

“Intro to Colossians”  
Colossians 1:1  
(Preached at Trinity, September 24, 2017)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. This morning we begin this NT epistle – The Book of Colossians. It was written in the early 60's of the first century, a culture almost 2000 years removed from our day. It is hard for us to imagine what it would have been like on this exciting day when two men by the name of Tychicus and Philemon arrived with a letter from the great apostle, Paul.
2. Colossae was a city of Phrygia in Asia near Laodicea and Hierapolis. It is within the region of modern day Turkey. It was located about 120 miles from Ephesus and 1000 miles from Rome. It was formerly a prosperous city. It was known for its cold, pure streams of water, water of a perfect quality for the dying of cloth. Colossae became well known for their fabrics. In time, however, neighboring cities competed for the wealth and Colossae had difficulty keeping up. The wealth of neighboring Laodicea is documented in Revelation 3. By the time of the establishment of the church in Colossae it had become a city of relative insignificance—but we must not overlook that Paul wrote this important letter to the Church of Colossae.
3. Sadly, shortly after receiving this letter Colossae was largely destroyed by a devastating earthquake.
4. Paul had an indirect influence on the founding of the church of Colossae. While Paul was in Ephesus during his third missionary journey, a Colossian man by the name of Epaphras arrived and was converted under Paul's preaching. He returned to Colossae and began sharing the good news of Christ. Through his faithful witness of the Gospel the Church of Colossae was planted.  
**Colossians 1:7 NAU** - "just as you learned *it* from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf"
5. Like Philippians, Ephesians and Philemon, this letter was one of the four prison epistles written during the time of Paul's imprisonment in Rome. It was written sometime between A.D. 61-63. Colossians and Ephesians are similar in many ways. Both are prison epistles and were written during the same period. While they are similar, there are significant differences. Colossians is wonderfully Christological. We'll surely enjoy this as we make our journey through the letter.
6. While incarcerated in Rome, Paul spent his days chained to a Roman guard. But he was able to receive visitors. During this time Epaphras had arrived from Colossae and shared with Paul commendations about the church of Colossae—how they were prospering in the faith.  
**Colossians 1:3-4 NAU** - "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, <sup>4</sup> since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;"  
Epaphras, however, also shared several dangers confronting the church. Paul wrote this letter to address these dangers.

- A. First of all, there was false teaching being propagated in the Colossian church. Paul was not personally acquainted with the Colossian church but was passionate for the Gospel and passionate that all the churches of Christ flourish under the Gospel. He always dealt firmly with teachers of false doctrine.
- (1) Theologians have argued as to the nature of this false teaching. It seems to be multi-faceted. There was a false asceticism that was robbing the Colossians of their freedom in Christ. Asceticism is rigorous self-denial of the pleasures of this world as a measure of spirituality.  
**Colossians 2:8 NAU** - "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ."
- (2) This asceticism was influenced by Gnosticism that the early church was battling.
- The Gnostics claimed to possess a special knowledge, an enlightenment that was superior to faith and which ordinary Christians did not possess.
  - They believed in a strict separation of spirit and matter—that the physical was intrinsically evil. Denying the physical through asceticism was the means of attaining spiritual communion with God.
  - In a strange twist, however, some saw such a distinction between the spiritual and fleshly realm, that one could engage in all manner of physical acts while remaining spiritually pure.
  - Because of their belief in the evil of the physical realm, Gnostics denied the humanity of Jesus and denied His suffering on the cross.
  - For the Gnostics, the creator of this physical realm is distinct from the Supreme God that is separate from the material.
- B. In addition to the influence of this false teaching, the Colossians had been saved out of a pagan culture and were in danger from the constant pressure of returning to their old way of living and conform to the paganism around them. Satan's lies are cunning and deceptive. Does this not describe the state of the church in America? Are we conforming to the paganism around us?  
**Colossians 3:5-10 NAU** - "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. <sup>6</sup> For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, <sup>7</sup> and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. <sup>8</sup> But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him"
- C. Paul's way of attacking both the false doctrine as well as the weakened sanctity of the church is to present the all-sufficient fullness of Christ. There is no book in the New Testament that surpasses Colossians in displaying the supremacy of Christ.  
**Colossians 1:19 NAU** - "For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him"

