

Colossians

chapter 1

1. THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST (1:1 – 2:5)

A. GREETINGS (1:1-2)

Colossians 1:1

¹This letter is from Paul, chosen by God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy.

Paul generally stresses, when writing epistles, that he is not writing to churches based on his own authority. His authority came from the Lord. In another of Paul's epistles, which many scholars believe was Paul's earliest epistle, Galatians, he spends much of the first chapter defending the basis of his ministry authority as coming directly from the Lord. As he became more widely accepted and recognised, he didn't have to elaborate on his apostolic commission and authority from the Lord. In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul had used his endurance, suffering and hardship as the basis of his authority. In writing to the Colossians his authority is not under question.

It is worth noting however, that when Paul refers to himself as an apostle, he is not merely presuming this ministry. It is a dangerous thing to simply presume the mantle of an apostle upon oneself. The New Testament warns against tolerating "false" apostles, which means that from the earliest times there were those who claimed to be apostles without actually being called by

the Lord to be such. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for accepting those who claimed to be apostles, yet were actually spreading false doctrine (albeit often only very subtly false) and taking advantage of people and churches financially.

*¹³These people are false apostles. They have fooled you by disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.
2Corinthians 11:13*

Jesus commends the Ephesian church for refusing to tolerate those claiming to be apostles, when they weren't.

*²I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars.
Revelation 2:2*

It is an extremely serious thing to claim to be an apostle when the Lord Jesus has not called and commissioned the claimant. It is also a very serious thing for an apostle to succumb to using their ministry to manipulate people to focus on the apostle rather than the Lord, and to financially exploit vulnerable and generous people for personal gain. Paul addresses both of these issues in writing to the Corinthian church (note 1Corinthians 9; 2Corinthians 11:13).

This epistle to the Colossians is also co-authored by Timothy. The heart of apostolic ministry is fathering. Paul describes Timothy as his *son in the Lord* (1Corinthians 4:17; 1Timothy 1:18). By acknowledging Timothy as his co-author, Paul is showing us his heart to develop others and honour them. This too is an aspect of authentic apostleship. Paul could see in Timothy the seeds of God's anointing and ministry on his life and sought to do what he could to develop it.

Colossians 1:2

*²It is written to God's holy people in the city of Colosse, who are faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.
May God our Father give you grace and peace.*

Although Paul had never been to the Colossian church, he was well aware of their situation, and commended them for their positive qualities. He describes them as (i) holy, (ii) faithful, and, (iii) brothers and sisters (family). The apostle was paying them a very high compliment indeed.

Since it is written to God's holy people in Colosse, there may have been more than one congregation there. He blesses them with *peace* and *grace*. We have noted in the commentary on Ephesians that the early church seems to have looked more to the Lord for grace and peace in the midst of their trials than for deliverance from their trials.

B. PRAYER (1:3 – 14)

(i) Reason for thankfulness (1:3 – 6)

Colossians 1:3

³We always pray for you, and we give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

There is a lot of priority given to prayer in Colossians. Since Paul was writing this from a Roman prison cell, he would have had a lot of time to pray and write. This too is a large component of apostolic ministry. Peter said from the beginning that the apostles must devote themselves to prayer and the study of the Word of God (Acts 6:4). The content of Paul's prayer for the Colossians was largely thankfulness. (What's largely the content of your prayer for your church?)

Colossians 1:4

⁴for we have heard that you trust in Christ Jesus and that you love all of God's people.

Paul gives two reasons for his thankfulness in regard to the Colossian believers. Firstly, he mentions their *trust* in Christ. This seems to imply that they had held onto their commitment to Christ while under trial. Secondly, he mentions their *love* for each other. This certainly is a powerful combination which the apostle was impressed and thankful to God for. In our commentary on Ephesians we noted the relationship between faith and love (refer to 1Corinthians 13:2; Galatians 5:6; Ephesians 1:15; 6:23; 1Thessalonians 5:8).

Colossians 1:5

⁵You do this because you are looking forward to the joys of heaven—as you have been ever since you first heard the truth of the Good News.

Some people only live for today. In one sense we are not to *worry* about the future.

³⁴“So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.

