

THE APOSTLE’S GREETING

Colossians 1:1-2

Scripture Reading: Colossians 1:1-8

Intro: I know that most of you are doing a lot of Bible reading each week, and I don’t want you to cut back on any of that. But if you can possibly find time to read Colossians at least once each week while we are going through it, I am sure that you would find our time together on Sunday mornings much more profitable. Often in my own Bible reading, I may reread my Psalm for the day, or my chapter in Proverbs, just to get the truth of those passages more firmly fixed in my mind and heart. Lucille and I met a couple this week whom we heard speaking about the Bible, and I said to them, “It is good to hear someone talking about my favorite book.” Then they told me (and they were old enough to be grandparents) that in their church their Pastor was having them read the Bible through. It was obvious that they were very excited about what they were doing. It was the first time in their lives that they had *ever* read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Some of you have heard me mention Dr. Harry Ironside who was one of my teachers in Seminary. He told us (and he was in his seventies when he said this) that he had read the Bible through for every year in his life. Of course he had to double up several years to make up for the years before he could read. *We would probably be surprised to know how many Christians there are today who have never read the Bible through once.*

So I hope that reading Colossians thoughtfully and prayerfully will be one of the delightful things that you, *and I*, will be doing in the coming days.

Two weeks ago when I brought the first message in this series, I tried to summarize the epistle for you. We all know that it follows very much the pattern that we can see in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, but Colossians is a couple of chapters shorter than Ephesians. I think that we can safely say that the theme of Paul’s letter to the church at Colosse is stated in the last phrase of verse 18 in chapter 1: “. . . that in all things He (our Lord Jesus Christ) might have the preeminence.” This is the only time that this word is used in the NT, but in leading up to this statement in verse 18, Paul had shown:

- 1) In verses 13 and 14 that our Lord is preeminent in salvation. And then, although I didn’t mention this last week,
- 2) In verse 15 our Lord is preeminent as the revelation of God.
- 3) In the latter part of verse 15 and going through verses 16 and 17, out

Colossians #2 (2)

Lord was preeminent in creation. The Apostle John brought this out in John 1:3 when he wrote,

3 All things were made by Him (Christ), and without Him was not any thing made that was made.

He not only was the Creator, but He keeps all creation going. As Paul said here in Colossians 1:17, “by Him all things consist,” that is, are held together. In Hebrews 1:3 we learn that our Lord is “upholding all things by the word of His power.” If Mr. Al Gore only knew this he could relax.

But then the fourth place where Christ is preeminent is stated

4) In verse 18 that our Lord “is the head of the body, the Church.” When the Lord mentioned the Church for the first time He said as we read in Matthew 16:18, “I will build my Church.”

But then let me add this. Since you and I are who are saved are the Church, the Apostle Paul really wrote this epistle to the Colossians to tell them and all of us who are in the body of Christ, that He wants to be preeminent in our lives too! As this word “preeminent” indicates, He wants to be first in our lives. He wants to hold the first place. He wants to be the One Who has the greatest influence in our lives. And all of this means that He is not only our Savior, but He is our Lord. And Paul could speak with real authority on this because the Lord Jesus was the Lord of his life. The Colossian believers were to live in such a way that the unsaved people of Colosse would know that Jesus Christ had the preeminence in their lives.

Now beginning with verse 9 in chapter 1, all of this was the main reason that Paul prayed so faithfully for them. (Read verses 9 through 14 showing how Paul’s prayer focused upon Christ, and upon God, and then back to Christ again.)

But now after all that I have said, I still have not gotten to my text. Let’s turn to verses 1 and 2 of this chapter and of the whole epistle. (Read.)

Now those of us who read the Bible have gotten to the place where we can read Paul’s greetings without giving them much thought. In Paul’s letters to the churches especially, his greetings are very much the same. And so we read through his greetings eager to get to the real message of the epistle, not recognizing that his greeting is a vital part of his message. We quote that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” and then we read Paul’s epistles like his greetings are not inspired by God. But they

Colossians #2 (3)

are! And we ought to read each greeting in each of Paul's epistles as though we were reading them for the first time. Aren't we quick to say that when God repeats Himself in Scripture that it is *always* for emphasis? That means that Paul's greetings at the beginning of his epistles ought to be high on our list for verses that we need to pay attention to.

When you read about "Paul an apostle," we ought to ask ourselves not only, What does this mean? But we ought to ask ourselves, "Was he always an apostle? Where did he come from? What do we know about Him? Well, let's try to answer these questions.

The first mention that we have of him is in Acts 7. That is the chapter which records for us the death of Stephen, who is remembered as the first martyr of the Church. Let's turn to Acts 7 and see what it says.

The last part of chapter 6 tells us about the charges and false accusations which the Jews made against Stephen. But he was permitted to speak before the Jewish council, which he did. His message is recorded for us in most of Acts, chapter 7, from verse 2 down through verse 53 we have Stephen's defense. Then let me read beginning with 54 and read to the end of the chapter, noticing especially verse 58.

As far as I know Saul of Tarsus who as we shall see in a moment later became Paul, never mentioned this experience in his epistles. But this all must have made a profound effect upon him, to see what Stephen said, and how he died.

But then read the first three verses of Acts 8. (Read.) Saul quickly established the reputation for being one of the major persecutors of the Church, and possible *the major persecutor* of the Church.

