

### The Salutation of Paul's Letter to the Church at Colossae

#### Colossians 1:1-2

Colossians 1:1-2 - *"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

#### Background Notes

Verse 1 tells us that Paul is the author of Colossians, and that Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. He didn't become an apostle because he decided he wanted to be an apostle, or because somebody else decided he was an apostle. Paul was an apostle by the sovereign will of God. Think of the great change that took place in the life of this man, Saul of Tarsus! One day he was on the way to Damascus to kill Christians – and the next day he was an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God!

His letter to the Colossians is known as one of the "Prison Epistles." There are four Prison Epistles - Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon, and Colossians. They're called Prison Epistles because they were written during Paul's first Roman imprisonment.

Paul had three "missionary journeys." On the third missionary journey, he came to a city called Ephesus, and there he ministered for a couple of years. Probably the church at Colossae, about a hundred miles east of Ephesus, was established at that time.

Acts 19 gives an account of Paul's time at Ephesus. In Acts 19:9-10 we learn that he taught at a "Bible school" at the lecture hall of Tyrannus: *"And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks."* It was probably at this time that some people from Colossae heard the apostle Paul's teaching, became believers, went home to Colossae and started the church there.

Possibly Philemon was one of those who heard the Word at that time, because the church at Colossae met in Philemon's house (see Philemon 2). Epaphras (mentioned in verse 7 and in Philemon) and others from Colossae may have heard the Word when Paul was preaching in Ephesus, and went back home to be part of the church in Philemon's home.

After his third missionary journey, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and was imprisoned for some time at Caesarea (Acts 23-26). Paul appealed his case before Caesar and was sent to from Caesarea to Rome for his trial. His voyage is covered in Acts 27.

When Paul got to Rome, he was put under house arrest while awaiting his trial. This went on for about two years (see Acts 28). The two years of house arrest became known as Paul's "first Roman imprisonment." It's considered an imprisonment, even though he was in his own rented house, because he was always chained to a Roman guard. However, he was able to have visitors and guests, send his fellow colleagues on missionary journeys, and - write letters! It was from this situation, then, that he wrote the Prison Epistles, including the book of Colossians, some time during the 60s AD.

During this time Epaphras came to visit the apostle Paul, and told him how the church at Colossae was doing (1:3-8). There was good news and bad news. The good news was that the church at Colossae was growing in numbers, in faith, and in love for "all the saints" – love in the Spirit. The bad news is that there was some false teaching around Colossae. It has not yet penetrated the church, but Paul was quite concerned about this.

What was this false teaching? It was a mixture of Judaism and Gnosticism. Some commentaries say it was Jewish Gnosticism; others say it was Gnostic Judaism.

Judaism said that the work of Christ was not sufficient – that believers must also keep the Old Testament Law in order to become a Christian. That was certainly an error!

Gnosticism was a second century heresy, but the seeds of Gnosticism were already around at this time in the 1st century. A lot could be said to describe Gnosticism, but one outstanding feature was that it denied the deity of Christ. Gnostics said that Christ was only an "emanation" from God. In essence, it said that Christ was only a creature.

So it's clear that this mixture of Judaism and Gnosticism watered down the essential core of Christian doctrine – the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. This was the primary concern of the apostle Paul. He did not want the Colossians to be ensnared in any way by this false teaching! Although it had not yet penetrated the church at Colossae, Paul was concerned, and he wanted to see the Colossian believers mature to the point where they would not be vulnerable to this false teaching.

Thus the primary purpose for and great theme of the letter to the Colossians is the **supremacy of Christ** and the **all-sufficiency of Christ**.

## Doctrinal Point

**All Christians are "saints" and "brethren."**

Notice the way Paul addressed the Colossian believers: "*To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colossae.*" Does this mean there were two different categories of Christians at Colossae? No. They were **all** saints and

they were **all** brethren! This is true of us, too, if we're true believers. In relationship to God, we're **saints**. In relationship to each other, we're **brothers and sister** in Christ.

The word "*saint*" comes from the same word as "holy" and "sanctified." So a saint is one who is set apart by God to live a holy life. It's true that some of us don't lead very saintly lives, but by definition, we are saints. You could call me Saint Dave, and maybe if we did address one another as saints, it would motivate us to live more saintly lives! Better yet, think of the Lord addressing us as saints, because He does. That certainly should stir us up and motivate us to be what we are – saints, set apart by God to lead holy lives.

In relation to one another, we're brothers and sisters. We're God's family, so let's treat one another like family members. It's great to see and experience the love and the fellowship here at the church in Chicago where I'm giving this Talk! This is something unbelievers don't know about. Unbelievers can experience friendship, but not the family love that we can experience as believers - because we're brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Notice that the Colossian believers are called "faithful brethren." They were not only brothers and sisters; they were *faithful* brethren – faithful to the Lord and faithful to each other. The fact that they were called "faithful" shows that the false teaching had not yet penetrated the Colossian church. The fact that they're faithful to one another shows that they can be trusted and counted on.

Could that be said of you and me - not just brothers and sisters, but **faithful** brothers and sisters? That we can be counted on, that we will follow up on our responsibilities, that we can share the load of various ministries as we're called on to help with things?

Can we really be called faithful brothers and sisters - or would a little asterisk be placed by your name? Brother, yes, and sister, yes, but not always faithful? All Christians are saints and brethren. Let's live more saintly lives, and let's be more faithful to our family.

## Practical Application

### Let's remember our two spheres of life.

Notice how the Colossian believers were addressed in verse 2: "*brethren in Christ who are in Colossae: Grace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" They are in Christ and they are in Colossae – that's the two spheres. They are in Christ – that's their spiritual position; they're in Colossae – that's their physical location.

As Christians, we also live in these two spheres. We are in Christ – that's the sphere of our spiritual position. We are in Chicago – that's our physical location. God sees us as identified with Christ; we have died with Christ, we have been

raised with Christ, and we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. In Ephesians 1 we even see that we are ascended, seated in heavenly places, with Christ. That's our spiritual position.

But we're also in Chicago (and other specific places here on earth) – and that's our physical location. We have responsibilities here on earth: in our homes, in our communities, and in our churches. We need to keep both spheres in mind.

If we remember that we're in Chicago but forget that we're in Christ, we'll tend to be secularized and worldly Christians. On the other hand, if we remember that we're in Christ, but forget that we're in Chicago, we'll tend to become "so heavenly-minded that we're no earthly good"! We'll be walking around with our heads in the clouds and not aware of our earthly responsibilities. Let's remember our two spheres of life – our spiritual position in Christ and our physical location here on this earth!