

INTRODUCING COLOSSIANS; COL. 1:1-2 (Ed O'Leary)

INTRODUCTION.

THIS A.M., ~ WE BEGIN A THOROUGH EXAMINATION ~ OF THE APOSTLE PAUL'S letter ~ to the church at Colossae. ⇨⇨ 1 of prison epistles. ~~ along w/ Eph., ~ Phil., ~ & Philemon.

▶▶ What we're going to do this morning, ~ is introduce and look at the background to the letter ~ and then consider a couple of phrases from [verses 1-2](#).

▷▷ But the bulk of our time will be spent ~ on introducing and looking at the background to ~ this letter, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ in order to help us begin to get a good grasp ~ of what Paul is doing in his letter to the Colossian believers.

COLOSSAE ~ WAS LOCATED IN WHAT IS NOW ~ MODERN TURKEY.

▶▶ By the time of Paul, ~ Colossae ~ was a small and socially unimportant city.

▷▷ However, ~ it is good to point out that ~ the church in Colossae ~ was not ~ too small ~ or insignificant ~ in the Lord's eyes.

↳↳ He had something to say to them. ~~ He cared about them ~ and was watching over them.

▶▶ Likewise, ~ we may be small in number, ~ and perhaps insignificant in some people's eyes.

▷▷ But, ~ in the Lord's eyes, ~ we are important. ~~ He cares about us ~ and loves us. ~~ He is watching over us. ~~ And he is at work here at NHCC.

AND HERE'S SOMETHING ELSE TO THINK ABOUT.

▶▶ Jesus told the church at Philadelphia, ~ "I know that you have but little power, ~ and yet ~ you have kept my word and have not denied my name." ¶¶ 1/12

▷▷ In all likelihood, ~ this means that they had little authority or influence.

▷▷ Most likely ~ they lacked size and stature in the community ~ and were looked down upon and persecuted.

▷▷ Authority or influence ~ was not the important thing. ~~ The most important thing ~ was that ~ they kept Jesus' word ~ and did not deny his name.

▶▶ For us as a church: ~~~ stature in the community, ~ numbers, ~ or what the world considers success ~ are not the important things.

▷▷ Jesus will not measure us by those things.

▷▷ What is most important ~ and what Jesus looks for ~ and measures ~ in a local church ~ and what we must as a church body keep central ~ ↴↴

↳↳ is ~ obeying his word ~ and not denying his name.

▷▷ Remember, ~ in the parable of the talents, ~ Jesus said, ~ ↴↴

↳↳ "Well done, ~ good and faithful servant."

▷▷ So ~ we may be small in number, ~ and perhaps insignificant in some people's eyes.

↳↳ But as long as we stay faithful to Jesus, ~ we'll be ok.

→→ And we'll have his blessing and support.

↳↳ And it's way better ~ to have his support and blessing ~ than anyone else's.

OK, ~ BACK TO COLOSSIANS.

▶▶ Paul may have never been to Colossae. ~~ Seems Epaphras founded it.

▷▷ He may have been converted during Paul's stay at Ephesus ~ and had carried the gospel back to Colossae. ~~ Home town.

▶▶ And it looks like ~ Epaphras came to Paul with a report regarding the church. ↴↴ 2/12

IT SEEMS THAT HERESY HAD ARISEN ~ THREATENING THIS CHURCH.

NOW, ~ PAUL DOES NOT IDENTIFY THE HERESY. ~~ HE SIMPLY OFFERS A REBUTTAL.

▶▶ But from what Paul says within the letter, ~ the heresy seems to have been ~ ¶¶

▷▷ a mixture of Jewish ritual practices, ~ and paganism, ~ i.e., ~ pagan beliefs and practices.

AND SEVERAL ELEMENTS OF THE FALSE TEACHING ~ CAN BE IDENTIFIED FROM WHAT Paul says.

TO GIVE US A GOOD START ON UNDERSTANDING THE LETTER, ~ HERE ARE ~ FOUR ~ of the elements of the false teaching ~ that can be identified from what Paul says.

▶▶ 1st, ~ it seems ~ the heresy undermined the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ.

▷▷ It looks like the heretics told believers ~ ¶¶

↳↳ they needed something more than their relationship with Jesus ~ to bring them to genuine spiritual experience.

→→ IOW, ~ they gave Jesus a place, ~ but not the supreme place.

↳↳ They did not ~ deny him. ~~ They just ~ dethroned him.

▷▷ And this is most likely why ~ Paul spends so much time ~ on the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus.

↳↳ It's said that Colossians ~ is the most Christ-centered book in the Bible.

