

Colossians 1, Part 1 (Conrad Bowman) (May 14, 2006)

We're going to cover chapter 1. The first take being an introduction to the study.

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

This is a typical beginning for Paul to address a group of the leaders. The only difference between this and Ephesians is that he includes Timothy as being with him when he wrote this to the saints that were in Colosse. The particular problem in Colosse is the *Gnostic* heresy that had taken root there. It was a mixture of Jewish legalism and an unbridled license that came out of the philosophy of the *Gnostics*, and Paul is addressing that to the believers.

He calls himself an apostle – one sent with a message. “Of” is a genitive of possession. He belongs to Jesus Christ. But, his belonging to Christ is by the will of the Father. This is very important. Paul emphasizes over and over again that the believer’s focus is to be on God the Father. Our position is bought by Christ in His work, but our focus is to be on the Father.

2. To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

And grace always precedes peace. Its grace that provided for us the love of God. Satisfied His justice. Satisfied His righteousness by the work of Christ on the cross so that by means of grace He could pour His love out to the cross. We by faith approach the cross and accept that gift. So grace to you and peace from God our Father. What happens is that when we accept that gift the Spirit of God – the Holy Spirit – takes us and moves from the ground on which we stood – that of animosity between us and God – Christ removes the animosity, reconciles us to the Father, and the Spirit moves us onto the ground of peace there at the cross. So, “grace to you and peace from God our Father” is Paul’s salutation and acknowledgment of that.

3. We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

Notice that in verse 3 his thanks are directed toward the Father. “To God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He’s praying always to you. And there’s a word there, the continuing presence tense.

4. since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus ...

Now note carefully that this is one of the responsibilities that the believer has. When we lead someone to Christ, or we present the Gospel to them and they accept it, we accept the responsibility to support those people in prayer. That's what Paul is saying here. "We're praying always for you from the very moment we heard of your faith in Jesus Christ,"

4. ... and the love which you have for all the saints;

So we know that you have received the love of God, because that love – *agape* love – it can't be faked. It's real. Francis Shafer wrote a small book – *The Mark of the Christian*. And *The Mark of the Christian* – in that one chapter by the way out of the Christian at the end of the twentieth century. Francis Shafer says that love is the absolutely unfakable element and mark of a true Christian. The way he loves other people and loves the saints.

4. since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;

5. because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth,

The "word of truth" is a term used by Paul to describe the doctrine of the Church. The mystery of the Church that God had revealed to him and committed to him as a ministry. So when you see "word of truth," you know that he is talking about the full Gospel of the revelation of the Church which mystery had been hid in the ages of the past.

4. ... we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;

And you have that love -

5. because of the hope laid up for you in heaven,

And that hope is the hope of the resurrection and a hope of the Rapture – hope of the return of Christ, because that's what was promised. And that hope is on deposit for them – is the sense of the word here.

5. ... in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth,

You heard that revealed as you began to understand what the Body of Christ is all about.

5. ... the gospel

6. which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth;

So there's that term "in truth" again that incorporates everything that Paul knows of the mystery and the revelation of that mystery to the saints as they come in contact with the teaching of the Gospel as Paul understands it. "The word of truth" is the Gospel. The glad tidings. The good news. Now, it's come to you just as in all the world also. It's constantly bearing fruit and increasing. That is a term that suggests in pretty clear terms – the Gospel is worldwide. It's not just located right there where Paul is. But the good news and tidings that comes from the Father are constantly being revealed. Now, it may have been a mystery in the ages past, and hidden in terms of the fullness of the revelation. But now the Church is being revealed and it's beginning to grow here in this first century. It's bearing fruit and its increasing even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it. So that's the way the Gospel works. These believers in Colosse had heard it. They responded to it. They grasped it. Now they're growing in knowledge of it as they hear Paul and the other apostles begin to unfold it. You have to constantly remind yourself that they didn't have all these letters. They didn't have the epistles – the New Testament that we have. All they had, and all they knew about, were the first books or the Old Testament. The Pentateuch. And that they knew about. But there is no church there. There's an assembly of God, and the nation of God, but that's not what we're talking about. There was no intimacy or union with God that was going to be had by any of the Old Testament saints. All of these believers have union with Christ. Union with God in Christ as part of their salvation package. Verse 7.

7. just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant,

The word “bond-servant” is, again, a word that means a slave. He’s one sold out to God. He may have even been born in slavery, is what it is talking about. And indeed, when you’re talking about a believer, you’re talking about one who has been born into slavery. Our rebirth, to say that we’ve been re-born again is literally, we have been born again into God’s family. But having been born again into God’s family means that we’re born into a slave relationship for a service. So the first bond-servant, in verse 7, the first word “servant” is that of a slave in service.

7. ... who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf,

That second word is the Greek word from which we get the word “deacon.” He’s a willing servant, one who does the work of, and cheerfully does the work of another. So he’s a faithful deacon of Christ on our behalf. So Epaphras is working on behalf of the apostle Paul, and doing things that Paul would ordinarily have to do, but he doesn’t have to do because Epaphras is doing them.

8. and he has also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

So that *agape* is *agape* that’s spirit driven.

9. For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you ...

And there’s that responsibility again that Paul recognizes of one that he’s brought to the Lord and presented the Gospel to, and he accepts his responsibility to pray and support these believers in everything that they do.

9. For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask ...

Now watch what he asks for.

9. ... that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

Now these are coded words. There are three words here that the *Gnostics* love to dwell on. One is “knowledge.” The word for “knowledge” here is *epignosis*. *Gnosis* is the word for just facts. *Epignosis* is facts applied to experience. Okay? So when the believer uses the word *epignosis*, he’s talking about things that have been tested and tried. And he knows with certainty that there’re true. And when

the *Gnostic* uses the word “knowledge,” he’s talking about things he’s reasoned out. Okay? So these three words: knowledge, wisdom, and understanding is truth. The word for ...

