

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Colossians 1

Introduction

Paul wrote this letter around 60AD while he was a prisoner in Rome. Colosse was a city in Phrygia which is located in the northwest part of Turkey. At the time Paul wrote this letter, he had not visited Colosse. It is generally believed that Epaphras established the church. The primary reason for writing this letter was to correct false teachings that became known as Gnosticism. The Gnostics claimed to have superior knowledge. They said that true happiness required being initiated into their secrets. Some of the false teachings were that Jesus was not human, that he did not die on the cross, that human bodies are evil and required self-denial or even torture to attain a higher spiritual state.

Greeting (1:1-2)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

1. Paul begins by identifying himself as an apostle of Jesus who was chosen by God to preach the gospel. (Acts 9:15-16) Paul did not choose to be an apostle and he did not train to become one. He received his training and authority directly from God. (Gal 1:11-12) *Why do you think he begins this letter in a formal and authoritative way?*
2. Paul may have included Timothy to indicate they were both in agreement with the contents of the letter. This would add credibility especially among Jewish Christians as they believed every legal testimony requires at least two witnesses. (Dt 19:15; Mt 18:15-17)
3. Born-again Christians are called saints and are granted royal status. They have been made holy and adopted into the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 2:9) Paul establishes his relationship with them and calls them brothers. Christians are called to love each other like members of our natural families.
4. Grace and peace are foundations in the experience of born-again Christians. Paul reminds them of the blessings they have experienced. This is another way to identify and affirm those who are genuine Christians.

- A. God grants grace (or unmerited favor) to those who accept the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for their sins. The blood of Jesus satisfies the wrath of God for those who are covered by it. God pardons sins and grants mercy instead of punishment. (Jn 3:16-18; Rom 8:1-4)
- B. Peace with God comes from being adopted into his family. This peace enables us to call God our Father and we are eternally secure in this relationship. (Jn 1:12-13; Rom 8:15-16)
- C. We are loved by God. This love is a consuming fire that motivates us to love God and teaches us how to love others. (Gal 5:6; 1 Th 1:3)

Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:3-14)

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all of the saints—the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. 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. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit. 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. 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, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

1. The word gospel means good news. *What is the gospel?* (Jn 3:16-18) *How does love for God, faith and hope come from having faith in Jesus and accepting the gospel?*
2. The fruits of the gospel are those who are born-again Christians. This is how the gospel grows numerically. As born-again Christians are changed in their thinking actions and character, the gospel produces the fruit of the Holy Spirit. This is another way in which the gospel grows. (Gal 5:22-26)
3. Spiritual wisdom and understanding come from studying the Bible, prayer and fellowship with other Christians. These are necessary to know of God’s will and

to live in obedience, which pleases God.

4. *Why do Christians need to be strengthened so that they have patience and endurance?* (Heb 12:1-2)
5. God chooses and purifies people who are saved through faith in Jesus. These people are called saints because they are made holy or sanctified. They have a glorious future in the presence of God. They will reign with him as kings in the kingdom of God. (1 Cor 1:2; Eph 2:8-9; 1 Tim 6:11-16; Rev 20: 4-6)

Jesus is God (1:15-23)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church, he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

1. The Bible teaches that Jesus is God. When you look in the mirror, you see a reflection that is the exact representation of yourself. In the same way, Jesus is the human form of God. Jesus said that he and the Father are one and that when you look at him you see God. (Jn 10:30-33; 14:9-11)
2. Jesus is the first person to rise from the dead with a glorified body that is not subject to death. One day, this will happen for all who put their faith in him. Everything in creation will also be remade in holiness because of the work of Jesus. Therefore, Jesus is the firstborn of not only born-again Christians but of all of creation. (1 Cor 15:42-53; Rev 21:1-5)
3. Jesus is the creator and sustainer of the universe. Everything is subject to his will and authority. Christians take comfort in knowing that, no matter how bad things become, Jesus is king and everything that happens is part of his plan.

