

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

WRITER. The Apostle Paul (1:1).

Date. Colossians was sent by the same messenger who bore Ephesians and Philemon, and was probably written at the same time.

Theme. Epaphras, who laboured in the Word in the assembly at Colosse, was Paul's fellow-prisoner at Rome. Doubtless from him Paul learned the state of that church. As to fundamentals that state was excellent (1:3–8), but in a subtle way two forms of error were at work: The first was legality in its Alexandrian form of asceticism, "touch not, taste not," with a trace of the Judaic observance of "days"; the object of which was the mortification of the body (cf. Rom. 8:13). The second form of error was false mysticism, "intruding into those things which he hath not seen"—the result of philosophic speculation. Because these are ever present perils, Colossians was written, not for that day only, but for the warning of the church in all days.

The Epistle is in seven divisions: I. Introduction, 1:1–8. II. The apostolic prayer, 1:9–14. III. The exaltation of Christ, Creator, Redeemer, Indweller, 1:15–29. IV. The Godhead incarnate in Christ, in whom the believer is complete, 2:1–23. V. The believer's union with Christ in resurrection life and glory, 3:1–4. VI. Christian living, the fruit of union with Christ, 3:5–4:6. VII. Christian fellowship, 4:7–18.

Chapter 1

¹ Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus, by God's will, and Timotheus the brother, ² to the holy and faithful brethren in Christ which *are* in Colosse. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ.

³ We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ continually *when* praying for you, ⁴ having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and the love which ye have towards all the saints, ⁵ on account of the hope which *is* laid up for you in the heavens; of which ye heard before in the word of the truth of the glad tidings, ⁶ which are come to you, as *they are* in all the world, *and* are bearing fruit and growing, even as also among you, from the day ye heard *them* and knew indeed the grace of God, in truth: ⁷ even as ye learned from Epaphras our beloved fellow-bondman, who is a faithful minister of Christ for you, ⁸ who has also manifested to us your love in *the* Spirit.

⁹ For this reason we also, from the day we heard *of your faith and love*, do not cease praying and asking for you, to the end that ye may be filled with the full knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, ¹⁰ *so as* to walk worthily of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing by the true knowledge of God; ¹¹ strengthened with all power according to the might of his glory unto all endurance and longsuffering with joy;

¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has made us fit for sharing the portion of the saints in light, ¹³ who has delivered us from the authority of darkness, and translated *us* into the kingdom of the Son of his love: ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins; ¹⁵ who is image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶ because by him were created all things, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones, or lordships, or principalities, or authorities: all things have been created by him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all, and all things subsist together by him. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the assembly; who is *the* beginning, firstborn from among the dead, that he might have the first place in all things: ¹⁹ for in him all the fulness *of the Godhead* was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and by him to reconcile all things to itself, having made peace by the blood of his cross—by him, whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens. ²¹ And you, who once were alienated and enemies in mind by wicked works, yet now has it reconciled ²² in the body of his flesh through death; to present you holy and unblamable and irreproachable before it, ²³ if indeed ye abide in the faith founded and firm, and not moved away from the hope of the glad tidings, which ye have heard, which have been proclaimed in the whole creation which *is* under heaven, of which I Paul became minister. ²⁴ Now, I rejoice in sufferings for you, and I fill up that which is behind of the tribulations of Christ in my flesh, for his body, which is the assembly; ²⁵ of which I became minister, according to the dispensation of God which *is* given me towards you to complete the word of God, ²⁶ the mystery which *has been* hidden from ages and from generations, but has now been made manifest to his saints; ²⁷ to whom God would make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you the hope of glory: ²⁸ whom we announce, admonishing every man, and teaching every man, in all wisdom, to the end that we may present every man perfect in Christ. ²⁹ Whereunto also I toil, combating according to his working, which works in me in power.

1:21 Reconciliation. The Greek word signifies “to change thoroughly from,” and occurs, Rom. 5:10; 11:15; 1 Cor. 7:11; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19, 20. Reconciliation looks toward the effect of the death of Christ upon man, as propitiation (Rom. 3:25, *note*) is the Godward aspect, and is that effect of the death of Christ upon the believing sinner which, through divine power, works in him a “thorough change” toward God from enmity and aversion to love and trust. It is never said that God is reconciled. God is propitiated, the sinner reconciled (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18–21).

Chapter 2

¹ For I would have you know what combat I have for you, and those in Laodicea, and as many as have not seen my face in flesh; ² to the end that their hearts may be encouraged, being united together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to *the* full knowledge of the mystery of God; ³ in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge.

⁴ And I say this to the end that no one may delude you by persuasive speech. ⁵ For if indeed in the flesh I am absent, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing and seeing your order, and the firmness of your faith in Christ. ⁶ As therefore ye have received the Christ, Jesus the Lord, walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, and assured in the faith, even as ye have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. ⁸ See that there be no one who shall lead you away as a prey through philosophy and vain deceit, according to the teaching of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰ and ye are complete in him, who is the head of all principality and authority, ¹¹ in whom also ye have been circumcised with circumcision not done by hand, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of the Christ; ¹² buried with him in baptism, in which ye have been also raised with *him* through faith of the working of God who raised him from among the dead.

