

## **MINISTERED TO, AND MINISTERS TOGETHER**

### **Colossians 1:1-14**

#### **(Read Colossians 1:1-14)**

**Intro:** I was searching for scriptures on the subject of commitment and ran across a very helpful passage in Colossians 3. As I researched the text and pondered it, it became more and more obvious to me that I should teach on the entire letter. This was bolstered by the fact that the idea had been percolating in various ways in my spirit, thinking, and conversation for some time. So here we are, beginning a sermon series from Saint Paul's letter to the church in Colossae that will take us into and maybe through October – and I will still preach that message on commitment when we get to Colossians 3.

Colossae was in what is present day west-central Turkey. It was about 100 miles due east of Ephesus in an area known for chalk deposits, which also made crops grow well and a thriving wool and dye trade. These things helped it to be known as a wealthy region. But perhaps the most significant thing about the region was the prevalence of EARTHQUAKES, which is probably why today, in the words of one source, not one stone remains on another as evidence of the city walls or homes and structures that were there when Paul wrote to the church there. It was already a fading city that was overshadowed by larger and more thriving cities nearby, the most significant be Hierapolis and Laodicea.

Another thing is that Paul had never been there. He planted the church in Ephesus, but it was his protégé, Epaphras, who was from Colossae, who had begun the Church in his home town.

When Paul wrote this letter he was imprisoned in Rome and near the end of his life and would never be able to enjoy meeting the ones he was writing to. Word had gotten to him of inroads by some teachers who were spreading Jewish legalism and, probably, the beginnings of a heresy we've heard about before, and that was Gnosticism. As a quick reminder, Gnostic teaching held that matter is evil and that freedom from it comes through special knowledge which is where the heresy gets name from the Greek word *gnosis*. Now, that's a really simple and quick definition, because I'm not going to spend time on it today. Suffice it to say gnostic teaching replaced the need for faith in Jesus Christ with the false teaching of attaining salvation by special knowledge. We'll look at it further as we continue through the letter, but that is what we need for now.

Some have questioned whether Paul wrote the letter because, even though it sounds like Paul, A LOT! He uses some new terms and a slightly different theological approach from previous letters. This has been almost completely discounted, and I believe, along with most others that, since this is the end of his long ministry, Paul's teaching has become more developed and polished over the years.

What we need to know here is that Paul wanted this group of believers to know he was a fan of the church in Colossae even though he'd never physically been there, and that he wanted to encourage them in keeping true to the Gospel. As he ministers to them he knows that he can count on them to be ministers together with him. As he does this, notice how . . .

#### **Paul includes others in his ministry plan**

- He starts the letter by including his spiritual son, Timothy, in his greeting. Timothy may have even been the one writing down Paul's words as the apostle dictated to him. But Timothy must have experienced a little holy pride as Paul referred to him as his brother. (**Tell about Luke Keefer's comments to us in Greek readings**) This kind of encouragement is hugely significant.
- It also is highlighted in Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of the first couple verses. Listen, *I, Paul, have been sent on special assignment by Christ as part of God's master plan. Together with my friend Timothy, I greet the Christians and stalwart followers of Christ who live in Colosse. May everything good from God our Father be yours!* Colossians 1:1-2 (The Message). Paul is not buttering them up – he's laying out the truth. WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER!
- Next Paul commends the Colossians for . . .

#### **The big three must-haves for ALL Christ Followers**

- They are faith, love, and hope. Peterson puts it like this, *Our prayers for you are always spilling over into thanksgivings. We can't quit thanking God our Father and Jesus our Messiah for you! We keep getting reports on your steady faith in Christ, our Jesus, and the love you continuously extend to all Christians. The lines of purpose in your lives never grow slack, tightly tied as they are to your future in heaven, kept*

*taut by hope.* Colossians 1:3-5 (The Message). This is huge! He's getting wonderful reports that the church in Colossae is bursting with the ingredients to thrive as the people of God and grow in sharing the Gospel.

