

Colossians 1A

- Background on the letter
 - Written by Paul while in house arrest in Rome
 - To a small community located between Ephesus and Hierapolis
 - It is widely considered to be written to the least important city to which any of Paul's epistles were addressed
 - But the topics of the letter are some of the most important
 - Paul never visited the city himself
 - He did visit nearby Ephesus where he met a man named Epaphras who came to faith under Paul's teaching
 - Epaphrus was from Colossae
 - So when Epaphrus returned to Colossae, he brought the gospel and founded the Colossian church
- Now as Paul sits in Rome awaiting trial, he has time to receive visitors and write letters
 - Apparently, Paul is visited by Epaphrus (or perhaps he receives a letter from him)
 - Epaphrus shares with Paul that the church he was leading was battling against a long list of threats
 - There were false teachers undermining the person and pre-eminence of Christ
 - They were introducing man-made philosophies in place of sound Christian doctrines
 - They were battling increasing legalism from Judaism and other forms of ritualism
 - They were being told to venerate angels
 - The church was being taught by false teachers that they must not eat certain foods or observe certain festivals
 - Do these kind of threats to the integrity of the church sound familiar?

- Some of us may have been in churches that were very legalistic, handing out rules and judgment left and right
 - If so, then this letter was written to you
- We've all heard about the movement in some churches toward a kind of new age self-help appeal where "self" is key to rising above it all
 - This letter was written to us
- So in response to what he hears from Epaphrus, Pauls writes this letter to this small church he's never visited
 - As a side note, Paul sent this letter to Colossae with two travelers: Onesimus and Tychicus
 - You may remember Onesimus (the runaway slave who belonged to Philemon)
 - When Onesimus became a believer while in prison with Paul in Rome, Paul convinced him he should return to his master Philemon
 - To help Onesimus' return go a little easier, Paul sent a letter with Onesimus we call the Letter to Philemon
 - Since Onesimus and Tychicus would need to travel through Ephesus to reach Colossae, Paul took advantage of the opportunity to send them with a letter for Ephesus too
 - So these two men delivered the letters to the Colossians, Philemon and the Ephesians
 - The other letter Paul wrote while in this period of captivity was Philippians
- So Paul has a difficult task here
 - First, he must establish some credibility with this church that has never seen him before
 - Meanwhile, it's under the influence of false teachers who won't like what Paul has to say
 - Secondly, he must contend with serious issues that are weakening the church yet do so without crushing their spirit

- Finally, Paul wants to redirect them toward the basics, the essentials of their faith so that the false teachers can't regroup and re-gain an audience

[Col. 1:1](#) Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
[Col. 1:2](#) To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

[Col. 1:3](#) We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,
[Col. 1:4](#) since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;

[Col. 1:5](#) because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel

[Col. 1:6](#) which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth;

[Col. 1:7](#) just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf,

[Col. 1:8](#) and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

- Those opening verses consist of two sentences, which is why I read to verse 8
 - The opening salutation, which we all know is a common feature in Paul's letters, always fulfills a purpose in Paul's writing
 - His purpose here is given by a couple of clues
 - First, Paul commonly referred to himself as an apostle in his letters, though not always
 - When he did, he was careful to mention that he was appointed an Apostle by Christ
 - Here he says by the will of God

[Gal. 1:1](#) Paul, an **apostle** (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead),

- So what is an apostle?
 - The word means "messenger sent by God"
 - But can just anyone be appointed an apostle?
- Scripturally, what is the definition of who could be an apostle?

- Jesus personally selected them
- But how can Paul be an apostle in light of the fact that Jesus was dead before Paul became a believer?
- Let's point out the difference first between disciple and apostle
 - Disciple means a follower
 - All of us, those who believe in the Gospel, are disciples of Christ
 - An apostle, was a position Christ gave to certain disciples
 - It's a calling out of a larger group to create a smaller sub-group that He gives a special office to
- You can look at it this way: All are disciples, but not all are apostles
 - The apostles were appointed by Christ through a personal moment in His presence
- Yes we know that one among Him was a "devil"
 - But Judas was never a true disciple – he never believed
 - Jesus preserved Judas' as an unbeliever in the group for the purpose of fulfilling a role in His betrayal
- But when looking at the roles of the apostles in the Millennial Kingdom in ruling over the 12 tribes of Israel, 11 apostles and 12 tribes doesn't quite add up
- If you've ever wondered who the 12th apostle was, here's your answer
 - In Acts 1 you hear about Matthias being selected by lot, but he doesn't fit our definition
 - In fact it is Paul (Saul of Tarsus, we learn in Acts 9)
 - The apostle to the Gentiles
 - But people contend his claim because he wasn't there when Christ walked the earth
- So time and time again Paul re-iterates that he was an apostle
 - To gain the church's respect for what he's about to say
- Let's look at the next series of verses