¹³ And you, being dead in offences and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he has quickened together with him, having forgiven us all the offences; ¹⁴ having effaced the handwriting in ordinances which *stood out* against us, which was contrary to us, he has taken it also out of the way, having nailed it to the cross; ¹⁵ having spoiled principalities and authorities, he made a show of them publicly, leading them in triumph by it.

¹⁶ Let none therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in matter of feast, or new moon, or sabbaths, ¹⁷ which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ. ¹⁸ Let no one fraudulently deprive you of your prize, doing his own will in humility and worship of angels, entering into things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh, ¹⁹ and not holding fast the head, from whom all the body, ministered to and united together by the joints and bands, increases with the increase of God. ²⁰ If ye have died with Christ from the elements of the world, why as *if* alive in *the* world do ye subject yourselves to ordinances? ²¹ Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, ²² (things which are all for destruction in the using *of them*;) according to the injunctions and teachings of men, ²³ (which have indeed an appearance of wisdom in voluntary worship, and humility, and harsh treatment of the body, not in a certain honour,) to *the* satisfaction of the flesh.

2:2 The “mystery of God” is Christ, as incarnating the fulness of the Godhead, and all the divine wisdom and knowledge for the redemption and reconciliation of man.

2:18 The errorists against whom Paul warns the Colossians, and against whom, *in principle*, the warning has perpetual significance, were called “Gnostics,” from *gnosis*, “knowledge.” These Gnostics “came most keenly into conflict with the exalted rank and redeeming work of Christ, to whom they did not leave His full divine dignity, but assigned to Him merely the highest rank in the order of spirits, while they exalted angels as concerned in bringing in the Messianic salvation.”—*H. A. W. Meyer*. Paul’s characteristic word in Colossians for the divine revelation is *epignosis*, i.e. “full-knowledge” (1:9, 10; 3:10), as against the pretended “knowledge” of the errorists. The warnings apply to all extra-biblical forms, doctrines, and customs, and to all ascetic practices.

Chapter 3

¹ If therefore ye have been raised with the Christ, seek the things *which are* above, where the Christ is, sitting at *the* right hand of God: ² have your mind on the things *that are* above, not on the things *that are* on the earth; ³ for ye have died, and your life is hid with the Christ

in God. ⁴ When the Christ is manifested who *is* our life, then shall ye also be manifested with him in glory.

⁵ Put to death therefore your members which *are* upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, vile passions, evil lust, and unbridled desire, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of which things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ In which ye also once walked when ye lived in these things.

⁸ But now, put off, ye also, all *these* things, wrath, anger, malice, blasphemy, vile language out of your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, having put off the old man with his deeds, ¹⁰ and having put on the new, renewed into full knowledge according to *the* image of him that has created him; ¹¹ wherein there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ *is* everything, and in all.

¹² Put on therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³ forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any should have a complaint against any; even as the Christ has forgiven you, so also *do* ye. ¹⁴ And to all these *add* love, which is the bond of perfectness. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ preside in your hearts, to which also ye have been called in one body, and be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of the Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another, in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And everything, whatever ye may do in word or in deed, *do* all things in *the* name of *the* Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by him.

¹⁸ Wives, be subject to *your* husbands, as is fitting in *the* Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing in *the* Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not vex your children, to the end that they be not disheartened. ²² Bondmen, obey in all things your masters according to flesh; not with eye-services, as men-pleasers, but in simplicity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatsoever ye do, labour at it heartily, as *doing it* to the Lord, and not to men; ²⁴ knowing that of *the* Lord ye shall receive the recompense of the inheritance; ye serve the Lord Christ. ²⁵ For he that does a wrong shall receive the wrong he has done, and there is no respect of persons.

Chapter 4

¹ Masters, give to bondmen what is just and fair, knowing that ye also have a Master in *the* heavens.

² Persevere in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving; ³ praying at the same time for us also, that God may open to us a door of the word to speak the mystery of Christ, on account of which also I am bound, ⁴ to the end that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak.

⁵ Walk in wisdom towards those without, redeeming opportunities. ⁶ *Let* your word *be* always with grace, seasoned with salt, *so as* to know how ye ought to answer each one.

⁷ Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow-bondman in *the* Lord, will make known to you all that concerns me; ⁸ whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that he might know your state, and that he might encourage your hearts: ⁹ with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is *one* of you. They shall make known to you everything here. ¹⁰ Aristarchus my fellow-captive salutes you, and Mark, Barnabas's cousin, concerning whom ye have received orders, (if he come to you, receive him,) ¹¹ and Jesus called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These *are the* only fellow-workers for the kingdom of God who have been a consolation to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is *one* of you, *the* bondman of Christ Jesus, salutes you, always combating earnestly for you in prayers, to the end that ye may stand perfect and complete in all *the* will of God. ¹³ For I bear him witness that he labours much for you, and them in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Luke, the beloved physician, salutes you, and Demas. ¹⁵ Salute the brethren in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the assembly which *is* in his

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house. ¹⁶ And when the letter has been read among you, cause that it be read also in the assembly of Laodiceans, and that ye also read that from Laodicea. ¹⁷ And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in *the* Lord, to the end that thou fulfil it. ¹⁸ The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace *be* with you.

4:12 A touching illustration of priestly service (see 1 Pet. 2:9, *note*) as distinguished from ministry of gift. Shut up in prison, no longer able to preach, Epaphras was still, equally with all believers, a priest. No prison could keep him from the throne of grace, so he gave himself wholly to the priestly work of intercession.