

Colossians Study 2: Chapter 1

Introduction

In his usual style, Paul begins with an introduction, and then builds a bridge, introducing the answer to the problems in Colosse. There are many similarities between the Ephesian letter and the Colossian letter, and we will notice some of them in this study.

Body of the Study

What are the important things that Paul wants them to know?

Who is the letter addressed to?

Greetings and Salutations

Lightness and Darkness

Christ is the Pinnacle

Christ as the head of the church

Our Reconciliation to God

Paul's Role as a Minister of the Gospel

Homework and preparation for next week:

Read chapter 2 in preparation for next week.

- *What motivated the Colossian's faith and love? And how does their example apply to us, and motivate us? Think about the things that motivate you as a christian? How does the Colossian example help you to focus on God?*
- *What does Paul say is the force behind our growth as a christian? How can we direct and apply that force more effectively in our lives? Think of some specific examples and work on them this week.*

Notes for study 2: Chapter 1

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Body of the Study

What are the important things that Paul wants them to know?

Paul's introduction to the letter is found in 1:1-20. The main part of the letter begins in 1:21 "*...Now you who one were alienated from God...*"

As an exercise, highlight the key words in the introduction section, and then look to see if you can find the same key words also in the conclusion of the letter. Draw a line linking the key thoughts / words together.

What does this tell you about the things Paul is going to say in the letter?

Some of the key things that we find are:

Paul and Timothy write to the faithful brethren at Colosse (1:1-2). Paul does not know most of them personally, although he has heard of their faith in Christ (1:3). The gospel has been bearing fruit amongst them (1:6) and Paul wants it to continue (1:10). But for this to happen, they need to focus their minds in Christ, and live a life that is worthy of Him (1:10). Christ is the pre-eminent being (1:18) and has the fullness of God (1:19). We have been reconciled back to God through Him (1:20). Paul is encouraged by all of the news that he hears about them (1:9) and he wants them to be encouraged by knowing the things that are happening to him (4:8).

In the introduction, Paul discusses *faith* and *faithfulness* a great deal. In fact, he mentions it 5 times in the first chapter. However, it is mentioned only another 6 times in the rest of the book (3 times in chapter 2, and 3 times in chapter 4).

By contrast, he discusses our relationship of being "in Christ" a total of 66 times! (27 in chapter 1, 18 in chapter 2, 17 in chapter 3, and 4 in chapter 4). This gives us a great insight into Paul's motivation in writing the letter, particularly in light of the so-called Colossian Syncretism. The antidote to the problem is to remain *in Christ*.

In the Ephesian letter (which very much parallels the Colossian letter) Paul mentions being "in Christ" 27 times. There the letter is a call to faithfulness on the part of the Ephesian brethren.

Who is the letter addressed to?

The church probably didn't have elders and deacons, since Paul does not address them in his greetings. Apart from the things written in the Colossian letter, we know nothing about the church, which was established around 20 years after Christ's death, and had been in existence for around 7 years when Paul wrote the letter (assuming that the church was planted during the time of Paul's ministry in Ephesus)..

The letter is also intended to be read by the neighbouring congregation in Laodicea (4:16), and presumably also the one in Hierapolis (4:13).

Greetings and Salutations

In Paul's typical style, he begins the letter with the usual greetings and salutations. Despite not having visited Colosse, he has a great love for them, and he is "...always praying for you..." (1:3), and has always done so "...since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus..." (1:4 NKJV). Sometimes, people become Christians and then become self-centred. But, the Colossians were also focussed on others and had a "...love for all the saints..." (1:4 NKJV).

Paul begins a very long sentence in verse 3, that goes right through verse 8: "...We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints-- ⁵the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel⁶ that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. ⁷You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸and who also told us of your love in the Spirit..." (1:3-8 NIV).

In essence he says:

- We are thankful for your faith
- You have a hope laid up in heaven
- It has born fruit amongst you, just as it has in all the world
- You learned it from Epaphras
- I have learned about you from him.

