

**Colossians 1:1-14**  
**August 18, 2024**

**Open with Prayer**

**INTRO TO COLOSSIANS:**

- Colossae was one of three cities located about 100 miles inland from Ephesus.
- All kinds of philosophies mingled in this cosmopolitan area, and religious hucksters abounded.
- There was a large Jewish colony in Colossae, and there was also a constant influx of new ideas and doctrines from the East. It was fertile ground for religious speculations and heresies!
- The Colossian assembly was predominantly Gentile in its membership.
- The church was probably about five years old when Paul wrote this letter.
- Paul wrote this letter because a crisis had occurred that was about to destroy the ministry of the church.
- The crisis was a heresy that threatened the peace and purity of the Colossian church. It was a combination of Eastern philosophy and Jewish legalism, with elements of what Bible scholars call Gnosticism.
- This heresy was in direct contrast to the teaching of Paul. It took a negative view of life: “God is far away, matter is evil, and demonic forces are constantly threatening us.”
- The Christian faith teaches that God is near us, that God made all things good (though they can be used for evil), and that Christ has delivered His people from the powers of darkness (Col. 1:13).
- Paul did not begin by attacking the false teachers and their doctrines. He began by exalting Jesus Christ and showing His preeminence in five areas: the Gospel message, redemption, Creation, the church, and Paul’s own ministry.
- Once he establishes the preeminence of Christ, then Paul will attack the heretics on their own ground.

**Transition:** With that background as our starting point, let’s read Col 1:1-14 and we’ll process it from there.

**BOOK:**

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

<sup>2</sup>To the holy and faithful (believing) brothers in Christ at Colosse:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father.(and the Lord Jesus Christ)

*Thanksgiving and Prayer*

<sup>3</sup>We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, <sup>4</sup>because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints— <sup>5</sup>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 <sup>6</sup>that has come to you. 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. <sup>7</sup> You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our (some say "your") behalf, <sup>8</sup> and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, <sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you (some say "us") to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. <sup>13</sup> For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, (thru His blood) the forgiveness of sins.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

**LOOK:**

Man's greatest problem is sin—a problem that can never be solved by a philosopher or a religious teacher. Sinners need a Savior. Jesus Christ did not release us from bondage, only to have us wander aimlessly. He moved us into His own kingdom of light and made us victors over Satan's kingdom of darkness. Jesus Christ is preeminent in salvation. No other person could redeem us, forgive us, transfer us out of Satan's kingdom into God's kingdom, and do it wholly by grace.

**Close in Prayer**

## **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

***Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 2, pp. 102-115). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.***

### **Colossians 1:1–2**

Do the heavenly bodies have any influence over our lives? The millions of people who consult their horoscopes each day would say, “Yes!” In the United States, there are about 1,750 daily newspapers, and 1,220 of them carry astrological data!

Is there any relationship between diet and spiritual living?

Does God speak to us immediately, in our minds, or only through His Word, the Bible?

Do the Eastern religions have something to offer the evangelical Christian?

These questions sound very contemporary. Yet they are the very issues Paul dealt with in his magnificent Epistle to the Colossians. We need this important letter today just as they needed it back in A.D. 60 when Paul wrote it.

### **The City**

Colossae was one of three cities located about 100 miles inland from Ephesus. The other two cities were Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4:13, 16). This area was a meeting point of East and West because an important trade route passed through there. At one time, all three cities were growing and prosperous, but gradually Colossae slipped into a second-rate position. It became what we would call a small town. Yet the church there was important enough to merit the attention of the Apostle Paul.

All kinds of philosophies mingled in this cosmopolitan area, and religious hucksters abounded. There was a large Jewish colony in Colossae, and there was also a constant influx of new ideas and doctrines from the East. It was fertile ground for religious speculations and heresies!

### **The Church**

Colossae probably would never have been mentioned in the New Testament had it not been for the church there. The city is never named in the Book of Acts because Paul did not start the Colossian church, nor did he ever visit it. Paul had *heard* of their faith (Col. 1:4, 9); but he had never seen these believers personally (Col. 2:1). Here was a church of unknown people, in a small town, receiving an inspired letter from the great Apostle Paul!

How did the Colossian church begin? It was the outgrowth of Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19; 20:17–38). So effective was the witness of the church at Ephesus that “all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10). This would include people in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis.

When we examine the persons involved in the prison correspondence of Paul (see Eph., Phil., Col., Phile., and 2 Tim.), we can just about put the story together of how the Colossian church was founded. During Paul's ministry in Ephesus, at least two men from Colossae were brought to faith in Jesus Christ—Epaphras and Philemon (see Phile. 19). Epaphras apparently was one of the key founders of the church in Colossae, for he shared the Gospel with his friends there (Col. 1:7). He also had a ministry in the cities of Hierapolis and Laodicea (Col. 4:12–13).

Philemon had a church meeting in his home (Phile. 2). It is likely that Apphia and Archippus, mentioned in this verse, were respectively the wife and son of Philemon, and that Archippus was the pastor of the church (Col. 4:17).

There is a good lesson for us here: God does not always need an apostle, or a “full-time Christian worker” to get a ministry established. Nor does He need elaborate buildings and extensive organizations. Here were two laymen who were used of God to start ministries in at least three cities. It is God’s plan that the Christians in the large urban areas like Ephesus reach out into the smaller towns and share the Gospel. Is *your* church helping to evangelize “small-town” mission fields?

The Colossian assembly was predominantly Gentile in its membership. The sins that Paul named (Col. 3:5–9) were commonly associated with the Gentiles, and his statement about the mystery applied more to the Gentiles than to the Jews (Col. 1:25–29). The church was probably about five years old when Paul wrote this letter.

## The Crisis

Why did Paul write this letter to the church in Colossae? Because a crisis had occurred that was about to destroy the ministry of the church. By comparing the prison letters, we can arrive at the following reconstruction of events.

Paul was at that time a prisoner in Rome (Acts 21:17–28:31). He met a runaway slave named Onesimus who belonged to Philemon, one of the leaders of the church in Colossae. Paul led Onesimus to Christ. He then wrote his letter to Philemon, asking his friend to forgive Onesimus and receive him back as a brother in Christ.

About the same time, Epaphras showed up in Rome because he needed Paul’s help. Some new doctrines were being taught in Colossae and were invading the church and creating problems. So Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians in order to refute these heretical teachings and establish the truth of the Gospel.

Epaphras remained with Paul in Rome (Col. 4:12–13). Onesimus and Tychicus carried Paul’s epistles to their destinations: Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7–9; and Philemon. Epaphras was called Paul’s “fellow-prisoner,” a title also given to Aristarchus (Col. 4:10; Phile. 23). This suggests that Epaphras *willingly* remained with Paul to assist him. Neither Aristarchus nor Epaphras was a prisoner because he broke the law and was arrested. They were Paul’s willing companions, sacrificing their own comfort to help him.

What was the heresy that threatened the peace and purity of the Colossian church? It was a combination of Eastern philosophy and Jewish legalism, with elements of what Bible scholars call gnosticism (NOS-ti-cism). This term comes from the Greek word *gnosis* (KNOW-sis) which means “to know.” (An *agnostic* is one who does not know.) The gnostics were the people who were “in the know” when it came to the deep things of God. They were the “spiritual aristocracy” in the church.

To begin with, this heresy promised people such a close union with God that they would achieve a “spiritual perfection.” Spiritual fullness could be theirs only if they entered into the teachings and ceremonies prescribed. There was also a “full knowledge,” a spiritual depth, that only the initiated could enjoy. This “wisdom” would release them from earthly things and put them in touch with heavenly things.

Of course, all of this teaching was but man-made philosophy based on traditions and not on divine truth (Col. 2:8). It grew out of the philosophical question, *Why is there evil in this world if creation was made by a holy God?* As these philosophers speculated and pondered, they came to

the false conclusion that matter was evil. Their next false conclusion was that a holy God could not come into contact with evil matter, so there had to be a series of “emanations” from God to His creation. They believed in a powerful spirit world that used material things to attack mankind. They also held to a form of astrology, believing that angelic beings ruled heavenly bodies and influenced affairs on earth (see Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15).

Added to these Eastern speculations was a form of Jewish legalism. The teachers believed that the rite of circumcision was helpful in spiritual development (Col. 2:11). They taught that the Old Testament Law, especially the dietary laws, was also useful in attaining spiritual perfection (Col. 2:14–17). Definite rules and regulations told them what was evil and what was good (Col. 2:21).

Since to them matter was evil, they had to find some way to control their own human natures in this pursuit of perfection. Two different practices resulted. One school of thought held that the only way to conquer evil matter was by means of rigid discipline and asceticism (Col. 2:23). The other view taught that it was permissible to engage in all kinds of sin, since matter was evil anyway! It appears that the first opinion was the predominant one in Colossae.