[Gap in the Tape].

As it develops is a goddess of the *Gnostics*. They have three things. Understanding is truth. The word for truth. Understanding is truth. *Sophia*, which is wisdom. And *epignosis*, which is knowledge. They make goddesses of all three of those that they worship. That’s what the *Gnostics* do. So Paul is using – tied to all of these terms that he is using here in the very opening of his letter.

8. ... we have not ceased to pray for you and have asked that you may be filled with the *epignosis* of His will ...

Of His will – the Father’s will.

8. ... in all spiritual *sophia* – spiritual wisdom and [complete] understanding,

So Paul says, these three things that the *Gnostics* search after is exactly what we’re praying for you. We’re praying that you may have it, but not in its sham form, but in its real form taught by the Spirit – the Holy Spirit. Now, that’s his prayer. He didn’t pray for relief for them. He didn’t pray that they might be wealthy. He didn’t pray that their family’s might be working good. He prayed that they may be filled with *epignosis* of His will. “And in spiritual wisdom, and in complete understanding.”

10. so that ...

For this purpose. “So that” introduces a purpose.

10. so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the [*epignosis*, the] knowledge of God;

Now, here’s the purpose of their gaining these three things. “So that they may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.”

We just finished studying Ephesians. And in Ephesians we learned that the works of God are works prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. We

should be walking in His works. Now think about that. If they're going to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, they're going to walk in works that the Lord Himself has prepared from before the foundation of the world. And they're going to walk in those. They're going to be walking in the very things that Christ has accomplished in their life. Now think about this, believer. Because what this is saying is, when we say God has a life for you, we don't mean He has a pathway for you to walk down, and if you walk down that pathway, you're going to be able to do all kinds of pleasing things for Him. That's not what this means at all. What this means is, God has since before the foundation of the world, prepared a life. And the works that are done in that life have already been accomplished in Him. And He's allowing you, by virtue of the direction of His will, to walk down that pathway and step right through those works just as if you did them yourself, but knowing that there're His works all the time. Accomplished for you. So that you could walk in them. That's what we learned in Ephesians. No wonder that would please Him. It would please Him in all respects. And, it would bear fruit in every good work because there're His works and increasing in the knowledge of God is where we gain. The bearing fruit is the drawing of other people to Him. The increasing in the knowledge of God is our pleasure. We're going to be

11. strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might,
for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously

12. giving thanks ...

Now here's this word "joyously giving thanks" – he's talking about abounding. Abounding and giving thanks. Can you think of a child at play. Its something they genuinely love to do. Kids in a pool. Kids playing together. That's the sense in which this is talking about. Joyously giving thanks to the Father. We ought to be at our absolute utmost delight when we're giving thanks to the Father for the works that the Son has done. Prepared for us to walk in them. We ought to be like children. Absolutely giddy with joy at being in that position.

12. giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in
the inheritance of the saints in Light.

Now, we're going to walk in light. First John is going to teach us that. We'll get to that eventually. But we walk in light. Why? Because we walk in the presence of God. We're in union with Him. God is light. In Him there's no darkness at all. So it follows when we walk in Him we walk in light. There's no darkness there.

Everything is available. Everything we can see. We can understand it. We can perceive it. There's nothing hidden, because of the light of His presence. Now that's where He expects us to be. When we're walking in the works that He's prepared, we're walking in His presence, because that's where He's working. And in that presence there's absolute light, and we can see Him work. No wonder we gain all understanding and all knowledge. Because we can clearly see Him at work. Not us at work. Not one another at work. But we see Him at work in one another's lives. You see how that removes us from the picture and it puts Him in the picture? He then becomes preeminent in everything, and He's increased, and we're decreased. We give thanks to the Father who's qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

13. For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,

Which is a kingdom of light, and it's the Father who's done this. Paul is just bringing us constantly back to that. It's the Son

14. in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

15. And He is [the icon] the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

That's talking about His resurrection and ascension – His coming out of the grave as the firstborn of all creation.

16. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Now get this. The Son who is preeminent is the one in Him all things were created. They were placed in Him, and He gave them life and being.

Now, it doesn't matter "whether there're thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities,"

17. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

18. He is also head of the body, the Church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything.

Now look at those three verses right there. Because what those verses say is that in the beginning, God the Father, put everything into the Son, and the Son expressed it all and gave it life. That's what creation was all about. And He did that so that there would never be a time when Christ Himself was not head of all things, because He is the creator. And all things are subject to Him, for He controls all things, and is superior to all things. Now the Jews had to know that, so Paul wrote his whole letter to the Hebrews – I believe – was written in collaboration between Paul and Peter and perhaps several others. Written by third party, no doubt – to present to them the superiority of Christ over anything they had in the Law. Because they had this whole mechanical system to follow. Now Paul is doing the same thing for the Church. And he started doing it in Colossians. And he continued doing it in Galatians, and Philippians, and then Ephesians, and then the Pastoral epistles. This whole body of books – I'm glad we're studying them together, because what there're doing is presenting Christ in His superiority over everything. Now he brings that down finally in his final statement in that regard – he brings it down to Christ is also head of the Body. The Church. The beginning. The firstborn from the dead so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. Verse 19. A pivotal verse.

19. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,

Get that. When there was nothing but the Trinity, it was the Father's will and pleasure to have everything that He had expressed of Himself – the fullness of everything – to be in Christ. That's what pleases the Father. Now don't miss this, because through union with Him you will become the masterpiece of creation.

[TAPE ENDED]. [This recording was transcribed on a tape recorder, and transmitted to a digital format. The earlier recordings, of which this is one, were made on a tape recorder. Some are more audible than others].