



COLOSSIANS
AND
PHILEMON

THAT IN EVERYTHING
CHRIST MIGHT BE
Preeminent

SARAH IVILL



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Although many publishers do not capitalize terms, and particularly pronouns which refer to the Trinity, texts original to CDM have capitalized those elements for reverence and clarity of reference.

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CONTENTS

A Note from Sarah	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction to This Study	xiii
A Note to Leaders	xxi
Introduction to Colossians	1
Lesson 1: Gratitude in Prayer (Colossians 1:1-14)	5
Lesson 2: The Preeminence of Christ (Colossians 1:15-23)	17
Lesson 3: God's Mystery (Colossians 1:24–2:5)	27
Lesson 4: Alive Together with Christ (Colossians 2:6-23)	37
Lesson 5: Christ Is Your Life (Colossians 3:1-17)	49
Lesson 6: You Are Serving the Lord Christ (Colossians 3:18–4:6)	63
Lesson 7: Fellow Workers for the Kingdom of God (Colossians 4:7-18)	73
Introduction to Philemon	83
Lesson 8: Refresh My Heart in Christ (Philemon 1-25)	85
Bibliography	97

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LESSON 1

GRATITUDE IN PRAYER

COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

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PURPOSE . . .

Head. What do I need to know from this passage in Scripture?

- Paul gives thanks for the Colossians' faith and love that is grounded in hope and prays that they would be pleasing to the Lord, by His power.

Heart. How does what I learn from this passage affect my internal relationship with the Lord?

- I am a kingdom disciple who has been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

Hands. How does what I learn from this passage translate into action for God's kingdom?

- I will extend grace and peace to others.
- I will make thanksgiving a regular part of my prayers for my family, church, friends, and neighbors.
- I will pray for the faith, love, and hope of those under my leadership to increase.
- I will teach others the gospel, praying it will be effective.
- I will pray for others proclaiming the gospel, asking that it will bear fruit.
- I will encourage others to be fully pleasing to the Lord in their attitudes and actions.

PERSONAL STUDY . . .

Pray. Ask that God will open up your heart and mind as you study His Word. This is His story of redemption that He has revealed to us, and the Holy Spirit is our Teacher.

Ponder the Passage. Read Colossians in its entirety. Then reread Colossians 1:1-14 while keeping the following questions in mind.

LESSON 1

- *Point.* What is the point of this passage? How does this relate to the point of the entire book?
- *People.* Who are the main people involved in this passage? What characterizes them?
- *Persons of the Trinity.* Where do you see God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit in this passage?
- *Puzzling Parts.* Are there any parts of the passage that you don't quite understand or that seem interesting or confusing?
- *Place in Scripture.* What is the redemptive-historical context—what has or hasn't happened in redemptive history at this point in Scripture?
- *Person and Work of Christ.* How does this text reveal the need for Christ, or anticipate His person and work, or fulfill God's promises of the coming Redeemer?

Probe the Passage. Now it's time to dig a little deeper into the text by answering the following questions. Remember, these questions are meant to help you. If you get stuck on a question, put a star beside it and move on to the next one. Later, either when reading "Putting It All Together" or while discussing the questions with others, look for the answers to the ones you starred.

1. 1:1. (a) The book of Acts gives us a lot of background on the apostle Paul that is helpful to know as we read Colossians. What do you learn about Paul from Acts 9:1-8, 15-17; 22:6-21; 26:12-23?

(b) What does Paul call Timothy? What do you learn about Timothy from Acts 16:1-5?

2. 1:2. (a) To whom is Paul writing? How does the term *saints* identify them with Old Testament Israel (see Ex. 19:6; Lev. 11:44; Deut. 7:1-11; Dan. 7:18, 21-22, 25, 27)?

(b) How would you define God's grace and peace (see, for example, Eph. 2)?

3. 1:3. (a) Whom does Paul thank?

(b) What is always part of Paul's prayer for the Colossians?

4. 1:4-5a. (a) For what does Paul specifically thank God?

(b) Briefly define:

faith (Rom. 4:1-5:11) –

love (1 Cor. 13:4-7) –

hope (see Rom. 8:23-25; Gal. 5:5-6; Col. 1:27; 3:4, 24) –

5. 1:5b. (a) Where had they heard of the hope laid up for them in heaven?

(b) Using Scripture, briefly define the gospel (see, for example, Rom. 1:16-17 or Titus 2:11-14).

6. 1:6. (a) How did the gospel come to the Colossians (see verse 7)? Had Paul ever visited the Colossian church (see Col. 2:1, 5)?

(b) Where else had the gospel reached? What did Jesus say about where the gospel would reach (see Matt. 24:14; 28:18-20)?

