



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for May 2, 2010
Released on Wednesday, April 28, 2010**

"Understand and Live Truth"

Lesson Text: Colossians 1:1-14

Background Scripture: Colossians 1

Devotional Reading: Jeremiah 29:10-14

Colossians 1:1-14

- 1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
- 2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colossae: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 3 We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,
- 4 Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints,
- 5 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;
- 6 Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth:
- 7 As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;
- 8 Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.
- 9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;
- 10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;
- 11 Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness;
- 12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:
- 13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.
- 14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to show how Christians can live in truth and wisdom in community by praying for one another.

Principle: to assert that Christians are called to live the truth and wisdom of God.

Application: to demonstrate that when we as Christians pray for one another, we can grow in wisdom and the truth of God together.

HOW TO SAY IT

COLOSSAE. *Ko-lahss-ee.*

EPAPHRAS. *Ep-uh-frass.*

INTRODUCTION

The city of Colosse was located on the Lycus River in the Roman province of Asia (in the western part of present-day Turkey). Since Paul focused his ministry on the larger cities, he had not preached in Colosse or visited the church there (Col. 2:1). But during his two-year-three month stay in Ephesus on his third missionary tour, the gospel had made its way outward from there to other parts of the province (Acts 19:10, 26). Colosse was probably evangelized then. The church that came from this effort was primarily Gentile (Col. 1:27).

Now Paul was a prisoner at Rome. Epaphras, a minister from Colosse, visited him and brought news of the church (Col. 1:7,8). Some of it was disturbing. False teaching was threatening the faith of believers. So Paul sought to combat this through sound teaching, especially about the Person and work of Christ. The passage in this lesson sets the stage for this instruction.

GREETING TO THE SAINTS (Colossians 1:1-2)

We should remember that *Paul* is under a type of house arrest when he writes this letter. He has been charged with crimes by the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem (see Acts 24:5, 6). As a Roman citizen, Paul has exercised his right to appeal his case to Caesar (Acts 25:11).

He has been taken from Judea to Rome in order that his appeal to the emperor might be heard. Thus he is in a house in Rome where he can receive visitors but where there is a guard present at all times. Timothy, Paul's trusted helper, is there with him.

1. Who was Paul's companion as he wrote Colossians? How did his status differ from Paul's (Colossians 1:1)?

First Paul introduced himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ." Though "apostle" can simply mean a delegate, Paul used the term in its strict sense of one who was commissioned directly by the risen Christ. It was especially important when counteracting false teaching that he establish his authority for a church he had never met. He wanted it known that the words he wrote were in fact a message from Christ Himself. "By the will of God" shows that apostleship was not a vocation that Paul had chosen for himself. When he was persecuting the church, God stopped him in his tracks and revealed the special calling he was to follow (Acts 9:15,16). From that time on, Jesus Christ directed everything he did.

Paul also introduced his companion, "Timotheus our brother" (Col. 1:1). Timothy was with Paul so frequently that he was here introduced as an associate. But he was not an apostle, for he was not commissioned directly by Christ. He was a learner at the feet of the apostle.

2. What did Paul mean when he called the Colossians "saints" (v. 2)?

The reference to *the saints and faithful brethren* means that Paul's greeting is for the entirety of the Colossian church. This is not a letter intended just for one or two of the church leaders (contrast 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4).

One of Paul's points of emphasis in Colossians is the appreciation he has for such faithful people (see Colossians 2:5,7). A faithful church is made up of faithful men and women acting both individually and collectively in ways that are consistent with

their trust in Christ and His commandments. Christ is the source and foundation of this faith.

As is common in his letters, Paul gives a two-fold blessing to his readers. *Grace* reflects a traditional Greek style for greeting beloved friends. *Peace* (or *shalom*) is a Jewish blessing.

THANKSGIVING FOR THE SAINTS (Colossians 1:3-8)

3. How did the Colossians' faith affect their relationships to each other (vs. 3-5)?

Paul is unable to do much for the Colossians personally because of his situation. This does not hinder him from *praying* for them, however. Paul assured the Colossians that whenever he prayed, he gave thanks for them. For this church has been an encouragement to Paul.

Paul specifically gave thanks for the Colossians' reception of the gospel. He had heard of their "faith in Christ Jesus" (v. 4). We can perhaps see in this more than a simple statement that Christ was the object of their faith. Paul may have been implying that theirs was the kind of faith exhibited by persons who are "in Christ Jesus"—that is, totally identified with Him. Because they are in Him, their entire lives are characterized by faith.

