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COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

Today we begin a short study in the book of **Colossians**. Let's just set a little background for this book...let's look at the **who, what, when, where, why and how** of this book.

Who? Paul wrote this book to the church at Colossae.

What? This book is a letter...an epistle.

When? It was written around 60-62 A.D.

Where? Paul was a prisoner in Rome. Colossae was in Asia (modern day Turkey).

Why? Paul wrote this to refute false doctrine.

How? Paul refuted false doctrine by setting forth true doctrine!

Colossae had been a great city at one time, but the main trade routes had been re-routed to bypass it and it had declined in population so that it was a much smaller city when Paul wrote this letter.

The city of Colossae was destroyed in the 12th century and nothing remains except a few ruins today.

Keep this in mind as we go along...When Paul wrote this letter, the population of Colossae was predominantly **Gentile**...but there was a sizeable **Jewish** community living there.

And because there were both Jews and Gentiles living in Colossae, the false doctrine that had entered the church held both Jewish and pagan elements.

The church at Colossae wasn't established by **Paul**. Paul, as far as we know, had never even been there.

The church at Colossae was founded by a man named **Epaphras**. It is believed that Epaphras had come to know the Lord under the preaching of Paul while they were both in Ephesus.

Epaphras was, however, **from** Colossae. And when Epaphras was saved, he did what saved people are **supposed** to do...he went and **told** somebody...in fact, he went back to his hometown and planted a Christian church!

At some point, Epaphras came to Paul in Rome and shared with Paul that the little church he had established in his hometown was in trouble. **False doctrine had crept into his little church.**

Epaphras knew Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ.
Epaphras knew that Paul would know exactly how to handle this.
Epaphras did what he **should** have done...**he sought the godly counsel of a godly man!**

And we can only imagine how this conversation might have gone...

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Paul, under house arrest, chained to Roman soldiers listened intently to the pleas of a heartbroken pastor and when Epaphras had finished pouring out his heart Paul could have said something like this...

"Well, Epaphras, I can't go to Colossae...as you can see, I'm sort of tied down at the moment...but I'll do the next best thing... I'll write these folks a letter and I'll teach them truth in my letter."

I truly believe for us to really understand the book of **Colossians**, we must understand what the problem was. What false doctrine had Epaphras so concerned that he would come all the way to Rome from Asia to tell Paul?

We need to know on the front end what these false doctrines are...because Paul doesn't give us the specific **problems**...but he **does** give us specific **answers**...and **praise God for the answers!**

What were the problems? **Heresy!** What is heresy? False teaching!

And there were two areas of heresy that had invaded the Colossian church!

1) Jewish heresy...We're familiar with this. We've seen it over and over in Paul's writings.

The Jews said you must keep the dietary laws...you must observe holy days, such as the Jewish Sabbath, the Jewish feast days, you must be circumcised, etc. The Jews were legalistic and they said, "Believers in Jesus aren't saved by grace alone, but must also follow Jewish traditions, Jewish feast days and Jewish rituals.

2) Gentile heresy...This was a gnostic heresy.

Have you heard of **agnostics**? Agnostics take this view...

"God is unknowable, the mystery of the universe is unsolvable.
I don't know...There may or may not be a personal God back of all this.
I don't know...There may or may not be an eternity.
I don't know...Man may or may not survive death."

The agnostic says, "I just don't know." And he takes for granted that because **he** doesn't know, **no one else does!**

The agnostic refuses the divine revelation of Scripture and is content to be an ignoramus...which by the way is a good definition of the word, agnostic.

Now, all that was free, because in this book we're not dealing with **agnostics**, we're dealing with **gnostics**. And these folks are the **exact opposite** of the agnostic. These folks say, "**I know!**"

The root word for both the words gnostic and agnostic is the Greek word "gnosis" which simply means knowledge. The gnostic has it, the agnostic doesn't!

The gnostic professed to have fuller knowledge of the mysteries of life and death and heavenly things than even the Bible itself reveals. The gnostic added to and perverted Scripture. And because the area of Colossae had once been under the dominion of the Persian Empire, he linked his doctrine with weird Persian beliefs as well as his own human reasoning.

As a result of these two heresies, there was **something for everybody!**

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I mean, if being **legalistic** appealed to you, then you could follow the Judaizers. And if being **liberal** in your theology appealed to you, then you had a huge supply of Oriental philosophy, pagan astrology, mysticism, asceticism all mixed up with a little bit of Christianity that you could follow.

See, the false teachers claimed that they were not denying the Christian faith, but only lifting it to a higher level! These people...**both groups**...tried to change people from the outside, by means of diet and discipline and rituals...but no spiritual growth comes from **outside** a person...it comes when the Lord Jesus Christ does a work on the **inside** of a person.

The bottom line is this...both groups denied the **sufficiency** and the **adequacy** and the **supremacy** of the Lord Jesus Christ!

So, Paul wrote this letter to tell them that

Christ is all and in all...

