

Journey Into Spiritual Maturity

LESSON 1 . . . The Real Gospel (Colossians 1:1-8)

The book of Colossians, as no other book in the New Testament, presents the absolute supremacy and authority of Jesus Christ in all things—the family, the church, the workplace, and all creation. This book uniquely and beautifully pictures Christ in His rightful place as Head of all things. To have a “journey into spiritual maturity,” we must understand exactly who Jesus Christ is. The first thing we must do as Christians is establish Christ as Lord of our lives. What do the following references in *Colossians* tell us about the authority of Jesus Christ?

1:18 _____

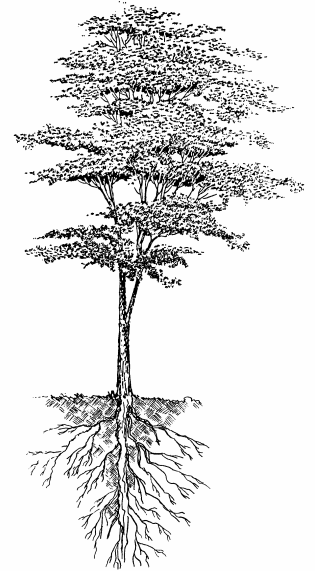
2:9-10 _____

People today desperately need the book of Colossians because the secular world is promoting a lifestyle where “anything goes.” We live in a day when people reject any claim of authority on their lives, and the result is sexual immorality, violence, broken homes, and an “if it feels good, do it” lifestyle. The book of Colossians presents Christ as the absolute authority in life.

This book is applicable today because people are looking for something that works and makes a difference in life. In the United States, millions of people every day consult horoscopes, seeking some kind of direction in life. People are not concerned about pre-destination, election, or other argumentative theology, but they are interested in something that can give purpose and direction to their lives. The book of Colossians can meet those needs. It is more up-to-date than tomorrow’s newspaper because it speaks to the greatest human needs of our day. Therefore, let’s begin our journey by considering **Paul’s greeting** and **Paul’s gospel** . . .

Paul’s Greeting (1:1-2)

The first word in this epistle gives us the name of the author, *Paul*. In his pre-Christian life he was known as *Saul of Tarsus*, but during the early years of his Christian life his name was changed to *Paul*. Born to Jewish parents, Paul was probably named after the first king of Israel (1 Sam. 9:2).



NOTES



In designating himself *an apostle of Jesus Christ* (1:1), Paul establishes his authority for the letter. The word *apostle* (APOSTOLOS) denotes an authorized spokesman for God. He is not just a man writing his own opinion. Paul writes and speaks with the authority of God because he is His official representative, proclaiming God's message. How did Paul receive God's divine message, according to Galatians 1:12?

Paul did not preach a message he received from a mere human but one he received directly from the Lord Himself. Therefore, the author of this book is an official ambassador of Jesus Christ, who didn't attain his position by choice or politics but *by the will of God* (Col. 1:1). Paul is an *apostle* by divine appointment.

Paul is writing *to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ* (1:2) in the city of Colosse. It was a small town in modern-day Turkey (see map on page 11). Though Paul had never visited there or met the believers there, he shows a loving spiritual oneness with them by calling them *saints* and *brethren* (1:2). The word *saints* (HAGIOS) means "set apart ones." In the New Testament the word denotes those who are set apart from the world to be used by God and includes all true believers. It basically means "different."

The church at Colosse was composed primarily of Gentiles (2:13), which means they came from backgrounds of immorality, superstition, and pagan religions. However, there was a radical newness in their lives because of what spiritual truth found in 2 Corinthians 5:17?

Paul continues, *Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (Col. 1:2b). This is a blending of Greek and Hebrew greetings. The common Greek greeting among Christians in Paul's day was *grace* (Greek, CHARIS), from which we get our English word "Karen." It refers to God's unmerited favor in being willing to forgive our sins, even when we do not deserve it. The second part of Paul's greeting, *peace*, comes from the Hebrew "shalom." This means more than simply an absence of trouble; it is a general well-being, resulting from God's presence.

Before we can experience God's *peace*, we must first experience His *grace*, for peace is the result of grace. A tragedy of our age is the human pursuit of peace through drugs, alcohol, sex, money, etc. However, apart from experiencing God's grace, real peace cannot be found. When we experience God's grace, the result is peace. As Christians we have peace in at least two ways. What are they, according to the following scriptures?

Romans 5:1 _____

Philippians 4:7 _____

When we experience God's grace, the spiritual war with God in our hearts and minds is over. As a bonus we get supernatural peace in our hearts that provides tranquility in the storms of life. We've looked at **Paul's greeting**; now let's look at . . .



Paul's Gospel (1:3-8)

In verse 3 Paul follows his greeting with a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the believers at Colosse. Paul knew how to encourage believers. Nothing is more uplifting than to hear someone thank God for you or something you have done. In verse 4 Paul thanks God for their *faith in Christ* and *love for all saints*. Faith in Christ always results in love for all believers, even those who are difficult to love.

In verses 5-8 Paul begins to describe the real Gospel the Colossians had originally received and he preached. First, Paul says the Gospel is one that gives a *hope which is laid up for you in heaven* (1:5). The Greek word translated *laid up* means "reserved." How does Hebrews 6:19 describe our "reserved hope" in heaven?

