

## “The Book of Truth”

April 23, 2017

Colossians 1:1-8

### I. Introduction

In **Ecclesiastes 1:9** Solomon wrote, “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.” The Letter to the Colossians is a prime example of just that—the problems and crises that were affecting the church in Colossae are the same problems we are facing today. They were facing a movement called syncretism—a blending of all religions into one world religion. Today we call it ecumenism, but it means the same thing—unifying the world’s religions. Efforts are being made today to unite not only Protestants and Catholics, but also such varied religions as Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. For example, we are told that Allah and Jehovah are names for the same God; we see the Eastern religious activities of yoga and transcendental meditation being taught in churches as ways to reduce stress and coming to “know” one’s self. With this in mind, Paul warned in **Colossians 2:8**, “See to it that no-one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.”

Rebellion against all forms of authority was also an issue. Absolutes were denied. Truth was viewed as relative. All religious traditions were assumed to be of equal value. To claim that one religion was exclusively true was regarded as the height of intolerance and bigotry. With this thought in mind, Jesus was merely another wise man. Similarly today, people claim that Jesus is nothing more than a great moral teacher on the same order as Muhammad, Confucius, and the Buddha. Colossians gives the true identity of Jesus. **Colossians 1:15** says, that “He, i.e. Jesus Christ, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” And later in **Colossians 2:9** we read, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.” As God in human flesh, Jesus’ word is the last word; it is absolutely and exclusively true—truth is not relative.

### II. Background

As we begin “The Letter to the Colossians,” it might be good to consider some background.

**A. First, the City of Colossae** Colossae was one of three cities located about 100 miles inland from Ephesus in the province of Asia in the country now called Turkey. The other two cities were Laodicea and Hierapolis. During the time of the Persian king Xerxes, the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther, Colossae was a great city. But in Roman times, the major road that went through Colossae was rerouted and Colossae became a small, 2<sup>nd</sup> rate town. Yet the church was important enough to merit the attention of the Apostle Paul.

**B. The Church** During his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey, Paul spent 3 years in Ephesus and Luke wrote in [Acts 19:10](#) “that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.” Most likely, it was at this time that the churches in Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossae got their start. God used a man by the name of Epaphras, not Paul, to start the church in Colossae—in [Colossians 2:1](#) Paul wrote that he had never seen the Colossians in person. [Colossians 4:12](#) says that Epaphras was a native of Colossae. He was probably converted to Christianity while visiting Ephesus during Paul’s stay there. Epaphras then returned to his city and with Philemon established the church.

**C. The Author** Colossians is one of Paul’s Prison Letters. Like Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Philemon, Paul wrote this letter while he was a prisoner in Rome. [Turn to Colossians 4:10, 18](#). The date was around AD 60. Epaphras had traveled over 1000 miles to Rome to find Paul because he needed Paul’s help. Some new doctrines—heretical doctrines—were being taught in Colossae and were threatening to destroy the church. From what we see in this letter, these doctrines included the denial of the sufficiency of Christ for salvation, the need of special knowledge for salvation, the need to observe the Jewish holidays, the worship of angels, and reliance on human wisdom and tradition. So Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians to counter all this.

**D. The Theme** The theme can be seen in two verses, [turn to Colossians 1:18 and then 3:11](#). This is the theme: Jesus Christ alone is the preeminent One. All that the believer needs is Jesus. There is no need to worry about angelic mediators or any other spiritual manifestations. As we celebrated last week, God sent His Son to die on a cross for us. Every person who believes on Jesus Christ is saved and is a part of Jesus’ body the church, of which Jesus is the Head. Nothing needs to be added to this relationship, because as [Colossians 2:10](#) says, “**You have been given fullness in Christ.**”

The best way to detect a counterfeit bill is to learn everything one can about the genuine bill first. This same thought applies to distinguishing truth from falsehood concerning biblical issues. One must know what is truth before he can recognize what is false. So, rather than attacking the false teachers and their doctrines, Paul began by exalting Jesus Christ and showing His preeminence in five areas: the Gospel message, redemption, Creation, the church, and Paul’s own ministry. Once he had taught the truth, Paul then turned to the heretics and their false teachings. Finally, like he did in many of his letters, Paul closed this letter to the Christians in Colossae with practical applications for the church members. Now, let’s look at the salutation beginning with Paul’s authority.

