

### **Colossians 1:1-8**

The theme of this short book is the completeness, fullness, freedom, adequacy and sufficiency that we have in Christ and Christ alone. It defends the Lordship of Christ against the attack from the surrounding culture. This letter is about the supremacy, sufficiency, and preeminence of Christ.

Over the last two weeks Rocky has been teaching on the imputation of our sin to Christ and His righteousness to us. The wrath of God was completely satisfied in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is nothing more that God could have done to propitiate his divine wrath against sin. One could say that Christ is the preeminent and only Savior – there is no other name by which a man may be saved.

What Paul does in Colossians is expand on that idea of Christ's preeminence. As Christ is preeminent in salvation He is also preeminent in the old creation – 1:16-17. He is the architect and the builder of the universe and the one for whom the creation was created. We do not have angelic mediators or eons who are responsible for the creation. Jesus Christ is the one responsible for the creation.

He's also preeminent in the church – 1:18.

And of course, Paul concludes that if Christ is preeminent in the old creation, having created it, and if He's preeminent in the church, having wrought it by virtue of the fact that He's the first born from the dead, He's sufficient for us in all of our needs – 2:9-10.

**Theme:** The theme is the fruitful and effective power of the gospel message, a message that heralds the supremacy or preeminence, headship, and the sole sufficiency of Christ to the church, which is His body. In this little book, we see Paul's "*full-length portrait of Christ.*"

Christ is the object of the Christian's faith (1:4), but why? Because He is God's Son (1:13), the Redeemer (1:14), the very image of God (1:15), the Lord of creation (1:15), the head of the church (1:18), the fullness of salvation (1:19), the Reconciler of the universe (1:20), the One who contains all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:3), the standard by which all religious teaching is judged (2:8), the fullness of God, undiminished deity (2:9), the One under Whom all power and authority is subjected (2:10), the Victor over all the cosmic powers (2:15), the reality of the truth foreshadowed in Old Testament types and figures, regulations and rituals (2:17), the One exalted and enthroned at the right hand of God in heaven (3:1), the One in Whom we are complete and in Whom our life is hidden, protected, and kept (2:10; 3:3), the One by Whom our new life will be gloriously manifested at His coming again (3:4), and it is through Him and because of our new life in Him that we ought to put away our old manner of life from which we have been marvelously saved (3:5f). The preeminence of Christ declared!

#### **I. How Did the Colossian Church Begin Acts 19:8-10**

The church in Colossae began as an outgrowth of Paul's ministry in Ephesus. It is doubtful if Paul ever visited Colossae – 2:1. Colossae was a commercial city on the Lycus River about 100 miles east of Ephesus in what is now western Turkey. It formed a triangle with Hierapolis and Laodicea.

And it seems likely that Epaphras had wandered over to Ephesus, most likely on business, heard the apostle preach, accepted the message of the gospel and he had gone back to his own land of Colossae,

and there he had preached the word to them – 1:6b-7; 4:12-13.

Now over time some doctrinal issues had arisen in the church and Epaphras felt inadequate to combat them so he traveled to Rome where Paul was now in prison under house arrest. He shared with Paul his concern about what was happening in the church and his inability to know how to respond. Paul called what Epaphras was hearing “*enticing words or persuasive arguments*” – 2:4. Colossians then becomes Paul’s response to these enticing words. It is written between 60-62 AD while Paul was in Rome, and was sent back to the church in Colossae via the messenger of Tychicus and Onesimus – 4:7-9. Epaphras remained with Paul.

## II. Why Paul Wrote Colossians

Colossae was a pagan city in the sense that the pantheon of gods was worshiped, just as they were in Ephesus; and I would add just as it is today even if the gods are not made of wood or metal. When one comes to faith out of that environment it can be a challenge to leave that all behind and fully follow Christ.

The believers in Colossae are experiencing “*an enticing new teaching*”. It promised the believers a close union with God – a spiritual fullness would be theirs if they entered into the teaching and ceremonies prescribed. They would have a full knowledge and spiritual depth. This wisdom would release them from earthly things and put them in touch with heavenly things.

The leading features of the new spirituality were:

- 1) spiritual fullness – to build on the simple elementary faith and complete it
- 2) spiritual freedom – liberty and freedom from earthly things
- 3) spiritual protection from the powers of evil
- 4) deeper knowledge of God and greater experience of his power

What we will discover, particularly in chapter 2 is that this teaching is Religious Syncretism. They were not denying the Christian faith but lifting it to a higher, more complete level. A fullness and freedom that would solve all the problems they faced. Does any of this sound familiar?