- Paul has a sincere and serious purpose behind these statements
 - (v3) We thank God (father of Jesus Christ)
 - Heard of your faith (in Jesus Christ)
 - Your love for saints
 - Intentional repetition of name and position of Christ
 - (v5) You have a hope for eternal reward
 - You learned of this hope when you heard the gospel
 - Which has come to you (as it has the whole world)
 - Examples of what we have to look forward to in the Millennial Kingdom
- Imagine it's like if you had an old junker car, but knew that in 6 months time upon your Graduation your parents were gifting you with a new car
 - How much car and concern would you give that old junker?
 - I bet you wouldn't even wash it
 - Much less spend unnecessary money on it
- What we are waiting for in our mind is that future vehicle – that's the promise you've been given, and that's the thing you truly want
- Likewise, let's not invest in the things of this world that will burn up anyway
 - Paul continues in the text encouraging them they are not alone in this knowledge
 - (v6) And it is bearing fruit (as in the world)
 - From the day you understood the gospel of grace in truth
 - (v7) And Epaphrus told you the same thing I did
 - He told us of your love in the Spirit

- Do you see what Paul is doing here? The false teachers are probably already starting to squirm a little
 - Up front, Paul begins to emphasize that Jesus is key to everything
 - Jesus is pre-eminent, the Son of God, the object of our faith and the word of truth
 - We'll see Paul go after the false teachers on the issue of Jesus in the rest of the first chapter
 - Then Paul says you have love for one another as you should
 - The theme of caring for one another will re-emerge later as well
 - Paul tells them that their hope lies in an eternal reward located in heaven
 - That's also going to come up again later
 - Then finally, Paul brilliantly builds this pattern of reminding them of what they believed and what positive effect it had in their lives together with the fact that their experience was not unique
 - They believed the same gospel the world believed
 - Which contrasts with the style of false teachers

[Col. 1:9](#) For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

[Col. 1:10](#) so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

[Col. 1:11](#) strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously

[Col. 1:12](#) giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

[Col. 1:13](#) For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,

[Col. 1:14](#) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

- Paul continues on, but now he begins to focus in on his first issue for this church
 - Paul says we, meaning Paul & Timothy, leading some to speculate Timothy might have acted like a ghost writer for Paul

- So, “we” are praying that God would fill them with a knowledge of God’s will and all spiritual wisdom
 - This is apparently what the church sought
 - They wanted spiritual knowledge
 - Influenced by early stages of Gnosticism
 - Gnostics taught you were believed by what you knew
 - Selective, only for certain people
 - We see examples of this in Mormonism and Scientology
 - But they sought knowledge from the wrong places
 - They had false teachers leading them astray
 - Because they sought something new, different, special
 - Today, we see people doing the same thing
 - We see people seeking spiritual wisdom in a million places
 - Oprah and Dr. Phil
 - Chicken Soup for the Soul
 - Even Christian authors’ best sellers
 - Or a friend
 - These things in themselves are not evil, but as Christians, where should we go first for the wisdom we seek?
 - God’s word!
- The bigger picture isn't to block out any other source of knowledge in the world, but to filter it through the lens of Scripture
 - And to do that requires us to know what is in this book
 - To not know leave us prey to whatever might capture our attention
 - In the movies we see the guy with the black hat and the white hat, and we can easily identify bad guy/good guy

- But if the devil came at us with a tail, horns and pitchfork, essentially revealing himself for who he really was, he'd stand no chance in capturing our attention
 - Instead, he puts the white hat on to deceive us
- So what does Paul to move this church towards?

[Heb. 1:1](#) God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,

[Heb. 1:2](#) in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

- The phrase "spoken to us in His Son" means several things
 - He has spoken through what Christ said
 - In what He did as He lived
 - And in the revelation that Christ has given through the apostles' writings in the New Testament
- He has given us all we need to know in these last days – there is no other source
- Revelation warns that if anyone changes or adds to scripture, they are to be judged harshly
 - Paul is saying that where you want to go for your knowledge is where you got it from – from Christ himself

[Col. 1:10](#) so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

- Paul addresses probably the most commonly discussed principle of the NT for believers
 - He wants to draw a clear connection between knowledge of spiritual matters and the fruit that knowledge produced in terms of their behavior
 - What you know has everything to do with what you do
 - Jesus spoke of this idea of fruit

[Matt. 7:15](#) "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

[Matt. 7:16](#) "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?

[Matt. 7:17](#) "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

[Matt. 7:18](#) "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.

[Matt. 7:19](#) "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

[Matt. 7:20](#) "So then, you will know them by their fruits.

- Here we see a basic principle at work in our lives in two ways...
 - First for discerning false teachers:
 - Get to know them first
 - If what you see in their life doesn't align – listen to their speech, look at their priorities, how they raise their kids, what they do with their time, how they treat their spouse
 - If you don't see fruit reflected in their life, why would you care what they say?
 - The second, which we will cover more next week, is the key if we want to have more fruit in our lives
 - True knowledge of God – Who He is and His will for our lives, as revealed in His Scriptures
 - Like a marriage, if we want it to grow stronger we need to spend time together
 - Similarly, we don't become more Christ-life unless our time in the word is a preeminent part of our week