Matthew 6:34

But we are not to focus our lives on just living for now with no thought given for eternity (refer to Matthew 6:20). The Colossian believers had a heavenly hope that meant they weren't just living for today. The way they lived was weighed against the backdrop of eternity. In fact, trying to live without a clear recognition of eternity robs a life of purpose and meaning. If there is not life beyond the

grave then the injustices of this world will never be dealt with; unsatisfied dreams realized; or the objects of faith possessed (note Hebrews 11:13-15).

Part of Paul's purpose in writing to the Colossians was to remind them of their acceptance of the Gospel and what they had actually initially accepted. This is one of his first references to this purpose. He reminds them that they had accepted Christ to save them for eternity, not just as a quick-fix for some momentary difficulties they may have been experiencing. We need to keep in mind that the Gospel is good news for the poor, and liberty for the oppressed, now.

⁵the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor.

Matthew 11:5

¹⁸The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the downtrodden will be freed from their oppressors,

¹⁹and that the time of the Lord's favor has come."

Luke 4:18-19

But perhaps even more importantly, the Gospel is for *eternity*. Jesus made it clear that life on earth is fleeting, and eternity is forever.

⁹And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better to enter heaven half blind than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell.

Matthew 18:9

The Colossians had accepted the Gospel because it gave them clear hope for eternity. While Christianity is not just "*pie in the sky, but steak on the plate while you wait*", we all too often underestimate the benefit of being saved for all eternity outweighing any short-term affliction we may endure now (2Corinthians 4:17).

Colossians 1:6

⁶This same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world. It is changing lives everywhere, just as it changed yours that very first day you heard and understood the truth about God's great kindness to sinners.

What a statement about the power of the Gospel! It literally changed the lives of the Colossians and of those around the world. The Gospel is not a cultural message. It is not the religion of just one particular cultural group. Accepting Christ does not mean losing cultural identity. Paul said that this Gospel was going out, and being accepted, all over the world. The mistake that some earlier cross-cultural missionaries made was a failure to distinguish between the Gospel and their own cultures when evangelising a foreign culture.

But today, modern cross-cultural missionaries are trained to appreciate the cultures of those they are trying to reach, and equipped to share the Gospel in a way that is not enculturated with their own culture.

By stating that the Gospel was changing lives all around the world, Paul was encouraging the Colossian believers with news of what God was doing elsewhere. This is a very pragmatic and effective means for encouraging believers. I have personally been very stirred when I have received news from other parts of the world describing what the Holy Spirit had been doing. Some people feel that this manipulates people into copying what they hear about or see reported from these places. I think that this undoubtedly does happen, but I don't think all reporting of what God is doing elsewhere is going to cause this negative reaction. I also think that the Holy Spirit is able to give believers discernment as to whether something is genuinely of God or not (1John 2:27). I was stirred when I heard the reports of what God was doing in Toronto, Canada in the mid 1990s and Pensacola, Florida in the late 1990s.

Paul continues to remind the Colossians about the real essence of the Gospel: *God's great kindness toward sinners*. This reminder of God's grace counters what the false teachers were teaching about having to add works to the work of Christ on the cross.

(ii) Epaphras (1:7 – 8)

Colossians 1:7

⁷Epaphras, our much loved co-worker, was the one who brought you the Good News. He is Christ's faithful servant, and he is helping us in your place.

Epaphras was the founder of the church at Colosse since he is mentioned by Paul as being the one who brought the Gospel to them. Paul further honours him before the Colossians by stating that he was *much loved* and a faithful servant of Christ. These were two highly prized characteristics for a Christian leader which the early Church regarded as essential qualities for their ministers. For Epaphras to be much loved by the Colossians and the broader Christian community meant that he was a very amiable person. When a pastor is described as "*much loved*" by his church it is a rare delight that should be far more common.

Epaphras is also described as Paul's co-worker, which implies that he had a similar ministry to that of Paul. At the very least we know that he was involved in church planting and church governance (oversight). Yet he appears to be in willing submission to Paul the apostle. It is my conviction that most of the ministries

given by Christ to the Church are actually assigned spheres of authority and responsibility.

¹³But we will not boast of authority we do not have. Our goal is to stay within the boundaries of God's plan for us, and this plan includes our working there with you.