- Barclay calls faith and love the "twin pillars of the Christian life." He puts it this way, "*These are the two sides of the Christian life. The Christian must have faith; he must know what he believes. But he must also have love for men; he must turn that belief into action. It is not enough simply to have faith, for there can be an orthodoxy which knows no love. It is not enough only to have love for men, for without real belief that love can become mere sentimentality. The Christian has a double commitment—he is committed to Jesus Christ and he is committed to his fellow-men. Faith in Christ and love to men are the twin pillars of the Christian life. That faith and love depend on the hope that is laid up in heaven.*"
- Paul gives them a huge, sanctified, pat on the back for the wonderful reports he is receiving from their founder Epaphras. He praises them for latching on to the Good News and plumbing the depths of the truth of God's grace and then passing it on. Their life in Christ is bearing fruit and Paul wants them to know he is a happy spiritual grandfather. And as he does, he lets them know . . .

### **He is praying for them**

- As a matter of fact, he stops in his tracks and prays for them, right out loud and its recorded here. Listen to it again, *Be assured that from the first day we heard of you, we haven't stopped praying for you, asking God to give you wise minds and spirits attuned to his will, and so acquire a thorough understanding of the ways in which God works. We pray that you'll live well for the Master, making him proud of you as you work hard in his orchard. As you learn more and more how God works, you will learn how to do your work. We pray that you'll have the strength to stick it out over the long haul—not the grim strength of gritting your teeth but the glory-strength God gives. It is strength that endures the unendurable and spills over into joy, thanking the Father who makes us strong enough to take part in everything bright and beautiful that he has for us.* Colossians 1:9-12 (The Message)
- Even though he's never met them, it's cool to hear a spiritual giant pray for his friends. And as Paul prays, he sneaks in some teaching – mainly about two things: That the Christ Followers in Colossae clearly discern God's will and then that they do God's will. Barclay points out that we are to pray "*Thy will be done*", rather than "*Thy will be changed.*"
- Archibald Hunter points out Paul's prayer "*Remembering the dangers that face them from the false teachers, he prays that they may have three things: First, a right knowledge of God's will, which will issue in corresponding moral conduct; second, power to hold joyfully to the course; and third, a spirit of thankfulness for God's redeeming love shown to them in the fact of Christ.*" And then he adds this awesome teaching: "*Does any Christian wish to know how to pray for others and what to pray for them? Then let him be guided by these verses. Here are three heavenly favors which any congregation of Christ's people might long to possess: Knowledge of God's will (with conduct to match it), equipment with divine power to run the Christian race, and an ever-thankful spirit for the inestimable love of God to us in Jesus Christ.*"
- How about that? Are you praying for others in that way? Are you praying that for yourself? Are you praying that for ABC, that we would be *filled with the knowledge of his will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as 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; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy* (vv. 9-11)? Are we?

**Conclusion:** Time is flying. A news digest I receive every day has a fun opening each morning. On Thursday morning they posted a news item I had seen elsewhere with this: *It's not just you—the Earth has been spinning faster lately. June 29 was the shortest day on record at a full 1.59 millisecond less than the average day. We KNEW something felt off.*"

Now that's kind of cute, but as time flies it doesn't detract from the fact that people need Jesus more than ever and they are dying without him. We don't know when Jesus will return. The hymn says

*It may be at morn, when the day is awaking,  
When sunlight through darkness and shadow is breaking,  
That Jesus will come in the fullness of glory,  
To receive from the world "His own."*

And it may not be in our lifetime. But the world needs to be ready. WE need to be ready! Are you his own? We need to share the good news that through Jesus Christ God provides deliverance from the domain of darkness and our transfer to the kingdom of light. That's the promise.

In the way Paul ministers to his friends in Colossae so that they can effectively minister to their culture – we can as well.

We will continue with Colossians next week. Why don't you make it a goal to read through Colossians at least once a week as we do this study? It would not be difficult since you can probably read the entire letter in less than a half-hour. Read ahead. Amen.