

# Already in the Kingdom

## A study of Colossians 1

By Mike Morrison

**C**olosse was a small city in Asia Minor, not important for much of anything—it is known to us chiefly because the apostle Paul wrote a letter to the believers who lived there. The church was started by Epaphras, who had learned about Christ from Paul, so even though Paul hadn't started the church, he felt a sense of responsibility for its health and growth.

Strange ideas were circulating in Colossae. False teachers were saying that knowing about Jesus was a good beginning, but that believers needed deeper wisdom and some new ascetic practices in order to reach their true potential. Epaphras had tried to set them straight, but Paul thought it would be helpful for him to assure the Colossians that the gospel they heard from Epaphras was indeed the complete gospel.

Their growth comes from knowledge the gospel has given them: **The faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you** (v. 5). By the word “hope,” Paul is referring to the *object* of our hope—a heavenly reward. Christian life, including faith toward God and love toward others, is given a foundation by knowing that God gives us eternal life.

Paul reminds them that they are part of a growing movement: **All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth** (v. 6). He assures them that they have heard *all* the truth—they do not need any supplements or add-ons to bring them to a higher level of spirituality.

**You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit** (vv. 7-8). Since

Paul could not go everywhere, he trained people like Epaphras to be part of a missionary team that carried the gospel into outlying areas. He brought back news to Paul that the people in Colosse were responding to the gospel.

After this, Paul resumes the description of his prayers for the people: **For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding** (v. 9). Paul did not wait for a crisis to pray for the people—as soon as he heard about their love, he started praying for their growth in wisdom. He did not mean additional information—he wanted them to grow in their understanding of the message they had already received.

Why did he pray for this? Because he wanted to see their faith and love be evident in the way they lived: **And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way** (v. 10). Paul then lists four ways in which believers might please God:

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### Address information

The letter begins by saying who wrote it: **Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother** (1:1). Greek letters didn't normally name companions as co-authors, so it is likely that Timothy helped write this letter.

Next, the recipients are greeted: **To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father** (v. 2). Paul believes that they are faithful; he does not seem to think that they are in serious danger of apostasy—they just need some reassurance.

### Prayer of gratitude

Greek letters often began with a prayer or blessing; Paul modifies this custom to tell the Colossians what he prays about. He praises them indirectly, giving God the credit for their faith and love: **We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints** (vv. 3-4).



1. **Bearing fruit in every good work,**
2. **growing in the knowledge of God,**
3. **being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and**
4. **joyfully giving thanks to the Father** (vv. 10-12).

Paul wanted the believers to know God's will so they would do good works, learn more about God, have strength to withstand difficulties, and remain thankful.

### Already qualified

One reason to be thankful is that God has already qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. We could not qualify on our own, but God did it for us. How did he do that? **He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins** (vv. 13-14).

Our sins would disqualify us from the kingdom of light, but God, in Jesus, has forgiven our sins, so we are now qualified. Just as God redeemed the Israelites out of Egypt and gave them land as an inheritance, he redeemed or rescued us from the dominion of darkness and sin, and has given us our inheritance.

### Christ is supreme

In a poetic passage, Paul then describes how great Christ is: **He is the image of the invisible God...** He shows us what God is like—not in physical characteristics, but in spiritual attributes such as love and righteousness. He is also **...the firstborn over all creation** (v. 15). This does not refer to a birth or any other beginning in time. Rather, “firstborn” refers to a pre-eminent status.

Christ has this superiority because he is the Creator: **For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him** (v. 16). Christians do not need to appease government officials or spirit beings; we are already approved by Christ, the highest of all powers.

Paul summarizes: **He is before all things, and in him all things hold together** (v. 17). He sustains all that he has created.

After recounting Christ's role with creation, Paul describes his role in redemption, the new creation: **And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead** [the first to be raised from the realm of the dead], **so that in everything he might have the supremacy** (v. 18).

Paul again mentions that Jesus is a complete representation of the Father, and a complete Savior: **For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him** [Jesus is

fully divine], **and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross** (vv. 19-20).

Earlier, Paul used the metaphor of redemption. Here, he describes salvation as reconciliation, making peace between enemies. God achieved this peace by sending Jesus, who was not only fully divine, but also fully human—someone who could represent all creation in his atoning death on the cross. The Creator became part of creation in order to rescue us from our own sinfulness. In him we died, and in him we are raised to new life—life with God.

**Once you were alienated from God, Paul says, and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior** (v. 21). Yes, our sins had separated us from God. **But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death.**

Why? **To present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation** (v. 22). The debt has been paid, the sin has been erased; there can be no accusation for those who trust in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1, 33-34). When we appear before God, we are holy in Christ—fully qualified for his kingdom.

There is one requirement: **...if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel** (Col. 1:23). You are on the right boat, headed to the right destination. Don't jump ship—this is the right ship. The ticket has been paid for, so you don't need to work for it. Jesus has done all that needs to be done—he is the only one who could, and the only one who did.

**This is the gospel that you heard, Paul assures the Colossians, and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant** (v. 23). You have heard the real gospel, and you already know enough, Paul says—you do not need any secret, obscure information or any extra rituals. You are already in the kingdom of Christ. It's good news! ●

### Questions for discussion

- 1. How often do I pray that others might grow in wisdom and knowledge? (v. 9)
- 2. Is it *possible* for people to live a life worthy of the Lord and do everything he wants? (v. 10)
- 3. Do I *feel* like I am in the kingdom of Christ? (v. 13)
- 4. Is Christ supreme in my life and thought? (v. 18)
- 5. When I was alienated from God, did I *feel* alienated? (v. 21)
- 6. What supplements do people try to put on the gospel today?