It is easy to see how this kind of teaching undermined the very foundations of the Christian faith. To begin with, these heretics attacked the person and work of Jesus Christ. To them, He was merely one of God’s many “emanations” and not the very Son of God, come in the flesh. The Incarnation means God *with us* (Matt. 1:23), but these false teachers claimed that God was keeping His distance from us! When we trust the Son of God, there is no need for intermediary beings between us and heaven!

In His work on the cross, Jesus Christ settled the sin question (Col. 1:20) and completely defeated all satanic forces (Col. 2:15). He put an end to the legal demands of the Law (Col. 2:14–17). In fact, Jesus Christ alone is the Preeminent One! (Col. 1:18; 3:11) All that the believer needs is Jesus!

Matter is not evil, and the human body is not evil. Each person is born with a fallen human nature that wants to control the body and use it for sin; but the body itself is not evil. If that were the case, Jesus Christ would never have come to earth in a human body. Nor would He have enjoyed the everyday blessings of life as He ministered on earth, such as attending wedding feasts and accepting invitations to dinner. Diets and disciplines can be good for one’s health, but they have no power to develop true spirituality (Col. 2:20–23).

As for astrology and the influence of angels and heavenly bodies, Paul denounced this with vigor. On the cross, Jesus won a complete victory over all satanic powers (Col. 2:15). Christians do not need to turn to the rudiments of the world (Col. 2:8, 20). This word translated *rudiments* means “elemental beings” or “elementary principles.” In this case, it refers to the beings that (according to the gnostics) controlled the heavenly bodies that in turn controlled events on earth. Believers who consult horoscopes substitute superstition for revelation and deny the person and work of Christ.

This false teaching was a deceptive combination of many things: Jewish legalism, Oriental philosophy, pagan astrology, mysticism, asceticism, and even a touch of Christianity. There was something for everybody, and this was what made it so dangerous. The false teachers claimed that they were not *denying* the Christian faith, but only lifting it to a higher level. They offered fullness and freedom, a satisfying life that solved all the problems that people face.

Do we have any of this heresy today? Yes, we do; and it is just as deceptive and dangerous! When we make Jesus Christ and the Christian revelation only *part* of a total religious system or philosophy, we cease to give Him the preeminence. When we strive for “spiritual perfection” or

“spiritual fullness” by means of formulas, disciplines, or rituals, we go backward instead of forward. Christian believers must beware of mixing their Christian faith with such alluring things as yoga, transcendental meditation, Oriental mysticism, and the like. We must also beware of “deeper life” teachers who offer a system for victory and fullness that bypasses devotion to Jesus Christ. In all things, He must have the preeminence!

This heresy was in direct contrast to the teaching of Paul. It took a negative view of life: “God is far away, matter is evil, and demonic forces are constantly threatening us.” The Christian faith teaches that God is near us, that God made all things good (though they can be used for evil), and that Christ has delivered His people from the powers of darkness (Col. 1:13). This heresy turned the world into a frightful prison, while Jesus made it clear that the Father is at work in this world caring for His own. Finally, these false teachers tried to change people from the outside, by means of diets and disciplines. But true spiritual growth comes from within.

## **The Correspondence**

With this background, we can now look at Paul’s Letter to the Colossians and get an overview of what he has written. We know that his Epistle to the Ephesians was written and sent about the same time as his Colossian letter. Keeping this in mind, we can discover many parallels between these two letters. However, the emphasis in Ephesians is on the church, the body of Christ; but the emphasis in Colossians is on Christ, the Head of the body.

In this letter, Paul used the vocabulary of the false teachers, but he did not use their definitions. He used these words in their true Christian meaning. As we study Colossians, we will find words such as *fullness*, *perfect*, *complete*. all of which were used by the gnostic heretics. Over thirty times Paul used the little word *all*. He also wrote about *wisdom* which was a key term in the gnostic vocabulary; he had a great deal to say about angels and spirit powers too.

His main theme was *the preeminence of Jesus Christ* (Col. 1:18; 3:11). There is no need for us to worry about angelic mediators or spiritual emanations. God has sent His Son to die for us! Every person who believes on Jesus Christ is saved and is a part of His body, the church, of which He is the Head (Col. 1:18). We are united to Christ in a wonderful living relationship!

Furthermore, nothing need be added to this relationship, because each believer is “complete in Him” (Col. 2:10). All of God’s fullness dwells in Christ (Col. 2:9), and we share that fullness! “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ” (Col. 2:9–10, NIV).

While in an airport waiting for my plane to be called, I was approached by a young man who wanted to sell me a book. One look at the garish cover told me that the book was filled with Oriental myths and philosophies.

“I have a book here that meets all my needs,” I told the young man, and I reached into my briefcase and took out my Bible.

“Oh, we aren’t against the Bible!” he assured me. “It’s just that we have something more, and it makes our faith even better.”

“Nobody can give me more than Jesus Christ has already given me,” I replied. I turned to Colossians 2, but by that time the young man was hurrying down the corridor.

Sad to say, there are many Christians who actually believe that some person, religious system, or discipline can add something to their spiritual experience. But they already have everything they ever will need in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Paul did not begin by attacking the false teachers and their doctrines. He began by exalting Jesus Christ and showing His preeminence in five areas: the Gospel message, redemption,

Creation, the church, and Paul's own ministry. The people to whom Paul was writing had become Christians because of the Gospel message brought to them by Epaphras. If this message was wrong, then they were not saved at all!

Once he had established the preeminence of Christ, then Paul attacked the heretics on their own ground. In Colossians 2, Paul exposed the false origin of their teachings and showed how their teachings contradicted everything Paul taught about Jesus Christ. The believer who masters this chapter is not likely to be led astray by some alluring and enticing "new-and-improved brand of Christianity."

But Paul did not think his task completed when he had refuted the heretics, for he still had some important words for the church. In Colossians 3–4, Paul explained the greatest antidote to false teaching—a *godly life*. Those who say, "I don't care what you believe, just so long as you live a good life" are not thinking logically. *What we believe determines how we behave*. If we believe that matter is evil, we will use our bodies one way; but if we believe that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, we will live accordingly.

Wrong doctrine always leads to wrong living. Right doctrine should lead to right living. In the two concluding chapters, Paul applied the preeminence of Christ to the daily affairs of life. If Christ is truly preeminent in our lives, then we will glorify Him by keeping pure, by enjoying fellowship with other saints, by loving each other at home and being faithful at work, and by seeking to witness for Christ and serve Him effectively. Unless doctrine leads to duty, it is of no use to us.

Many Bible scholars have concluded that Colossians is the most profound letter Paul ever wrote. This must not keep us from reading and studying this wonderful letter. But we must be cautioned against a superficial approach to these chapters. Unless we depend on the Spirit of God to teach us, we will miss the truths God wants us to learn.

The church today desperately needs the message of Colossians. We live in a day when religious toleration is interpreted to mean "one religion is just as good as another." Some people try to take the best from various religious systems and manufacture their own private religion. To many people, Jesus Christ is only *one* of several great religious teachers, with no more authority than they. He may be prominent, but He is definitely not preeminent.

This is an age of "syncretism." People are trying to harmonize and unite many different schools of thought and come up with a superior religion. Our evangelical churches are in danger of diluting the faith in their loving attempt to understand the beliefs of others. Mysticism, legalism, Eastern religions, asceticism, and man-made philosophies are secretly creeping into churches. They are not denying Christ, but they are dethroning Him and robbing Him of His rightful place of preeminence.

As we study this exciting letter, we must heed Paul's warnings: "Lest any man should beguile you" (Col. 2:4), "Lest any man spoil you" (Col. 2:8), "Let no man therefore judge you!" (Col. 2:16)

### **Colossians 1:3–8**

The famous Scottish preacher, Alexander Whyte, was known as an appreciator. He loved to write postcards to people, thanking them for some kindness or blessing they had brought to his life. Those messages often brought a touch of encouragement to a heart just when it was needed most. Appreciation is great medicine for the soul.

The Apostle Paul was a great encourager, and this epistle is a good example of the grace of thanksgiving. In this section (which is one long sentence in the original Greek), he gives thanks

for what Christ has done in the lives of the Colossian Christians. But he also mentions thanksgiving in five other places in this letter: Colossians 1:12; 2:7; 3:15, 17; and 4:2. When you recall that Paul wrote this letter *in prison*, his attitude of thanksgiving is even more wonderful.

Like Paul, we should be grateful for what God is doing in the lives of others. As Christians, we are all members of one body (1 Cor. 12:12–13). If one member of the body is strengthened, this helps to strengthen the entire body. If one church experiences a revival touch from God, it will help all the churches. In this expression of thanksgiving, Paul traced the stages in the spiritual experience of the Colossian believers.

### **They Heard the Gospel (Col. 1:5b–7)**

The Good News of the Gospel was not native to their city. It had to be brought to them; and in their case, Epaphras was the messenger. He was himself a citizen of Colossae (Col. 4:12–13), but he had come in contact with Paul and had been converted to Jesus Christ. This was probably during Paul's great three-year ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:10).

