras** is identified in chapter 1:7 as being the one who taught the gospel to the brethren there. At the time of this letter's writing, Paul was a prisoner in Rome. There was some occasion for Epaphras to visit with Paul in Rome, at which point he was able to share with him the details of the congregation there, as well as perhaps ask Paul for advice in combatting error that was troubling the brethren there, as it had in many other churches.
 - b) In response to this, Paul writes a letter to the brethren there, and delivered it by fellow workers Tychicus and Onesimus, mentioned in chapter 4:7-9. These are the same workers who brought the letter to the church at Ephesus (Eph. 6:21-22) and most likely these two letters were written and sent out at the same time. **In fact, they are almost** like companion Epistles; they share many of the same points, and reading them side by side can help illustrate certain teachings found in each letter.

B. Paul's Ministry at the Time:

1. So why not send the letter with Epaphras?
 - a) Epaphras we learn elsewhere (**Philemon v 23**) was among those companions of Paul who became his fellow prisoners: In fact, One will notice throughout the book that there was an entire support team that had made its way to Paul; and although they did not help in the actual writing of the letter; many of the

wishes and prayers expressed for the brethren there come from all of these fellow workers:

b) Aside from Timothy who is mentioned in verse 1, Epaphras, and Tychicus and Onesimus the letter bearers, These are mentioned:

(1) Aristarchus is mentioned in **4:10** as a fellow prisoner, we had previously seen him accompanying Paul in **Acts 27** as he left for Rome

(2) Mark, the same one that Barnabas and Paul has gone their separate ways over is also mentioned in chapter 4; He is once again working with Paul and may even be sent to encourage and work among the Colossian brethren:

(3) Jesus who is called Justus as well as Demas are both mentioned in chapter 4:

C. Occasion for Writing:

1. As stated, Epaphras would have had opportunity to discuss with Paul what was going on with the brethren there, and much of the discussion in the book will sound somewhat familiar:

2. The main reason for writing seems to have been to deal with troublesome teachings about Jesus: Some of the statements in chapter two certainly make it seem like this is more of the same false teaching from some of the Jews, but they are not spelled out as specifically as they are in other places:

a) The bottom line of the teachings though had their root in undermining Christ; As with so many false teachings, they revolved around what Christ had done simply wasn't enough; **there was a need to add more** what Paul would call in chapter two as ***Philosophies and Empty Deception***; Things that caused people to become puffed up, and had the appearance of being very wise and religious, but ***were self-made and of no value***:

D. Basic Outline:

1. Chapter One: Christ Has Supplied Every Need

2. Chapter Two: Do Not Be Robbed of Christ's Blessings by Empty Religion

3. Chapters Three and Four: What It Looks Like to be Changed by Christ

II. Content of Chapter 1:

A. Verses 1-8 Paul Expresses His Thanksgiving for the Brethren

1. Paul begins his letter in the same way he does most others: It carries the authority of an Apostle who had been appointed by God, and is written for the benefit of men and women who have been set apart for the service of God:
2. Beginning in verse 3, Paul shares with the brethren there the effect that they had in encouraging both Paul and his fellow workers:
 - a) Paul says that the church at Colossae had become a source of thanksgiving for him for several reasons:
 - (1) **First he mentions their faith:** first and foremost what had established a connection between Paul and these brethren he'd never met, was their common bond of faith in Christ Jesus: Being a part of God's family through Christ creates an instant connection between people regardless of distance or familiarity:
 - (2) **Second,** he was thankful that theirs was an active Faith: Elsewhere we read about faith being expressed through **Love**, and their love for their brethren was alive and well
 - (3) **Third,** their faith and love were rooted in the right place: ***hope that was laid up in heaven***: Contrary to all of the empties and deceit that was offered to them, mentioned in chapter two, Epaphras had seen to it that they were built on a firm foundation
 - (4) **Fourth,** this had been accomplished through their knowledge of the **truth, the Gospel**. This is something of a contrast to what he will describe in chapter two: The Truth, the Gospel, continues to bear fruit everywhere it goes, just as it always has, and just as it always will;
3. **I'm always** humbled when I'm reminded how frequently Paul prayed for, and gave thanks for his brethren: I'm consistently prodded by his example to do much more of this myself:
 - a) I'm also impressed each time I see what it was that caused Paul to be thankful, because it is completely spiritual in nature:

b) By this I simply mean that when I find myself being thankful for others, It might be because I have similar interests and I'm thankful for companionship: I might be thankful that we have members who very intelligent, or brethren who excel in their line of work; ***If I'm not careful I'll tread dangerously close to what James warned about, and my thankfulness for brethren will be based on what I perceive they have to offer:***

(1) Paul's list is relatively simple: **Faith, Love, Hope, and Truth:** If these things are found to abide in brethren, those who people we can be thankful for:

B. Verses 9-14: Paul's Prayer for the Colossians:

1. Now that Paul has expressed his joy over their initial obedience to the gospel, he goes on to pray that they would continue to grow and mature in Christ:

a) Again, we should be impressed by the constant petitions that Paul offered up for these brethren; not ceasing to pray for them:

2. Notice those things that Paul prayers for on behalf of his brethren:

a) First: A Knowledge of His Will, accompanied by Wisdom and Understanding:

(1) When Paul prays for knowledge of God's will, consider that the brethren here have already been taught the fundamentals by Epaphras: They had been baptized and had already begun to demonstrate an active faith:

(2) Paul's prayer it would seem is one for a continued growth: That they would move beyond what are called elsewhere fundamental principles and be filled with knowledge:

(3) Looking at the broader context, that these brethren are being called on to be ready to defend the work of Christ against false philosophies, I get the picture that Paul's prayer is for a mature knowledge, that grows to understand the more difficult aspects of the faith, and gains a broader appreciation for God's plan as a whole:

b) Second, Paul makes it clear that this knowledge has a purpose:

(1) Their increase in understanding is not to elevate self, or to feel more important; but is so that you'll be properly instructed in who you should walk:

(2) To know God's will but refuse to obey is useless: Knowledge is only useful if it results in obedience: And obedience as a Christian results in the bearing of fruit:

(3) This has a result of continuing to increase their knowledge:

(a) It isn't circular arguing; It is self-sustaining: The more you gain a working knowledge of God's will, the more work your hands will find to do: The more time you spend working for the Lord, the more you will learn of His will:

c) *Third, Paul prays for strength... and endurance*

(1) It is also a reminder: God's people are not to rely on their own strength to carry out God's will, but they are to turn to God to provide

(2) In praying for these things, Paul is acknowledging the difficulty of continuing on in building up their faith:

d) *Finally:* their endurance and patience was so that they could continue to give thanks to God for the salvation offered through Jesus Christ:

3. Let me pause again to take note of how impressed we should be by those things that Paul prays for:

a) There are many ways that we mention our brethren: Many of them are physical: we pray for their safe journeys as they travel: We pray for success in physical endeavors; we pray for health; that it would increase or return or continue; And these are all fine; but we shouldn't lose sight of what is most important:

b) Paul's prayer for these brethren was that they would **Increase in knowledge of God's Will**, that they would **continue to do God's will**, that they would be **Granted strength and endurance** and that in all things they would **continue to praise Christ**