4. The death of Jesus on the cross paid the price of reconciliation required by God for sin. Those who put their faith in Jesus are declared to be holy in the sight of God. They will have glorious and resurrected bodies like Jesus. (1 Jn 3:1-3)
5. Paul says that faith in the physical death and resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of forgiveness. Some false teachers were saying that Jesus did not suffer a physical death on the cross. The gospel stands or falls on the physical death and resurrection of Jesus. If this is not true, then Christians have no hope. (1 Cor 15:12-19)

The Church and Jesus (1:24-29)

Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of this body, which is the church. I have become it(s) servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fulness—the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

1. Paul suffered many kinds of physical and mental discomforts while travelling to spread the gospel. (2 Cor 11:23-29) Despite these hardships, Paul was filled with joy knowing that his sacrifices were bringing many to faith in Jesus. Christians suffer persecutions of various kinds yet they bear it joyfully and persevere in obeying God. (Acts 5:41; 2 Tim 3:12) *Have you experienced joy because you suffered for doing what you know pleases God?*
2. Christians are part of the body of Christ. Jesus is our head and we are the other parts. When we are afflicted, Jesus feels this. (Acts 9:1-6) There is an intimate spiritual and mental connection which will be perfected in a physical connection at the resurrection of our bodies. We will bear his image in glorious bodies. (1 Cor 15:42-49)
3. *What are some of the mysteries that were hidden but have been revealed through the life and death of Jesus?*
4. Those who are born-again spiritually through faith in Jesus have the presence of God within. This is a deposit or guarantee of our salvation. Therefore, the “hope of glory” is sure and we “hope” for it not because it is uncertain but because we

are waiting for it.

5. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. (Prov 9:10) Paul taught that humans are sinful and subject to the wrath of God without his forgiveness offered through faith in Jesus. Therefore, it is necessary to believe in a holy God and fear judgment because of sins.
6. Paul diligently preached the gospel but he acknowledged that it was the presence and power of God that converted people. The Holy Spirit within Paul motivated him to keep going despite opposition and hardships. *How has the Holy Spirit within you provided energy and determination to work for Jesus?*

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Colossians 2

Keep the Faith (2:1-8)

I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how firm your faith in Christ is. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

1. Paul was concerned for the Christians in places that he had never visited. This letter was intended to encourage and help these Christians to grow in their faith and knowledge of Jesus. He prays for their unity and that their understanding of the gospel would enable them to reject false teachers. It is important for Christians to study the Bible so that they can discern false teachings.
2. *What are some of the mysteries of faith in Jesus? How do false teachers use human logic to make “fine-sounding arguments” that conflict with the gospel?*

3. Jesus has done the work to enable our salvation and spiritual growth (sanctification). This is why we proclaim him as our Savior and Lord. We must live in obedience to the leadership of the Holy Spirit within us. We must live in daily dependence upon his mercy and grace. In this way, we will grow strong in our faith and experience great joy and thankfulness. (Jn 15:5)
4. Deceptive philosophies and human traditions can keep our minds in a mental prison. These things can become barriers that blind us keep us from seeing truth. An example of a false philosophy is that, if we try hard enough, we can do anything. It is just a matter of effort and perseverance. There are religious traditions that also can drive our behavior and create fears. The need to observe certain holy days, fasting, confessing our sins to a priest and abstaining from alcohol are some examples. *Can you think of other examples?*

The Person and Work of Jesus (2:9-15)

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them by the cross.

1. Paul clearly says that Jesus is God. God lives in human form in Jesus. This verse says that Jesus is fully God and does not have some percentage or likeness of God. This absolutely refutes the false teachings of many religions such as Jehovah's Witness, Mormonism, Christian Scientists and Gnosticism. (2 Cor 4:4)
2. Because Jesus is God, he is supreme in power and authority. Therefore, his redemptive work on the cross is perfect and able to save us and transform us into his likeness. Christ became like us that we might become like him through faith "in the power of God." (1 Jn 3:2-3)
3. Humans are dead in their sins, being alienated from God. This means that humans are not able to do works to connect with God. Paul clearly says that God must take the initiative to give us eternal life, through faith in Jesus. Salvation is a gift and can't be earned. It is totally due to the redemptive work of Jesus and so all glory, honor and praise are due to him alone. (Eph 2:1-10)