Once Epaphras had been saved, he shared this thrilling news with his relatives and friends back home. Perhaps it would have been exciting for Epaphras to stay with Paul in Ephesus where so many wonderful things were taking place. But his first responsibility was to take the Gospel to his own home city (see Mark 5:19).

The Gospel is the Good News that Jesus Christ has solved the problem of sin through His death, burial, and resurrection. The word *Gospel* means "Good News." Unfortunately, some people witness as though the Gospel is the bad news of condemnation.

I recall one church officer who was more of a prosecuting attorney than a Christian witness. Though he constantly reproved people for their sins, he failed to share the Good News of forgiveness through faith in Christ.

But we can learn a lesson from him. In our witnessing, we should remember to emphasize the good news of the Gospel (see 1 Cor. 15:1–8). In this section in his Letter to the Colossians, Paul reviews the characteristics of this exciting Gospel message.

***It centers in a Person—Jesus Christ.*** The theme of this epistle is the preeminence of Jesus Christ, and He is certainly preeminent in the Gospel. The false teachers who had invaded the fellowship in Colossae were trying to remove Jesus Christ from His place of preeminence; but to do this was to destroy the Gospel. It is *Christ* who died for us, and who arose again. The Gospel message does not center in a philosophy, a doctrine, or a religious system. It centers in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

***It is the "Word of truth" (v. 5, NIV).*** This means that it came from God and can be trusted. "Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17). There are many messages and ideas that can be called *true*, but only God's Word can be called *truth*. Satan is the liar; to believe his lies is to be led astray into death (John 8:44). Jesus is the Truth (John 14:6); when we trust Him, we experience life. Men have tried to destroy God's truth, but they have failed. The Word of truth still stands!

Everybody has faith in something. But faith is only as good as the object in which a person puts his trust. The jungle pagan worships a god of stone; the educated city pagan worships money or possessions or status. In both cases, faith is empty. The true Christian believer has faith in Jesus Christ, and that faith is based on the Word of truth. Any other kind of faith is but superstition—it cannot save.

***It is the message of God's grace (v. 6b).*** Two words in the Christian vocabulary are often confused: *grace* and *mercy*. God in His grace gives me what I do not deserve. Yet God in His mercy does not give me what I do deserve. Grace is God's favor shown to undeserving sinners.



The reason the Gospel is *good* news is because of grace: God is willing and able to save all who will trust Jesus Christ.

John Selden (1584–1654) was a leading historian and legal authority in England. He had a library of 8,000 volumes and was recognized for his learning. When he was dying, he said to Archbishop Ussher: “I have surveyed most of the learning that is among the sons of men, and my study is filled with books and manuscripts on various subjects. But at present, I cannot recollect any passage out of all my books and papers whereon I can rest my soul, save this from the sacred Scriptures: ‘The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men’ (Titus 2:11).”

***It is for the whole world (v. 6).*** When I was a young pastor, one of my favorite preachers was Dr. Walter Wilson of Kansas City. He had a unique way of making old truths seem new and exciting. I once heard him quote John 3:16 and ask, “If you were to give a gift that would be suitable for the whole world, what would you give?”

He then listed several possibilities and showed how those gifts could not suit everybody: books (many people cannot read); foods (people eat different things in different parts of the world); clothing (climates are different); money (not every culture makes use of money). He came to the logical conclusion that only the Gospel, with its gift of eternal life, was suitable for the whole world; and he was right.

Paul said that the Gospel was bearing fruit in all the world. The Word of God is the only seed that can be planted anywhere in the world and bear fruit. The Gospel can be preached “to every creature which is under heaven” (Col. 1:23). Paul’s emphasis was on “every man” (Col. 1:28). False teachers do not take their message to all the world. They go where the Gospel has already gone and try to lead believers astray. *They have no good news for lost sinners!*

If people are to be saved, they must hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And if they are to hear, we who are saved must carry the message. Are you doing your part?

### **They Believed in Jesus Christ (Col. 1:4)**

It is possible to hear and not believe, even though the Word of God has the power to generate faith in those who hear (Rom. 10:17). Millions of people have heard the Good News of salvation and yet not believed. But those who believe in Jesus Christ receive from God the gift of eternal life (John 3:14–18).

We are not saved by faith *in faith*. There is a cult of “believism” today that promotes faith but has little to do with Jesus Christ. Even some popular songs carry the message of “faith in faith.” The modern attitude is, “If you believe, you are safe.” But the obvious question is, “Believe in *what?*” Their answer: “Just believe!”

Nor are we saved by faith *in a set of doctrines*. I have often told the story about the famous evangelist, George Whitefield, who was witnessing to a man. “What do you believe?” Whitefield asked. The man replied, “I believe what my church believes.”

“And what does your church believe?” asked the evangelist.

“What I believe,” replied the man.

Undaunted, Whitefield tried again and asked, “And what do you *both* believe?”

“Why, we both believe the same thing!” was the man’s evasive reply.

Saving faith involves the mind, the emotions, and the will. With the mind we understand the truth of the Gospel, and with the heart we feel conviction and the need to be saved. But it is only when we exercise the will and commit ourselves to Christ that the process is complete. Faith is not mental assent to a body of doctrines, no matter how true those doctrines may be. Faith is not emotional concern. *Faith is commitment to Jesus Christ.*

When missionary John G. Paton was translating the Bible in the Outer Hebrides, he searched for the exact word to translate *believe*. Finally, he discovered it: the word meant “lean your whole weight upon.” That is what saving faith is—leaning your whole weight upon Jesus Christ.

Saving faith is grounded in the Gospel (Col. 1:23). It is the Word of God that gives us assurance. As we grow in the Lord, our faith becomes steadfast (Col. 2:5) and established (Col. 2:7).

The false teachers who had come to Colossae tried to undermine the saints’ faith in Christ and the Word. This same kind of undermining goes on today. Any religious teaching that dethrones Jesus Christ, or that makes salvation other than an experience of God’s grace through faith, is either confused or antichristian and born of Satan.

One final thought: the experience of the believers in Colossae was so wonderful that people talked about it! Paul heard about it from Epaphras; the false teachers heard about it and decided to visit the Colossian assembly to see the remarkable change for themselves.

You cannot keep silent once you have experienced salvation in Jesus Christ. Is your Christian life the kind that encourages others and makes it easy for them to witness? Is your church fellowship so exciting that even the unsaved are taking notice?

### **They Were Discipled (Col. 1:7)**

Epaphras did not simply lead the Colossians to Christ and then abandon them. He taught them the Word and sought to establish their faith. The word translated “learned” in Colossians 1:7 is related to the word *disciple* in the Greek language. It is the same word Jesus used: “Learn of Me” (Matt. 11:29) or, in effect, “Become My disciple.”

These new believers were in danger of turning from the truth and following the false teachers. Paul reminded them that it was Epaphras who led them to Christ, discipled them, and taught them the Word. The word *before* (Col. 1:5) probably means “before these false teachers appeared on the scene.” Like the Colossians, we should beware of any religious leader who does not seek to win lost souls, but who devotes himself to “stealing sheep” from the flocks of others.

We should never forget that new Christians must be discipled. Just as the newborn baby needs loving care and protection until he can care for himself, so the new Christian needs discipling. The Great Commission does not stop with the salvation of the lost, for in that commission Jesus commanded us to teach converts the Word as well (Matt. 28:19–20). That is what the fellowship of the local church is all about. The New Testament does not teach the kind of “individual Christianity” that is so prevalent today—people who ignore the local church and who find all their spiritual food in books, radio, TV, or cassette tapes.

Epaphras was a faithful minister. He not only won people to Christ, but he taught them the Word and helped them to grow. He also prayed for them (Col. 4:12–13) that they might become mature in Jesus Christ. When danger threatened the members of the church, Epaphras went to Rome to get counsel from Paul. He loved his people and wanted to protect them from false doctrines that would destroy the fellowship and hinder their spiritual development.

The word *disciple* is found more than 260 times in the Gospels and Acts, and the verb translated, “to learn as a disciple” is found 25 times in the New Testament. In that day, a disciple was not simply a person who sat and listened to a teacher. He was someone who lived with the teacher and who learned by listening, looking, and living. Discipleship involved more than enrolling in a school and attending lectures. It meant total surrender to the teacher. It meant learning by living. Perhaps our modern-day medical students or trade apprentices come close to illustrating the meaning of discipleship.

But we who disciple other believers must be careful not to get in the way. We are not to make disciples *for ourselves*, but for Jesus Christ. We must relate people to Him so that they love and obey Him. Epaphras faithfully taught his people and related them to Jesus Christ, but the false teachers came in and tried to “draw away disciples.” (For Paul’s warning about this problem, see Acts 20:28–30.) Human nature has the tendency to want to follow men instead of God—to want “something new” instead of the basic foundational truths of the Gospel.

Now we come to the results of Epaphras’ efforts.

### **They Became Faithful in Christ (Col. 1:6, 8)**

The Word of God is seed (Luke 8:11). This means the Word has life in it (Heb. 4:12). When it is planted in the heart, it can produce fruit. “All over the world this Gospel is producing fruit and growing” (Col. 1:6, NIV).