That is in essence what Charismatics do. They like to come to those who are believers, and they appeal to them with, “*You have, so far, gone into the Christian faith quite well. You’ve made advances, and you are now at the place where, in order to finish off your Christian experience, you need to know what we have experienced and to experience it. And that will make you a full and complete Christian - a Deeper Life.*” And who as a believer doesn’t want a deeper, fuller faith?

It’s what the Prosperity Gospel presents. Jesus is great and your faith is wonderful but don’t you want more? More joy, more satisfaction, more fulfillment, more health and wealth, more...? If so then join us, give us money, get pumped up, believe and God will give it to you.

It’s what Liberation Theology presents. If you really want to follow Jesus then you will strive for social justice, involve yourself in social issues, protest corruption and rescue people from poverty and other injustices. You do those things then your faith will be complete but if not then it demonstrates that you are close-minded and out of touch.

When we strive for spiritual perfection or spiritual fullness by means of formulas, disciplines or rituals, even good ones we are going backward not forward. We must beware of “*deeper life*” teachers who offer a system for victory and fullness that bypasses devotion to Jesus Christ. In all things He must have preeminence. What we need as believers is to know, understand and apply our fullness in Christ. For in Him we are complete and in Him we have everything we need.

### **III. The Structure of Colossians**

There are many similarities between Ephesians and Colossians. The major distinction between them is that in Ephesians the emphasis is on the *church* as the body of Christ. In Colossians the emphasis is on *Christ* as the head of the body. Stylistically Colossians is somewhat tense and abrupt whereas Ephesians is more diffuse and flowing. The mood of Colossians is argumentative and polemical, but that of Ephesians is calm and peaceful. Paul evidently wrote both letters about the same time. These two epistles, along with Philippians and Philemon, constitute the Prison Epistles of Paul.

A simple outline would look like this: (Warren Wiersbe [Expository Outlines of the New Testament](#))

#### **I. Christ’s Preeminence Declared 1:1-29**

#### **II. Christ’s Preeminence Defended 2:1-23**

#### **III. Christ’s Preeminence Displayed 3:1-4:18**

Now back to chapter 1 and the opening verses of this letter.

### **IV. Greeting and Praise Col. 1:1-8**

#### **A. The Author and Recipients 1:1-2**

In accordance with the conventions of the time the first thing the recipients of a letter would expect to read (*or hear*) is the name(s) of the sender(s) and confirmation that the letter had been intended for them. So here: “Paul ... and Timothy ... to ... Colossians....”

As usual in the Pauline letters, a descriptive phrase is attached to the name itself: “*an apostle of Christ Jesus.*” In wider usage the term “*apostle*” could bear the sense of an “*authorized emissary*”. But as always in Paul’s claims for his own apostleship, the claim is that his commission and authorization came directly from Christ Jesus; it is as a representative of and spokesman for Christ Jesus.

Paul is the author and the recipients are the believers who reside in the city of Colossae. They are called “*saints*” and “*faithful brethren*” and “*in Christ*”.

“*Saints*” indicates those who have been set apart for God. “*Faithful brethren*” indicates their practice – consistent in their walk and care for each other. Positionally they were “*in Christ*” indicating they partook of all that Christ has done, is doing, and all that he ever would be. This phrase reminds us of Ephesians 1:3-14 where Paul uses the phrase “*in Christ*” no less than 10 times to describe the depth of our regeneration in Christ.

While they, and we, have everything we need spiritually the reality is that we live “*in the world*”. The Colossians lived in Colossae while we live in Dallas, Plano, Richardson and so forth. We are in the world but not “*of the world*” and hence the tension we live with. How to navigate who we are in Christ as *saints* living in a world that is anything but holy is the challenge.

I'm reminded of the prayer that Jesus prayed in John 17:15-18.

These new believers who are in the world are encountering teaching that is causing them to doubt the truth of who they are in Christ. It is telling them they need more knowledge, more understanding, more spiritual experiences in order to be complete or whole. Paul writes to combat that teaching and remind them that they are already complete in Christ – 2:10. So having introduced himself and described the readers Paul encouraged them with praise.