Paul (in his usual style) gets right down to the point – we have a hope laid up in heaven – and we learned about that hope from the truth of the gospel. He will later draw on this principle when he considers the problem of the Colossian church trying to merge – to blend in – other doctrines into the gospel. They had started out with the pure gospel of Christ, but had perverted it. As a consequence they had abandoned their hope of salvation in heaven. Paul emphasises "...the truth of the gospel..." (1:5) and "...the grace of God in truth..." (1:6).

Consequently, Paul continually prays for them "...that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding..." (1:9 NKJV). If their understanding of the God's will was true, then they would not even contemplate trying to water down the gospel. They needed to grow spiritually so that they "...may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God..." (1:10 NIV). He describes our relationship with God as *a walk*. It is not standing still, but one of progression. We cannot stand still in our christian lives. We must continually grow and go to further and further depths in our relationship with Him. Only then can we be "...fully pleasing to God..." (1:10). But just because *we are going somewhere* doesn't mean that we are pleasing Him. Indeed, that was the problem in Colosse. They were progressing in their christian lives, and dealing with issues, but they did not deal with them in scriptural ways. [In this case, we can suppose that they were trying to embrace the worship of angels. They (correctly) recognised angels as spiritual beings, and therefore concluded (incorrectly) that we should worship them. In exactly the same way, we need to ensure that when we find *issues* in our christian lives, that we deal with them in a scriptural way.]

As we deal with these things scripturally, we become "...fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God..." (1:10). Our knowledge comes from *studying the scriptures*, and *reasoning out the conclusions* that God has revealed to us. We cannot simply reason things out for ourselves, but we must take all that God has said about the matter, and then draw the conclusion.

These things will not happen quickly! Indeed, it takes much study with “...*all patience and endurance...*” (1:11) to understand God’s will. By doing so, we will be “...*strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power...*” (1:11 NKJV).

We have been made “...*partakers of God’s provision of an eternal inheritance...*” (1:12) having been qualified to that provision through Jesus Christ. We need to “...*give thanks to the Father for this glorious provision...*” (1:12)

Lightness and Darkness

Paul contrasts, our relationship with Christ “...*translated into the kingdom of His dear Son...*” (1:13 KJV) with our former lives before we became christians “...*delivered us from the power of darkness...*” (1:13 KJV). The contrast between the two is as stark as that between darkness and light. The contrast is directed to the particular situation in Colosse. They recognised the “powers” that dwelt in the spiritual realm – the spirit world – and that the angels were real. Paul points out that the parallels of recognising these things, and that in our former time we were under the power of Satan. However in contrast, we are now under the power of Christ.

This verse also tells us something about Christ’s kingdom. Paul says that we ***are*** in the kingdom – ie the kingdom has been established. The Old Testament prophets looked for the time when the Messiah would come to establish the kingdom. It was something that was future to them (eg Dan 2:44). Just before Christ’s ascension, the apostles asked Jesus if this was the time that He was going to restore the kingdom (Acts 1:6), which shows that at that time it had not yet been established. So, we can clearly see that the Lord’s kingdom having been established sometime between Acts 1 (prior to Pentecost in AD 33), and AD 62 when Paul wrote the Colossian letter. In fact, it was established before AD 52, because Paul was accused of teaching that Jesus was King in Thessalonica (Acts 17:7). This subject deserves a proper study, but for the sake of brevity here, the kingdom is the church, and was established on the day of Pentecost in AD33. Saying that the Colossians were in the kingdom is the same as saying that they were members of the church that Jesus purchased with His blood.

We have only been brought to God through Christ. In Him “...*we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins...*” (1:14 NKJV). Paul uses this as a bridge into the discussion on the pre-eminent position of Christ.

Christ is the Pinnacle

Christ is held up as the pinnacle – the pre-eminent position – the fulfilment of God’s eternal plan. “...*He is the image of the invisible God...*” (1:15 NKJV) Paul is not talking about Jesus’ physical appearance, but rather the *character* of Christ. When we understand Christ, understand how He dealt with the trials and afflictions in His life, and understand His love and willingness to suffer for others, then we can begin to understand His character – and when we understand Christ’s character, we can understand – know – God. “...*He who has seen me has seen the Father...*” (Jn 14:9 NKJV).