### **III. The Salutation**

#### **A. Paul’s Authority**

**1. First, he was an apostle and an ambassador.** As was the custom of the day, Paul began the letter with his name. He then followed that up with the reason for his authority. He wasn't simply a messenger, but an official representation of the One who sent him—he was “an apostle of Christ Jesus.” In [2 Corinthians 5:20](#) Paul wrote, “We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.” As an apostle and ambassador, what Paul wrote in this letter is not merely his opinion, but God's authoritative Word.

**2. He was chosen by God.** Paul didn't choose to become an apostle through his own efforts. Neither was he nominated for the position by any human organization. He was an apostle by the will of God. He was chosen by God. It's been a while so turn to Paul's story—[turn to Acts 9:1-19](#). God chose Paul for this gigantic task.

**B. Next we see Paul's Co-laborer** Again, as was his custom, Paul mentioned a fellow laborer who was with him: “Timothy our brother.” In [Philippians 2:22](#) Paul wrote, “But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.” Timothy stayed with Paul and helped him even when Paul was under house arrest in Rome during his first imprisonment.

**C. The Recipients** Then we see the recipients, Paul addressed them as “the saints and faithful brothers in Christ which are at Colossae.” The “saints and faithful brothers” are the same people. Being “saints,” or “holy” as some Bibles have it, had to do with being separated from sin and set apart to God; it does not imply that these believers belong to some exalted group of saints. And they are “faithful.” In spite of the pressures around them, they have remained faithful to their call to Jesus Christ.

**D. The Results of being holy and faithful.** Paul closed the salutation with the results of being holy and faithful: “grace and peace to you from God our Father.” Everyone wants peace—Paul said that there is only one source of peace—God the Father. As an old hymn says, “*If you want peace real peace, wonderful peace, let Jesus come into your heart.*”

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The church today desperately needs the message of Colossians. We live in a day when religious toleration is interpreted to mean “*one religion is just as good as another; all you have to do is be sincere.*” Some people try to take the best from various religious systems and manufacture their own private religion. To many people, Jesus Christ is only one of several great religious teachers, with no more authority than anyone else. He may be prominent, but He is definitely not preeminent.

This really is an age of “*syncretism.*” People, including some religious leaders, are trying to harmonize and unite many different schools of thought and come up with their own superior religion.

Under the guise of political correctness, even some evangelical churches are in danger of diluting the faith in their loving attempt to understand the beliefs of others and not wanting to make anyone feel left out. Mysticism, legalism, Eastern religions, self-denial, and man-made philosophies are secretly creeping into churches. They aren't denying Christ, but they are dethroning Him and robbing Him of His rightful place of preeminence. Instead of asking "*What would Jesus do?*" they are asking "*What would people think?*"

Christianity can never be one element in any form of a composite religion. In Christ, we have everything we need. He is our hope and life. Only in Him can we find salvation; Jesus said in [John 14:6](#), "I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me." In [Colossians 2:4](#) Paul wrote, "I tell you this so that no-one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments." Later in [verse 8 \(NLT\)](#) he wrote, "Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ." If we as a church and you as an individual Christian are going to stand firm and not be deceived or captured, you need to know what is in this book—you need to know the Truth. Don't listen to hearsay, i.e. what others say it says—read it and study it yourself.

In [Acts 17:11](#) Luke wrote, "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." The only way you can know if what a person says or writes about God and His Word are true is to study God's Word. In Paul's last letter just before he was beheaded, he wrote to Timothy in [2 Timothy 2:15](#), "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." [Ephesians 6:17](#) says that "the sword of the Spirit . . . is the word of God." If you were going to use a sword in battle without cutting yourself, you have to practice with it. You have to hold it in your hand. It has to become part of you. The same is true for the Word of God—you have to spend time with it. You have to hold it in your hands. It has to become part of you.

At the beginning of this year, a challenge was given to read the Bible daily with the goal of reading through the Bible in one year. Did you take the challenge? If so, how are you doing? The important thing really isn't how fast you are going, but how much you understand. I know of one person who reads and takes notes of what she has read and then, periodically, goes back and reviews her notes—she may not make it all the way through the Bible in a year, but she will have studied and will not stand ashamed before God.

If you haven't started to read the Bible yet, it's not too late. The Daily Bread devotional has suggested daily readings on each page. I can give you a copy of the schedule that was passed out at the

beginning of the year. You can choose some other schedule or make up one of your own; the important thing is that you become familiar with God's Word. Be like David who wrote in Psalm 119:11, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."