2Corinthians 10:13

There are pastors with a God given capacity to be a responsible for a larger sphere of influence, and there are pastors with a lesser sphere of authority. There are apostles with a larger sphere of influence and authority to whom other lesser apostles submit. Perhaps this was the case with Paul and Epaphras, because Paul certainly writes this epistle as if he had authority over the church even though he had never been there. His apostolic authority over the Colossian church was by virtue of his apostolic authority over Epaphras whom he regarded as representing the Colossian church.

Colossians 1:8

⁸He is the one who told us about the great love for others that the Holy Spirit has given you.

Churches develop reputations over time. What a great reputation the Colossian church had. To be known as a church that is freely receiving from the Holy Spirit is a good thing, but to also be known as a church that greatly loves is altogether marvellous.

(ii) Request (1:9 – 14)

Colossians 1:9

⁹So we have continued praying for you ever since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you a complete understanding of what he wants to do in your lives, and we ask him to make you wise with spiritual wisdom.

It was protocol for an apostolic epistle to be addressed to the leaders of the Church (where there were leaders present, note Philippians 1:1), which leads me to assume that because Epaphras was with Paul and was most probably the leader of the Colossian church, he was therefore absent from Colosse. A church without a leader is spiritually vulnerable, and perhaps this is why when Paul heard from Epaphras about the Colossian church, he prayed so earnestly for them. I know that whenever I am away from my own church there is increased prayer happening by me for them (and vice versa I might add).



One of the things that I like to do when reading the writings of Paul, who spent much of his time praying, is to learn what he prayed for. In this verse we have another clue as to what Paul prayed for when interceding on behalf of churches. In this verse we note that Paul prayed for-

- A complete understanding of God's will for them (knowledge)
- Spiritual wisdom

There is often a combination between knowledge (understanding) and wisdom. It's one thing to know God's will but another thing to know how to wisely live it out. To truly know God's will and to have the wisdom to live it out begins with a proper understanding of who Jesus really is, and what actually happened for us when He purchased our redemption on the cross. This is the essence of Paul's epistle to the Colossians. He wants to remind them of the fundamentals of the Gospel and ground them in these truths.

Colossians 1:10

¹⁰Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and you will continually do good, kind things for others. All the while, you will learn to know God better and better.

We continue to discover what Paul prayed for when he prayed for the Colossians. He shows that the goal of understanding (knowledge) and wisdom was to:

- honour and please the Lord
- continually do good
- do kind things for others, and
- learn to know God better

Colossians 1:11

¹¹We also pray that you will be strengthened with his glorious power so that you will have all the patience and endurance you need. May you be filled with joy.

- strengthened with His glorious power
- patience
- endurance
- joy

The next time you're wondering what to pray for when you pray for another brother or sister in Christ you might like to reflect on what Paul prayed for the Colossians.

Colossians 1:12

¹²always thanking the Father, who has enabled you to share the inheritance that belongs to God's holy people, who live in the light.

Paul's prayer was sandwiched between thanks. I like that. Note that the tenor of his praying wasn't to change the Colossians. "*God please make my friend give me his car...*" is a manipulating prayer that is completely absent from the New Testament. We've noted here that Paul prayed for wisdom, revelation, understanding, strength, endurance and joy for the Colossians.

He alludes to their inheritance (which he elaborated more about in his circular epistle to the Ephesians, which the Colossians would eventually have sent to them). He simply states that God had qualified them for their inheritance which countered the Gnostic argument that salvation was a matter of accepting Christ *and* adding works. But this inheritance is for those who *live in the light*. That is, they live purely and without trying to earn their salvation through works.

Colossians 1:13

¹³For he has rescued us from the one who rules in the kingdom of darkness, and he has brought us into the Kingdom of his dear Son.

Satan is the one who rules the kingdom of darkness and all those who have come to Christ have been rescued from him. The New Testament is very black and white about allegiances. Satan binds even the nicest, politest, kindest people in darkness if they don't know Christ as Saviour. There are no spiritual grey zones. Jesus came to deliver everyone from the power of Satanic darkness. Everyone.

⁴⁶I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the darkness.

John 12:46

The early Church had a very clear understanding of the spiritual absolutes involved in people's eternal destinies. Paul recounts his original commission from Christ to King Agrippa-

¹⁸to open their eyes so they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in me.' ¹⁹"And so, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to that vision from heaven.