Near King’s Cross station in London, England, there is a cemetery containing a unique grave, that of the agnostic Lady Ann Grimston. She is buried in a marble tomb, marked by a marble slab. Before she died, she said sarcastically to a friend, “I shall live again as surely as a tree will grow from my body.”

An unbeliever, Lady Ann Grimston did not believe that there was life after death. However, *a tree did grow from her grave!* A tiny seed took root, and as it grew, it cracked the marble and even tore the metal railing out of the ground! There is life and power in a seed, and there is life and power in the Word of God.

When God’s Word is planted and cultivated, it produces fruit. Faith, hope, and love are among the first fruits in the spiritual harvest. These spiritual graces are among the evidences that a person has truly been born again (see Rom. 5:1–4; Eph. 1:13–15; 1 Thes. 1:3; Heb. 6:9–12; 1 Peter 1:3–9).

*Faith* comes through the hearing of God’s Word (Rom. 10:17). Our Christian lives start with *saving* faith; but this is only the beginning. We learn to walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7) and work by faith (1 Thes. 1:3). It is faith that gives power to prayer (Luke 17:5–6). Faith is a shield that protects us from Satan’s fiery darts (Eph. 6:16).

*Love* is another evidence of true salvation, for the unsaved person is wrapped up mainly in himself (Eph. 2:1–3). The fact that these people loved *all* the saints was proof that God had changed them and given them eternal life. Christian love is not a shallow feeling that we manufacture; it is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (Rom. 5:5; Col. 1:8). It is worth noting that Colossians 1:8 is the only verse in the letter that mentions the Holy Spirit, and it is in connection with love.

This Spirit-given love was for “all the saints” (Col. 1:4) and not only for the people of their own fellowship. As Christians, we also need to realize the vastness of God’s love and share it with all the saints (Eph. 3:17–19). Believers should be “knit together in love” (Col. 2:2) so that there will be a true spiritual unity to the glory of God. The bond that unites us is love (Col. 3:14). Uniformity is the result of compulsion from the outside; unity is the result of compassion on the inside.

*Hope* is also a characteristic of the believer. Unsaved people are without hope because they are without God (Eph. 2:11–12). Those outside of Christ have no hope (1 Thes. 4:13). In the Bible, hope does not mean “hope so.” Our hope in Christ is as definite and assured as our faith in Christ. Because Christ is in us, we have the “hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

The false teachers tried to unsettle the Colossian believers and move them away from the hope of the Gospel (Col. 1:23). But Paul made it clear that this hope is “laid up” for believers in

heaven (Col. 1:5). The word translated “laid up” carries the meaning of “to be reserved, to be set aside for someone.” It was used to refer to money laid up or hidden. The tense of the verb indicates that this hope has *once and for all* been reserved so that nothing can take it from us. Not only has this hope (our glorious inheritance in glory) been reserved for us, but we are being kept by God’s power so that we can be sure of enjoying heaven one day (1 Peter 1:1–5). We are being guarded for glory!

What is the relationship between faith, hope, and love? Certainly, the more we love someone, the more we will trust him. We do not trust a casual acquaintance to the same degree that we trust a confidential friend. As we come to know God better, we trust Him more and we love Him more. Love and faith encourage each other.

But hope also has a valuable contribution to make. Wherever there is a relationship of faith and love, there will be a growing hope. When a man and woman fall in love and learn to trust each other in that love, their future always becomes brighter. In fact, Paul taught that hope is a motivating power for love and for faith: “The faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven” (Col. 1:5, NIV).

The blessed hope of seeing Jesus Christ and going to heaven to be with Him is a powerful force in the Christian’s life. When we realize the joy we shall have in heaven, it makes us love Him more. The fact that we *know* we shall be with Him in glory encourages us to trust Him more. Even the problems and trials here on earth do not move us away from that hope.

I have noticed that the prospect of a future happiness has a way of making people love one another more. Have you ever watched children just before Christmas or a family vacation? The bright promise of heaven encourages our faith and expands our love. Then faith and love work together to make the present more enjoyable and the future more exciting.

Divisions and dissensions among Christians are tragic. I am not suggesting that we all get together in a “super church,” but I do feel that there could be more love and understanding among God’s people. The fact that we are going to be together in heaven ought to encourage us to love each other on earth. This is one reason why Christ has already given us His glory within. “And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are One” (John 17:22).

The hope of seeing Christ and going to heaven is not only a motivation for faith and love, but it is also a motivation for holy living. “And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (1 John 3:3). When I was a young Christian, an older friend warned me, “Don’t be caught doing anything that would embarrass you if Jesus returned!” That is a rather negative view of the promise of heaven, even though it does have some merit. In fact, John warns us that if we do not abide in Christ (keep in fellowship with Him in obedience), we may be ashamed when He returns (1 John 2:28).

But there is a positive side to this truth. We should keep our lives clean so that when Jesus Christ *does* return, nothing will cloud our first meeting with Him. We will enter into the joy and glory of His presence with confidence and love! Peter called this a “rich welcome” into the everlasting kingdom (2 Peter 1:11, NIV).

The hope of heaven is also an encouragement in times of suffering (1 Peter 1:4–9). As believers, we have our share of suffering; but in the midst of trials, we can rejoice “with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8). When unbelievers suffer, they get discouraged and they want to give up. But when Christians suffer, their faith can become stronger and their love can deepen because their hope shines brighter.

How do we know that we have this hope? The promise is given in “the Word of the truth of the Gospel” (Col. 1:5). We believers do not have to “work up” a good feeling of hope. God’s unchanging Word assures us that our hope is secure in Christ. In fact, this hope is compared to an anchor (Heb. 6:19) that can never break or drift.

No wonder Paul was thankful for the believers in Colossae! God had given Paul “special miracles” at Ephesus (Acts 19:11). But no miracle is greater than the salvation of the lost sinner. Through the faithful witness of Epaphras, God performed miracles of grace in Colossae.

Have you experienced the miracle of salvation?

If you have, then keep growing and being fruitful for the Lord. The same Word that gave you life when you trusted Christ will continue to nourish that life and make you a faithful, fruitful Christian.

Are there any “Gospel miracles” of grace taking place where you live?

### **Colossians 1:9–12**

The prayers in Paul’s prison letters are certainly unique. To begin with, he prays for others and not for himself. The requests in his prayers center on *spiritual* blessings, not on material or physical matters. Of course, it is not wrong to pray about physical or material needs. But spiritual needs are vastly more important.

How would you pray for a group of people you had never seen? All that Paul knew about the believers in Colossae he learned from their faithful pastor, Epaphras. Paul knew of the false teaching that was threatening the church, so he centered his praying on that problem. In his prayer, Paul made three requests.

#### **He Prayed for Spiritual Intelligence (Col. 1:9)**

The false teachers promised the Colossian believers that they would be “in the know” if they accepted the new doctrines. Words like *knowledge*, *wisdom*, and *spiritual understanding* were a part of their religious vocabulary; so Paul used these words in his prayer.

Satan is so deceptive! He likes to borrow Christian vocabulary, but he does not use the Christian dictionary! Long before the false teachers had adopted these terms, the words had been in the Christian vocabulary.

The phrase, *for this cause*, relates the prayer to what Paul had written in Colossians 1:6: “And knew the grace of God in truth.” The report from Epaphras convinced Paul that these believers truly knew Christ and were born again. But there was much more to learn *from* Him and *about* Him! “You do not need a new spiritual experience,” Paul was saying. “You only need to grow in the experience you have already had.”

When a person is born into God’s family by faith in Jesus Christ, he is born with all that he needs for growth and maturity. This is the theme of Colossians: “And you are complete in Him” (Col. 2:10). No other experience is needed than the new birth. “Do not look for something new,” Paul warned the church. “Continue to grow in that which you received at the beginning” (author’s paraphrase).

Every believer needs to have “the knowledge of His will.” The Greek word translated “knowledge” in this verse carries the meaning of “full knowledge.” There is always more to learn about God and His will for our lives. No Christian would ever dare to say that he had “arrived” and needed to learn nothing more. Like the college freshman who handed in a ten-page report on “The History of the Universe,” that Christian would only declare his ignorance.

The will of God is an important part of a successful Christian life. God wants us to *know* His will (Acts 22:14) and *understand* it (Eph. 5:17). God is not a distant dictator who issues orders and never explains. Because we are His friends, we can know what He is doing and why He is doing it (John 15:13–15). As we study His Word and pray, we discover new and exciting truths about God’s will for His people.

The word *filled* is a key word in Colossians. It was also a key word in the teachings of the false teachers who had invaded the Colossian church. Paul used it many times (see Col. 1:19, 25; 2:2, 9–10; 4:12, 17 [*complete* = “filled full”]). The word carries the idea of being fully equipped. It was used to describe a ship that was ready for a voyage. The believer has in Christ all that he needs for the voyage of life. “And you are complete in Him” (Col. 2:10). “And of His fullness have all we received” (John 1:16).