But now turn to chapter 9. Verses 1 and 2 tells us how aggressive Saul was against the early Christians. It probably would not be an exaggeration to say that he was for the Church her #1 enemy. But with verse 3 of Acts 9 it became clear that things were about to change for Saul. (Read verses 3 through 9.)

Now let us continue reading with verse 10, and notice how a local Christian was very hesitant to do what the Lord wanted him to do. (Then read down through verse 20). We witness here in Acts 9 the amazing story of the salvation of Saul of Tarsus. In Acts 13:9 we are told that at that point

he became known as Paul. I don't think there is a single reference in all of the NT that there were those in the Church who were praying for the salvation of Saul of Tarsus. He was not seeking Christ, but our Lord not only was seeking him, but saved him, and made him an apostle in the Church.

Some years later when the Apostle Paul was writing to the church at Corinth, he spoke of the resurrection of Christ, and those who saw him after His resurrection. And as he concluded the list, he wrote beginning with verse 8 in 1 Corinthians 15,

8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me (1 Cor. 15:8-10).

Let me read another passage which Paul wrote before his death to emphasize even further that he had been "called to be an apostle." This is found in 2 Timothy 1:8-11:

8 Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;

9 Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,

10 But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:

11 Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.

When Paul spoke of himself in his letter to the Colossian church as "an apostle of Jesus Christ," did he do this boastfully. Definitely not! To his dying day he considered himself to be an apostle only by the marvelous grace of God. He knew that he had been saved by the grace of God. And as he grew in his Christian life, he knew that that grace had been given to him "before the world began." And so he was deeply convinced that he had been called, appointed, to be an apostle "by the will of God."

Paul did not choose to be an apostle; he was chosen to be an apostle. He did not seek salvation, but the Savior sought him, found him, and transformed his life completely.

Why they would Paul call himself, “an apostle of Jesus Christ.” It was because of the extreme importance of the message that he had to convey to them in his epistle, a message in which he was exhorting, as a basic part of his mission, that for all of the Colossian believers, and for all of us who have been saved through the years since that time, Christ Jesus came and died, putting away our sins, not just that we might go to heaven (as great and glorious as that will be), but that beginning when we were saved, and continuing throughout our lives here on earth, we are to make sure that the Lord Jesus Christ has the preeminence, the first place, in all of our lives. So He wrote this epistle as “an apostle of Jesus Christ” to show the divine authority of his message. Paul expressed himself in these words found in his letter to the church at Rome. You will find these words in Romans 14:8-9:

8 For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

9 For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

And it was with true humility that Paul said that his message was also from his son in the faith, Timothy.

But we still have verse 2 in our text to explain.

Verse 1 tells us who this letter was from. The first part of verse 2 tells us *to whom* it was written: “To the saints and faithful brethren (and sisters) in Christ (their position with regard to God) at Colosse (their geographical location. And he put first things first: “in Christ,” then “at Colosse.” Believers are united to Christ, and this is an eternal relationship. “At Colosse,” or at “Portland,” or wherever you live, is our present place of ministry. “In Christ” is our source of strength; “at Colosse” is where that strength is to be spent giving our precious Lord and Savior the first place in our lives. We are in this world, but we are not of this world. Some day for all of us, our “at Colosse” is going to be changed to “in glory” (Col. 3:4).

But then Paul prayed. “Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our

Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” And the frequency of this prayer-greeting emphasizes how important “grace” and “peace” are – whether we are at Rome, or Corinth, or Galatia, or Portland, or wherever we may be.

The words, “and the Lord Jesus Christ,” are not in the best manuscripts. But that does not change the meaning of Paul’s prayer in any way. Sometimes in his epistles Paul did include Christ, in others, as here, it seems that he did not. But we know that if grace and peace come from God, they come also from the Lord Jesus Christ. “Grace” always means *undeserved*, but in a place like this it also means *strength*, as in 2 Corinthians 12:9 where Paul had asked the Lord to take away his thorn in his flesh. This was God’s answer and Paul’s response to God’s answer. May it be our response too:

9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Nobody can live like a Christian until he or she becomes a Christian. But no Christian can live the Christian life in his or her own strength. Living by the power of God is what brings peace. Again quoting Paul, he described peace in these words in his letter to the church at Philippi:

6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-7).

One OT explanation of “peace” is found in Isaiah 26:3-4:

3 Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

4 Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord JEHOVAH is everlasting strength:

Concl: We can always be sure that neither we, nor any other child of God, can get along in this world without a constant supply of God’s grace and an equal supply of His peace.

My niece, Karen Wilson, who lives in Philadelphia, has been very good about writing to several of us in our family, giving us the latest news

Colossians #2 (7)

about her mother, Marilynn Custis. The last report she sent to us was not as good as we would like to have received. Marilynn is going through a very difficult time. But at the end of her letter, Karen concluded with these words, "Grace and peace, Karen." We know that is what Karen and Robin are in special need of just now, and so are we.

So whether it comes at the beginning of a letter, as it did with the Apostle Paul, or at the end of her letter, as it did with our Karen. These are two words which convey what we all need, words that all should love to see and read.

As we come to the Lord's Table this morning, we are reminded as we eat the bread and drink from the cup that grace and peace are ours only through the salvation that we have in Christ.