This faith is manifested, in turn, in the love that they displayed to all believers. This love, exercised not out of the emotions but as an act of the will, is a reflection of God's love for believers (1 John 3:14-18). It is significant that the Colossians exhibited love to all the saints. Godly love does not discriminate; it reaches across all kinds of human boundaries.

Combined with the Colossians' faith and love was "the hope" based on the promises "of the gospel" (v. 5 of our lesson). They have *hope* for the future, for they know that *Heaven* is their eternal home. The central element of this hope is the resurrection of Christ (compare 1 Peter 1:3, 4). Without the resurrection, the gospel is not true (see 1 Corinthians 15:14). Hopeful people tend to be happy people (see Psalm 146:5).

Notice that we now have the three core elements of the famous triad of faith, hope, and love (compare 1 Corinthians 13:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:3). Where all three of these are strong, one will find a healthy congregation made up of blessed, purposeful believers.

4. What does sincere reception of the gospel produce (v. 6)?

Paul encouraged the Colossians by assuring them that the gospel they had received was transforming lives all over the world. The outward reach of the gospel was probably far greater than what is recorded in Acts. These believers needed to know that it was not just another local religion like the mystery cults that thrived in their region. The gospel is infused with divine power that brings new life wherever it goes.

Paul also recognized that the Colossians sincere, faithful reception of the gospel resulted in *fruit* from the believers (v. 6). A well-known principle taught by Jesus is that a tree is known by its fruit (Matthew 12:33). This might be lifestyle characteristics and attitudes that Paul considers to be spiritual fruit (Galatians 5:22, 23; compare Colossians 1:10, today's text).

Also included may be the evangelistic efforts of the Colossians that result in new disciples (compare John 15:8). The *grace of God*, as seen in the sacrifice of His Son for our sins, should cause us to share the gospel and thereby grow the church.

5. How was Epaphras related to the Colossians and to Paul (vs. 7,8)?

The gospel does its supernatural work, but it is spread by God's human instruments. That instrument in the case of the Colossians was a man named Epaphras, who is mentioned here.

Epaphras is originally from Colossae (Colossians 4:12). At some point, he is jailed with Paul (Philemon 23). Paul views this man in two ways. First, Epaphras is a beloved *fellow servant*. This is a remarkable designation, for with it Paul puts Epaphras on the same level as himself. The man from Colossae is more than Paul's assistant. They are serving together equally in some ways. The fact that they end up in prison together signifies that the Romans themselves realize this.

The second way Paul views this man is as a *faithful minister* to the Colossians. Epaphras has been one of the designated leaders of the Colossian church. He is now in Rome with Paul, although we are not told why. Epaphras has brought the heartening news of the love and faith of the Colossians to the imprisoned apostle. It is "the Epaphras connection" that can cause Paul to have a strong attachment to a church that he may never have visited.

PRAYER AND ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE SAINTS (Colossians 1:9-14)

6. How are knowledge, wisdom, and understanding related (v. 9)?

Paul recognized that spiritual growth depends on spiritual comprehension. So he prayed that they "might be filled with the knowledge of his will."

Knowledge of God's will is not given to satisfy curiosity. Paul prayed that it might be known "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col. 1:9). "Wisdom" denotes both fullness of knowledge and the skill to use it. "Understanding" refers to critical discernment—the ability to tell the difference between right and wrong, truth and error, important and unimportant. The Colossians faced an error that claimed superior knowledge; they needed these tools to combat it.

7. What elements of godly character did Paul request for the Colossians (vs. 10,11)?

Comprehension, though essential, must be disclosed in character. Thus, Paul prayed that his readers "might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." One who knows God's will is obligated to practice it. To walk worthy of the Lord is to conduct oneself in a manner becoming to one who bears His name. Others should be impressed not by *what* we know but by *whom* we know. "Unto all pleasing" is our final goal—to please God in every respect.

Those who cultivate an obedient attitude bear fruit in all kinds of works, just as a tree properly cared for naturally bears fruit. The strength to do so, of course, does not come from ourselves; it comes from the Spirit within.

Another aspect of godly character for which Paul prayed was stability in unfavorable circumstances. The power of God enables believers to achieve this. "Strengthened with all might" (Col. 1:11) is, literally, "empowered with all power." The measure of God's empowering is "according to his glorious power (might)." God's mighty arm is stretched out to give the needed stability.