In the language of the New Testament, to be *filled* means to be “controlled by.” When we are filled with anger, we are controlled by anger. To be “filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18) means to be “controlled by the Spirit.” Paul’s prayer, then, is that these believers might be controlled by the full knowledge of God’s will.

But how does this take place? How can believers grow in the full knowledge of God’s will? Paul’s closing words of Colossians 1:9 tell us: “By means of all wisdom and spiritual insight” (literal translation). *We understand the will of God through the Word of God.* The Holy Spirit teaches us as we submit to Him (John 14:26; 16:13). As we pray and sincerely seek God’s truth, He gives us through the Spirit the wisdom and insight that we need (Eph. 1:17).

The *general* will of God for all His children is given clearly in the Bible. The *specific* will of God for any given situation must always agree with what He has already revealed in His Word. The better we know God’s general will, the easier it will be to determine His specific guidance in daily life. Paul did not encourage the Colossians to seek visions or wait for voices. He prayed that they might get deeper into God’s Word and thus have greater wisdom and insight concerning God’s will. He wanted them to have “all wisdom”—not that they would know everything, but that they would have all the wisdom necessary for making decisions and living to please God.

Spiritual intelligence is the beginning of a successful, fruitful Christian life. God puts no premium on ignorance. I once heard a preacher say, “I didn’t never go to school. I’m just a igerant Christian, and I’m glad I is!” A man does not have to go to school to gain spiritual intelligence; but neither should he magnify his “igerance.”

Great men of God like Charles Spurgeon, G. Campbell Morgan, and H.A. Ironside never had the privilege of formal Bible training. But they were devoted students of the Word, learning its deeper truths through hours of study, meditation, and prayer. The first step toward fullness of life is spiritual intelligence—growing in the will of God by knowing the Word of God.

### **He Prayed for Practical Obedience (Col. 1:10)**

The false teachers in Colossae attracted people through their offer of “spiritual knowledge,” but they did not relate this knowledge to life. In the Christian life, knowledge and obedience go together. There is no separation between *learning* and *living*. The wisdom about which Paul prayed was not simply a head knowledge of deep spiritual truths (see Col. 1:28; 2:3; 3:16; 4:5). True spiritual wisdom must affect the daily life. Wisdom and practical intelligence must go together (see Ex. 31:3; Deut. 4:6; 1 Cor. 1:19).

In my pastoral ministry, I have met people who have become intoxicated with “studying the deeper truths of the Bible.” Usually they have been given a book or introduced to some teacher’s

tapes. Before long, they get so smart they become dumb! The “deeper truths” they discover only detour them from practical Christian living. Instead of getting burning hearts of devotion to Christ (Luke 24:32), they get big heads and start creating problems in their homes and churches. All Bible truths are practical, not theoretical. If we are growing in knowledge, we should also be growing in grace (2 Peter 3:18).

Two words summarize the practicality of the Christian life: *walk* and *work*. The sequence is important: first, wisdom; then walk; then work. I cannot work for God unless I am walking with Him; but I cannot walk with Him if I am ignorant of His will. The believer who spends time daily in the Word and prayer (Acts 6:4) will know God’s will and be able to walk with Him and work for Him.

After all, our purpose in life is not to please ourselves, but to please the Lord. We should walk *worthy of our calling* (Eph. 4:1) and *worthy of the Gospel* (Phil. 1:27), which means we will walk *worthy of God* (1 Thes. 2:12). In short, we should walk to *please* God (1 Thes. 4:1).

It is not we who work for God; it is God who works in us and through us to produce the fruit of His grace (Phil. 2:12–13). Christian service is the result of Christian devotion. The work that we do is the outflow of the life that we live. It is by abiding in Christ that we can produce fruit (John 15:1ff).

God must make the worker before He can do the work. God spent thirteen years preparing Joseph for his ministry in Egypt, and eighty years preparing Moses to lead Israel. Jesus spent three years teaching His disciples how to bear fruit; and even the learned Apostle Paul needed a “postgraduate course” in Arabia before he could serve God with effectiveness. A newborn babe can cry and make its presence known, but it cannot work. A new Christian can witness for Christ and even win others—but he must be taught to walk and learn God’s wisdom before he is placed in an office of responsible ministry.

God’s wisdom reveals God’s will. As we obey God’s will in our walk, we can work for Him and bear fruit. We will not just occasionally serve God; we will be “fruitful in every good work” (Col. 1:10). But there is a blessed by-product of this experience: “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10). As we walk with God and work for God, we get to know Him better and better.

Our Christian lives desperately need *balance*. Certainly we get to know God better as we pray in our private rooms and as we meditate on His Word. But we also get to know Him as we walk in our daily lives and work to win others and help His people.

Worship and service are not competitive. They always go together. When He was ministering on earth, our Lord retired to pray—then He went out to serve. We need to avoid the extremes of impractical mysticism and fleshly enthusiasm. As we spend time with God, we get to understand Him and His will for our lives; and as we go out to obey Him, we learn more.

Practical obedience means pleasing God, serving Him, and getting to know Him better. Any doctrine that isolates the believer from the needs of the world around him is not spiritual doctrine. Evangelist D.L. Moody often said, “Every Bible should be bound in shoe-leather.” Paul would agree.

Paul has prayed that we might have spiritual intelligence, and that this intelligence might result in practical obedience. But there is a third request that completes these first two; and without it, the Christian life could not be mature.

### **He Prayed for Moral Excellence (Col. 1:11–12)**

Wisdom and conduct should always be related to moral character. One of the great problems in our evangelical world today is the emphasis on “spiritual knowledge” and “Christian service,” without connecting these important matters to personal character.

For example, some teachers and preachers claim to have God’s wisdom—yet they lack love and kindness and the other basic qualities that make the Christian life beautiful and distinctive. Even some “soul-winning Christians” are so busy serving God that they cannot take time to check facts—so they publish lies about other Christians. For some months, I read a certain religious publication. But when I discovered that they had no “Letters to the Editor” column (except for praise), and that they never published a correction or apologized for an error, I stopped reading the magazine.

Knowledge, conduct, service, and character must always go together. We know God’s will that we might obey it; and, in obeying it, we serve Him and grow in Christian character. While none of us is perfectly balanced in these four factors, we ought to strive for that balance.

It is God’s energy that empowers us. Colossians 1:11 reads, in effect: “With all power being empowered according to the might of His glory.” Paul used two different Greek words for God’s energy: *dunamis* (from which we get our word “dynamite”) means “inherent power”; and *kratos* means “manifested power,” power that is put forth in action. The grace of our Christian lives is but a result of God’s power at work in our lives. Spiritual growth and maturity can come only as we yield to God’s power and permit Him to work in us.

We usually think of God’s glorious power being revealed in great feats of daring—the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, David leading a victorious army, or Paul raising the dead. But the emphasis here is on Christian character: patience, long-suffering, joyfulness, and thanksgiving. The inner victories of the soul are just as great, if not greater, than the public victories recorded in the annals of history. For David to control his temper when he was being maligned by Shimei was a greater victory than his slaying of Goliath (2 Sam. 16:5–13). “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city” (Prov. 16:32, NASB).

The word *patience* means “endurance when circumstances are difficult.” It is the opposite of despondency. This word is never used in reference to God, for God does not face difficult circumstances. Nothing is impossible with God (Jer. 32:27).

Patience is an important characteristic of the maturing Christian life. If we do not learn to be patient, we are not likely to learn anything else. As believers, we are able to rejoice even in our tribulations, because we know that “tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance proven character; and proven character, hope” (Rom. 5:3–4, NASB).

We must never think that patience is complacency. Patience is *endurance in action*. It is not the Christian sitting in a rocking chair, waiting for God to do something. It is the soldier on the battlefield, keeping on when the going is tough. It is the runner on the race track, refusing to stop because he wants to win the race (Heb. 12:1).

Too many Christians have a tendency to quit when circumstances become difficult. The saintly Dr. V. Raymond Edman, late president of Wheaton College (Illinois), used to remind the students, “It is always too soon to quit.”

I have often thought of that statement when I find myself in the midst of trying circumstances. It is not talent or training that guarantees victory: it is perseverance. “By perseverance the snail reached the ark,” said Charles Spurgeon.

Along with patience, we need *long-suffering*. This word means “self-restraint” and is the opposite of revenge. Patience has to do primarily with circumstances, while long-suffering has to



do with people. God is long-suffering toward people because of His love and grace (2 Peter 3:9). Long-suffering is one fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It is among the “grace garments” that the believer should wear (Col. 3:12).

It is amazing how people can patiently endure trying circumstances, only to lose their tempers with a friend or loved one. Moses was patient during the contest with Pharaoh in Egypt. But he lost his temper with his own people and, as a result, forfeited his right to enter the Promised Land (Num. 20). “Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit” (Prov. 25:28, NASB).

Patience and long-suffering go together if we are growing spiritually. Paul listed them as the marks of the true minister of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 6:4–6). Certainly, Paul displayed these graces in his own life (2 Tim. 3:10). The great example of patience and long-suffering in the Old Testament is Job (James 5:10–11). In the New Testament, of course, it is Jesus Christ.