LESSON 1

(c) What is the gospel doing, and how does it do this (see also John 15:5, 16)? How is this an allusion to Genesis 1:28, and why is this significant?

(d) When did the gospel start bearing fruit and growing in Colossae?

7. 1:7-8. (a) What do you learn about Epaphras from these verses?

(b) What else do you learn about Epaphras from Colossians 4:12 and Philemon 23?

8. 1:9-10. (a) Paul had prayed from the day he had heard of what (see verse 4)?

(b) How often had Paul prayed for the Colossians, and what does this reveal about his view of prayer?

(c) What does it mean to be filled with the knowledge of God's will?

(d) How does one gain spiritual wisdom and understanding (see Prov. 1:7)? How does this allude to Exodus 31:3; 35:31-32; 1 Kings 7:14?

(e) In what is this wisdom and understanding to result?

(f) How does the phrase, “bearing fruit in every good work” reflect verse 6, and like verse 6, allude to Genesis 1:28?

9. 1:11-12. (a) Who is strengthening the believer, how, and for what purpose?

(b) To whom is the believer to give thanks, and why?

(c) What is the inheritance of the saints in light?

10. 1:13-14. (a) From what have believers been delivered (see also Luke 22:53; Eph. 6:12)?

(b) How did the first exodus (see Ex. 12–13) anticipate the exodus of believers out of the domain of darkness into Christ’s kingdom?

(c) To what place have believers been transferred? How is this an allusion to 2 Samuel 7:12-16?

(d) What do believers have in Christ?

Principles and Points of Application

11. 1:1-2. (a) To whom do you need to extend grace and peace to right now?

(b) In what present situation do you need to be a peacemaker?

LESSON 1

12. 1:3. (a) When you pray for fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, how can you begin to make thanksgiving for them a part of your prayer?

(b) Spend time in prayer now for your church family, giving thanks to God for them and lifting up any needs of which you are aware.

13. 1:4-5. (a) Think of someone you know who has recently come to saving faith in Christ Jesus. Spend time thanking God for saving them. Then pray that their faith will grow.

(b) Think of a believer, or a church, that is filled with love for fellow believers. Spend time thanking God for how He has filled their hearts with love and ask Him to continue doing so.

(c) How often do you think of the hope laid up for you in heaven, namely Christ Jesus Himself? How does this help you keep your present circumstances in perspective?

(d) We often forget the gospel. How do you remind yourself, as well as those under your leadership, of the word of truth on a regular basis? If you're not doing so, how could you begin?

14. 1:6. (a) Spend time praying for those you know who are proclaiming the gospel in other nations, asking God that their ministry will bear fruit and grow.

(b) How are you boldly proclaiming the gospel? How does it encourage you that Jesus, the One who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth, is always with you as you make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20)?

15. 1:7-8. Paul was a team player when it came to ministry, as is clear from the terms he used to describe Epaphras. Would others describe you as a team player in ministry who is faithful in your work for God's kingdom? Why or why not?

16. 1:9-14. (a) Seek to memorize these verses this week by using them in your daily prayer time.

(b) How are you teaching those under your leadership God's commandments so that they can walk in a manner worthy of the Lord?

(c) Take time this week to examine your heart. In what area(s) are you walking in a manner worthy of the Lord? In what area(s) are you not doing so? Give thanks to God for His grace in those areas where you're bearing godly fruit. Repent of your sin in those areas you're not fully pleasing to Him and ask Him to help you change.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER . . .

One of the greatest gifts we can give others is a commitment to pray for them. It brings great joy to my heart to pray for my brothers and sisters in Christ each day. I start with a broad perspective (praying for people I know serving Christ around the world), then come closer to home (praying for my country's leaders and needs), and then come home (praying for my church family and my immediate family). But sadly, when I pray for those close to me, it's all too easy for me to jump right to petitions instead of first thanking God for their faith, hope, love, and fruitful ministry. Paul's thanksgiving and prayer for the Colossians is a powerful reminder of how important it is to do both. Paul was always thanking God for the Colossians, even as he regularly prayed for them. Let us grow in regularly thanking God for our fellow believers in our prayers for them as well.

I. People of God (1:1-2)

Paul was "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (1:1). The book of Acts tells us much about Paul's background that informs and illuminates his letters and brings us to a deeper appreciation of what he said and why he said it. So, let's briefly look at what we learn about him from Luke's sequel to his gospel account.