Acts 26:18 - 19

This verse suggests that many in the Colossian church had been delivered from the bondage of Satanic oppression perhaps just as the Philippian slave girl had been (Acts 16). The modern Western mind even when regenerated is often still far too rational to appreciate such spiritual realities. Maybe because of our lack of understanding about these matters do we rarely see such experiences of new converts having the chains and claims of darkness being broken off. Yet in many parts of "the 2/3 world" (commonly referred to as 'The Third World', but the reality is that *The Third World* constitutes around two thirds of the world's population) where there is a greater degree of openness to such spiritual realities, like demonic oppression, deliverance from the powers of darkness as alluded to in Colossians 1:13, is seen almost routinely and in some places considered mandatory for genuine conversion.

This verse also shows us that conversion is radical and dramatic. Many people consider coming to Christ as part of a journey. And it is. *Kind of*. But more Biblically speaking, the journey *begins* when you come to Christ. There are no shades of grey in spirituality. It is either spiritually dark or spiritually light. When a person comes to Christ it is in the strictest sense not a journey into the light, but an immediate translation from darkness to light. This is how Paul describes the Colossians and it is also true for each one of us who truly know the Lord.

Colossians 1:14

*¹⁴God has purchased our freedom with his blood and has forgiven all our sins.
Christ Is Supreme*

Our deliverance from darkness is made possible by the blood of Christ. When Christ died on the cross it was not simply the death of another good intentioned martyr as some have diminished it to. Neither was it a mere symbolic act that provided some kind of examples to others as has been proposed occasionally. No, when Christ died on the cross and shed His blood something momentously powerful took place. It was powerful enough to reach back in time and redeem all who placed their faith in God from the beginning of time. It was so momentous that it immediately affected humanity and has continued to do so through the span of time for all those who place their faith in Christ.

Under the Old Covenant, the blood of bulls and goats was used to atone for sins (Lev. 16:27). The priest would place the guilt of the people on the animal and then slay it to transfer the punishment of the people's sins onto the animal. But it was only ever a shadow of what Christ would achieve on the cross (Heb. 10:1-4). Because Jesus has shed His blood on the cross, our sins are atoned for and our punishment has been transferred to Christ. We can do nothing to earn this forgiveness or repay God for it.

C. CHRIST IS THE SUPREME HEAD (1:15 – 17)

(i) Christ is the Creator (1:15 – 17)

Colossians 1:15

¹⁵Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before God made anything at all and is supreme over all creation.

Paul now seeks to show the glory and supremacy of Christ. In what appears to be an echo of Hebrews 1:3 where it also states that Christ is the exact likeness of the invisible God, Christ is revealed as more than a mere man. He is God. His likeness to the Father is not meant to mean that His physical appearance was what was representing God to the world, but rather His physical nature gave expression and visible demonstration of the Father's heart, character and mind.

That Christ was before anything that God made, demands that He Himself could not have been created. In 313AD the Council of Nicaea was called to debate the radical doctrine proposed by Arius that Christ was a created being. Known as the *Arian Controversy* the Council concluded on the basis of the New Testament witness that:

We believe in One God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in One Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through Him all things were made...

An extract from the Nicene Creed

Colossians 1:16

¹⁶Christ is the one through whom God created everything in heaven and earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—

kings, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities. Everything has been created through him and for him.

The Father created everything through Christ. Simply put, this means that Christ is the Creator. Despite the Nicene Council's rebuttal to the Arian heresy, this false doctrine was rehashed in the 1800s by Charles Taze Russell who founded the *Jehovah's Witnesses*. Yet this verse presents a real problem to Jehovah's Witnesses. They were left with no option when translating their own version of the Bible but to include an additional word implying that Christ *was* created. Rather than "*He made the things*" they include "*other*" before "*things*" thus implying that after the Father had created the Son, the Son then made every *other* thing. The NLT captures the true essence of verses 15 and 16 stating that Christ existed before God had created anything. He is therefore, as Paul says, the Supreme Lord over everything, and always has been.

Paul states that Christ created two realms: the seen and the unseen. We should not underestimate the intimate relationship between the two realms. What happens in the seen realm can have a direct bearing on the spiritual realm. John Dawson wrote an excellent book several years ago called *Taking Our Cities For God* where he describes how the crime rate plummeted, suicides and murders phenomenally decreased and thousands of people came to Christ. He attributes this happening because of what they were achieving in the spiritual realm through prayer, godliness, and tremendous unity.