Christ is God...

Christ is Creator...

Christ is Savior...

Christ is the Head of the Church...

Jesus said, "**If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto Myself.**"

Not if we lift up knowledge or tradition or philosophy or even the preacher or the teacher of the denomination...only Jesus is to be lifted up!

Paul is saying,

"Don't listen to these false teacher, they will lead you astray!

Don't let anyone add to the simple truth of the gospel.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!

There is no one else. There is nothing else. Christ is sufficient!"

By the way, why do you believe God allowed false doctrine to come into the early church?

I believe He did it in order that it might be exposed! And in order that truth might be declared and reaffirmed! Not only for the folks in Colossae in 60 A.D., but also for the ladies in the our class at our church in our day!

See. Satan has nothing new to throw at us. He just dresses up old false doctrines in a new suit of clothes...and hurls them again and again at the church.

We don't have to fall for Satan's tricks. We can be assured of this...We as believers have all we need to protect ourselves from false doctrine, right here in this Book...

But, if we don't **read** it and if we don't **study** it and if we don't **know** it and if we don't **understand** it...then, we're going to be exactly like the Colossians...we'll be blown by every wind of doctrine that comes over the radio, or from the pulpit, or from the TV.

Let me just say this. Be careful whom you listen to on TV. Some of the teachers these days are very slick. They dress so well. They sound so good! Be discerning! And if you have the least

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little check in your spirit about any of them, don't disregard it! Ask the Lord if that check in your spirit is from the Holy Spirit! I believe it will be!

Let me also say this and then we'll get into the Scripture. There is a dangerous thing going around in some of the so-called Christian churches today.

Many churches today are encouraging an "all-inclusive" attitude. They are encouraging their people to get to know and to understand that other people have their own beliefs...that all folks are attempting to get to heaven...and it really doesn't matter what one believes, as long as they are sincere in their beliefs.

I think we've seen this especially take place in the aftermath of 9/11. Oh, we must by all means understand the fundamentalist Moslem. We mustn't say anything to offend him. We must by all means be "politically correct."

And I want to tell you this...when churches do this...when pastors encourage their flock to do this...they may not think they're **denying** Christ, but they are, because they are dethroning Him and robbing Him of His rightful place of preeminence.

That's the theme of this book we're beginning today...**the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ in everything!**

Well, with all that as introduction and background, let's look at the book of **Colossians...**

Verses 1-2...

Here, Paul follows his custom of identifying himself at the beginning of the letter and also by establishing his authority to write such a letter. Paul reminds the Colossians that he is an apostle by the will of God.

Paul addresses them as saints. Just this past week Pope John Paul made Mother Teresa a saint. Well, if Mother Teresa really had given her heart to Jesus, she was **already** a saint.

And you and I are as well! We didn't have to be voted on!

We didn't have to work miracles. You and I are saints because God has worked a miracle in us. You and I are saints because at some point in time we listened to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and called upon the Lord Jesus Christ to save us!

Remember who the recipients are of this letter...they are folks who are **true believers** but who are in danger of being led astray. Paul approaches this with love and tenderness....he doesn't just pounce on this!

Paul didn't begin by **attacking** the false teachers and their false doctrine. Paul began by **exalting** Jesus Christ and showing His preeminence.

Verses 3-8...

Paul was grateful for what God had done in the lives of the folks at Colossae. He thanked God for their **faith** in Christ and their **love** for the saints and the **hope** that was within them.

We must be very careful where we place our **faith**. Faith is only as secure as its object.

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We are to **love** the brethren. Now, some of the brethren and the "sisters" are hard to love...but God doesn't tell us to love them if they're easy to love...we're just to love them!

And Paul mentions **hope**. This doesn't mean a "not for sure" thing...it means a "for sure" thing! In the Bible, "hope" doesn't mean "hope so." Our **hope** in Christ is as definite and assured as our **faith** in Christ! Because Christ is in us we have a hope! We have a blessed hope...Christ in us the hope of glory!

When you look at the world in which we live, we really don't see much hope in it, do we? But, we as Christians have a blessed hope!

And that blessed hope is possible by the wonderful gospel! Paul said that gospel had come to the Colossians and also to all the world. Paul said this gospel constantly bears fruit.

I want to tell you...I don't see any other "religious truth" bearing fruit, do you? I mean, when was the last time you heard of great sweeping revivals under the name of Hinduism, or Shintoism, or Taoism, or Buddhism, or Mormonism...any other "ism?"

We **do** hear that Islam is spreading...and I suppose it is, but what kind of fruit does it bear? It bears **terrorism** and **hatred** and **intolerance** and **suppression and enslavement of women**...and all sorts of other rotten fruit!

But, Paul says here that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ bears fruit and increases. **The gospel is not merely a stagnant system of ethics. It is a living, moving, growing reality.**

And then, Paul introduces us to the man, Epaphras in **verse 7**.