The first time we are introduced to Paul in Scripture is when Stephen was stoned to death by enraged Jews whom he had accused of betraying and murdering Jesus Christ (Acts 7:51-60). The witnesses of the stoning laid their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul (Paul's Hebrew name) who approved of Stephen's execution. Saul was ravaging the Church by dragging believers off to prison (Acts 8:1-3). He lived to breathe threats and murder against the Lord's disciples, even going to the high priest and asking him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus so that he could hunt down believers and bring them bound to Jerusalem. But as he was on his way to arrest the Lord's disciples, Jesus made him His disciple (Acts 9). The Lord chose Paul to carry His name before Gentiles, kings, and Jews (Acts 9:15). Although there was much he had to suffer for the sake of Jesus's name (Acts 9:16), Paul experienced the grace and peace of God.

As a former Pharisee, Paul was a Jewish legalist at heart. He had been a persecutor of Christ and His Church. But he had been saved by the grace of God. A persecutor of the Church became a church planter. If God can do this in the life of Paul, He can do this in the life of anyone.

Paul had many partners in ministry, and one dear to his heart was Timothy, a son in the faith and a dear brother in Christ. He had first met Timothy in Lystra, a city in Galatia, during his second missionary journey. Timothy's mom was a Jewish believer, and his dad was a Greek. He was highly spoken of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium (another city in Galatia). Paul and Timothy were a dynamic ministry team, and the Lord blessed their ministry greatly (Acts 16:1-5).

The opening verses of the letter to the Colossians are far more than a greeting; they tell us who we are as the people of God. First, we are "saints" (Col. 1:2). God has opened our hearts to believe in Him and set us apart as His own possession to be holy as He is holy. Second, we are family. Believers have received the Spirit of adoption and are children of God (Rom. 8:15-16). As such, we have many brothers and sisters in Christ. Finally, we are those who have received "grace . . . and peace from God our Father" (Col. 1:2). God graciously and lovingly saved us while we were still sinners, and Christ reconciled us to the Father through the cross, making peace. Since we have received His grace and peace, we must extend grace and peace to others.

Paul is writing to the saints "in Christ" (Col. 1:2). All believers are saints, set apart as God's chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, and His own possession (Ex. 19:5-6; 1 Pet. 2:9). United to Christ, His holiness becomes our holiness. We are set apart as worshipers of God, workers for His kingdom, and witnesses of His great name.

These saints were "at Colossae" (Col. 1:2). Paul was not the founder of the Colossian church; Epaphras was (1:7; 4:12). In fact, it doesn't appear that Paul had ever been to Colossae (see 2:1). Although Colossae had been replaced by Laodicea as the major city during Paul's day, it had been the major city of the Lycus valley for at least five centuries before Christ was born.¹ This was due to its location on a major trade route, and therefore, it was a place of different cultural and religious groups, including Judaism.² Notably, Paul wrote these believers were "in

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 77.

² Moo, 77.

Christ” before he stated they were “at Colossae” (1:2). First and primarily, they were united to Christ and citizens of His kingdom. Only secondarily were they citizens of Colossae.

Paul closed his greeting with, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father” (Col. 1:2). God’s grace is most clearly seen in the work of salvation when He redeems sinners, not based on any merit of their own, but as a gift (Eph. 2:4-5, 8). Zechariah foretold Jesus would come, “. . . to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79). The angels proclaimed, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased” (Luke 2:14). Jesus declared, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you” (John 14:27; see also 16:33; 20:19, 26). Jesus made peace by reconciling both Jews and Gentiles to God through the cross (Eph. 2:15-17). There is only one way to know this peace. We must trust in Christ alone for our salvation.

II. Praise to God (1:3-8)

It’s instructive that every time Paul prayed for the Colossians, he began by thanking God for them. Specifically, he thanked God for the Colossians’ “faith in Christ Jesus” and for their “love . . . for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for [them] in heaven” (vv. 4-5). Notably, it is the hope of the believer that is the foundation of their faith and love. This hope is nothing less than Christ, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27), but it’s also more. Believers are looking forward to the day when Christ will return and we will see Him face to face in our resurrected bodies.

The hope of glory had come to them through “the word of the truth, the gospel” (Col. 1:5), which Epaphras taught them. This dear saint was Paul and Timothy’s “beloved fellow servant” who had proven to be “a faithful minister of Christ” in Colossae on their behalf (v. 7). He was from Colossae, a servant of Christ Jesus, and a prayer warrior for the Colossian church (4:12). He was also a fellow prisoner with Paul in Rome (Philemon 23). Ever since Epaphras had planted the gospel in Colossae, it had produced fruit in the lives of the Colossian believers, especially seen in their “love in the Spirit” (Col. 1:8). The Lord had used Epaphras to open blind eyes, unstop deaf ears, and soften hard hearts in Colossae so that a number of men and women understood the grace of God in truth and began to grow in faith, hope, and love.

Paul stated that the gospel is “bearing fruit and growing” (Col. 1:6). This allusion to the cultural mandate is meant to emphasize that where the first Adam failed to fulfill God’s commands, the second Adam succeeded (see Gen. 1:28). Therefore, God’s people can “go . . . and make disciples of all nations” knowing that “all authority in heaven and earth has been given to [Jesus],” and He has promised, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:18-20).