It is easy for God to perform miracles in the realms of the material or physical, because everything in creation obeys His command. Jesus could heal Malchus’ ear, but He could not automatically change Peter’s heart and remove the hatred and violence that was in it (Luke 22:50–51). God could bring water out of the rock, but He could not force Moses to be patient.

A pastor often visited a Christian young man who had been badly burned. The young man had to lie still for hours, and it was difficult for him to perform even the basic functions of life.

“I wish God would do a miracle and heal me,” the young man said to his pastor one day.

“God is doing a miracle,” the pastor replied, “but not the kind you are looking for. I have watched you grow in patience and kindness during these weeks. That, to me, is a greater miracle than the healing of your body.”

God’s power is evidenced in our lives not only in our patience and long-suffering, but also in our *joyfulness*. When circumstances are difficult, we should exhibit *joyful* patience; and when people are hard to live with, we should reveal *joyful* long-suffering. There is a kind of patience that “endures but does not enjoy.” Paul prayed that the Colossian Christians might experience *joyful* patience and long-suffering.

We often use the words *joy* and *happiness* interchangeably, but a distinction should be made. Happiness often depends on happenings. If circumstances are encouraging and people are kind, we are happy. But joy is independent of both circumstances and people. The most joyful epistle Paul wrote was Philippians, and he wrote it from jail as he faced the possibility of being martyred for his faith.

Only God’s Spirit working within us can give us joy in the midst of problem circumstances and problem people. “The fruit of the Spirit is . . . joy” (Gal. 5:22). Joy is not something that we ourselves “work up”; it is something the Spirit Himself “works in”—“joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17, NIV).

I can recall times in my life when all the circumstances around me pointed to difficulty and possible defeat. Yet my heart was filled with a spiritual joy that could only come from God. Sad to say, I also remember times (far too many!) when I gave in to the problems around me, and I lost both the joy and the victory.

The fourth evidence of God’s power in our lives is *thankfulness*. Christians who are filled with the Holy Spirit will be joyful and thankful (Eph. 5:18–20). When we lose our joy, we start complaining and becoming critical.

The Colossian epistle is filled with thanksgiving. Paul gave thanks for the church in Colossae (Col. 1:3), and he prayed that they might grow in their own thanksgiving to God (Col. 1:12). The Christian life should abound with thanksgiving (Col. 2:7). One of the evidences of spiritual

growth in our Bible study is thanksgiving (Col. 3:15–17). Our prayers should always include thanksgiving (Col. 4:2). The Christian who is filled with the Spirit, filled with the Word, and watching in prayer will prove it by his attitude of appreciation and thanksgiving to God.

Some people are appreciative by nature, but some are not; and it is these latter people who especially need God's power to express thanksgiving. We should remember that every good gift comes from God (James 1:17) and that He is (as the theologians put it) "the Source, Support, and End of all things." The very breath in our mouths is the free gift of God.

Years ago, Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois had a life-saving squad that assisted passengers on the Lake Michigan boats. On September 8, 1860, a passenger boat, the *Lady Elgin*, foundered near Evanston, and a ministerial student, Edward Spencer, personally rescued seventeen persons. The exertion of that day permanently damaged his health and he was unable to train for the ministry. When he died some years later, it was noted that not one of the seventeen persons he had saved ever came to thank him.

Thankfulness is the opposite of selfishness. The selfish person says, "I *deserve* what comes to me! Other people *ought* to make me happy!" But the mature Christian realizes that life is a gift from God, and that the blessings of life come only from His bountiful hand.

Of course, the one blessing that ought to move us constantly to thanksgiving is that God has made us "meet [fit] to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12). The word *fit* means "qualified": God has qualified us for heaven! And, while we are waiting for Christ to return, we enjoy our share of the spiritual inheritance that we have in Him (Eph. 1:11, 18–23).

In the Old Testament, God's people had an *earthly* inheritance, the land of Canaan. Christians today have a *spiritual* inheritance in Christ. Canaan is not a picture of heaven, for there will be no battles or defeats in heaven. Canaan is a picture of our *present* inheritance in Christ. We must claim our inheritance by faith as we step out on the promises of God (Josh. 1:1–9). Day by day, we claim our blessings; and this makes us even more thankful to the Lord.

As we review this marvelous prayer, we can see how penetrating it is. We need spiritual intelligence if we are going to live to please God. We also need practical obedience in our walk and work. But the result of all of this must be spiritual power in the inner man, power that leads to joyful patience and long-suffering, with thanksgiving.

Have you been praying this way lately?

### **Colossians 1:13–14**

The false teachers in Colossae, like the false teachers of our own day, would not *deny* the importance of Jesus Christ. They would simply *dethrone* Him, giving Him prominence but not preeminence. In their philosophy, Jesus Christ was but one of many "emanations" that proceeded from God and through which men could reach God. It was this claim that Paul refuted in this section.

Probably no paragraph in the New Testament contains more concentrated doctrine about Jesus Christ than this one. We can keep ourselves from going on a detour if we remember that Paul wrote to prove the preeminence of Christ, and he did so by using four unanswerable arguments.

### **Christ Is the Savior (Col. 1:13–14)**

Man's greatest problem is sin—a problem that can never be solved by a philosopher or a religious teacher. Sinners need a Savior. These two verses present a vivid picture of the four saving actions of Christ on our behalf.

***He delivered us (v. 13a).*** This word means “rescued from danger.” We could not deliver ourselves from the guilt and penalty of sin, but Jesus could and did deliver us. We were in danger of spending eternity apart from God. The sword of God's judgment was hanging over our heads!

But this deliverance involved something else: we were delivered from the authority of Satan and the powers of darkness. The gnostic false teachers believed in an organization of evil spirits that controlled the world (see Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15): angels, archangels, principalities, powers, virtues, dominions, and thrones. John Milton used these titles when describing Satan's forces in his classic *Paradise Lost*.

***He translated us (v. 13b).*** This word was used to describe the deportation of a population from one country into another. History records the fact that Antiochus the Great transported at least 2,000 Jews from Babylonia to Colossae.

Jesus Christ did not release us from bondage, only to have us wander aimlessly. He moved us into His own kingdom of light and made us victors over Satan's kingdom of darkness. Earthly rulers transported the defeated people, but Jesus Christ transported the winners.

The phrase *His dear Son* can be translated “the Son of His love.” At the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus Christ, the Father declared that Jesus was His “beloved Son” (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). This fact reminds us of the price the Father paid when He gave His Son for us. It also reminds us that His kingdom is a kingdom of love as well as a kingdom of light.

The experience of Israel in the Old Testament is an illustration of this spiritual experience; for God delivered them from the bondage of Egypt and took them into the Promised Land of their inheritance. God brings us out that He might bring us in.

***He redeemed us (v. 14a).*** This word means “to release a prisoner by the payment of a ransom.” Paul did not suggest that Jesus paid a ransom to Satan in order to rescue us from the kingdom of darkness. By His death and resurrection, Jesus met the holy demands of God's Law. Satan seeks to accuse us and imprison us because he knows we are guilty of breaking God's Law. But the ransom has been paid on Calvary, and through faith in Jesus Christ, we have been set free.

***He has forgiven us (v. 14b).*** Redemption and forgiveness go together (Eph. 1:7). The word translated *forgiveness* means “to send away” or “to cancel a debt.” Christ has not only set us free and transferred us to a new kingdom, but He has canceled every debt so that we cannot be enslaved again. Satan cannot find anything in the files that will indict us!

In recent years, the church has rediscovered the freedom of forgiveness. God's forgiveness of sinners is an act of His grace. We did not deserve to be forgiven, nor can we earn forgiveness. Knowing that we are forgiven makes it possible for us to fellowship with God, enjoy His grace, and seek to do His will. Forgiveness is not an excuse for sin; rather, it is an encouragement for obedience. And, because we have been forgiven, we can forgive others (Col. 3:13). The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant makes it clear that an unforgiving spirit always leads to bondage (Matt. 18:21–35).

Jesus Christ is preeminent in salvation. No other person could redeem us, forgive us, transfer us out of Satan's kingdom into God's kingdom, and do it wholly by grace. The phrase, “through His blood,” reminds us of the cost of our salvation. Moses and the Israelites only had to shed the blood of a lamb to be delivered from Egypt. But Jesus had to shed His blood to deliver us from sin.

## Christ Is the Savior (Col. 1:13–14)

Man's greatest problem is sin—a problem that can never be solved by a philosopher or a religious teacher. Sinners need a Savior. These two verses present a vivid picture of the four saving actions of Christ on our behalf.

**He delivered us (v. 13a).** This word means “rescued from danger.” We could not deliver ourselves from the guilt and penalty of sin, but Jesus could and did deliver us. We were in danger of spending eternity apart from God. The sword of God's judgment was hanging over our heads!