When Christ created everything He did so with an *order*. He created Kings and Kingdoms, and Rulers and Authorities. God is a God of order and authority. All of this was created by Christ, and *for* Christ, which reinforces His Lordship over everything.

Colossians 1:17

¹⁷He existed before everything else began, and he holds all creation together.

Paul stresses Christ's supremacy over everything and says that not only is Christ the Creator, He is also the Sustainer of everything. He is not just the focus of Christian worship. He is the sustainer of *everything*. Dominant cultures tend to adapt Christ to their own culture. This can sometimes make cross-cultural evangelism an obstacle course. For example: how often do we in Western cultures see Christ portrayed as a blue-eyed, blonde, six feet four inches, sun bronzed lifesaver? Rather than the more likely Arabic/Jewish looking, five feet tall, dark oily hair with a full faced beard? Christ is not just a Christian god! He is God over all, and He holds the entire earth together, including every nation and people group.

(ii) Christ is the Head of the Church (1:18 – 23)

Colossians 1:18

¹⁸*Christ is the head of the church, which is his body. He is the first of all who will rise from the dead, so he is first in everything.*

Christ is the Head of the Church. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, the emphasis is on the Body of Christ, but in this epistle the emphasis is on the Head of the Church. The Head always goes first. Christ has already gone before us by being resurrected. He is our hope for a bright eternity and a glorified resurrected body.

The New Testament's reference to Christ as being the first is used in three ways. Firstly, Christ is the first in the sense that He is Supreme. Secondly, Christ is the first in the sense that He is the origin of everything, the source of all life. But most prominently, the third way in which He is *first* is that He rose from the dead, never to die again. Christ was not merely resuscitated, as Lazarus was, since Lazarus died again after Christ "resurrected" him (John 11:43).

When Christ was resurrected it was a display of what God will do for each of us. What many people do not realise is that everyone will be resurrected, not just the righteous.

³⁰*And if your hand—even if it is your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*

Matthew 5:30

²⁸*“Don't be afraid of those who want to kill you. They can only kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Matthew 10:28

The issue is: *where will you be resurrected to?* The impassioned plea from the New Testament is that you will surrender to Christ and enjoy your resurrected eternity in the Heavenly Paradise. The clear revelation of the same New Testament is that those who do not surrender to Christ stand the very real risk of feeling physical pain for all eternity in hell and eventually the sulphurous Lake of Fire.

¹⁴*And death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death—the lake of fire. ¹⁵And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.*

Revelation 20:14-15

Colossians 1:19

¹⁹*For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ,*

This is a statement of Christ's incarnation. When Christ walked the earth, He was totally human. The New Testament warns us that we should not overlook or diminish Christ's humanity.

²This is the way to find out if they have the Spirit of God: If a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ became a human being, that person has the Spirit of God.

1 John 4:2

⁷Many deceivers have gone out into the world. They do not believe that Jesus Christ came to earth in a real body. Such a person is a deceiver and an antichrist.

During the time of writing this epistle to the Colossians, there were some who taught that human flesh was basically corrupt and evil. The only way a person could be saved, according to these teachers, was to follow a strict regimen of rules to rein in the sinfulness inherent in human flesh, and to receive special knowledge that transcended what the natural mind would ordinarily apprehend. Thus, to these teachers, it was incomprehensible that Christ came in the flesh. Certainly He was God, but to these teachers of this doctrine (called "Gnosticism", pronounced with a silent "G", from the Greek word *gnosis* which means *knowledge*) Christ appeared to be human but would never have tainted Himself with human flesh. Much of this epistle is written to counter this false doctrine.

Gnosticism became a huge issue for the early and developing Church. A Church Council was called to meet in Chalcedon to decide this controversial issue. How could the *fullness* of God dwell in a human Christ? That is, how could Christ be totally God, yet totally human? The Council concluded that Christ was indeed fully human *and* fully divine. The following excerpt is taken from my book, *Survey of Christian Doctrine*-

Emperor Marcion ordered a council to resolve the conflict. Pope Leo wanted it to be held in Italy, but, the decision was made to have it in Chalcedon, Asia Minor. From that council meeting, the Spirit of God moved on over five hundred bishops to come to the following conclusion in A.D. 451 about the nature of Christ:

"to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of the two natures being in no wise taking away the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in the one person in subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons."