## **B. Thanksgiving for the Believers 1:3**

Whenever Paul and Timothy prayed for the Colossians they gave thanks to God for them. Note the many references to thanksgiving in this letter (1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:15, 16, 17; 4:2).

Paul persistently prayed and while he prayed, he gave thanks. Note the word “*always*” and the fact the words “*give thanks*” and “*praying*” are in the present continuous tense in the Greek text. Paul’s prayer life was regular, persistent, and faithful. Because of the lack of punctuation marks in the Greek text, “*always*” could be taken with “*we give thanks*,” even though several words separate them. It would then mean “*We always give thanks for you when we pray.*” But “*always*” could also be taken with “*we pray*,” i.e., “*we give thanks, always praying for you.*” Though difficult to decide, the adverb should probably be taken with “*we give thanks.*” Every time Paul prayed for the Colossian believers he was thankful for them: “*We always give thanks for you!*”

Question for you: When you and I pray for other believers do we also express thanks to God for them? Does thanksgiving permeate our prayers for one another? If not, why not? This is a pattern Paul follows in the majority of his recorded prayers – Eph. 1:15-16; Phil. 1:3-4; even 1 Corinthians 1:4

## **C. Cause of Thanksgiving for the Believers 1:4-8**

### **1. Their Faith in Jesus Christ 1:4a**

Now, this is where it all begins. Paul says, “*I want to thank God that you believe. I thank God that you have faith.*” It is not faith in faith but faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that saves.

### **2. Their Love for each other 1:4b**

Secondly, the gospel truth results in love – 4b. Galatians 5:6 says: “*Faith works by love.*” Where there's true faith there's going to be love. If you truly believe in Christ, you're truly His child; you're going to love your brother. It is inevitable that where there is a healthy faith there will be a true love for the brothers. Faith does not lead to isolation. It is faith in Christ, in a sense that purges us of selfishness and gives a new perspective toward others. And our love is a reflection of His love for us.

“*A new commandment I give you,*” said Jesus, “*that you love one another.*” We're saved by faith. We're saved to love.

### **3. Their Hope in Heaven 1:5**

The gospel truth not only is received by faith and results in love but it rests in hope. What hope is this? “*It's laid up for you in heaven.*” The verb means ‘*reserved*’, it's the divine-lay-away-plan. Peter calls it: “*An inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.*” 1 Pet.1:4

Hope is our eternal-lay-away-plan. The writer to the Hebrews calls hope “*an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast*” (Heb. 6:19). Hope is an incredible confidence borne out of faith that there's something in the future that's far better than anything in the present.

So that Paul can say in Rom. 8:18 “*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*”

And of course, as you know, faith, love and hope are the great triad of Christian virtues, right?  
1Cor.13:13.

Paul is thankful to God for the believers in Colossae because of their faith in Christ, their love for one another and for their hope. Might it be helpful for us to be thankful for the same?

#### **4. The spread of the gospel 1:6**

The gospel truth reaches the world as it produces fruit and grows – 6. This gospel which goes to the whole world is true and rooted in grace. This is not just another cult or another local group but this is a universal truth that changes lives by grace. It changed lives in Colossae and it changes lives today.

#### **5. The proclaimers of the gospel 1:7-8**

The gospel truth is reported or proclaimed by men – 7-8. Here he introduces Epaphras. You know why? Because somebody had to take the gospel to the Colossians and Epaphras had done it. Paul often referred to himself as a bond servant (*doulos*) and here he uses the same word (*sundoulos* - a fellow servant or one who serves the same master with another) to identify Epaphras thus connecting their ministry. What Epaphras taught and proclaimed is the same as that which Paul taught and proclaimed.

By the way, that reference in verse 8 is the only time the Holy Spirit is referred to in this letter. It is not because the truth about the Spirit is not important, but Paul is not focusing on the Spirit's work in this letter; rather, he is dealing with the results of the Spirit's work, faith and love arising out of renewed hope.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the focus of our study will be on the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is supreme, we are complete in Him; he is our fullness; and he is to have first place - *be preeminent* - in everything. *He is also head of the body, the church; and he is the beginning, the first born from the dead so that he himself will come to have first place in everything* – 1:18. *For in him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in him you have been made complete, and he is the head over all rule and authority.*

This is a book about the supremacy, sufficiency and preeminence of Christ. As those who have come to faith in Christ we have the opportunity to develop our thankfulness for one another. Every time we pray for someone let's start thanking God for them as well.