

Wednesday in the Word
Digging Deeper
September 30, 2020
Colossians 1:1-2

Due to time constraints tonight's lesson will be an inserted commentary by James Burton Coffman. Please allow God to bless you with time spent in His Word. Please continue to join us next week when we will be back to our schedule. Thank you.

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

COL. 1

This is one of the most important chapters in the Holy Writ, because of the Christology which reaches a climax of surpassing importance in Colossians 1:28.

It begins with the usual Pauline greetings (Colossians 1:1-2) and occasions of thanksgiving for the Colossians (Colossians 1:3-8); next comes a profound paragraph on the preeminence of the Son of God (Colossians 1:9-23), and then the superb mention of the mystery and the secret of human perfection to be achieved "in Christ" (Colossians 1:24-29).

Verse 1

Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Timothy our brother.

Paul, an apostle ... It is not necessary to refer to Paul as "Saint Paul," for such a title actually downgrades him. All Christians are "saints," but not all are apostles. "Apostle" was the high title given by Christ himself to his chosen representatives, and it carries with it the idea of plenary authority. A second reason for using the title "Apostle Paul" is that it is the title used by himself, and therefore the one preferred by himself. Still a third reason is that it emphasizes the truth that Paul was Christ's representative, not the representative of the church. He was not an apostle appointed by ecclesiastical authority, but a plenary representative of Christ, chosen and appointed by divine authority. Thus, the medieval conceit that the Holy Scriptures belonged to the church and were in some sense the property of it and therefore subject to their exclusive interpretation is defeated and destroyed by the apostolic title itself. Of course, it was medievalism that downgraded Paul from "apostle" to "saint," thus putting him on a parity with any deceased Christian. It is high time to restore the Biblical emphasis and speak of "Paul the apostle of Christ."

Timothy our brother ... The Greek has "Timothy the brother," and by this word Paul dissociated Timothy from any responsibility or authority for the letter to the Colossians, Paul being the exclusive author of it in the sense of its teachings pertaining to him alone.

As Barry noted, "In a special epistle like this, Timothy would be joined with Paul, as usual; but in a general epistle to the churches of Asia, the apostle alone would rightly speak." [1] Despite this view, it is incorrect to think of Timothy's name, in any sense, being joined with that of Paul, except as a courtesy in places where Timothy was known.

Another error is that of denying "apostle" as any kind of title. Guthrie said, "Apostle is no formal title, but a claim to divine authority." [2] On the contrary, "Apostle" is indeed a title, bestowed by

the Saviour himself (Luke 6:13). Although of Greek origin, the word "apostle" was most certainly known by our Lord, and its use in Luke's gospel is not anachronistic. See my Commentary on Luke, Luke 6:13, for more on this.

[1] Alfred Barry, *Ellicott's Commentary on the Holy Bible*, Vol. III, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), p. 96.

[2] Donald Guthrie, *New Bible Commentary, Revised* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), p. 1141.

Verse 2

To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ that are at Colossae. Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

The saints and faithful brethren ... Hendriksen pointed out that "The definite article the is omitted before brethren,"[3] indicating that not two classes, but only one class is addressed. As Wesley put it, "Saints refers to their union with God ... brethren refers to their union with fellow-Christians." [4]

In Christ ... at Colossae ... Hayes commented thus:

They were in Christ as surely as they were in Colossae. They had their residence in Colossae and walked about in Colossae; but they had received Jesus in their hearts as Lord, and they also walked in him as they went about their business day by day.[5]

As Barclay said, "Wherever a Christian is, he is in Christ." [6] That is why outward circumstances cannot destroy a Christian. No matter what happens in his environment, to his property, or even to his body, he, through it all, remains safe in Christ Jesus.

Although specifically addressed to the Christians in Colossae, this letter was also intended for the nearby congregations at Laodicea (Colossians 4:16), and in fact for the Christians of all times and places.

[3] William Hendriksen, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1964), p. 44.

[4] John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (Napierville, Illinois: Alec. R. Allenson, Inc., 1950), in loco.

[5] D. A. Hayes, *Paul and His Epistles* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1959, Reprint from Copyright Edition, 1915), p. 369.

[6] William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), p. 104

This commentary parallels our Pastor's sermon from this past Sunday and we will continue to Dig Deeper each week hence. Thank you for your faithfulness.