But this deliverance involved something else: we were delivered from the authority of Satan and the powers of darkness. The gnostic false teachers believed in an organization of evil spirits that controlled the world (see Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15): angels, archangels, principalities, powers, virtues, dominions, and thrones. John Milton used these titles when describing Satan's forces in his classic *Paradise Lost*.

**He translated us (v. 13b).** This word was used to describe the deportation of a population from one country into another. History records the fact that Antiochus the Great transported at least 2,000 Jews from Babylonia to Colossae.

Jesus Christ did not release us from bondage, only to have us wander aimlessly. He moved us into His own kingdom of light and made us victors over Satan's kingdom of darkness. Earthly rulers transported the defeated people, but Jesus Christ transported the winners.

The phrase *His dear Son* can be translated “the Son of His love.” At the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus Christ, the Father declared that Jesus was His “beloved Son” (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). This fact reminds us of the price the Father paid when He gave His Son for us. It also reminds us that His kingdom is a kingdom of love as well as a kingdom of light.

The experience of Israel in the Old Testament is an illustration of this spiritual experience; for God delivered them from the bondage of Egypt and took them into the Promised Land of their inheritance. God brings us out that He might bring us in.

**He redeemed us (v. 14a).** This word means “to release a prisoner by the payment of a ransom.” Paul did not suggest that Jesus paid a ransom to Satan in order to rescue us from the kingdom of darkness. By His death and resurrection, Jesus met the holy demands of God's Law. Satan seeks to accuse us and imprison us because he knows we are guilty of breaking God's Law. But the ransom has been paid on Calvary, and through faith in Jesus Christ, we have been set free.

**He has forgiven us (v. 14b).** Redemption and forgiveness go together (Eph. 1:7). The word translated *forgiveness* means “to send away” or “to cancel a debt.” Christ has not only set us free and transferred us to a new kingdom, but He has canceled every debt so that we cannot be enslaved again. Satan cannot find anything in the files that will indict us!

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blood of a lamb to be delivered from Egypt. But Jesus had to shed His blood to deliver us from sin.

**Geisler, N.L. (1985). *Colossians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 669-672) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

#### A. Greetings (1:1–2).

1:1–2. In all but his two earliest epistles (1 and 2 Thes.) and his personal letter to the Philippians, **Paul** began by designating himself as **an apostle** (see the chart, “Paul’s Introductions to His Epistles,” near Rom. 1:1–7). He was not one of the 12 Apostles (Acts 1:21–26) who were with Christ from the beginning of His earthly ministry (Acts 1:22; Luke 1:2; John 15:27). Nevertheless, he did see the risen **Christ** (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8–9), and he did possess special miraculous powers given to authenticate apostles (2 Cor. 12:12; cf. Heb. 2:3–4).

**Timothy** was with Paul here as he often was (cf. 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1). Timothy had a Gentile father (Acts 16:1) but his mother and grandmother were godly Jewesses (2 Tim. 1:5) from whom he had learned the Old Testament Scriptures from childhood (2 Tim. 3:15). Paul picked up Timothy on his second missionary journey at Lystra where the “brothers ... spoke well of him” (Acts 16:2). Paul spent much time discipling Timothy and wrote two of his last letters to him.

Paul addressed the Colossian believers as **the holy and faithful brothers in Christ**. This phrase marks them as holy people, chosen and set apart for **God**. It parallels the Ephesian introduction to “the saints ... the faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1). Paul’s characteristic greeting, **grace and peace** includes *charis* (“grace”), a variation of the normal Greek salutation, *chaire* (“Greetings”; cf. Luke 1:28). *Chaire* probably suggested the similar-sounding but richer *charis*. His greeting also includes the normal Jewish salutation, “peace.” So Paul wished for them God’s favor (grace) and a healthy condition of life (peace).

#### B. Thanksgiving (1:3–8).

1:3–4. Giving continual thanks to God was characteristic of Paul’s prayers (Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:14; Eph. 1:6; etc.), though he omitted this praise in Galatians and 2 Corinthians. Here **God** is recognized as the cause of goodness in His people. This thanks, Paul said, is rendered **when we pray**. And thanksgiving was given **because** Paul had **heard** (from Epaphras, Col. 1:7; cf. 4:12) about their growing **faith in Christ Jesus and their love ... for all the saints**. Prayer here is the broader, more inclusive act of worship including thanksgiving and intercession (cf. Matt. 6:7; Acts 16:25).

1:5. Paul thanked God for their **faith and love that spring from ... hope**.

This trilogy of virtue—faith, love, and hope—is a favorite of Paul’s (cf. 1 Cor. 13:13; 1 Thes. 1:3) and Peter’s (1 Peter 1:3, 5, 22). Faith is the soul looking *upward* to God; love looks *outward* to others; hope looks *forward* to the future. Faith rests on the past work of Christ; love works in the present; and hope anticipates the future. Even though “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6), and “hope does not disappoint us” (Rom. 5:5), nevertheless “the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13). The Colossians’ love extended to “all the saints” (Col. 1:4), or all believers, probably not only at Colosse but everywhere (cf. 1 Thes. 1:7–8 for a similar commendation).

Faith and love “spring from” (*dia*, lit., are “on account of”) “hope,” confidence in what God will do in the future. This confidence led to a greater trust in God and a deeper love for others. This confident expectation of Christ’s return, called “the blessed hope” (Titus 2:13), influences believers’ conduct (cf. 1 Thes. 4:13–18; 1 John 3:3).

This hope is **stored up ... in heaven** because Christ, the essence of this hope, is there. Without Christ’s Ascension to heaven (Acts 1:10–11) and His present intercession there on behalf of believers (Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1), they would have no hope (cf. 1 Cor. 15:16–19). This message is **the Word of truth** (cf. Eph. 1:13; 2 Tim. 2:15; James 1:18), **the gospel** as Paul defines it here and elsewhere (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–3; Rom. 10:9–10).

1:6. Paul thanked God because the **gospel** was spreading **all over the world**. In fact, in an obvious hyperbole, Paul wrote in verse 23 that the gospel was being “proclaimed to every creature under heaven” (cf. Rom. 1:8). But Paul stressed not only the universality of the gospel but also its practicality, for it was **producing fruit and growing**. As a tree bears fruit and grows in size, so the gospel produces spiritual “fruit” in believers’ lives (cf. “the fruit of the Spirit,” Gal. 5:22–23; “the fruit of righteousness,” Phil. 1:11) and spreads to and influences others (cf. the same words “bearing fruit” and “growing” in Col. 1:10). Heresies (such as the one at Colosse) are local and harmful; but truth is universal and helpful. One of the unmistakable characteristics of the true gospel is **God’s grace in all its truth**. Some preach a “different gospel—which is really no gospel at all” (Gal. 1:6–7). This is because it is a gospel of grace plus works, or faith plus works. But the true gospel is one of grace alone (Rom. 11:6; Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5–7).

1:7. The Colossians **learned it**, the gospel, **from Epaphras** who apparently founded the church at Colosse (cf. 4:12). Paul called him a **dear fellow servant**, a humble description from a great apostle, and a **faithful minister of Christ**, as opposed, no doubt, to those unfaithful ones who here and elsewhere were disturbing the faith of God’s flock (cf. 2 Cor. 11:15; 2 Peter 2:1–3, 12–19). Paul also called Tychicus “a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord” (Col. 4:7). Epaphras was in Rome with Paul, for Paul called him “my fellow prisoner” (Phile. 23). “Epaphras” is a shortening of “Epaphroditus,” referred to in Philippians 2:25 and 4:18. These could be the same person or different persons since both names were common.

Epaphras, said Paul, ministered **on our behalf**, probably as Paul’s representative (cf. Phil. 2:25; 4:18 for a similar situation). This implies, of course, that Paul had not visited Colosse himself (cf. Col. 2:1). But even though Epaphras was sent by Paul, he was primarily a “minister of Christ.”

1:8. Not only did Epaphras carry the good news of Christ to Colosse, but he also brought back to prisoner Paul the good news about their **love in the Spirit** for Christ. Believers are in the Spirit and the Spirit is in them (Rom. 8:9). Thus their “love ... for all the saints” (Col. 1:4; cf. v. 5) stemmed from the indwelling Holy Spirit. Elsewhere Paul urged that by “the love of the Spirit” (Rom. 15:30) believers manifest the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22).

### C. *Petition (1:9–14)*.

1:9. **For this reason**, because Paul had heard this good report of them from Epaphras, he continued to pray for them. Paul’s ceaseless prayer (**we have not stopped praying for you**; cf. 1 Thes. 5:17) does not mean that he prayed without ever stopping but that he never forgot to pray for them when he daily and regularly prayed (cf. Acts 20:31; Eph. 1:16). “Praying” (Col. 1:9) is the general word for prayer (*proseuchomenoi*), also used in v. 3; and **asking** is the word for petitioning or requesting (*aitoumenoi*).