→→ Contains one of the most, ~ if not the most, ~ definitive passages

▶▶ 2nd, ~ it looks like the heresy included strict rules about ~

▷▷ permissible food and drink, ~~ religious festivals, ~~ and circumcision. ¶¶ 3/12

▶▶3rd, ~ it looks like the heresy included the notion ~ that the body is evil ~ ¶¶

▷▷and that through self-torture ~ or self-denial ~ a person can attain exalted spirituality.

↳↳This is impossible, ~ because our sin problem is not outside of us. ~~ It's inside.

▶▶And 4th, ~ the worship of angels was included, ~ which is strictly forbidden.

ALSO TO GIVE US A GOOD START ON UNDERSTANDING THE LETTER, ~ I WANT TO give us a little bigger picture of the background.

▶▶Much of this heresy endangering the church at Colossae ~ probably was ~ an early form of Gnosticism.

▷▷This was a complex belief system ~ that would become very prevalent ~ in the second century.

▶▶Gnosticism emphasized ~ the supremacy of knowledge ~ and that salvation came through knowledge, ~ and not by faith.

▷▷This knowledge was attained ~ through astrology and magic ~ ¶¶

↳↳and was available ~ only ~ to those who had been initiated into the Gnostic system.

▷▷We spent a great deal of time in Philippians talking about the fact ~ ¶¶

↳↳that our salvation ~ is by grace alone ~ through faith alone ~ in Christ Jesus alone.

→→And Paul reinforces that here in Colossians.

▷▷And God's people ~ are not ~ to be involved in astrology or the occult.

↳↳Lev. ~ 19: ~ 31, ~ Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, ~ for you will be defiled by them. ~~ I am the Lord your God.

↳↳And Is. ~ 8: ~ 19, ~ When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, ~ who whisper and mutter, ~~ should not a people inquire of their God? ~~ Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? ¶¶ 4/12

▶▶ Another Gnostic belief, ~ which I alluded to earlier, ~ was that ~ ¶¶

▷▷ all matter ~ is inherently evil ~ and only the spiritual and nonmaterial is ~ of itself ~ good.

▷▷ This led to the idea ~ that God could not have created the world ~ and would have no contact with it.

▷▷ And based on their belief that all matter is evil, ~ they taught that ~ God, ~ in Christ, ~ never could have become a human person.

↳↳ Their thinking was, ~ if matter is evil, ~ how could God ~ ever be united ~ with a human body?

▷▷ This is what John was combatting in his first epistle, ~ when he said, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh ~ is ~ from God, ~¶¶

→→ and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus has come in the flesh ~ is ~ not ~ from God.

▷▷ Thus ~ the heretics denied ~ either ~ the humanity ~ or the deity ~ of Christ.

↳↳ In their view, ~ he couldn't have been both.

▷▷ Any teaching that denies either ~ the humanity ~ or ~ the deity ~ of Jesus ~ is a false teaching.

↳↳ And any teacher ~ who teaches such nonsense ~ is a false teacher.

SO, ~ THE CHURCH IN COLOSSAE ~ WAS FACING THIS FALSE TEACHING ~ COMPRISED ~ of a mixture of Jewish ritual practices and paganism.

CONSEQUENTLY, ~ PAUL'S FIRST PURPOSE FOR WRITING, ~ HE SEEMS TO HAVE had two overall purposes for writing, ~ we'll get to the second one shortly.

CONSEQUENTLY, ~ PAUL'S FIRST PURPOSE FOR WRITING TO THE CHURCH IN Colossae ~ was ~ to refute the false doctrines ~ that the heretics were teaching. ¶¶ 5/12

▶▶ Chapters 1-2.

▶▶ Paul did not take kindly to false teaching. ~ And ~ neither should we.

▷▷ There can be ~ no compromise ~ on our part ~ with false teaching, ~ 77

↳↳ any more than a surgeon ~ could compromise ~ with a cancerous tumor in a patient's body.

→→ False teaching ~ is to be exposed ~ and rooted out ~ when we hear it.

AND MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT, ~ IF FALSE TEACHING ~ IS LEFT UNOPPOSED, ~ 77

▶▶ it will end badly ~ for a local church ~ and ~ for individual believers.

▶▶ We talked about this in Philippians.

▷▷ And it's so important to understand ~ that it bears coming back to it again and again.

▶▶ Peter called heresy ~ destructive.

▶▶ Jude compared false teachers to ~ "hidden reefs" ~ that will suddenly destroy ships that come too near. ~ "cause divisions."

▶▶ False teaching ~ is not ~ neutral. ~ And ~ it is not ~ harmless.

▶▶ Nothing beneficial comes from it. ~ False teaching is the natural enemy of the true gospel.