The infusion of divine power brings patience, long-suffering, and joy. To have patience, or steadfastness, means to persist in the face of unbearable circumstances. The virtue of long-suffering refers to our reaction to persons. It involves holding our anger or irritability in check. The experience of joyfulness is the most amazing of all. Only by the power of God can we be steadfast and long-suffering *with joy!*

8. How do you go about "increasing in the knowledge of God"?

Certainly our ultimate source of information about God is the Bible, so we should place the highest priority on studying it thoroughly (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). We also learn about God through creation itself (Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:20; etc.).

We gain knowledge of God's will for us as we daily experience the open and closed doors of ministry opportunities. Similarly, we gain knowledge of God's will by talking with other believers about what God is doing in their lives. Learning about what God is doing in other parts of the world through reading or personal visits also expands knowledge of God in terms of the way He likes to work. We take care to interpret our experiences in light of the Bible and not the reverse.

9. At what point do we become qualified for our future inheritance (vs. 12-14)?

Paul's final request was that the Colossians be thankful. He pointed out three things for which they should give thanks. First, they should thank God that He had qualified them to share in the inheritance of the saints in light (v. 12). The verb tense indicates that this occurred at one point in time—when we were saved. The inheritance still awaits us, in the realm of God's light, but we have title to it already.

Second, thanks should be given that God has rescued us from the power of darkness. Previously, the saints in light belonged to the domain of darkness over which Satan rules (cf. Eph. 6:12). But God delivered us from that horrid realm. This should cause great thanksgiving.

Third, God deserves thanks because He "hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13). "Translated" means "transferred" or "transported." The Greeks used this term to speak of transporting captives or colonists from one land to another. Christians have been taken from Satan's kingdom of darkness and transported to the kingdom of Christ. Christ is here called "his dear Son," or "the Son of His love." The greatest bond of love exists between the Father and the Son. In addition, the Father's love for mankind was expressed through His Son. He is the one "in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (v. 14).

This is the heart of the Christian good news. Redemption speaks of setting free by the payment of a ransom, and in the Greek a prefix meaning "away from" intensifies this meaning. We are ransomed away from the slavery that once held us. Through this redemption, purchased by His blood, we now enjoy the forgiveness of our sins. Forgiveness speaks of release, as from bondage. The powers of darkness no longer control the redeemed.

The gospel of Christ, in both Paul's day and ours, has set those who embrace it apart from the rest of mankind. This brings upon them the enmity of the powers of darkness, but they can thank God that those powers can never again enslave them.

CONCLUSION

Pulling Together

Perhaps more than any other sporting event, crew rowing requires a coordinated team effort from all involved. The rowers must pull together in complete harmony and unison if they are to be successful. If the oars on one side are pulled too hard, the boat (or "shell") will go slightly off course and waste some of its focused energy. If one rower begins the stroke too early or releases too late, again the shell will be pulled off target.

The worst thing a rower can do is drop the head of the oar into the water on the backstroke, thus robbing the boat of some of its forward thrust. All the rowers must listen carefully to the cadence of the coxswain and stay in rhythm. The rower cannot be listening to a cadence in his head of his own making or the cadence of the coxswain from the boat in the next lane.

One of the things that endeared the Colossian church to Paul was that they were "pulling together." They were united by their faith in Christ and their love for one another. Many churches are sadly lacking in this area. The members have different agendas and different goals. Some members may pull on the oar that preserves

tradition and resists change. Other members may be pulling hard on an oar for radical change and dropping of tradition. The "boat" of a church like this will go in circles! May we learn from the Colossians the power of unity in purpose and faith for any church.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Grace and peace should be our prayer for all God's faithful people (Col. 1:1,2).
2. Believers' faith and love should be clearly evidenced to those around them (vs. 3-5).
3. The gospel properly preached and received will bear fruit to the glory of God (vs. 6-8).
4. Praying for the spiritual growth of others should be a high priority (v. 9).
5. Biblical truth is meant to be understood, accepted, and applied (vs. 10,11).
6. Redemption for any person comes only through the gracious work of Christ (vs. 12-14).

PRAYER

Loving God, may we seek to honor Christ in our church by our faith and our faithfulness, by our love for You and our love for each other. We pray in the name of the one whose blood has rescued us from the power of sin and darkness, Jesus. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Pull together for the most impact.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In our lesson next week we look at a very important concept for our day. It is no secret that we live in a day of deception. We learn next week how to distinguish truth from deceit and how to stay away from evil seductions that can easily draw even devout Christians from the simple but unchangeable truth that we have in Jesus Christ. Study Colossians 2:1-10 "**Distinguish Truth from Deceit.**"

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

Willie Ferrell
Jesus Is All Ministries
www.jesusisall.com

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