

# Two Great Themes

## COLOSSIANS 1:1-2

---

### Text:

<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, <sup>2</sup>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. (NKJV)

<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, <sup>2</sup>to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. (NASB)

### Introduction

A wise man once said, “Christ is worth more than all that you lose in this life.”<sup>1</sup> I assume this doesn’t merely refer to material things, but also things like our reputation, friendships, and even our lives. Christ is worth more than all these things.

What is Christ worth to you? According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus was the incarnate life force of the Archangel Michael. Jesus was a god, but not the one true God. According to Mormonism, which is the most polytheistic religion of the word, Jesus is one god among many gods. Jesus is the spirit brother of Satan. According to Islam, Jesus was a prophet...*period*. Muhammad has a greater position in Islam than does Jesus. In fact, the first of the five pillars of Islam consists of the confession of faith (the Shahadah), which is necessary to confess (in Arabic) if you wish to become a Muslim. The Shahadah goes like this: There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet. It is interesting how this closely parallels Jesus’ words in John 17:13, “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” It seems that whenever Satan invents a new religion, his primary focus is upon diminishing the worth and centrality of Jesus Christ; and such ultimately leads to a works-oriented salvation.

What should be our response? The apostle Paul tells us:

**1:15-18** “He is the image of the invisible God, 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

---

<sup>1</sup> Pastor Gary Carter. Taken from a sermon he preached.

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. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

**2:9-10** “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead [or Deity; NASB] bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

**3: 11** “...but Christ is all and in all.”

Is this your view of the worth of Christ? Do you see Him as supreme/preeminent and sufficient? Such is the major theme of this letter. The secondary and dependent theme of this letter has to do with the holiness and faithfulness of those in Christ (the heart of our text). These are the two great themes of the epistle. They are inseparable from each other, and such should become clearer as we progress through this sermon, and especially through the letter as a whole.

Now, it is one of my hopes that from this sermon you will come to appreciate more fully the introductions or greetings of the New Testament epistles. After all, don't we typically rush through the greetings, thinking they serve little importance for the letter as a whole? This, however, is far from the truth. While greetings may not contain the meat of the epistles, they do provide some foresight into key themes, and even perhaps key doctrines, of the epistles. This is certainly the case with the text before us.

### **I. The Authors: Paul & Timothy (v.1)**

*“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother”.*

First, let us give consideration as to why I have used the plural, “authors,” rather than the singular, “author”. Simply put, the reason I have done so is because the text says “Paul...and Timothy”. While I do believe that the apostle Paul is the primary and true author of this epistle, (God, of course, being the ultimate author [2 Tim. 3:16]), Timothy nonetheless has a role in the writing of this epistle. Notice, for instance, that the first person plural (“we”) is utilized in the thanksgiving portion of the letter (1:3-12), whereas the first person singular (“I”; of course referring to Paul) is utilized throughout the majority of the letter.

It is quite evident that Timothy served as an amanuensis for Paul in the writing of this letter. An amanuensis is someone who writes on behalf of another (e.g. a secretary). This is typically done by means of dictation. So, Paul would have been speaking what he wanted Timothy to write, and Timothy would have written it. The conclusion to this letter gives strong evidence that this is in

fact what took place: “This salutation by my own hand—Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen” (4:18; cf. 1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; Phm. v. 19). This obviously implies that the rest of the letter was not written by Paul’s hand, but by the hand of Timothy (cf. Rom. 16:22). Note especially what Paul says in Second Thessalonians 3:17-18: “The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” Now, when he says “so I write,” he may either be referring to the uniqueness of his handwriting, which apparently was distinct enough to verify it as coming from Paul (cf. Gal. 6:11), or to the benediction itself, which is a unique feature in Paul’s writings (of various lengths); or, perhaps, both the uniqueness of his handwriting and the benediction is to be understood. Either way, Paul obviously took some steps to validate these epistles as coming from his own hand. He took some measures to authenticate the letter as coming from him and not some fraud.

*“Why didn’t Paul just write it himself?”* What seems to be the most likely answer is that Paul apparently had poor eyesight (Gal. 4:13-15; 6:11; possibly 2 Cor. 12:7).

The discussion of authorship and the use of an amanuensis having been considered, let us now turn our attention to Paul’s *office: Paul’s apostleship.*

### ***Paul’s Apostleship.***

*What was and continues to be the place of the apostles in the church?* There is certainly much that could be said in response to this question; however, I will attempt to be brief and focus on those areas most pertinent to our study.

The apostles were those who had been entrusted with the protection and propagation of the gospel and the sound doctrine that accords with the gospel (1 Tim. 1:10-11; Mt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). In other words, they are the authoritative teachers of the church, and are therefore foundational to the church (Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:19-22). While there are no longer apostles today,<sup>2</sup> their teachings are preserved in the New Testament. This authority of the apostles was based on the fact that they were the close disciples of Jesus, and had been appointed to be apostles by the will of God. Although Paul was not with Jesus from the beginning, the resurrected Christ did appear to him and commission him as an apostle (Acts 9; cf. Gal. 2:7-10). Hence, Paul is termed an apostle “born out of due time” (1 Cor. 15:8-10). This apostleship was not willed or determined by the apostles, or any other man for that matter, but by God (Gal. 1:1; Eph. 4:11).

