

COLOSSIANS

CHAPTER ONE

1. Who sent this epistle?

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother” (Colossians 1:1). While collective pronouns like “we” do appear at first (1:3, 4, 28), including Timothy in the correspondence, individual pronouns like “I” quickly overtake them (24, 25, 29), showing that the primary sender is Paul.

2. Who were the recipients?

“To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Colossians 1:2). His address is to the faithful in the city of Colosse. There is no previous mention of this church in Scripture, but it will become apparent that Philemon is a member of this congregation and there is noticeable overlap with this epistle and the one sent to Ephesus.

3. How did the sender and recipients know one another?

“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints” (Colossians 1:3-4). Evidently, they were not directly acquainted. Paul and Timothy had only “heard of” the faith of the Colossians. They did not have to be involved in planting this congregation to take an interest in their edification.

What they knew about this church was positive: faith in Christ and love for the saints. There does not appear to be a corrective motive in what is written, just general admonitions.

4. Where was their hope centered?

“Because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven” (Colossians 1:5). By definition, hope cannot be about anything presently visible or tangible (Romans 8:24-25), so it is off earth. Heaven is the goal (2nd Corinthians 5:1; John 14:2-3).

5. Where did their hope come from?

“Of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel” (Colossians 1:5). Heavenly hope is only conferred through God’s power to salvation (Romans 1:16). Everything outside the gospel is hopeless.

6. As of this writing, how far had the gospel spread?

“Which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth” (Colossians 1:6) and *“The gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven”* (23). Jesus had commanded this in the great commission (Mark 16:15) and within a generation it had been accomplished, which is not to say it does not need to be refreshed each generation, but to emphasize how it was possible. Without any hierarchy larger than or other than local churches of Christ (Ephesians 3:10-11; 1st Timothy 3:15), and without any sending agency besides the local church (Acts 13:1-3), the gospel had gone to the ends of the earth.

7. Who taught the Colossians?

“As you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit” (Colossians 1:7-8). It was not Paul or any other apostle, nor Timothy, but Epaphras from whom the Colossians learned. Recall that Paul and Timothy had only “heard” about the Colossians (1:3-4), without knowing them face-to-face yet. Epaphras planted this church and then communicated about them to Paul, with whom he was imprisoned in Rome (4:12; Philemon 23).

8. What did Paul and Timothy pray for the Colossians about?

“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints” (Colossians 1:3-4).

“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father” (Colossians 1:9-12).

They were asking for the Colossians to:

- 1) Know the will of God,
- 2) Live the will of God,
- 3) Be strong with patience, and
- 4) Give thanks.

9. What has the Father “qualified us” to be?

“Who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light” (Colossians 1:12). Just as heirs of an earthly fortune cannot qualify themselves to receive the benefit, but are qualified by the relationship to their fathers who bequeath gifts to them, so it is God, the beneficent Father, who qualifies Christians by grace (Ephesians 2:9; Romans 6:23) to partake of the heavenly inheritance. This *“inheritance of the saints in the light”* clearly refers to that which is above, again specifying where our hope is.

10. What has the Father *“delivered us from?”*

“He has delivered us from the power of darkness” (Colossians 1:13). In contrast to the *“inheritance of the saints in the light,”* it is *“darkness”* we have been delivered from by God. Darkness is a common description of sin (John 1:1-5; 3:19; Romans 13:12; Ephesians 5:8).

11. What has the Father *“conveyed us into?”*

“He has... conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Colossians 1:13). Upon deliverance from darkness, Christians enter Christ’s kingdom. The kingdom is not yet to come, but was established in the generation of Jesus’ contemporaries (Mark 9:1). It was opened at the same time the church was built (Matthew 16:18-19). This kingdom will be handed from Jesus to the Father at the *“end”* (1st Corinthians 15:24-25).

12. What do we have in the Son of God’s love?

“In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14). To redeem is to buy back or to ransom. Redemption in Christ is the price He

paid to get us from Satan, and that price was His blood. What he redeemed us from was our sins.

13. Who is the Son in relation to the Father?

“He is the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). Just as anyone in the empire could recognize Caesar without ever meeting him because his image adorned the currency (Matthew 22:20-21), so anyone acquainted with Christ knows what God is like through Him (John 14:7-11). God is invisible (John 5:37; 1st Timothy 1:17), but knowing Jesus changes that (John 1:18; Hebrews 1:1-3).

14. Who is the Son in relation to *“all creation?”*

“The firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:15-17).

Jesus Christ is firstborn over all creation, not in the sense of birth order (Exodus 4:22 – Israel was not literally God’s firstborn, but His privileged offspring), as if He is part of God’s creation, but in the sense of the rights of primogeniture (Deuteronomy 21:17), being the senior heir of all that is God’s. What is meant by His *“firstborn”* status is explicitly stated in the passage; everything that exists was made by Him and through Him and for Him.

It was all created *“by Him”* and *“through Him”* (Genesis 1:1, 26; John 1:1-3, 10; Hebrews 1:1-3, 10; Romans 11:36; Ephesians 3:9; 1st Corinthians 8:6). More than that, it was created **for** Him (Revelation 4:11).

That He is *“before all things”* speaks to His eternity (John 8:58; Revelation 22:13).

That *“in Him all things consist”* means that He continues to hold it all together (Hebrews 1:1-3).

Since He is the Creator even of heavenly and invisible things, including principalities and powers, angels are under His command (Hebrews 1:5-14; Luke 2:12-13; Revelation 5).

15. What is the body and what is the Son’s relation to it?

“And He is the head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1:18).