If we have received Jesus Christ as Savior, we have a long, long chain with an anchor on the end of it. That anchor has been thrown into the holy of holies in heaven and hooked to the very throne of God. The author of *Hebrews* describes it as *an anchor of the soul . . . within the veil*. We have an unbreakable, unshakable connection with the very throne of God. Though our hope will not be fully realized until we receive our glorified bodies when Christ returns (1 Thes. 4:13-18), we are able to enjoy the benefits of our hope because we know it is secure.

Paul declares the Gospel is a living truth that brings *forth fruit* in the lives of the Colossians (1:6). The Gospel is contained in the Word of God, the Bible. How does the first phrase in Hebrews 4:12 describe the Word of God?

Since it is living, it produces fruit. The Word of God is a living seed, and when it finds good soil—a receptive heart—it takes root, grows, and bears fruit. The Gospel is not just the story of a great teacher or just a good moral guide; it is a fruit-bearing force that transforms a life and causes it to bear the fruit described in Galatians 5:22-23: *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*.

Paul also says that because of the Gospel the Colossians *knew the grace of God in truth* (1:6). The false teachers, called Gnostics, considered themselves spiritual intellectuals with superior knowledge who could help “lesser” believers obtain a higher level of spirituality. The word “Gnosticism” comes from a Greek word (GNOSIS), which means “to know.” The Gnostics taught that Jesus Christ was not the Creator, the incarnate God, and He alone was not enough for salvation. Paul never directly attacks the teaching of the Gnostics, but in the very beginning of this book he describes the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that exposes their heresy. There has always been and will always be those who try to change or add to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. However, what awesome warning do we find in Galatians 1:8-9?

We have our modern Gnostics who think people who believe the Bible and rely upon it as a guide for life are uneducated and ignorant. There are those who would enlighten us with their superior knowledge by having us add the teaching of some human being to the Word of God. Others say the Bible is out-of-date, and we need to begin tearing out pages that no longer apply. As believers, we must never retreat from the fact that the Bible is the inspired, infallible, complete Word of God. If it is anything less, it cannot be our authoritative guide in life.

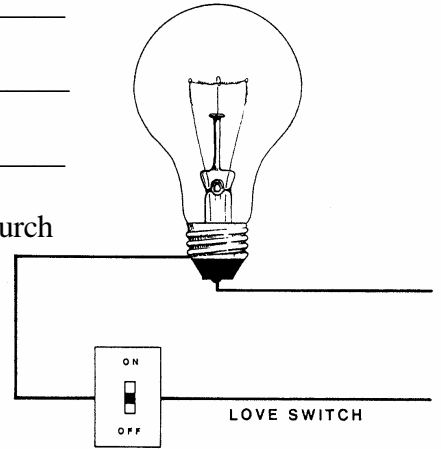
In Colossians 1:7 Paul mentions *Epaphras* (E-paf-rus), who had been a *faithful minister* to the Colossians. We don’t know much about Epaphras of Colosse. He probably became a believer during Paul’s three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31), was disciplined by Paul, and then returned to his hometown, Colosse, to share the Gospel and begin a church, using what he had learned from Paul.

When people accept the Gospel and then mature, there will be *love in the Spirit* (1:8), as Epaphras had communicated to Paul was the case with the Colossian believers. The presence of love in our lives for all other Christians is the acid test of whether we have responded to the real Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not mere human love but *love in the spirit*, which means the Spirit of God has produced a supernatural love. As true believers, why is a supernatural love inevitable in our lives, according to the following references?

1 John 2:9 _____

1 John 4:8 _____

None of us are easy to love. Oh, we all look so sweet and nice at church when we are at our Sunday-best. But what about when we are at our worst? When we are short-tempered with our children or spouse, we are not so easy to love. What about those bad days when we are grumpy with everyone about everything? In all my life I have found only one person who is easy to love, and I married her. There is only one way I can love most of you, and that is *in the Spirit*.



The fact we are going to be together in heaven for all eternity should encourage us to love each other on earth. However, the truth of the matter is as the poet puts it:

To live above, with saints we love,
Will certainly be glory.
To live below, with saints we know,
Well, that's another story.

The **real** Gospel of Jesus Christ results in the ability to live with saints we know and to love them. There is one real test of whether you have experienced the transforming power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not what you believe, which church you attend, or how much of the Bible you can quote. Jesus Himself gave us the acid test of true discipleship. What is it, according to John 13:35?

With that statement, Jesus gave the world the right to judge us by our love. The love of the Spirit is not the result of compulsion from the outside, but of a change on the inside caused by the real Gospel. Not only are we commanded to love each other, but we have also been given the capacity to fulfill this command. How, according to Romans 5:5?

The word *gospel* simply means “good news.” It is the good news that Jesus Christ, God’s Son, died on the cross so we could have all our sins forgiven. This amazing news brings men and women to repent, and through the power of the Holy Spirit be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This is *the truth of the gospel* (Col. 1:5). It includes the message that leads to salvation, the instructions in God’s Word, and the power of the Holy Spirit, all of which are requirements for a “journey into spiritual maturity.”

By examining **Paul’s greeting** and **Paul’s gospel** we see the **real Gospel**. An excellent example of a spiritually mature believer is Epaphras. What can you do to be more like him?