Knowing that Christ is with us and that salvation is of the Lord should encourage us to boldly proclaim the gospel. When we hear of fellow believers’ faith, hope, and love, we should give thanks to God. As we contribute to the spread of the gospel, we should ask God that our endeavors and those of our fellow believers will bear rich fruit. And when they do, let us once again go before our heavenly Father and thank Him. He delights to hear His children’s thanksgiving.

III. Prayer to God (1:9-14)

Not only did Paul and Timothy give thanks to God for the believers in Colossae, but they also prayed for them. From the day they heard of the Colossians' faith, love, and hope, they asked the Father to fill the Colossian believers "with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Col. 1:9). Not only did Paul want the Colossians to know all that God has done to accomplish the history of redemption, but he also wanted them to know God's precepts, so that their behavior would align with their beliefs.

Significantly, Paul alluded to those passages in the Old Testament that describe God filling certain people with wisdom and understanding in order to build His Tabernacle, and later, His Temple. The Lord filled Bezalel, a man from the tribe of Judah, with the Spirit of God, ability, intelligence, knowledge, and craftsmanship, in order to make the tabernacle furniture. The Lord also equipped Oholiab, a man from the tribe of Dan, to lead those with God-endowed ability in the craftsmanship of the tabernacle furnishings (Ex. 31:3; 35:31-32). Later, the Lord provided a man from the tribe of Naphtali, full of wisdom and understanding for any work in bronze, to make the temple furnishings (1 Kings 7:13-14).

Paul alluded to these passages because he was praying for the Lord to fill the Colossian believers (temples of the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 6:19] who love and serve the true Temple, Jesus Christ) with wisdom and understanding (Col. 1:9). Only then would they adorn the gospel in their attitudes and actions. Just as Adam and Eve were to bear fruit and grow in the garden, so too the Colossian believers, united to the second Adam, were to bear fruit in every good work for God's glory (v. 10).

The book of Proverbs teaches us that spiritual wisdom and understanding begin with the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7). In the language of James, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God" (James 4:6-7). Believers are to humble themselves before the Lord and submit to His commands. This is the only way "to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10). Jesus had said, "Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. . . . If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. . . . but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:5, 10, 15).

We must abide in Christ in order to bear fruit and grow. This means studying the Scriptures, which reveal Christ to us, and praying to God. It means loving, enjoying, trusting, and obeying Him. Since there are no shortcuts to sanctification, we must discipline ourselves to abide in Christ, especially in our high-speed, "minute-clinic" culture. Then, not only will we bear fruit and grow, but we will also please the Lord.

Paul and Timothy also prayed that the Colossian believers would be strengthened with God's glorious, mighty power, so they would have "endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks" (Col. 1:11b-12a). This is the same power God used when He "delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (1:13-14). In this kingdom Jesus reigns forever, fulfilling God's covenant to David (2 Sam. 7:12-16). Because of Christ's redemptive work, the Father

has qualified believers to share in the inheritance of the saints in light, fulfilling Daniel's prophecy. "But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever" (Dan. 7:18).

Endurance and patience with joy and thanks aren't virtues we can conjure up by our own strength. They are the fruit of the Spirit at work in our lives. The Christian life is long and difficult. Endurance and patience only come by God's power. The joy of the Lord is our strength. And a heart of thanks comes by way of God's grace. Our King has secured our redemption and canceled the debt of our sins. That's something for which we can joyfully give thanks!



One of the greatest gifts we can give another person is praying for them. Prayer is a means of grace God uses to increase our faith, hope, love, and fruitfulness in ministry. Ask God to give you a heart of thanks for others as you pray for them, the ability to recognize what He is doing in their life and ministry, and joy and endurance in asking Him to strengthen them with His power.

PROCESSING IT TOGETHER . . .

Prayer. Open in prayer, asking God to bless your endeavors as you study His Word together. Immediately following the opening prayer is a good time to pass a sheet of paper around the group for prayer requests. These can either be shared later by the group leader through some form of communication or prayed for during the closing prayer.

Prepare for Discussion. Read through the purpose section at the beginning of the lesson.

Process Personal Study. Share any answers from the personal study section that were particularly meaningful to you. If there were any that you found challenging, ask others to share their thoughts so that you can benefit from their insights. Be sure to leave adequate time to discuss the principles and points of application. Consider sharing the ones you found most meaningful with your group.

Prayer. Close in prayer, thanking God for your time together and what you have learned through His Word. If you have shared prayer requests, spend time praying for those now, especially those that are urgent. Remember to pray for one another until your next time together.