4. *What is the role and importance of doing good works? Do good works earn us anything?* (Mt 5:14-16; 6:1; Phil 2:12-16; Ti 2:11-14)
5. Good works are the result of who we are. It is the evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit within us. God rewards us based on how we respond to his love and commands. (1 Cor 3:9-16)
6. The death of Jesus on the cross was both humiliating and triumphant. *How can this be?* Paul says that Jesus won a great victory over evil. His death on the cross took away the power of death used by evil authorities such as the devil to condemn us. *How did Jesus do this?* (Jn 19:30; Rom 5:9-11; 2 Cor 5:17-21)

Warnings (2:16-23)

Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not touch!"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatments of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

1. Christians are given the Holy Spirit and the Bible to guide them. Paul warns against those who demand that Christians must do additional religious practices. These rules are a form of bondage that can replace the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Bible. People who accept these religious practices can come to rely upon them to define their faith and good works. Some examples include the observance of special holy days, abstaining from meat or drinks (such as alcohol, coffee or tea), prohibiting dancing, and keeping various Sabbath rules.
2. Paul says that Jewish religious practices were like shadows of the truth now revealed in Jesus. The sin offerings of animals foreshadowed the perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to atone for sins. Likewise, Jews rested from work on the Sabbath to remember God who created everything in six days and then rested. Jesus completed his work to redeem mankind and he is our Sabbath rest. (Heb 4:9-10;

11-15)

3. Paul warns against seeking mystical experiences and encounters with angels. There are those who pray to dead saints believing that these prayers will have greater influence with God. This is an example of the false humility that Paul warns can also mislead Christians. The Bible teaches that Christians should come directly to God with prayers based on their faith in Jesus as their mediator. (1 Tim 2:5-6; Heb 4:14-16)
4. Mystical experiences sought through meditation, fasting and rituals can put people in touch with deceiving spirits. Such visions can impart unique pleasures and experiences that can make a person feel more “advanced” than others. Paul warns against such teachers whose arrogance is clothed in false humility. These people wander down mystical paths and have lost contact with Jesus.
5. *What are some ways that superstitions put people into bondage? What are some religious practices, such as saying the rosary, that make promises which are forms of bondage?*

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Colossians 3

New Thinking and Living (3:1-4)

Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

1. Born-again Christians have spiritual life through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit transforms thoughts and actions to conform to the will of God. This gives us new desires to live for God, to love him and to long to be with him. (Rom 12:1-2; 1 Cor 6:19-20)
2. Christians are called pilgrims in this world because our affections reside upon Jesus and we long for him to return to the earth and establish a perfect kingdom. (Heb 11:13-16; 1 Pet 2:11-12) *How has the Holy Spirit changed your thinking? What are some things that are important to you now that were not before you were born-again?*

3. Jesus is our way to God. His words are true and he is our hope for eternal life. Therefore, Christians are to be truth seekers. Our new life in Christ currently is internal but it will be external when our bodies are resurrected and we appear in glory with Jesus. (Jn 14:6; 1 Jn 3:1-3)
4. *What does it mean to be dead to self but alive in Christ?* (Gal 2:20) This is a daily process. (Lk 9:23-24)

Turn from Evil Habits (3:5-11)

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

1. The way we live feeds old habits and creates new ones. Paul says that Christians must change the way they live and thereby destroy bad habits. He lists improper sexual habits first, perhaps because this is a powerful force in human nature. The sex drive is good but must be focused within the bounds of marriage. (Prov 6:32; Mt 5:27-28)
2. *What is idolatry? How are evil desires and greed types of idolatry?*
3. Christians are to live according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. (Gal 5:24-25; 1 Jn 1:5-10) This guidance comes from the Bible, prayer and learning from other Christians. These are to be priorities in the life of every Christian.
4. Living according to the will of God requires that we stop, or put to death, sinful ways such as anger, hatred, telling lies and using bad language. Self-control is required. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual growth comes from knowledge, loving and obeying God. (Gal 5:22-23)
5. Christ is the head of the church. He is the focus of our love, praise and devotion. Christians are brought into a holy union with God through faith in Jesus. Christians are made holy and take on the likeness of Christ. This new identity as part of his body and his bride are far superior to any petty differences such as sex, race or ethnicity. Jesus is the source of our new life and likeness. This is why Paul says that: “Christ is all and is in all.” (Rom 5:9-10; Gal 2:20; 1 Jn 3:1-3)

Christians Living (3:12-25)

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.

