

## 10. The Fullness of God Dwelling in Christ—Colossians 1

Turning from the letter to the Ephesians and to the letter to the Colossians, this study once again notes their commonalities: The cities have in common their geographic location in Asia Minor and the letters have in common the theme of God's eternal purpose in Christ and in the church. This study has noted that Colosse is not mentioned outside the letter to the Colossians, written to them by Paul. Just south of the more notable Laodicea, the proximity suggests that similar problems with the church at Laodicea might have existed. The Lord addressed the church at Laodicea in one of his seven letters in Revelation 3:14-22. Later, this study will note that Paul encouraged Colosse and Laodicea to exchange letters.

The greater commonality of these two letters is how they focus on Christ and the church as they fulfill God's eternal purpose. This importance is fundamental, since the letters focus on the one Lord and the one church. These letters reveal an unchanging Lord, an unchanging church, and an unchanging truth, forever excluding the multiplicity of churches and modern denominations with their multiple and universal ways of salvation.



Inspiration reveals the eternal nature and unity of this thesis in each book: For Ephesians, as noted, the thesis statement is in Eph 1:9-10:

9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

The thesis of Colossians, which is similar in wording and exact in meaning, reads in Col 1:19-20:

19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 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.

No other Christ reigns; no other church is his body; no other doctrine will instruct.

### **Salutation**

Col 1:1-2

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

2 To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

Paul begins by asserting his authority as an apostle, appointed so by the will of God. Timothy is with Paul, who, at this time, was a prisoner in Rome. The recipients of the letter are holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse. Paul greets these brothers with the customary prayer for

grace (unmerited favor) and peace (with God, with Christ, with their fellow-brothers, and with those of the world).

### **Prayers and Thanksgiving**

Col 1:3-8

*3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints – 5 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 6 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. 7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, 8 and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.*

Paul's prayer – mostly one of thanksgiving – for the Colossian saints who believe in Christ and love all the saints, speaks of a love and faith that springs from the hope in heaven awaiting the saints and assured of by the word of truth, the gospel. This guarantee echoes the passage in Eph 1:13-14:

13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

The phrases relate salvation and promise to the word of truth, the gospel, in this passage showing that it is only the gospel that is God's power to save:

. . . you have already **heard** about in the **word of truth**, the **gospel** 6 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**. 7 You **learned** it from Epaphras . . . [Emphasis added].

Epaphras was a local preacher who had worked closely with three churches within a 50-mile radius, according to Paul's comment in Col 4:12-13:

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. 13 I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Paul tells us in Philemon 23 that Epaphras was in prison with him in Rome: "23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings."

Col 1:9-14

*9 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.*

*10 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, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.*

*13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

Paul's prayer is that they might have knowledge of God's will with all spiritual wisdom and understanding, that live a life worthy of the Lord, pleasing him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, and being strengthened in all power. The result of the powerful attributes is that they have great endurance and patience.

Verse 12 begins a prayer of thanksgiving that Christians ought to pray and, in so doing, offers a final answer to the permanent existence of the kingdom of Christ at the time of this writing by Paul and continuing for ever and ever.

***Share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.*** Saints are in the kingdom at the time of this writing and for all time. *Hebrews* and *The Revelation* repeat the permanent status of God's saints in the kingdom. Heb 12:28-29 teaches that we receive the kingdom while alive and can be thankful for it: "28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire." Rev 1:5-6 asserts that Christ has made us to be a kingdom where we serve for ever and ever: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever!" John, a prisoner on Patmos, wrote that he was a companion in the kingdom in Rev 1:9-10: "9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." These and other scriptures stand forever in opposition to premillennial doctrines.

***Has rescued us from the dominions of darkness.*** Paul explained the dominions of darkness in Eph 6:12: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." The devil rules the dominion from which God rescues his saints, according to Eph 2:1-2:

1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

***Brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.*** Once again, the kingdom as the place where saints reside in this present world exists now and for ever and ever.

***In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*** The Father, who rescued us from the devil and translated us into the kingdom, redeemed us in Christ and forgave our sins.

### ***The Supremacy of Jesus, the Son of God***

Col 1:15-18

*15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 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. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 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.*

Three passages reveal the supremacy of Jesus. This one is significant because it notes that he is the head of the body, the church. The church is the one church which Jesus said that he would build in Matt 16:18. This passage leaves no room for many churches as in modern-day denominationalism. As to the supremacy of the Son of God, the passage speaks eloquently as do the other two: John 1:1-5, 14 teaches:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning.

3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Heb 1:1-4 teaches:

1 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. 4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

### **The Gospel of Reconciliation**

Col 1:19-23

19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 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.

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 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 – 23 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.

The sum of all the previous verses is that the fullness of God dwells in Christ, and through Christ, all things in heaven and earth were reconciled. Paul affirmed this same principle in Eph 2:14-17:

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

In 2 Cor 5:17-21, Paul described the ministry of reconciliation:

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

### **The Glorious Riches of God's Mystery**

Col 1:24-29

24 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 his body, which is the church. 25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness – 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. 27 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.

28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. 29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

Once again, Paul affirms that the body of Christ is the church. Returning to the mystery of God, Paul says plainly and clearly: "The glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you." This is the sum of it all. Paul also explain just as clearly how Christ comes to be in us in Gal 3:26-28: "26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed [did put on Christ ASV] yourselves with Christ. Rev 10:6-7 declares the mystery of God accomplished:

"There will be no more delay! 7 But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

In Rev 11:15, the seventh angel sounded his trumpet:

15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

And this is the kingdom, the church, the one body, into which God translated us, having redeemed us in Christ and forgiven us our sins.

### ***Study Questions from the Scriptures***

1. Eph 1:9-10: What did God make known to us?
2. Col 1:19-20: Where does all the fullness of God dwell?
3. Col 1:1-2: Who made Paul an apostle? To whom was the letter written?
4. Col 1:3-8: What springs from hope? Where do you learn of it?
5. Eph 1:13-14: What guarantees our inheritance?
6. Col 4:12-13: What kind of person was Epaphras?
7. Col 1:9-14: What are saints to bear? In what are they to grow? For what did God qualify us? Into what did He bring us? From what did He rescue us?
8. Heb 12:28-29: What is the nature of the kingdom?
9. Rev 1:5-6: What did Christ make us?
10. Rev 1:9-10: What was John a companion in?
11. Eph 6:12: Against what do we struggle?
12. Eph 2:1-2: What do worldly people follow?
13. Col 1:15-18: In what does Christ have supremacy?
14. John 1:1-5, 14: Where was Christ in the beginning? What did the word become?
15. Heb 1:1-4: Through whom does God speak?
16. Col 1:19-23: Where does God's fullness dwell? To whom had the gospel been proclaimed?
17. Eph 2:14-17: How was man reconciled to God?
18. 2 Cor 5:17-21: What is the ministry of reconciliation?
19. Col 1:24-29: Where are the glorious riches of God found?
20. Gal 3:26-28: How does one put on Christ?
21. Rev 10:6-7: What did the angel say when God accomplished his mystery?