The Chalcedon Council recognised Christ was both God and Man but was only one Person. (Theologians refer to this as the Hypostatic Union of Christ). They admitted that this was a mystery which they were unable to fully explain.

Survey of Christian Doctrine, page 27

The fullness of God was in Christ. The New Testament generally uses the term "God" to designate the Father. One of the hardest things for those who hold to a diminished view of Christ, like "Jehovah's Witnesses", is to understand how Jesus Christ is God. For these people, the term "God", exclusively refers to God the Father. Yet this verse clearly shows us that Christ was God in the flesh (Jn. 1:14; Philippians 2:1-5). The previous verses make it plain that Christ possessed the attributes of deity. One of the exclusive attributes of God is *immortality*. Only God is eternal (Genesis 21:33; Jeremiah 10:10). Since Christ was before every created thing (Colossians 1:15, 17), He is therefore eternal (refer also to the prophecy of the prophet Micah about the Messiah being eternal, Micah 5:2). Since Christ is eternal, and even invoked the eternal Name as His own (John 8:58), He is God.

The Scriptures clearly identify that it was God who created everything (Genesis 1:2-3), and that Christ is revealed as the Creator (Colossians 1:16), Christ is therefore God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father.

Colossians 1:20

²⁰and by him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of his blood on the cross.

This is the very reason why Christ came to earth and became human: to die a physical death on the cross where His blood would be shed to redeem all of creation back to God. That is why it is critical to understand that Christ indeed did come in the flesh. If He didn't come in the flesh, then He is not authentically the Head of the Human Race, and could not be our vicarious (substitutionary) offering for sin.

Another aspect to Christ's reconciliation that is often overlooked is its relationship to nature's redemption. Paul writes in Romans 8:21-22 that Christ's death on the cross has begun a redemption of all creation that will be completed one day. We need to understand that what Christ did on the cross and advanced through the resurrection affects recipients immediately when we submit to Christ as Lord and Saviour, and will be completed when we are resurrected. Thus, we are saved, being saved, and will be saved, simultaneously.

(i) Saved - 2Tim 1:9

⁹It is God who saved us and chose us to live a holy life. He did this not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan long before the world began—to show his love and kindness to us through Christ Jesus.

(ii) Being saved - 1Corinthians 1:18

¹⁸I know very well how foolish the message of the cross sounds to those who are on the road to destruction. But we who are being saved recognize this message as the very power of God.

(iii) Will be saved - Philippians 1:28

²⁸Don't be intimidated by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself.

Colossians 1:21

²¹This includes you who were once so far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions,

The purpose of Christ's death on the cross was not to make the good better, but to make the dead live, the lost found, the blind see, and orphan adopted. Gentiles were considered "far away" from God. As we have seen, spiritual matters are very black and white from a Christian perspective. If someone is not submitted to God, they are an enemy of God. Jesus said if someone was not for Him, they were against Him (Matthew 12:30). There is no independent status spiritually, no middle ground. Enmity with God is characterised by two things: *evil thoughts and actions*. Someone may seem to behave well, but may be totally corrupt in their thinking. It's a daunting thought to realise that God knows our every thought (Matthew 9:4; Romans 2:15; Hebrews 4:12). What an incredible display of God's grace that He has brought us, His former enemies, into His favour.

Colossians 1:22

²²yet now he has brought you back as his friends. He has done this through his death on the cross in his own human body. As a result, he has brought you into the very presence of God, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.

God has not just forgiven us our sins. If this was all He had done, it would have been enough though. But God has gone further, much further. He has done for us something absolutely amazing. He has taken His enemies and made them His friends, not just His acquaintances, through Christ's payment for our sins on the cross. We have been made friends of God!

The death of Christ on the cross has also changed our legal standing. Legally, although we are guilty of vile sin, we have been

made innocent, holy, blameless and without fault. This describes a saint. It therefore describes the status of every Christian as being that of a saint. Even though we may slip and stumble, when God looks at the Christian, He sees us *in* Christ, and therefore He doesn't see us in our fallen state, but He sees Jesus in His absolute righteousness (note Romans 3:22; 4:24; 5:17; 1Corinthians 1:30; 2Peter 1:1).