PAUL'S SECOND PURPOSE FOR WRITING ~ IS TO INSTRUCT BELIEVERS ~ ON HOW
~ to live a godly life.

MAINLY IN CHAPTER 3: ~ 1 - 4: ~ 6. 77 6/12

▶▶ But we can also look at this section ~ a little differently.

▷▷ Paul may have also been setting up a contrast ~ between the false way of living ~ taught by the heretics ~ ¶¶

↳↳ and what the Christian life ~ is really supposed to look like.

RECALL FROM OUR STUDY IN PHILIPPIANS, ~ WHEN WE DISCUSSED THE FALSE teachers.

▶▶ We noted that ~ holding to sound doctrine ~ will lead to right behavior.

▶▶ Recall from Rom. 6 ~ that we said ~ a correct understanding of justification and God's grace ~ will show us ~ ¶¶

▷▷ that we are not to continue in sin.

▷▷ In that chapter ~ Paul asks, ~ "Well then, ~ since God's grace has set us free from the law, ~ does that mean we can go on sinning?"

↳↳ His answer? ~ "Of course not!"

▷▷ Holding to sound doctrine ~ will cause us ~ to agree with Paul ~ and change our lives accordingly.

▶▶ Likewise, ~ we noted that, ~ while there may be some exceptions to this, ~ often false teaching leads to ungodly living.

▷▷ Scripture ~ definitely shows us ~ that ungodly living often ~ goes along with false teaching.

▷▷ Recall, ~ we said ~ that in 1 Tim., ~ Paul calls on Timothy ~ to hold firmly ~ to sound doctrine ~ and ~ a good conscience.

↳↳ Then he goes on to say ~ ¶¶

→→ that the cause of some making shipwreck of their faith ~ was their rejection ~ of sound doctrine ~ and a good conscience. ¶¶ 7/12

CONSEQUENTLY, ~ THE FALSE TEACHERS ~ WERE ~ MOST LIKELY, ~ TRYING TO lead the believers in Colossae astray, ~ not only in doctrine, ~ but also in practice.

SUBSEQUENTLY, ~ WE COULD SAY, ~ THEN, ~ THAT THE WHOLE EPISTLE TO THE Colossian church ~ is a rebuttal of false teaching.

▶▶ TPID, ~ the primary theme of this letter, ~ there are other things that Paul does, ~ but the primary theme, ~ I would suggest, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ is Paul's refutation ~ of false doctrine and false Christian practice.

↳↳ And he does so ~ by presenting sound doctrine ~ and what the Christian life is really supposed to look like.

MY FELLOW BELIEVERS, ~ ¶¶

▶▶ The only way ~ to not be taken in by false teaching ~ is to be grounded ~ in sound doctrine and sound practice. ⇒⇒ sound practice meaning the Bible's teaching on godly living.

▶▶ Loved ones, ~ it is incumbent upon us ~ who teach and preach here ~ to ground you in these things.

▷▷ And our study of Colossians ~ will be especially helpful in this regard.

▶▶ But, ~ it is also incumbent ~ upon each one of you ~ to ground yourselves ~ in sound doctrine and sound practice.

▷▷ Simply listening to a sermon once a week ~ or simply attending the summer Bible study ~ won't cut it.

↳↳ Every believer here ~ is to be ~ actively and continually ~ studying God's word.

→→ It is the only way ~ to not be fooled by heresy.

OK, ~ NOW LET'S TURN OUR ATTENTION TO PAUL'S GREETING. ¶¶ 8/12

AND WHAT I WANT TO DO HERE, ~ IS FOCUS ON ~ AND DEVELOP ~ ONLY TWO OF THE phrases in his greeting.

▶▶1st, ~ "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus." ~ And 2nd, ~ "To the saints and faithful brothers."

▷▷Just last week ~ we discussed the phrase "in Christ." ~ So we won't go over that again so soon.

↪↪As for the rest of the greeting, ~ I encourage you to explore that during your personal Bible study.

OK, ~ "PAUL, ~ AN APOSTLE ~ OF CHRIST JESUS."

PAUL IS AN EXAMPLE THAT EVEN THE WORST OF SINNERS IS NOT BEYOND THE reach of Jesus. ⇨⇨ Good to review periodically.

▶▶As we know, ~ Paul persecuted the church and even condoned Stephen's murder.

▶▶But Jesus didn't hold this against Paul. ~ Jesus didn't refuse to forgive Paul. ~ Jesus ~ forgives ~ all who come to Him ~ in true repentance. ~ 1 Tim. ~ 1.

▶▶Even the vilest of sinners ~ who come to Jesus in true repentance ~ ¶¶

▷▷and call out to Him for salvation ~ will be forgiven ~ and become a new creation in Christ.