The *“body”* is the *“church”* (Colossians 1:24; Ephesians 1:22-23) and Christ is its *“head”* (Ephesians 5:22-24).

As *“head”* over it, Jesus is exercising His universal authority (Matthew 28:20), which is especially fitting because He built the church (Matthew 16:18) and bought the church (Acts 20:28).

There is and must be a 1:1 ratio of head to body. Christ is the only authority over the universal church, being its Savior (Ephesians 5:23) and the only possible Savior there can be (Acts 4:12). Calling the pope or any man the church’s head or president is blasphemy. There is only one body (Ephesians 4:4; 2:16; Colossians 3:15; Romans 12:4-5; 1st Corinthians 12:12-13) without denominational division. Every church other than the one recorded in the New Testament is an affront the will of God.

16. In view of His relation to the Father, creation, and the body, what does the Son deserve?

“Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence” (Colossians 1:18). Jesus deserves “preeminence!” He is first in everything, outranking all others. He is #1.

17. What pleased the Father?

“For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Colossians 1:19-20).

It pleased God that the fullness dwells in Jesus. Specifically, it is *“the fullness of the Godhead”* (2:9) which dwells in Him, but Paul did not use that phrase until further on in the epistle. Before getting to that, thus far, the Son of God is revealed to be: Redeemer (1:14), Image of the invisible God (15), Creator (15-17), Head of the church (18), and Firstborn from the dead (18). Thus, He is deserving of preeminence. The fullness is His.

Accordingly, it is He by whom reconciliation is possible between heaven and earth. His crucifixion enabled that to happen.

18. What had *“wicked works”* done?

“And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works” (Colossians 1:21). Sin causes estrangement (Isaiah 59:1-2; Romans 8:5-8), which is why reconciliation is needed.

19. How was reconciliation achieved?

“Yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death” (Colossians 1:21-22), “and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven... blood of His cross” (20). Only the sacrifice of Jesus’ body and blood on the cross could achieve reconciliation (Romans 5:6-11).

20. Being reconciled, what have those once alienated become?

“To present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight” (Colossians 1:22). Upon reconciliation, one must quit the sin that previously alienated him from God. It is not acceptable to excuse unrighteousness with “I’m only human,” “Nobody’s perfect,” or “We’re all sinners.” The standard is now holiness, blamelessness, and irreproachability. We are called to this (1st Thessalonians 4:7; 1st Peter 1:15-16).

21. How do Christians remain *“holy, and blameless, and above reproach?”*

“If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel” (Colossians 1:23).

Only if faith continues without straying may one remain in that condition which reconciliation affords. There is a real risk in departure (Hebrews 3:12-15; 4:11; 10:39). Souls once saved can be not only lost again, but worsened (Hebrews 10:26-31; 2nd Peter 2:20-22).

In order to prevent apostasy, in order to continue in faith, one must be grounded (Matthew 7:24-27) and steadfast (1st Corinthians 15:58).

22. What did the Colossians have in common with *“every creature under heaven?”*

“The gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister” (Colossians 1:23). Within about three decades from Pentecost, the gospel had gone forth into the whole earth. The same straightforward message of salvation needs to spread abroad now. Gimmicks and innovations are unwarranted; all that is needed is the message of the cross.

23. Whom did Paul suffer for?

“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church” (Colossians 1:24). Inasmuch as the apostle was yet unacquainted with this church, his use of “you” here is interesting. He was writing from prison (4:3, 10, 18) and his incarceration began with accusations stemming from his inclusion of the gentiles (Acts 21:28). Thus, all gentile Christians are beneficiaries of his persecution. Indeed, the whole body of Christ, the universal church, benefits from what he experienced.

He took Jesus literally when He taught to rejoice in suffering (Matthew 5:10-12) because it put him in good company.

As he continued to suffer, Paul was gradually filling up in his own flesh what was lacking in Christ’s afflictions (Acts 9:16; Galatians 6:17).

24. What was he a “minister” of?

“The gospel... of which I, Paul, became a minister” (Colossians 1:23) and “The church of which I became a minister” (Colossians 1:24-25). A “minister,” by definition, is a servant. Paul served the gospel and he served the church. There is nothing wrong with referring to a preacher as a minister of the gospel, a minister of the church, a minister of the New Testament (2nd Corinthians 3:6), or a minister of Jesus Christ (1st

Timothy 4:6), but it is not a reference to rank or authority at all. It is a humble thing to be called a servant.

25. How did he become a minister?

“According to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God” (Colossians 1:25). His role of service was given to him by God (Acts 26:16-18).

Here he refers to it as *“stewardship,”* which is a type of service that does involve some management and overseeing (Galatians 4:2; Titus 1:7). His particular ministry includes apostleship, so he exercised authority that not every minister would have.

26. Is the gospel mysterious?

“The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles” (Colossians 1:26-27). It had been a mystery in ages past (1st Peter 1:10-12), but is now a revelation (Ephesians 3:1-5). It is meant to be made known! Specifically, what was once a mystery even to the Israelites is now a revelation even to the Gentiles!

27. *“What are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles?”*

“Which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

Christ is in the Christian through faith (Ephesians 3:17), repentance (Galatians 2:20), and obedience (John 14:23). With Him abiding in us, we have hope of a glorious hereafter.

28. Why is Christ preached?

“Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily” (Colossians 1:28-29).

The perfection of every man, that is completeness or maturity, is the absolute goal of preaching Christ in all its forms, including teaching and warning. Immaturity must be overcome (Hebrews 5:12-14; 1st Corinthians 3:1-3) as growth is essential (2nd Peter 3:18).