1. God has chosen the people that are to be made holy by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. These people are born-again Christians. Christians are commanded to pursue holiness or Christ likeness. (Eph 1:4-8; 1 Cor 1:2; 1 Pet 1:13-16, 2:9)
2. Christians are to practice or make every effort to be compassionate which is expressing love for others by helping them with their needs. Kindness and patience should characterize our encounters with everyone. Likewise, humility, or the absence of pride, and gentleness, or the absence of passion, should be our approach towards others. *What are some ways that you can live more like Jesus?*
3. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he told them to forgive and seek to be forgiven for sins and failures in relationships. He also told them to pray for unity that comes from seeking the will and lordship of God. (Mt 6:9-13) We have peace with God knowing our sins are forgiven. We find peace with other Christians, as we seek to live in unity and love as members of one family in Christ.
4. Paul says that Christians are to study, memorize, and pray the words of the Bible so that God's words penetrate deep into our minds. Every Christian should memorize and use verses of the Bible to help in times of need. *What are your favorite Bible verses?*
5. Christians are to work diligently and to the best of their ability. This is honoring

to God. This behavior can draw others to Christ because of our example. We should do our best in everything we do, knowing that God is watching us. *Is there anything in your life that you would change if you could see Jesus standing next to you?*

6. God judges and punishes sinful behavior without showing favorites. Christians will not be condemned but we will suffer a loss of rewards. Those without faith in Jesus will suffer eternal condemnation and separation from God. (Jn 3:16-18; Rom 14:10-12; 1 Cor 3:11-15) *What are some reasons that favoritism sometimes causes criminals to be judged differently? Why does God judge sins consistently?*

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Colossians 4

The Importance of Prayer (4:2-6)

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

1. *What does it mean to be devoted to something?* Paul says Christians are to be devoted to prayer. This means that praying is something that we desire to do and that we do it often. (1 Th 5:16-17)
2. Praying frequently helps us to be alert to temptations and opportunities to do good works. Prayer is coming into conversation with God which leads to thanksgiving, praise and worship. Meal and bedtime prayers are good habits but, as we grow in our knowledge and love for Jesus, we will be in prayer throughout our days.
3. *What are some reasons that sometimes make it hard to pray?*
4. We do not pray for God to meet our expectations but to seek his will. This is evident in how Jesus taught us to pray. (Mt 6:9-13) *What are other reasons to pray that are evident from these verses?*
5. Christians are to pray for each other. Paul asks for prayers so that he will have opportunities to share the gospel. He also wants his words to be guided by the Holy Spirit so that they will bring faith to those who hear. *How often do you pray for opportunities to share the gospel?* The more you witness for Jesus, the more you will seek God's guidance in approaching and talking to others.

Greetings and Conclusion (4:7-18)

Tychicus will tell you all the new(s) about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here. My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends his greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me. Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea. Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the work you have received from the Lord." I, Paul write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

1. Paul is in prison. He has never visited the Christians in Colossae. Nevertheless, he cares deeply for them. He sends two dear friends, Tychicus and Onesimus, to minister to them. Paul also mentions Aristarchus, Mark, Justus and Epaphras as being with him. Perhaps Paul (remove-he) did this because he might not be freed from prison and, in this way, he is validating these men as leaders.
2. Humility and a serving spirit must be strong qualities of those who lead in the church. Leaders must not be ambitious for power or popularity. They must be devoted to discipling others and growing the kingdom of God(,) through spreading the gospel. *Do you know some leaders who are like this? Do you know some Christian leaders who are not like this?*
3. *What are some ways that Christians can help each other to become stronger in faith and good works?*
4. *What are some ways that (bad-replace with)(spiritually weak) Christian leaders keep those that follow them from growing in faith and good works?*
5. Christians are saved and grow by the grace of God. This is totally the work of God through the Holy Spirit. This means that we must continually and humbly seek for God to work in and through us to his praise, honor and glory. (2 Cor 4:13-15; 9:8; Eph 2:1-10; Ti 2:11-12; 1 Pet 5:5-6)