So, what is the importance of all of this with regard to the Colossians? In short, Paul’s primary purpose for writing to the Colossian believers was to demonstrate certain false teachings creeping

---

<sup>2</sup> The word “apostles” was also used of what we would call “missionaries” today (e.g. Acts 13:2-3; 14:4). Therefore, in that sense there are apostles today, but not in the sense of “eye-witness” apostles (e.g. Acts 1:21-26).

into the church, rebuke the believers for their apparent openness, at least in part, to these teachings, and to point them in the way of the truth which is according to Jesus Christ. This false teaching is found in Chapter 2 of the epistle, and consisted of such things as worldly philosophy, worship of angels, and asceticism. This false teaching essentially diminished the glory of Jesus Christ and His redeeming work. Hence, Paul's overriding theme of Colossians is the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ. By pointing to his apostleship, Paul establishes his authoritative right and responsibility for writing such a letter. John Davenant sums this up well:

The Apostle adduced [or brought forward as evidence] this that the Colossians, to whom he was personally unknown, might understand that he did not write these things rashly, or intrude himself into the concerns of that church; but that he did it in virtue of his apostolic office and authority, whereby the care of all the churches rested upon him. And so he was able, though absent, to direct the faithful, to reprove seducers, and to support the sinking state of that church. For all these things were enjoined and imposed upon him *by the will of God*.<sup>3</sup>

## II. The Recipients: Holy & Faithful in Christ (v. 2a)

*"To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse".*

We come now to the heart of our text. Those who are the saints and faithful brethren are those who are "in Christ". The phrase "in Christ" modifies both designations – saints and faithful. This is an important theme throughout the letter, and it is a theme that directly ties into the more dominant theme of the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ. It is important to note that Paul is not talking about two groups of people, a group that are deemed "saints" and a group that are deemed "faithful". Rather, they speak of one group – those who are in Christ. So, let us look at the significance of both designations in turn, especially with regard to their relationship with the letter as a whole.

**Saints.** A saint is literally a "holy one"; one who is sanctified. He/She is one who is set apart from corruption and enslavement to the world unto fellowship with and service to God. Saints are those who have been brought into the household of God (Eph. 2:19-22). What is more, sainthood, as our text says, is "in Christ". This is to say that we are positionally holy in Christ; our holiness is based, not in ourselves or anything we have done, but in the perfect holiness of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:4). This refers to our union with Christ, an important teaching emphasized later in the letter (e.g. 3:1-4), and therefore speaks of our fundamental identify as Christians, since our identity is bound up in Christ. Our positional holiness in Christ implies and necessitates a lifestyle of righteousness

---

<sup>3</sup> Davenant, John. Geneva Series of Commentaries: Colossians (PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, reprinted 2009), 5. Emphasis is his.

and holiness (Rom. 6:1-11; Eph. 4:20-24). All Christians are saints; there are not different degrees of sainthood, as one finds within Roman Catholicism. Since sainthood is based on our being in Christ – that is, it is Christ’s holiness – then there cannot be varying degrees of sainthood.

*Now, how does this relate to Colossians as a whole?* An important teaching regarding the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, is that believers are “complete in Him” (2:10). That is to say that we lack nothing by being in Christ. Our stance before God, by virtue of Jesus Christ, is *holiness*.

**Faithful.** By faithful is meant those who have remained true to the gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 4:17), not carried away by the various falsities that had been introduced to the church which diminished the person and work of Jesus Christ. This, of course, speaks both to doctrine and practice; that is, sound belief and sound living. Faithful living is emphasized in the second half of the epistle; however, a passage that succinctly captures this concept of being faithful in Christ is Chapter 2, verses 6-7: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

\*So, with a focus upon the church, the theme of the letter is *being holy and faithful in Christ*. However, the greater theme, which focuses upon the head of the church, is *the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ*.\*

Those who are holy and faithful in Christ are those who have a high view – indeed, the highest view – of Jesus Christ. Such is the inseparable relationship between these two great themes.

### III. The Blessing (v. 2b)

*“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Finally we come to the blessing or benediction. God and Christ are the source of the church’s grace and peace. It is a grace and peace grounded in the truth. Although we are all likely familiar with the meaning of these two concepts, it will still benefit us to give a brief consideration of them.

**Grace.** We should not think that the Colossians had not been recipients of God’s grace; indeed, they were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, and were therefore saved, and were therefore the recipients of God’s abundant and amazing grace – salvation being by God’s grace (Eph. 2:8-9). Rather, Paul is here speaking of a growing in grace; that is, that the grace of God would continue to work in them and through them, that the favor of God would continue to manifest itself in their lives. Further, in Second Peter 3:18, the apostle Peter exhorts the Christians to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” How do

we grow in this grace of Christ? By growing in the knowledge of Christ. How do we grow in our knowledge of Christ? By looking to the word of Christ – the gospel. Where do we find the gospel? In the Holy Scripture.

**Peace.** Again, we should not think of peace here as referring to peace with God, as such peace is an aspect of salvation (Rom. 5:1). Rather, we are to think of this peace as peace within the body, the church. Later on in this letter Paul says the following: “But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection [or perfect bond of unity; NASB]. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful” (3:14-15). Love is absolutely critical if we are to maintain unity; and the peace that we have with God is to manifest itself in the peace that we have with one another.

### Conclusion

So, we have seen the two great themes running throughout this epistle:

1. The supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ
2. The church is holy and faithful in Christ

Having such an understanding of these things will certainly aid us as we continue our study throughout the letter (God willing). Remember this, all the false religions of the world have one major thing in common: A diminished view of the person and work of Jesus Christ. When this central doctrine is twisted and diminished, then everything else starts to crumble (e.g. doctrine of salvation; doctrine of the Trinity; etc.). This is why Paul emphasizes the supremacy of Christ’s person and nature, and the sufficiency of Christ’s redeeming work in this epistle. The glory of Christ was at stake, and therefore the true way of salvation was at stake. We must maintain a high view – the highest view – of Christ, and this letter will certainly strengthen us in these things. *Those who are holy and faithful in Christ are those who have such a view of Christ, a view that was handed down to the saints once for all time in the gospel.* The blessing of grace and peace is upon those who have such a view of and faith in Jesus Christ.