8. We can also see the close relationship between Colossians and Philemon. The household of Philemon was a part of the Colossian Church. We can hear Paul's words to him in **Chapter 3:12-13** - "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."
9. The slave, Onesimus, and Tychicus delivered the letter to be read publicly to the Church of Colossae. There would have been an air of excitement as they read this letter from Paul. He was one of the greatest intellects of the ancient world and Epaphras would have told them much about Paul. They would have listened intently. We will be reading and studying the letter they received.
10. Paul opens Colossians in a way similar to his other letters: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God."  
As I've stated with Paul's other epistles, while Paul follows the literary pattern for letters in his day, his words must not be seen as mere formality. They are rich in substance and truth that the church must not overlook. Paul's words are of great profit to the churches of Christ. It is the Word of God.
11. This morning as we begin the Book of Colossians I want to focus on **Verse 1**. In this verse Paul makes three statements worthy of our consideration. May God bless and edify us as we consider them together.
  - I. First of all, Paul states his apostolic calling "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ" It is essential that we have a clear understanding of this early office that Jesus raised up for His church.
    - A. The office of apostle had a significant place in the foundation of the church
      1. Paul signifies that he is "an apostle of Jesus Christ." The apostolic office spoke with authority and Paul is declaring at the beginning that this letter was to be received as a word of authority.
      2. Paul's office rested upon the authority of Jesus Christ  
Paul knew that he had been set apart for this work  
The word—ἀπόστολος – "a messenger, one sent forth with orders
      3. Although most of the members of the Church of Colossae had never laid eyes on Paul, he carried the authority of Jesus Christ.  
**1 Corinthians 14:37 NAU** – "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment."  
**2 Corinthians 13:3 NAU** – "since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you."
    - B. The office of Apostle was a unique, non-repeating office.
      1. There were to be no successors to this office. They provided the foundation of the church.  
**Ephesians 2:19-20 NAU** - "you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, <sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,"  
**Acts 2:42 NAU** – "And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."  
2. One of the criterion that validated a book under consideration for the NT Canon was its connection to one of the Apostles.

3. The absence of the Apostles today is significant as it speaks strongly to the issue of cessationism
  - a. The extraordinary gifts were uniquely connected to the Apostles
  - b. The cessation of the Apostles also brought the cessation of the miraculous gifts.

II. Second of all, I want to point out the significance of Paul's phrase, "by the will of God."

- A. This is a significant statement. On one hand, it points to Paul's authority as an apostle. But this phrase has far reaching implications for us as we apply it to ourselves, both in the context of the church and in the larger context of our lives.
  1. First of all, God determines our function within His church. The church has two offices: pastor and deacon.
 

No one has the right to appoint himself to an office in the Church of Christ

    - a. The church has often been plagued by individuals who were self-appointed – occupying positions they are not authorized to have. They can rise to positions of prominence and can become abusive. **3 John 1:9-10 NAU** - "I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. <sup>10</sup> For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire *to do so* and puts *them* out of the church."
    - b. Church office demands a direct calling from Christ. This is what Paul is saying here: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God."
  2. Calvin: "Now, two things are requisite in any one that would be listened to in the Church, and would occupy the place of a (*pastor*); for he must be called by God to that office, and he must faithfully employ himself in the discharge of his duties. Paul here lays claim to both. Let us learn, therefore, to take these two things together when we wish to ascertain what kind of persons we ought to esteem as ministers of Christ,—a call to the office, and faithfulness in the discharge of its duties." <sup>1</sup>
- B. This also has implications in other aspects of our lives
  1. We must guard against being overly ambitious. We must strive to a life of excellence to the glory of God. We must guard, however, against seeking preeminence, recognition and authority to satisfy our own selfish plans.
  2. Nicolas Byfield: "If God has set thee in thy calling, then it stands thee upon to discharge the duties of thy calling with all heedfulness and painfulness. *And it teaches men* not to pass the bounds of their calling; for seeing they are in their places by God's will, they must take heed of going eyond their limits, either by using unlawful ways and courses, or by intruding into other men's functions." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, John, *Commentary of the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, Vol. I*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003) Page 48.

<sup>2</sup> Byfield, Nicolas, *Commentary on Colossians*, (Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2012) Page 19.

III. Third, we can see the unique nature of Christian conversion - "Timothy our brother"

A. We are made a part of a universal family

1. Paul identifies Timothy as co-author, although this was an epistle of Paul under the authority of Paul. What is significant is Paul's terminology for Timothy - "Timothy our brother"
2. By referring to Timothy as "our brother" Paul is recognizing the reality of our union with one another into a unique family.
3. Our true family is comprised of those who are in Christ – this is the only family that will survive into eternity
4. Jesus taught that our spiritual family transcends our earthly family.  
**Matthew 12:47-50 NAU** - "Someone said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You." <sup>48</sup> But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" <sup>49</sup> And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! <sup>50</sup> "For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."

B. In Christ we have become the children of God

**John 1:11-12 NAU** - "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. <sup>12</sup> But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name"

1. One of the glorious aspects of our union with Christ is our adoption  
**Romans 8:14-17 NAU** - "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup> The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*."
2. Those for whom Christ has come and redeemed have become the sons of God – The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has become our Father.  
**Colossians 1:3 NAU** - "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,"  
 It is the Christian who is able to pray, "Our Father, which art in heaven." Paul is reminding us in **Verse 1** that if we are God's children then we are brothers and sisters.
3. As the children of the Living God we have become heirs and joint-heirs with Christ. We have a glorious inheritance
  - a. We have the blessedness of having sharing with all the saints in Christ's inheritance.  
**Colossians 1:12 NAU** - "Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light."
  - b. We are heirs of everlasting salvation and an everlasting Kingdom of which Christ Himself has become our inheritance.  
**Psalms 16:5-6 NAU** - "The LORD is the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You support my lot. <sup>6</sup> The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me."

**Conclusion:**

1. And thus we begin our journey. May God grant us discernment to look carefully at the text. May He grant us ears to hear as the text is preached and may we be lifted to new heights as the supremacy of Christ is displayed.
2. God's Word remains powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, and a powerful weapon against our foe.  
God bless us as we journey through this section of Your Word and may Christ be magnified.