Paul's primary petition was that **God** would **fill** them **with the knowledge of His will**. Paul used two key words, "fill" (*plēroō*) and "knowledge" (*epignōsis*, also used in v. 10 and 3:10). The first suggests a filling out to completeness, and the latter suggests a full, deep understanding. Such knowledge of God's will does not come from a fleshly mind (which "puffs up," 1 Cor. 8:1), but from the Holy Spirit who enlightens a believer's inner person (1 Cor. 2:5–6, 13), and from the Word of God. God's will, revealed in the Bible, is made known to believers by the Holy Spirit's teaching ministry. To this Paul added, **through all spiritual wisdom** (*sophia*; used six times in Col. 1:9, 28; 2:3, 23; 3:16; 4:5), that is, practical know-how which comes from God (James 1:5; 3:15), **and understanding** (*synesei*; also used in Col. 2:2), which speaks of clear analysis and decision-making in applying this knowledge to various problems. By contrast, the false teachers offered only "an appearance of wisdom" (*sophia*; 2:23), which captivated their minds and lives in legalistic regulations. But true spiritual wisdom is both stabilizing and liberating (Eph. 4:14). Knowledge (or understanding or intelligence) and wisdom are often connected in Scripture (cf. Ex. 31:3 ["skill" in the NIV is the Heb. word for wisdom]; Deut. 4:6; Isa. 11:2; 1 Cor. 1:19). And the fear of the Lord is the beginning of both (cf. Prov. 1:7; 9:10).

1:10. Paul's aim in this petition was practical: **in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord**. A genuine knowledge of Christ reveals itself in transformed character (cf. Eph. 4:1; 1 Thes. 2:12), in Christlikeness. *Axiōs*, "worthy," means "of equal weight." Believers are to equal the Lord's standards, to be holy as He is holy (cf. 1 Peter 1:15). The aim of believers in all their worthy conduct should be to **please Him in every way**, to anticipate and do His wishes in every aspect of life (cf. Eph. 5:10). Merely pleasing people is incompatible with being a servant of Christ (Gal. 1:10; Eph. 6:6; Col. 3:22; 1 Thes. 2:4). Indeed, Paul made it the ambition of his life to please God (2 Cor. 5:9). Four things, given in participles, result from such a God-pleasing life: "bearing fruit" and "growing" (Col. 1:10), "being strengthened" (v. 11), and "giving thanks" (v. 12). The first two are related: **bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge** (*epignōsei*) **of God** (Paul used these same words "bearing fruit" and "growing," translated "producing," in v. 6). As one manifests the fruit of faith (cf. Matt. 7:16; Gal. 5:22–23), he grows in faith himself (cf. Eph. 4:13). He comes to a deeper "knowledge" (*epignōsis*; cf. Col. 1:9) of God. As Augustine put it, "Faith is understanding's step, and understanding is faith's reward."

1:11. Spiritual strength is a third factor that results from knowing God's will and pleasing Him. **Being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might** includes three words for strength: "being strengthened" is *dynamoumenoi*; "power" is *dynamei*, spiritual vitality; and "might" is *kratos* ("power that overcomes resistance"; used only of God in the NT). This God-given strength produces **great endurance and patience**. This endurance (translated "perseverance" in James 1:3) was exemplified by Job (James 5:11). To this endurance Paul added "patience," a word generally connected with gentleness and calm sweetness (as in 1 Cor. 13:4). Endurance and patience are often associated (cf. 2 Cor. 6:4, 6; 2 Tim. 3:10; James 5:10–11). Endurance (*hypomonē*, lit., a "remaining under") implies not easily succumbing under suffering; and patience (*makrothymia*, lit., "long temper"; cf. Col. 3:12) means self-restraint which does not hastily retaliate. A lack of endurance often results in despondency or losing heart, whereas a lack of patience often leads to wrath or revenge (cf. Prov. 15:18; 16:32).

All this is according to God's "glorious might" (lit., "might of His glory"). Glory means manifest excellence. It is an outward manifestation of God's inner character. In Ephesians 1:19–20 Paul wrote of God's "great power" (*dynamis*) and "the working" (*energeian*) of His mighty (*kratous*) strength (*ischyos*)," which raised Christ from the dead.

1:12–13. Such patient-producing power should be accompanied by “joyfully,” not begrudgingly, **giving thanks to the Father** from whom comes every good and perfect gift (James 1:17).

Thankfulness, a fourth result of following God’s will and pleasing Him, is a keynote in the spiritual life. Believers are urged elsewhere by Paul, “Give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thes. 5:18) and to come before God “in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving” (Phil. 4:6). Four other times in Colossians (3:15–17; 4:2) Paul enjoined believers to be grateful. Joyfulness too is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), made possible by the gospel (cf. Isa. 29:19; John 16:20; Acts 13:52). Here Paul centered thanksgiving on the fact that God has **qualified you** (lit., “made you competent”; cf. 2 Cor. 3:6) **to share in the inheritance of the saints** (i.e., the kingdom treasures that belong to believers; cf. Eph. 1:7). In short, though believers are unfit in themselves, God has fitted them to share in the inheritance of His holy people. This “inheritance” (*tēn merida tou klērou*, lit., “the parcel of the lot”) is reminiscent of the way the inheritance of the land of promise was given to the Israelites under Joshua (Josh. 14:2). This inheritance is **in the ... light** (cf. 2 Cor. 4:6; 1 Peter 2:9). (The NIV, supplying the words “kingdom of,” which are not in the Gr., reads “in the kingdom of light.”) This light is the spiritual sphere to which believers have been transferred **from the dominion of darkness** (Luke 22:53; Acts 26:18; Eph. 6:12). From this dominion (*exousias*, “power, authority”) of darkness (cf. John 3:19–20) believers have been **rescued**, delivered. Through Christ they were brought from a rebel kingdom and placed under the sovereignty of their rightful King. The sovereign Christ is here called **the Son He loves** (lit., “the Son of His love”; cf. 1 John 4:8, 16). J. B. Lightfoot says this means the Son who embodies and manifests God’s love (*St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, p. 142). But H.C.G. Moule says it signifies the Son who is “the blessed Object of the Father’s love ... the supremely Beloved One” (*The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon*, p. 75). This seems preferable (cf. Eph. 1:6).

1:14. Through Christ, God’s “Loved One,” Christians **have redemption, the forgiveness of sins**. The parallel passage (Eph. 1:7) adds “through His blood” (as do some manuscripts) here. “Redemption” (*apolytrōsin*) means “to rescue by ransom” (see the chart, “New Testament Words for Redemption,” at Mark 10:45), and “forgiveness” (*aphesin*) means “remission” by the Redeemer. This emancipation is enjoyed only because of the tremendous cost Christ paid on the cross (cf. Rom. 3:24–26).

**Dockery, D. S. (1998). *The Pauline Letters In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 589). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.***

## **INTRODUCTION (1:1–14)**

Paul followed a standard form of salutation, thanksgiving, and prayer in the first part of the letter. It is perhaps longer than some of his other letters because Paul was not personally acquainted with the people of Colosse. The salutation carried greetings from both Paul and Timothy. Words of high commendation and thanksgiving follow for the well-being and spiritual health of the Christian community at Colosse.

These opening words are followed by Paul’s prayer for their knowledge and godly conduct. The prayer centered on spiritual blessings, not on physical or material things. He prayed for spiritual insight, genuine obedience, and moral excellence. The prayer went right to the heart of the false teaching invading the church.



The false teachers promised a special insight and a superior spirituality. Terms like knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual understanding were a part of the false teachers' vocabulary. So Paul employed these types of words in his prayer. The prayer requested that God "fill" them "with the knowledge of his will." The term "filled" is a key word in Colossians. It was likewise an important term for the false teachers. Paul used it here and in 1:19, 25; 2:2, 9–10; 4:12, 17. It carries the idea of *being fully equipped or controlled*. Paul's prayer then was for the Colossians to be controlled by the full knowledge of God's will, which would lead to obedience and moral excellence.

**Fields, W. C. (1972). *Colossians*. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The Teacher's Bible Commentary* (p. 754). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.**

### **Paul's Introduction (Col. 1:1–14)**

To a people whom he had not met, Paul identifies himself as an apostle "by the will of God." He writes not as a self-appointed teacher, but as one specially chosen of God. Timothy is included in the message of greeting to them.

Paul expresses thanks for their growth in the faith. He indicates that his information came from one of their own, Epaphras. Paul identifies with Epaphras as a fellow slave of Jesus Christ.

Paul indicates that he has been praying for them continually since hearing of their situation (vv. 9–14). In all of his epistles prayer and thanksgiving are closely linked together. He gives them (v. 9) the substance of his prayers—that they might indeed be filled with "knowledge," "wisdom," and "understanding." These were in-words, catchwords of the Gnostics among them. Paul uses them deliberately, emphasizing his concern for them achieving true knowledge, real wisdom, and "spiritual" understanding. This is his first petition to God for them.

The second petition (v. 10) is that this healthy intellectual life may produce worthy living. The third request (v. 11) is for spiritual strength. He concludes his prayer for them with thanks for their common hope (vv. 12–14).

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Colossians 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**