Christ is “...*the firstborn over all creation...*” (1:15) In some customs the idea of *the firstborn* relates to the right of inheritance. He was the Father’s pride and joy. He has the supreme position, and is over all creation in rank and dignity. And, He was the first in the sense that He was there at the beginning “...*For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible...*” (1:16 NKJV), (c/f Jn 1:1-3).

It was not only the things that we can see (on earth) that were created by Him, but He created all things, whether they “...*are in heaven or on earth, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers...*” (1:16). It is clear that Christ is supreme over all of these things, and anything that exists only exists because of Jesus. He is just as much a part of the

Godhead as the Father. And whilst it is true that God created all things, so it is also true that Jesus created them “...*All things were created through Him and for Him...and in Him all things consist...*” (1:16-17 NKJV).

Christ as the head of the church

The church is described as His body (c/f Eph 1:22-23), and He is the head. If we ask anyone who is the head of the Roman Catholic church, the answer is “the Pope”. And the Queen is the head of the Church of England. There are many man-made churches that have men as their head. But the church that we read about in the New Testament was not made by man, but by God. Jesus said “...*I will build my church...*” (Mt 16:18). It is **His** church – the church **belonging to** Christ – the church **of** Christ. Of course He is the head! And all of the body (the church) is subject to Him! He is the sovereign ruler over it, and all members of the church are subject to Him and His rule.

The church (as a body) is described a living organism – and one which has many members (c/f 1 Cor 12:12-27; Rom 12:4-21) all of which interact with each other to make the complete body work as a whole.

Christ’s pre-eminent position is further described as “...*the firstborn from the dead...*” (1:18 NKJV). Christ was not the first person to be resurrected. That honour belongs to the widow’s son raised by Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24). Nor was He the first person in the New Testament (there were several, Lazarus being the most prominent). However, all of these who were raised, died again. Jesus was the first person to be raised from the dead *never to die again*. Because of that, He has shown Himself to be the *victor over death*, and can rightly claim to be *the firstborn from the dead*.

His preeminent position is further shown by God the Father who is pleased to have “...*all the fullness (of the Godhead) dwelling in Him...*” (1:19). Jesus was not just a heavenly being who came to earth, nor a good man who went about doing good. He was “...*called Immanuel, which means, ‘God with us’...*” (Mt 1:23 NIV).

Jesus came to earth to perform a work of reconciliation – bringing sinners who were alienated from God, back into a relationship with Him. He reconciled man back to God when He paid the price for sin and “...*made peace through the blood of His cross...*” (1:20 NKJV).

Our Reconciliation to God

Our sins made us enemies of God, but we have been brought back, and bought with a price. We have been totally turned around by Christ’s work of reconciliation, so that we are now presented as “...*holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight...*” (1:22 NKJV).

Our former lives, and our state with God in having been made one of His children are contrasted. We “...*were once alienated and enemies...*” from God, “...*but now He has reconciled...*” us (1:21).

However, there are conditions to our reconciliation – “...***If*** *we continue in the faith...not moved away from the hope of the gospel...*” (1:23). God’s promises are conditional. He will always keep His end of the bargain, but it is up to us to decide whether we want to keep our end. This goes to the heart of the problem in Colosse. By adding to the gospel, they were saying that it was inadequate as it stood, and therefore made it (as far as they were concerned) of none effect.

Paul’s Role as a Minister of the Gospel

Paul rejoices in his sufferings (refer to notes on 2 Cor 11). He does everything that he can “...*for the sake of His body, which is the church...*” (1:24 NKJV).

Paul has stewardship responsibility as a minister, to ensure that the gospel is taught everywhere – “...which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister...” (1:23 NKJV). The gospel is a mystery. In ages past (ie the Old Testament times) the gospel was not understood. None of the prophets really understood the Messiah’s characteristics. But the mystery “...has now been revealed...” (1:26) so that we “...His saints...” can understand it. How blessed we are! The revelation of the mystery has been made known in Christ – “...Christ in you, the hope of glory...” (1:27 NKJV).

Christ then, is the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies, and the culmination – the pinnacle – of God’s creation. There are profound implications for the Colossians (and for us). Since Christ has been given this position, we need to hold due reverence for His exalted position, and not abandon our faith by adding to the word of God.

