

“Word on Wednesday Bible Study”

“HOLINESS IN ACTION!”

Minister Perseus Poku

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Background: The book of Colossians provides valuable insights into the teachings of the early church. Paul’s letter to the Colossian church gives readers an insight into the false dogma preached during the 1st Century. In addition, readers are given a list of commandments obligatory for righteous conduct. Moreover, Paul details what believers should embrace instead as well as eliminate. The warning against syncretism is a common theme in his letter.



Historical Significance: Paul’s letter is a valuable asset in better understanding the city of Colossae and its Christian residence. Colossae was situated in the upper Lycus Valley in Asia Minor. It was approximately 110 miles east of Ephesus, 12 miles east of Hierapolis, and 10 miles east of Laodicea.

In ancient times Colossae was very prominent. According to Xenophon (4th Century BC) an old Greek soldier and writer, Colossae was also populous. Xenophon wrote the following when recounting Cyrus’ march through Phrygia (Colossae):

“Crossing it, he marched through Phrygia a single stage, of eight parasangs (a fraction of the distance an infantry could march), to Colossae, an inhabited city, prosperous and large.”¹

Greek writer Herodotus also writes that Colossae was a great city. He writes:

“Having carried out this promise, Xerxes moved on. Passing the Phrygian town of Anaua, and a lake from which salt is extracted, Xerxes now arrived at the large city of Colossae, where the river Lycus disappears underground to reappear about half a mile further on, where it joins the meander.”²

¹ Xenophon, *Anabasis: The March Up Country*, trans. H.G Dakyns (El Paso: El Paso Norte Press, 2007), 6.

² Herodotus, *Herodotus: The Histories*, trans. John De Selincourt (London: Penguin Group, 2003), 428.

Colossae at one point was the center of the textile industry in the Lycus Valley. They created wool called colosseum. This great city's decline was partly due to the main road being redirected to Laodicea. However, its ultimate demise was due to an earthquake in 60 AD. Today's only evidence of its existence is a large mound (stele) in Turkey.

Chapter 1

vv.1-29

This letter begins with Paul's usual format of salutation. He makes it clear to his audience the following:

1. He is an apostle of Jesus Christ. The preposition "by" informs us how he became an apostle. His apostleship was not conferred upon him by human efforts but by the consent or will of God alone.

We also learn that Timothy is with him.

Verse 2 informs us that the letter was written to the faithful brethren in Christ located at Colossae. Paul sends them spiritual blessings not just from himself but from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In **verse 3**, he gives thanks to God. His gratitude was not self-centered, but it was somewhat altruistic. He thanks God for them (the church of Colossae) and He is praying for them. God is certainly pleased when we are not always thinking about ourselves but also about the welfare of others.

Paul wanted this church to know that He is always praying for them. This sentiment is similar to what Paul shared with the church of Thessalonica. He wanted them to pray without stopping (1 Thessalonians 5:17). In this verse, Paul is modeling what he told others to do. The church needs those Christians who are not just hearers but doers of God's words.

In **verse 4**, he gives them accolades for their faith. This faith was not found in vain philosophies, sociology, or psychology. It is rooted in Christ. Their faith was in Jesus Christ. The conjunction "and" tells us how their faith was exemplified. They loved all the saints.

We must learn to love others. There is a distinction between who we are ontologically and what we do functionally. In short, we must learn to love the person and abhor the sin. Paul is essentially repeating the teaching of Jesus.

*Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.**44** But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; **45** That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.**46** For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?**47** And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?**48** Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.-Matthew 5:43-48*

The church of Colossae exhibited this virtue of love toward others.

Paul also informs his readers that their hope was found in the truth of the Bible (**verse 5**). They heard about the gospel and placed their hope in the truth. The Christian's hope is rooted in the veracity of the gospel. It is this same hope which is credited to all believers in heaven.

This same hope in Christ produced fruit in the lives of the Colossian church since the first day they heard the gospel (**verse 6**). In addition, they heard the truth from Epaphras the faithful servant of Christ (**verse 7**).

