

From the Apostle to the Saints Colossians 1:1-2

Introduction and Outline

- Praise God! Today marks the start of our expository sermon series in Colossians.
- An important principle of biblical interpretation: consider the background information — Who wrote it? To whom? What's the occasion? What's the purpose?
- Today's content:
 1. **Background**, and an **Overview**
 2. Discuss two special identities: the **Apostles**, and the **Saints** (1:1-2)

Background and Overview

- Author — the apostle Paul (with Timothy as the co-author)
- Recipient — believers in the Colossian church
- Time and Place — during the two years of Paul's Roman imprisonment (cf. 4:3; Acts 28)
- Introduction of Colossae:
 - A city of Phrygia in Asia Minor, in the same valley with Laodicea and Hierapolis (cf. 4:13).
 - About 100 miles west of Colossae is Ephesus, which served as Paul's missionary base in Asia (cf. Acts 19:1-10).
 - Once a significant city, Colossae had dwindled greatly in Paul's time due to some changes in major commercial routes.
- Origin of the Colossian church: How did Christianity come to this remote little town?
 - Paul had not been there nor met with the church personally (cf. 2:1).
 - Key connection: Epaphras — a faithful coworker who planted the church in Colossae (cf. 1:7-8; 4:12-13)
 - Epaphras's theological training: studied under Paul in the "seminary" of Tyrannus, located in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:10).

Application: Be amazed at the wonderful work of the gospel. Praise God for His works!

- Current state of the Colossian church:
 - Reason for thanksgiving: Fruit of genuine salvation (cf. 1:3-6)
 - Reason for concern: Influence of wrong teachings (cf. 2:4, 8, 16-23)
- Occasion for this letter: Epaphras traveled thousands of miles to bring news about the church to Paul (cf. 1:7-9)
- Purpose of writing: To rebuke the false teaching, and to defend the truth of Christ!
 - All kinds of false teaching: Gnosticism, Legalism, Mysticism, Asceticism.....
 - Core of the error: **Christ is not sufficient**. Complete Christian life = **Christ + XYZ**
 - Truth: **Christ alone. Christ is sufficient**. Complete Christian life = **Christ + 0**
 - False teachings do great harm: They are not from God but from man (2:8); they deny the deity of Christ (2:9-10) and the sufficiency of Christ for salvation (2:16-23); they advocate legalistic obedience (2:16), worship of angels (2:18), harsh treatment of self (2:20); they have a false appearance of humility (2:23) but are arrogant inside (2:18); they have no value for sanctification (2:23); and worse, they even draw people away from the blessed hope of the gospel (1:23).

- Structure:
 - Chapter 1 focuses on encouragement: thanking God and praying for the faith of saints in Colossae.
 - Chapter 2 focuses on instruction: refuting the heretics with the all-surpassing richness of Christ.
 - Chapter 3 focuses on exhortation: urging the saints to pursue the sanctified life in Christ.
 - Chapter 4 focuses on personal care: filled with loving greetings of individual saints.
- Colossians confronts our world today:
 - Our world today advocates Materialism, seeking only the richness on the earth; while Col 3:3 says.....
 - Our world today advocates Secularism, pursuing only the here and now, with no concern for the future; while Col 3:4 says.....
 - Our world today advocates Hedonism, justifying the gratification of all fleshly desires; while Col 3:5 says.....
 - Our world today advocates Cynicism, turning sarcastic criticism about everything into a fashion; while Col 3:15-17 says.....
 - Our world today advocates Egoism, telling everyone to be the lord of his own life; while Col 3:18-4:1 says
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Apostle (Verse 1) — Their Unique Identity

- "Apostle": The original meaning is "to be sent", generally refers to any person who is sent on a mission (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:23, Philippians 2:25).
- "Apostle of Jesus Christ": 13 particular individuals sent by the Lord Jesus himself (originally 12 persons -Judas +Matthias +Paul)
 - Verification of true apostle qualifications:
 1. Chosen and sent by Jesus (see Luke 6:13; Acts 1:24; 9:15; 26:15-18)
 2. Saw the resurrected Lord with his own eyes (Acts 1:22; 10:39-41; 1 Corinthians 15:7-9)
 3. Powerful signs and wonders as evidence (2 Corinthians 12:12; Acts 2:43; 5:12)
- "By the will of God": Not from man, but from God! (contrasting "tradition of men" in 2:8; cf. Galatians 1:1)
 - Their mission comes from God: To witness the gospel message of Jesus (Acts 26:16) so as to serve as the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20)!

Application: The Bible is unique and very important, because it comes from God's authority! This is why we need expository sermons, verse by verse explaining what God means. We want to see what God has to say to us through prophets and apostles, not what we want God to say. Beware of this temptation: judging the Bible by other things, such as science, philosophy, psychology, personal experience, etc. The only authority in the believer's life is the Word of God. It is crucial to distinguish between what comes from God and what comes from man!

Saint (Verse 2) — Our Precious Identity

- "Saints": The original meaning is "holy ones"! Incredible? Sanctification (becoming holy) is the purpose for which believers are called (Ephesians 1:4, Romans 8:29).
 - 1 Corinthians 6:11 "but you were washed, but **you were sanctified**, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."
 - This is positional sanctification. It is the result of "the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5)

- The three stages of sanctification:
 1. Positional sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11, where the Greek has the verb in the perfect tense)
 2. Progressive sanctification (Hebrews 12:14; see also the vivid illustration in Proverbs 4:18)
 3. Perfected sanctification (2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 3:2, being conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus)

Application: What a glorious hope! Saints, when you are discouraged by things in the world, think about this precious identity! You are a saint who has been washed clean by the blood of the Lord Jesus!

- "Faithful": It is the same word as "believing", when used as "faithful" it means trustworthy. True believers not only have faith in Jesus, but this faith is trustworthy and unshakable because the power of God protects them.

1 Peter 1:5 "who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

Application: To be called a faithful saint means that you remain singularly devoted to Christ and have no divided loyalties.

- "Brothers": God's children are family members to one another. We can become so familiar with this title as to forget what a loving relationship it signifies!
 - Illustration: In the 1st century, Roman government persecuted Christians with many false accusations, one of which says they secretly engaged in fornication, because they called one another brother/sister and showed such an unusual love toward one another!

Application: If the world has to misunderstand us, let it be because of our love! Don't let our quarrels and conflicts confuse them, thinking we are no different from the world.

Application: If you call someone a brother yet do not love him but rather hate him in your heart, then you are no different from Cain (1 John 3:11-15)!

- "In Christ": the amazing mystical union between believers and Christ (cf. Ephesians 1:3-14; John 5:5; Galatians 2:20)

Colossians 3:4 "Christ, who is our life...!"