Not only has God done this, He has brought us into His presence like a King invites His court to have a permanent banqueting position at His table. There is a marvellous picture of this in 2Samuel 9 where King David shows grace to Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan. Even though the House of Saul had set itself up in opposition to the House of David, David showed grace to the grandson of Saul and gave him a permanent place at his banqueting table. This verse in Colossians describes a similar thing that God has done for us also. Even though we were once enemies of God, He has cancelled our criminal record and transferred the righteousness of His perfect Son to us and invited us into His royal court.

Colossians 1:23

²³But you must continue to believe this truth and stand in it firmly. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News. The Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed by God to proclaim it.

There was real threat that the Colossians would succumb to the heresy of the Gnostics and forsake the grace of God that had been shown to them. To fall from grace isn't necessarily to fall into sin, but rather it is fall into legalism and works (the opposite of grace). To resist falling from grace the apostle says they must-

- (i) Believe the truth (understand the Gospel)
- (ii) Stand firm in the Gospel (fully trust in Christ and His work on the cross for salvation)
- (iii) Don't drift away from the assurance of salvation (don't even tolerate false teaching since even heresy sounds reasonable if it is tolerated long enough)

As Paul had previously stated in verse 6, this is the Gospel that had been going out all over the world and changing lives everywhere. It was not the invention of Paul, but Paul had received it by revelation, and had been appointed by God to preach it. The Gospel is therefore *God's* message to mankind. The Gnostics, who diminished Christ and His work of salvation, could not claim the same authority for their message.

Colossians 1:24

²⁴I am glad when I suffer for you in my body, for I am completing what remains of Christ's sufferings for his body, the church.

This is a somewhat perplexing verse. The context is of little help in ascertaining its original meaning, we can therefore only speculate what Paul means by *completing* what remains of the sufferings of Christ for His body. We know for certain what it does *not* mean. It does not mean that salvation was incomplete without Paul (or any other person) having to suffer. The Scriptures are plain, that Christ is exclusively sufficient for our salvation. It does not mean that someone *has to suffer* for the Church. There is no hint of this in the teaching of the New Testament.

I think we have a clue to what Christ's sufferings for His Body are when we consider what the Lord said to Paul on the road to Damascus.

³As he was nearing Damascus on this mission, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him! ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

⁵"Who are you, sir?" Saul asked.

And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!"

Acts 9:3-5

When Saul of Tarsus had been persecuting the Church and causing it suffer, Christ actually told Saul that it was Him who was actually suffering. In this way, every time a Christian suffers for the cause of Christ, it is Christ who feels the suffering. Christ told His disciples that they could expect to suffer in His service.

⁹"Then you will be arrested, persecuted, and killed. You will be hated all over the world because of your allegiance to me.

Matthew 24:9

¹⁴I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not.

John 17:14

When the world persecutes the Church and causes it to suffer, it is actually Christ they are persecuting and causing to suffer. When Paul suffered at the hands of his persecutors and jailors, it was in this way that Christ was suffering. Just as Paul had once caused Christ to suffer, he now suffered with Christ.

Colossians 1:25

²⁵*God has given me the responsibility of serving his church by proclaiming his message in all its fullness to you Gentiles.*

In one sense we are all called to proclaim the Gospel. But in another sense God especially selects servants to totally commit their time to the carriage of the Gospel. This is a duty that cannot be assumed. Paul strongly claims through his epistles that he is called and appointed by God to be a preacher and apostle. Anyone who is charged by God to preach the Gospel is also responsible to preach the Gospel in all its fullness. The power of the Gospel is not just limited to eternal life. The Gospel declares a salvation that is *wholeness* (which is what the Greek word for salvation [sozo] means) for the soul: *body, mind and spirit*. Christ summed up His Gospel by citing the prophet Isaiah-

¹⁸*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
for he has appointed me to preach Good News to
the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim
that captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
that the downtrodden will be freed from their
oppressors,
¹⁹and that the time of the Lord's favor has come."*
Luke 4:18-19

When He commissioned His disciples to preach the Gospel He told them-

⁷*Go and announce to them that the Kingdom of
Heaven is near. ⁸Heal the sick, raise the dead, cure
those with leprosy, and cast out demons. Give as
freely as you have received!*
Matthew 10:7-8

Paul told the Corinthians that the Gospel was not really a matter of fancy words, but the power of the Holy Spirit.