Epaphras alerted Paul and other saints about the conduct of the Christians at Colossae (**verse 8**). It is a great thing for others to speak well of you. Our lifestyle should always be spiritually attractive. This church exhibited the love of Christ due to their obedience to the Spirit of God.

As a result of hearing this good news about the church in Colossae, both Paul and Timothy continued to pray for them. In addition, they desired for the church to be filled with Godly wisdom and understanding (**verse 9**).

The modern church suffers from a lack of Godly wisdom. Too many believers often lean unto their own understanding or rely on carnal influences. This should not be the case. The same power which was able to help the church in Colossae is still accessible to us today. It is essential for all Christians to be filled with Godly wisdom if we are to overcome the world.

The first person we should consult when dealing with life's issues is God not our friends or family member.

Paul and Timothy's desire was for this church to practice Godly wisdom and to attain divine understanding. **Verse 10** explains the reason for this desire. Having Godly wisdom and understanding will allow them to please the Lord by doing the following:

1. _____.
2. _____.
3. _____.

Paul then transitions to worship. This church is indebted to God and must learn to praise Him for all that He has done for them. God had made them partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light (verse 12). The Greek word for light in this verse is photi (φωτί). The word light in this context is similar to our modern translation. Light is "that which contrasts the darkness." In other words, Paul is telling the church of Colossae that they are to live in the light of Christ which effectually contrasts the lifestyle of those that live outside of the will of God (darkness).

Paul reminds them that we were all delivered from the power of darkness. The power of darkness is real. All of us were in darkness prior to accepting Christ. We lived outside of the perfect will of God.

Darkness is often manifested in various ways. The following examples highlight the yoke of bondage experienced by many who live outside of God's will:

1. Occult
2. Cults
3. Atheism
4. Astrology
5. Numerology
6. New Age
7. Religion
8. Cultural Traditions

In addition, God also made available His kingdom. The kingdom that Jesus preached about deals with the reign of God in a believer's heart (verse 13).

In his discourse concerning redemption, Paul teaches the church how it (redemption) works (verse 14). We are all forgiven through the blood of Christ. Furthermore, we learn about the ontology of Jesus Christ and His divinity. Paul states that Christ is image of the invisible God. In other words, Jesus is a direct representation of God the Father. He (Jesus) is also the **first born** of every creature.

The Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) use this verse (15) to teach a false view of Jesus. In their attempt to diminish the divinity of Christ, they claim that this verse prove that Christ was created first by God the Father because of the word firstborn. Does this word actually convey the idea that Jesus was born first? The answer is no. Let me address my point.

The correct translation for the word firstborn is definitely "first in rank." It should be interpreted Jesus is first in rank or General over all of God's creation. This translation fits well with verse 16. Paul further clarifies his point regarding the supremacy in Christ by itemizing the "why?" Why is Christ supreme?

1. _____.
2. _____(verse 16).
3. _____.
4. _____(verse 17).
5. _____(verse 18).
6. In Him all fullness dwells (verse 19).

After giving reasons for Christ's pre-eminence, he returns to the Colossian church. He reminds them that they were once alienated from God. He then provides specific examples of how they were estranged from God. Paul reminded them that their previous way of thinking was evil and produced evil works. However, God through Christ, had reconciled them to the Father (verses 21-22).

The chapter concludes with a contingent statement. If the church of Colossae does the following, He (Christ) will present them as blameless to God (verse 22). This promise is only valid if they do the following:

1. Continue in the faith by being grounded and settled.
2. Do not move away from the hope of the gospel.

Finally, this chapter concludes with information about Paul's apostolic credentials. He has sacrificed on behalf of Christ for the benefit of others. God made him a minister to dispense His gospel (verses 24-25).

God called Paul for that dispensation period. He did not call himself. It was God that called Him. His calling was intended to dispense the gospel.

The mystery of how God would present the Messiah and save the world has now been revealed (verse 26). This gospel is not only for the Jews but all people (including Gentiles)-verses 27-29