

COLOSSIANS 1:1-2 | PAUL'S INTRODUCTION

VERSE 1 - BLACK

In this verse, Paul introduces himself as an "apostle of Jesus Christ" and clarifies that he is such "by the will of God."

While some scholars, including E.W. Bullinger, parse out differences of emphasis between "Jesus Christ" and "Christ Jesus", I am not convinced that these differences are anything more than incidental.

In his other writings, Paul gives more insight into his apostleship "by the will of God". In Acts and 1 Timothy 1:15-16, he elaborates on his journey to becoming an apostle. In Colossians, he will go on to explain how his apostleship has been specifically shaped through the revelation of the mystery, which came years after his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus (see Galatians 1:11-2:8).

It's crucial to note that the date of the writing of Colossians is long after the Jerusalem council (as recorded in Acts 15 and Galatians 2:1-2). This timeline allows Paul to write extensively concerning the mystery revelation in the book of Colossians.

Paul claims "Timotheus OUR brother" as a co-author. The exact role that Timothy played in the creation of this book is uncertain. Was he simply the amanuensis, writing down Paul's words? Was he the courier, tasked with delivering the letter? Or was he there for moral support, standing beside Paul in concurrence and encouragement? We simply do not know. It is also possible that Paul mentioned Timothy to endorse his ministry to the people of Colosse.

Colosse was an ancient city in the western part of modern-day Turkey, known as Asia Minor in the Roman times. It was one of the important cities in the Lycus Valley, and its location made it a significant commercial hub. It was not far from Laodoea. Both cities eventually declined into ruins.

As for Paul, though it is not explicitly stated within the letter, it is widely accepted by biblical scholars that he wrote this epistle from Rome during his first imprisonment. This would place him a great distance from Colosse at the time of writing. It is unknown whether Paul had visited the city at any time.

VERSE 2 - BLACK

In verse 2, Paul extends a customary greeting of "Grace to you and peace from God our Father." This greeting is not exclusive to Paul but is also used by other New Testament authors. Peter, for example, uses a similar greeting in his epistles (1 Peter 1:2, 2 Peter 1:2). The use of this greeting demonstrates an intention to connect with the recipients of the letter on a personal and spiritual level, emphasizing the grace and peace that comes from God.

Interestingly, Paul adds the word "mercy" to his greeting in the following letters: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus. These are letters to individuals, with the book of Philemon being written to "the church in thy house" (Philemon 1:3). It is unknown why Timothy and Titus get the added "mercy" to the greeting, and is perhaps of little meaning.

Of more interest is the phrase "To the saints and faithful brethren". At first glance, this may appear to refer to one group. However, the conjunction can clearly imply two groups: one called "saints" and another called "faithful brethren". An example of this grammatical structure can be found in Philemon 1:1-2, where the letter is written to several individuals using the same grammatical structure. The grammar does not require a singular group or a duality, but it allows for either interpretation, that is, the linguistic analysis alone does not decisively favor one interpretation over the other.

For our purposes, we will examine the possibility of two distinct groups within the audience of Paul's letter: "saints" and "faithful brethren". We will assume that "saints" refers to believers of Jewish heritage and "faithful brethren" to believers of Gentile heritage. It's important to remember that those of Jewish heritage, due to their covenantal obligations, might receive instructions that wouldn't apply to those outside such obligations. Overlooking the possibility of these two distinct groups

could lead us to misinterpret the scripture, inadvertently assigning obligations or promises where they don't belong. Therefore, it's crucial to "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15) while interpreting this letter.

COLOSSIANS 1:3-8 | COMMENDATIONS BY PAUL

VERSE 3 - BLACK

In this verse, Paul expresses his thankfulness and testifies to his continual prayers for the Colossians. Though this verse is very specific to its initial audience, hence the black coding, it offers us a glimpse into Paul's heart, characterized by a spirit of gratitude and prayer.

VERSE 4 - GREEN

In this verse, we encounter the first instance of text that has been color-coded in green. This color coding signifies that the text is directed specifically towards the Colossians, as opposed to being a broad, universal declaration. However, the truths contained within these words bear such significant resemblance to our own dispensational position that we can still apply them without harm. While these texts should not be used as the foundation for any doctrines related to Christian living, they can serve as supplemental material, providing valuable insights.

Paul reverses the title from "Jesus Christ" in verse 1 to "Christ Jesus", an incidental shift (refer to the note on this matter in verse 1 for further discussion).

The primary reason for Paul's thanksgiving is their faith - an element fundamental to all dispensations, though it manifests differently across them. Paul rejoices in their faith in Christ Jesus, highlighting the importance of faith in the believer's relationship with Christ.

Paul further testifies that he celebrates their love for "all the saints." If taken in the standard understanding, this is a love for all believers. If taken in a more text-driven understanding, Paul is celebrating the Colossians' love for the Jews, especially those who are believers and suffering from the delay of the arrival of the kingdom.

VERSE 5 - GREEN

In this verse, Paul provides the basis for the action, namely "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven." This hope was expressed to them through "the word of the truth of the gospel." However, the phrase "for the hope" presents some ambiguity. It is unclear whether it is modifying. Is this hope the basis for:

1. The Colossians' love for all the saints,
2. Both their faith in Christ Jesus and their love for all the saints, or
3. Paul and Timothy's thanksgiving mentioned in verse 3.