▷▷O perfect redemption, ~ the purchase of blood, ~ to ev'ry believer the promise of God; ~ ¶¶

↪↪The vilest offender who truly believes, ~ that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

WHAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT HERE ~ SHOULD ALSO BE A WORD OF encouragement for believers as well. ¶¶ 9/12

▶▶ We've talked about this before.

▷▷ And it is so marvelous ~ and so important ~ that we need to come back to this ~ again and again.

▶▶ Sometimes when we sin we may think that God could never forgive us

▷▷ And the enemy

▶▶ But that's not true. ~ God will ~ always ~ forgive his children.

▷▷ 1 Jn. ~ 1: ~ 9.

↪↪ "If we confess our sins, ~ he is faithful and just ~ to forgive us our sins ~ and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

▷▷ And 1 Jn. ~ 2: ~ 1.

↪↪ "My little children, ~ I am writing these things to you ~ so that you may not sin. ~
But if anyone does sin, ~ ¶¶

→→ we have an advocate with the Father, ~ Jesus Christ the righteous."

▶▶ Once again, ~ take Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, ~ recorded in Lk. ~ 15: ~ 11-32.

▷▷ Notice right off the top, ~ the word "son." ~ We're talking family relationship.

▷▷ After the son comes to his senses ~ and decides to return to his father ~ ¶¶

↪↪ and admit ~ that he has sinned against heaven and before his father, ~ ¶¶

→→ Jesus tells us this, ~ ¶¶

↪↪ "And he arose and came to his father. ~ But while he was still a long way off, ~ his father saw him ~ and felt compassion, ~ and ran and embraced him ~ and kissed him."

▷▷ Picture that the father was constantly looking for him

↪↪ Picture of God the Father ¶¶ 10/12

LOVED ONES, ~ GOD THE FATHER'S LOVE FOR US ~ IS ~ UNLIMITED AND UNENDING.

▶▶ As the old hymn says: ~~ "Could we with ink the ocean fill, ~~ And were the skies of parchment made; ~~ ¶¶

▷▷ Were every stalk on earth a quill, ~~ And every man a scribe by trade; ~~ ¶¶

↪↪ To write the love of God above ~ Would drain the ocean dry; ~~ ¶¶

→→ Nor could the scroll contain the whole, ~ Though stretched from sky to sky."

▶▶ My, ~~ God the Father's love for us ~ is ~ unlimited and unending.

▷▷ Rest ~ in that love. ~~ Rejoice ~ in that love. ~~ Be encouraged ~ by that love.

▶▶ And always remember, ~ our heavenly Father's mercy and willingness to forgive ~ is just ~ as unlimited and unending.

▷▷ Rest in this. ~~ Rejoice in this. ~~ Be encouraged by this.

NOW THE 2nd PHRASE WE'LL LOOK AT IN PAUL'S GREETING.

TO THE SAINTS AND FAITHFUL BROTHERS (AND SISTERS).

▶▶ And to narrow it down even more, ~ we'll talk about the word "faithful."

NOW, ~ THE LITERAL TRANSLATION HERE CAN BE A LITTLE CONFUSING.

▶▶ It might seem that Paul has two groups in mind, ~ the saints and those who are faithful.

▷▷ Actually, ~ the Greek word for ~ "and" ~ introduces a description of one group.

↪↪ It could be translated as, ~ "To the people of God at Colossae, ~ who are faithful brothers and sisters." ¶¶ 11/12

▶▶IOW, ~ Paul is describing them as being faithful believers. ~~ In light of the rise of false teaching, ~ this was very encouraging,

▶▶As we'll see, ~ there were some problems within the church of at least some believers following some error.

▶▶But, ~ from what Paul says, ~~ the church largely stayed ~ united in ~ and faithful to ~ sound doctrine and godly living.

▶▶And his description of them as faithful ~ could have been an implicit exhortation to them ~ to continue to stay ~ ¶¶

▷▷united in ~ and faithful to ~ sound doctrine and sound practice.

WE COULD ALSO LOOK AT THIS ~ AS AN EXHORTATION TO US.

▶▶We need ~ to continue to stand ~ united in ~ and faithful to ~ sound doctrine and godly living.

▷▷We must ~ not ~ waver.

CONCLUSION.

AND THAT'S AS FAR AS WE GO TODAY.

▶▶I encourage you to read Colossians ~ at least ~ three times per week.

▷▷I encourage you to do so ~ ¶¶

↪↪in order for you to get a good grasp of the letter as a whole ~ ¶¶

→→and ~ so you won't lose sight of the forest for the trees.

LET'S PRAY 12/12