



# SERMON NOTES

US N<sup>o</sup>. 132

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Title: Greetings

#1 in the Series on the Letter to the Colossians

## 1. Introduction to Colosse

- a. The epistle to Colossians specializes in theological abstraction, it is difficult to preach and teach because it is the ideas of faith that are at stake, not the actions of faith.
- b. Paul probably never visited Colosse (cf. Col. 2:1) but it was the product of Paul's ministry in Ephesus where he spent 3 years teaching. It is believed that a young man named Epaphras studied with Paul, then returned to Colosse and began the church there. (cf. Col. 1:7; 4:12) It was mostly a Gentile congregation and the text shows that there was a serious threat of false teaching facing the Colossians. This teaching sought to undermine the person and work of Christ and the sufficiency of the salvation believers have in Him.
  - i. Allusion to our work in Benin
- c. Paul wrote the letter during his first Roman imprisonment around 61-62 AD. It appears that Epaphras came to visit Paul in Rome to encourage him and to garner help in combating the false teaching spreading in Colosse. So Paul wrote to counter this false teaching and sent this epistle to the Colossians by the hand of Tychicus (4:7). Meanwhile, Epaphras seems to have stayed with the apostle, perhaps because he was forced to because of his own imprisonment (cf. Philemon 23, Col. 4:12), and for instruction and encouragement from Paul.
- d. The Colossian Heresy and what we know about it:
  - i. It detracted from the person and work of Christ by calling for human works of religion or asceticism.
  - ii. It claimed to be human philosophy based on the traditions of men including a Greek form of dualism that believed all matter was evil and that only pure spirit was good.
  - iii. It contained certain Jewish elements as circumcision, rabbinical traditions, dietary regulations and sabbatical & festival observances.
  - iv. It contained ascetic elements designed to control the flesh.
  - v. It included the worship of angels pointing to a pagan and mystical element.
  - vi. It contained and flaunted an exclusivity of mystery, secrecy, and superiority, the element of knowledge for a few elect through some form of initiation by religious experience or religious rites; foreshadowing full-blown Gnosticism that would later develop.
- e. The first fourteen verses prepare the Colossian believers for the words of warning and the exhortations that will follow.

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

- a. Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.
  - b. Timothy our brother; he may be known to the readers and he is apparently well-known as an important leader of the church's Gentile mission in this part of Asia.
  - c. In Christ... in Colosse... This parallelism is the focal point of the Christian life; those “*in Christ*” are made holy and faithful by divine grace and must live “*in Colosse*” as public agents of divine grace.
    - i. Those who are faithful believers in Christ are also responsible citizens in Colosse, and the two worlds must never be separated.
    - ii. Part of the Colossian conflict is the struggle to connect their life in Christ with their life in Colosse. Religious observance that tends toward moral and spiritual mysticism actually disconnects us from the world around us. Additionally, interest in philosophical speculation has given rise to a Christian devotion that is much too private and esoteric, and largely irrelevant to unbelievers.
  - d. Grace and peace to you...
    - i. *Grace to you* was a common greeting among people living in the Roman world. There is a stark contrast between God's saving grace and the secular forms of salvation offered by the elites of the Roman world; a free gift even to those without social merit or political power.
    - ii. *Peace* is reflected by the prophetic catchword “*shalom*.” The prophets of the Old Testament speak of *shalom* when describing the fulfillment of God's promise to restore all things to their created order: *peace* is the word that summarizes a “new world,” transformed from its fallen state into the form of life intended by the Creator God. God's victory in Christ is celebrated and confessed as a cosmic event: the exalted Christ now mediates God's rule over the natural order as well as over the spiritual order (cf. Col. 1:15-20). As a result, peace is more than a good feeling or mystical experience; it presumes a universal condition, in which all of human life is brought into conformity with the Creator's intentions for all things (cf. Col. 3:5-4:6).
3. Paul’s Prayer – Col. 1:3-14. Verses 3-8 and 9-11 are just two long sentences and his prayer is not “*devotional musings*” detached from the more important main body of the letter. Paul is suggesting that a more thorough knowledge of the gospel they have heard and accepted (cf. Col. 1:7-8) is required to produce a practical Christianity of good works and transformed lives (cf. Col. 1:9-11).
- a. Paul’s thankfulness for the Colossians – Col. 1:3-6 the first triad, “*faith, love and hope*”
    - i. Paul's frequent use of “*Father*” alludes to an Old Testament metaphor for God's covenantal relationship with Israel. Thanksgiving is given to God within the structure of a covenant of mutual fidelity: Him to us and us to Him.
    - ii. “*Faith*” occupies the place of eminence in the Christian life and half of the NT references are found in Paul’s letters. Faith for Paul focuses on a relationship with Christ which nurtures a distinctive religious identity. The believer trusts in the God whose promised salvation is fulfilled in the life of God's people through a sequence of historic events, climaxing with the dying and rising of the Messiah. A community of faith has been cleansed of sin; it is a place, created by divine grace through human faith, where the Spirit reigns and where believers are liberated from the power and consequences of sin.

1. Paul sees salvation as something Christians experience together; to enter the living Christ by faith is to experience intimate fellowship with him and also with other believers (*cf.* 1 Cor. 12; Gal 5:6-11).
- iii. “Love” for Paul love is a transforming act, not an abstraction, a moral principle or an empathetic feeling. Love is faith in motion. Christianity is not the private religion of a particular believer. Rather, every believer is baptized with other believers into Christ, where they worship God together and where God's grace forms them into a community to love one another. The word for love here is “*agape*,” or God’s love.
- iv. “Hope,” the community's shared faith and mutual love result in their common hope for God's coming salvation. The phrase indicates that faith and love are the effective yield of hope: *faith and love . . . spring from hope*. The idea of hope “*stored up in heaven*” points to the tension between a salvation already realized in heaven but not yet fully realized on earth (*cf.* Col. 3:1-4).
1. There is a clear tie between eschatology and present life.
  - a. If we believe that a restored creation only comes at the end of history when Christ returns, then we are likely to view the present order in pessimistic ways and we’re less likely to work for changes within the cultural order today. We are also likely to view salvation as personal rather than public and as spiritual rather than social. Paul's is a balanced perspective.
  - b. On the one hand, he agrees that Christ's work will have its perfect result in the restoration of all things at his future return. On the other hand, Christ's work already is transforming believers into the community of faith and love, and the presence of that transformed community does make a positive difference in the surrounding social order. Paul's emphasis in Colossians, however, is on a “*realized*” rather than “*futuristic*” eschatology.
- v. There is a connection between proclamation and transformation that makes perfect sense where the gospel is bearing fruit and growing.
- b. Paul’s thankfulness for the Epaphras – Col. 1:7-8; serves as a pivotal point of two parallel ideas. Epaphras embodies the model that Paul desires for all his readers, whose predicament is their failure to incarnate their faith in practical, life-transforming forms.
  - i. Epaphras is faith, love and hope in action, his faith in Christ Jesus is embodied in his work as a faithful minister of Christ.
- c. Specific requests of God for the Colossians – Col. 1:9-12
  - i. Second triad, “*endurance, patience and joy*”
  - ii. Paul prays that God would fill them with knowledge so that they may live a life worthy of the Lord. The essence of this “*worthy life*” exemplified by Epaphras which recall the yield of the gospel ministry: bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God.
  - iii. Three specific petitions of God for the Colossians:

- d. Specific thanks to God for the Colossians – Col. 1:12-14. Christian worship is rooted in our singular devotion to God, from whom and to whom our salvation is directed.

4. Take-aways

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