Interpretation 1 would suggest that the Colossians' love for all the saints is motivated by their hope of heavenly reward. This could imply that their love is driven by their own future benefit, a thought that seems less than meritorious.

Interpretation 2 would link the Colossians' faith and love together, grounded in their shared hope of eternity in heaven. This would emphasize the idea that their faith and love are the result of their confidence in the gospel message and its promises.

Interpretation 3 would mean that Paul and Timothy are giving thanks because of the hope laid up in heaven, which could be seen as the basis for their gratitude for the Colossians' faith and love.

While all three have their merits, interpretation 3 seems most viable, removing the rewards motive from the Colossians actions and making the "hope which is laid up for you in heaven" as the fuel for Paul's thanksgiving. Reading in this light puts then end of verse 3 and all of verse 4 as somewhat a parenthetical, as here:

We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, (praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love WHICH YE HAVE to all the saints), for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel...

The latter part of verse 5 speaks of "the word of the truth of the gospel." Given that this verse is addressing both groups ("saints" and "faithful brethren"), it is reasonable to assume that this phrase refers to the Gospel of Grace as taught by Paul. This Gospel, unique to Paul's ministry, emphasizes salvation by faith alone in Christ's finished work on the cross, apart from the works of the Law. This message would be applicable to both Jewish and Gentile believers, making it relevant to all recipients of the letter. Verse 6 will confirm our assumption.

VERSE 6 - GREEN

In this verse, Paul notes that the gospel has come "in all the world," which is significant. If Paul were referring to the Gospel of the Kingdom, the spread of that Gospel to "all the world" would signal the end of the age, according to Matthew 24:14. However, we know that the end of the age has not yet arrived, and since the prophecy in Matthew 24:14 cannot be incorrect, it's clear that the Gospel in question must not be the Gospel of the Kingdom. Instead, this must refer to the Gospel of Grace, which aligns with the context and the audience of the letter.

Paul's assertion that the Gospel of Grace has spread worldwide is not an exaggeration. This is supported by various passages in the Bible:

In Romans 1:5, Paul states, "By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name." Here, Paul speaks of the grace and apostleship he received to bring about obedience of faith **among all nations**. This shows that the Gospel of Grace was intended for a worldwide audience.

In Romans 16:25-26, Paul writes, "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, **made known to all nations** for the obedience of faith." This passage clearly states that the mystery of the Gospel, which was once kept secret, has now been made known to all nations.

Colossians 1:23 also supports this claim. The verse states, "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and **which was preached to every creature which is under heaven**; whereof I Paul am made a minister." Here, Paul reiterates that the Gospel has been preached to every creature under heaven, emphasizing the global reach of the Gospel of Grace.

In Ephesians 3:9, Paul declares his mission to "make **all men** see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ." This mission to make all men see the mystery speaks to the worldwide dissemination of the Gospel of Grace.

These passages affirm that the Gospel of Grace, as preached by Paul, had indeed spread to all corners of the world.

Furthermore, not only had the Gospel of Grace reached all corners of the world, it had also borne fruit everywhere it was received.

When a person truly experiences "the grace of God in truth" (v. 6), it inevitably bears fruit. This transformative power of understanding God's grace is a recurring theme in Paul's writings. However, it's important to note that the spread and acceptance of this message were not always smooth. Despite the initial positive response, there came a time when Paul lamented to Timothy that all in Asia had turned away from him (2 Timothy 1:15). From that time onward, the knowledge of the grace of God in truth has been so sparse that it was challenging to find significant movements at certain points in history. Despite these challenges, the enduring message of God's grace continues to bear fruit wherever it is truly understood and accepted.

Understanding the Pauline mystery is crucial to comprehending the Word of God. Without it, we cannot fully grasp the depth and breadth of the scriptures. This mystery, revealed only to Paul, provides a unique lens through which we can interpret

God's Word. As we study Colossians, our primary focus will be on deciphering this Pauline mystery and its profound implications for our understanding of the Gospel and our Christian life.

VERSES 7-8 - BLACK

Epaphras is a figure who appears in the New Testament, specifically in the books of Colossians and Philemon. In Colossians 1:7, he is described as a "dear fellow servant," and a "faithful minister of Christ." It is also mentioned in Colossians 4:12 that Epaphras was from the city of Colossae.

In Philemon 1:23, Epaphras is described as Paul's "fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus." This suggests that he, like Paul, was imprisoned for his faith.

From these passages, we can infer that Epaphras was a devoted follower of Christ who worked closely with Paul. He likely played a key role in spreading the Gospel in the city of Colossae and possibly other parts of Asia Minor as well. Despite facing persecution and imprisonment, he remained faithful to his calling.

The preservation of the names and memories of lesser-known individuals like Epaphras in the biblical accounts serves as a source of encouragement for many of us who might not be as renowned as figures like Paul or Timothy. Despite not being in the spotlight, Epaphras played a crucial role in the propagation and establishment of the Gospel in Colossae and likely other parts of Asia Minor. His dedicated service, faithfulness, and perseverance in the face of adversity highlight the importance and value of every believer's commitment to the Gospel, regardless of their fame or status. This should remind us that in God's eyes, every act of service in furthering the Pauline Gospel, no matter how small it may seem, is significant and does not go unnoticed.