Paul commends this man. Paul calls him their teacher. He calls him his beloved fellow bond-servant and faithful servant of Christ.

Salvation is solely by God's grace, but He uses humans as channels of that grace! And Epaphras was used willingly by God as a channel of grace to impart the saving knowledge of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Verses 9-12...

Isn't it a wonderful thing when someone tells you he or she has been praying for you? And isn't it more wonderful when they tell you **exactly** what they have been praying?

Let me ask you...do you pray often?

Let me ask you this...do you pray often for others?

Let me ask you this...do you pray often for folks you've never even seen?

Well, Paul did. All he knew about the folks at Colossae was what Epaphras had told him. And on the basis of this, Paul prayed for these dear people.

And the first thing Paul said he prayed for them was that they be **filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.**

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Paul wanted them to have a knowledge of God's will, not a knowledge of what man had dreamed up...not a knowledge of Jewish traditions or Gentile philosophy...but a **knowledge of the will of Almighty God!**

What is Paul saying? Paul is saying, "Don't look for something new!
Stick with what you have learned at the
beginning of your Christian walk! And
grow in that knowledge!"

We tend to think sometime that finding the will of God is like looking for a needle in a haystack.

I like what Warren Wiersbe said concerning this:

"The *general* will of God for all His children is given clearly in the Bible. The *specific* will of God for any given situation must always agree with what He has already revealed in His Word. The better we know God's general will, the easier it will be to determine His specific guidance in daily life. Paul did not encourage the Colossians to seek visions or wait for voices."

Paul wanted the Colossians to have "all wisdom"...**not that they would know everything...but that they would have all the wisdom necessary for making decisions and living their lives in a way that would be pleasing to God!**

Paul wasn't concerned with their education. He wasn't concerned with their degrees. There's nothing wrong with education and degrees, but here Paul was concerned with their **knowledge of the will of God**. And he was concerned with their **spiritual wisdom and understanding**.

So...that they may **walk in a manner worthy of the Lord**
So...that they may **please Him in all respects**
So...that they may **bear fruit in every good work**
So...that they may **increase in their knowledge of God**.
So...that they may **be strengthened with all power!**

That's quite a lot to ask isn't it? I believe if **Paul** asked God for these things for the **Colossian** believers, **we** can ask God for them for the **Friendship Class** believers, don't you?

I believe it would be a good idea if we would pray this prayer for ourselves. I believe it would be a good idea if we would insert our husband's or our children's or our grandchildren's names in these verses.

Let's look quickly at the next two verses and then we'll be through...

Verses 13-14...

I want us to think a moment about the profound truth that these two verses teach us.

- He delivered us from the domain of darkness...

David put it this way...

"He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay; and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm.

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And He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God..."

Not only did He deliver us,

- **He transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son...**

Just as God took the children of Israel out of the bondage to Pharaoh in Egypt and placed them in the Promised Land of Canaan, He has taken you and me out of the bondage of Satan...out of the domain of darkness...and He has placed us in the kingdom of His beloved Son!

Not only that, but

- **He redeemed us...**

This word means "to release a prisoner by the payment of a ransom." The Lord Jesus paid the ransom for us at Calvary! He didn't pay Satan! He met the demands of His holy Father. It was by the blood He shed at Calvary.

The book of *Isaiah* tell us that it pleased the Father to crush His Son. You know, I don't understand that! How could it please the Father to watch His precious Son die?

Because God loved you and God loved me. And there was no other way that we could be delivered and transferred and redeemed except by the precious blood of His dear Son. There was no other way we could be reconciled to the Father except through the blood of the Son.

Also **verse 14** tells us

- **He forgave us...**

The word translated forgiveness means "**to send away**" or "**to cancel a debt.**"

The Lord Jesus not only set us free and transferred us to a new kingdom, but He has canceled every debt so that we cannot be enslaved ever again! Satan may accuse us, but he cannot find anything in the files that will indict us!

David tells us in *Psalms 103* that God has **removed my sins as far as the east is from the west.**

The book of *Isaiah* tell us that God has **cast all our sins behind His back!**

The book of *Micah* tells that God has **buried my sins in the depths of the sea.**

How deep is the depths of the sea? I don't know...

John Jasper was a great old black preacher of yesteryear. One day he was studying and he just began to shout.

His secretary ran to the door and said, "Bro. Jasper, what's wrong with you?"

And he said, "Well I was just reading in the Word of God where the Bible says that the Lord has taken my sins and buried them in the depths of the deepest sea and I got to thinking about that. And if the old devil was to try to go down there and try to drag them up he'd drown before he got to the top."

That's what it means to be forgiven!

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"My sins are washed away
and my night has turned to day...
Heaven came down and glory filled my soul!"

Well, this introduces us to this great book! As we said before, the theme of this book is the **preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ**. Paul has just shown us **Christ's preeminence in salvation**. Next week, Paul is going to show us **Christ's preeminence in creation**.