COMPARISON OF EPHESIANS AND COLOSSIANS (from NIVBC)		
Theme	Ephesians	Colossians
Paul's greeting	Eph 1:1-2	Col 1:1-2
Holy and without blemish in God's sight	Eph 1:4;5:27	Col 1:22
Redemption through Christ's blood	Eph 1:7	Col 1:14,20
Wisdom, knowledge, and understanding from God	Eph 1:8, 17	Col 1:9-10
Knowledge of God's will	Eph 1:9	Col 1:9
All things (re)created through Christ	Eph 1:10	Col 1:16
Paul heard about faith and gave thanks	Eph 1:15-16	Col 1:3-4
Paul's continual prayer for them	Eph 1:16	Col 1:9
The believer's hope	Eph 1:18	Col 1:5, 27
An inheritance for the saints	Eph 1:18	Col 3:24
Strengthened by God's power	Eph 1:19; Eph 3:16; Eph 6:10	Col 1:11
Christ's power over rule, authority, and dominion	Eph 1:21	Col 1:13,16; Col 2:10,15
Christ as the head of his body, the church	Eph 1:22; Eph 4:15-16	Col 1:18, 24
Christ as God's fullness	Eph 1:23; Eph 3:19	Col 1:19; 2:9
Christ fills all things	Eph 1:23	Col 3:11
Apart from Christ people are dead in sin	Eph 2:13	Col 2:13; 3:7
God made us alive in Christ and in his resurrection	Eph 2:5-6	Col 2:12-13
Reconciliation through Christ's blood	Eph 2:13	Col 1:20
Christians called to peace	Eph 2:14-15	Col 3:15
Christ abolished the law and its regulations	Eph 2:14-15	Col 2:14
Being built up in Christ	Eph 2:20-22	Col 2:7
Paul's call by God's grace to reveal God's mystery	Eph 3:2-4	Col 1:25-27; Col 2:2

God's grace at work in Paul	Eph 3:7, 20	Col 1:29
God's mystery hidden for centuries	Eph 3:9	Col 1:26
Rooted in Christ and his love	Eph 3:17	Col 2:7
Humility, gentleness, patience, and love	Eph 4:20, 31	Col 3:12-14
	Eph 5:1	
Encouragement to unity	Eph 4:3	Col 3:14
Becoming mature/perfect in Christ	Eph 4:13	Col 1:28
Obtaining fullness in Christ	Eph 4:13	Col 2:10
Growth in Christ	Eph 4:16	Col 2:19
Apart from Christ, alienation from God	Eph 4:18	Col 1:21
Impurity and lust in unbelievers	Eph 4:19	Col 3:5
Putting off the old self and putting on the new	Eph 4:22-24	Col 3:9-10
Putting off falsehood and lies and speaking the truth	Eph 4:25	Col 3:9
Putting away filthy language	Eph 4:29;5:4	Col 3:8
Speaking in order to help others	Eph 4:29	Col 4:6
Getting rid of anger, malice, and slander	Eph 4:30	Col 3:8
Being forgiving	Eph 4:31	Col 3:13
Believers should allow no one to deceive them	Eph 5:6	Col 2:4, 8
God's coming wrath	Eph 5:6	Col 3:6
Doing what pleases the Lord	Eph 5:10	Col 3:20
Walking carefully and making the most of every opportunity	Eph 5:15	Col 4:5
Singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs	Eph 5:19	Col 3:16
Giving thanks to God the Father	Eph 5:20	Col 3:17
Instructions for wives	Eph 5:22	Col 3:18
Instructions for husbands	Eph 5:25	Col 3:19
Instructions for children	Eph 6:1	Col 3:20
Instructions for fathers	Eph 6:4	Col 3:21
Instructions for slaves	Eph 6:5-8	Col 3:22-25
Instructions for masters	Eph 6:9-10	Col 4:1
Praying and keeping watch	Eph 6:18	Col 4:2
Praying for Paul, the missionary	Eph 6:19-20	Col 4:3-4
Tychicus as Paul's messenger	Eph 6:21-22	Col 4:7-8
Closing benediction	Eph 6:24	Col 4:18