⁴*And my message and my preaching were very
plain. I did not use wise and persuasive speeches,
but the Holy Spirit was powerful among you. ⁵I did
this so that you might trust the power of God
rather than human wisdom.*
1Corinthians 2:4-5

Paul reported to the Romans that he had *fully* proclaimed the Gospel to others with an emphasis on its power rather than its content-

¹⁹*I have won them over by the miracles done
through me as signs from God—all by the power of
God's Spirit. In this way, I have fully presented the
Good News of Christ all the way from Jerusalem
clear over into Illyricum.*
Romans 15:19

And to the Thessalonians he reminded them about the Gospel he presented when he said-

⁵*For when we brought you the Good News, it was
not only with words but also with power, for the*

Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true. And you know that the way we lived among you was further proof of the truth of our message.

1Thessalonians 1:5

As a preacher, it is my prayer that God will enable me to *fully* proclaim the Gospel.

Colossians 1:26

²⁶This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to his own holy people.

In Paul's epistle to the Ephesians he continually referred to the *mystery* of the Gospel. He says that God has now revealed to Jews that they are not the exclusive people of God anymore. God has now revealed that He is inviting Gentiles, people of all races, to come to Christ and become His people. No longer does God have a people based primarily on ethnic blood lines. To qualify as a member of God's holy people now, it is now a matter of accepting God's grace through faith in Christ.

Colossians 1:27

²⁷For it has pleased God to tell his people that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. For this is the secret: Christ lives in you, and this is your assurance that you will share in his glory.

God's heart is for all people. While many Jews had failed to understand that God had a heart for the people of all nations, like Jonah who initially refused to preach to the people of Nineveh, He has always wanted the people of the whole earth, not just one nationality or race, to be saved. For those Jewish Christians who understood God's heart for Gentiles, they too could share in God's pleasure in announcing salvation for the Gentiles. And for the Gentiles, Paul says that they have absolute assurance of their salvation based on what Christ has done *in* them. If you are constantly doubting your salvation, and battling with a lack of assurance that you are saved, it is probably because you have not experienced true salvation and the reality of Christ living within you. Why not seek God and ask Him to truly save you, and give you the assurance of Christ living in you?

Colossians 1:28

²⁸So everywhere we go, we tell everyone about Christ. We warn them and teach them with all the wisdom God has given us, for we want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ.

As we have seen, the Gospel does not end at the point of acceptance. Its power continues to transform lives long after they have accepted Christ. We see here also the duty of a preacher of the Gospel.

- (i) Preachers may go anywhere to proclaim Christ
- (ii) Preachers are prepared to preach to anyone
- (iii) Preachers warn people of eternal consequences
- (iv) Preachers teach people with wisdom
- (v) Preachers aim at presenting people perfect (complete) to Christ

We all need the influence of strong preachers in our lives. From this list we see that Paul thought it important to continually proclaim Christ. It is all too easy to drift through our Christian walk and church life without the reference point of the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Good preaching keeps us referenced to Christ. That's why it's so important for the believer to be actively connected to a local church and being constantly influenced by preaching that brings them back to the focal point of Christ in their lives.

Preachers also warn. It is also too easy to become complacent about sin. Good preaching warns us with the holy fear of the Lord about the dire eternal and present consequences of sin, and God's judgment to come. The Holy Spirit is able to use this kind of loving preaching that convicts us of sin and gently corrects us back to Christlikeness.

For preachers this is an awesome task and responsibility. It requires great wisdom. This is perhaps the most urgent and repeated request that this preacher seeks God for. The goal of the preacher is not to merely present a nice sounding talk that draws the adoration of the crowd, but to change lives more and more into the likeness of Christ and a stronger relationship with Him.

Colossians 1:29

²⁹I work very hard at this, as I depend on Christ's mighty power that works within me.

Much can be done for the Lord in our own strength, but usually with very little fruit for the amount of energy expended. Yet, when we serve the Lord in His strength, there is increased fruitfulness. This is how Paul served the Lord: with all his strength, in the strength of the Lord. We give God all of our strength in exchange for His strength. This is the principle found in Isaiah 40.

²⁹He gives power to those who are tired and worn out; he offers strength to the weak. ³⁰Even youths will become exhausted, and young men will give up. ³¹But those who wait on the LORD will find new strength. They will fly high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:29-31