

# JESUS IS ENOUGH!!!

## A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

### *How Smart Are You?*

One Saturday morning a minister was busily trying to prepare his sermon under the most difficult conditions. It was a rainy day, and his young son was restless and bored, with little to do. Finally, in desperation, the minister picked up an old magazine and thumbed through it until he came to a large brightly colored picture. It showed a map of the world. He tore the page from the magazine, ripped it into little pieces and scattered the scraps all over the living room floor with the words, “Son, if you can put this page together I’ll give you a dollar.” The minister hoped that this might take his son most of the morning, but 10 minutes later there was a knock on his study door. His son had completed the puzzle. The minister was amazed to see that his son had finished the project so soon, with the pieces of paper neatly arranged and the map of the world back in order. “Son, how did you get that done so fast?” “Oh, said the boy, it was easy. On the other side there was a picture of a man. I just put a piece of paper on the bottom, put the picture of the man together, put a piece of paper of top and then turned it over. I figured that if I got the man right, the world would be right.” His father smiled and handed his son a dollar. – Barry Johnson

#### **Jesus is the Man! Jesus makes our world right!**

Today we begin our study of Paul’s letter to the Colossians. Because of the rising tide of human philosophies confronting us today, no New Testament book speaks with more relevancy than does the epistle to the Colossians. Colossae was a city of Phrygia (modern-day Turkey). This area was an important trade route. At one time, Colossae was growing and prosperous, but it gradually slipped into a second-rate position and became what we would call a small town notable for its angel cult.

Paul did not start the church at Colossae. Mostly likely a man named Epaphras did. Nevertheless, the Colossian church was a product of his ministry. Warren Wiersbe says, “The story of the establishment of the church at Colossae illustrates an important truth. “God does not always need an apostle, or a ‘full-time Christian worker’ to get a ministry established. Nor does He need elaborate buildings and extensive organizations.” Paul was writing to people he had never met or visited but he did not make any distinction between them. He had heard of their faith and that was all what mattered.

Warren Wiersbe goes on to say, “All kinds of philosophies mingled in this cosmopolitan area, and religious hucksters abounded. There was a large Jewish colony in Colossae, and there was also a constant influx of new ideas and doctrines from the East. It was fertile ground for religious speculations and heresies!”

When we really think about it, we realize that we live in a similar culture. The world around us is constantly inviting, coercing and demanding that Christians walk in the way of the world. The world wants God’s people to conform to the world’s beliefs. **Romans 12:2 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup> *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

**Read Colossians 1:1-2 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,* <sup>2</sup> *To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.*

In Bible times, people signed their letters in the beginning rather than at the end so you immediately knew the sender. Therefore, we know Paul was the author of the letter to the Colossians. Paul included Timothy in his greeting because Timothy was in Rome with him. It would be similar to how we sign a spouse's name with our own name to letters and cards today.

Paul begins by telling the Colossians that he was an apostle *by the will of God*. Paul often would establish his credentials as chosen and sent by the Lord because he had not been one of the original 12 disciples. Apostle means one sent out by God to preach the gospel. Paul wanted the Colossians to understand that he was appointed by God to his ministry. He was not 'operating under his own power'. As we think of Paul's testimony, it is a reminder for us to consider whether or not we are serving the Lord by the will of God. It is easy to overlook the will of God and serve Him only when it is convenient for us. A deep satisfaction comes from knowing we are in the will of God.

Saints in the Bible do not refer to the person's spiritual condition but rather to the person's spiritual position. The word 'saint' means consecrated or set apart ones. We qualify to be saints when we realize that we are sinners, that Jesus died for our sins, and we believe in Christ and turn from our sins. Paul also called the brothers at Colossae faithful. All believers are saints in God's sight but not all are faithful. Faithfulness speaks of our behavior. When we have trusted Jesus Christ as our Savior, we become a saint. But when do we become faithful? When we walk consistently with God in humble service to Him, we are faithful.

Paul never gives the specific details of the heresy facing the Colossians. From 'reading between the lines' in Paul's letter, most believe the heresy was a combination of Eastern philosophy and Jewish legalism, with elements of what Bible scholars call gnosticism. This term comes from the Greek word *gnosis* which means 'to know.' (An *agnostic* is one who does not know.) The Gnostics were the people who were 'in the know' when it came to the deep things of God. I would add that the Gnostics **thought** they were in the know! Without going into great detail, this heresy promised people spiritual fullness only if they entered into the teachings and ceremonies prescribed. As we move through our study, we will learn how Paul's teaching always magnified the deity and the sufficiency of Christ.

Paul greeted the Colossians by saying: *Grace to you and peace from God our Father*. A common Greek greeting was *charis* meaning grace. A common Hebrew greeting was *shalom* meaning peace. Think of it this way - one who has experienced the grace of God is able to experience the peace of God.

**Read Colossians 1:3-8 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup> *We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,* <sup>4</sup> *since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,* <sup>5</sup> *because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel.* <sup>6</sup> *which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth,* <sup>7</sup> *just as you learned it from Epaphras our*

*beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf<sup>8</sup> and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.*

We are reminded from Paul's statement in verse 3 that we should thank God for the people He has placed in lives when we pray for them. Sometimes we get so focused on specific needs that we forget to be thankful for family and friends. Paul the Apostle had an appreciative heart in all things. He was thankful for the Trinity of Graces that is found in believers: their faith, their love, their hope

The Good News of the Gospel did not begin in Colossae. It was brought to them by Epaphras, one of their own citizens who had come in contact with Paul and had been converted to Jesus Christ. This was probably during Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus which was not that far away from Colossae. Once Epaphras had been saved, he shared this thrilling news with his relatives and friends back home and became the minister at the Colossae church. Although the names are similar, Epaphras should not be confused with Epaphroditus who was involved in the Philippian ministry. They are two individual workers for Christ.

The Gospel is the Good News that Jesus Christ has solved the problem of sin through His death, burial, and resurrection. We should not act like a prosecuting attorney who constantly criticizes people for their sins while missing opportunities to share the Good News of forgiveness through faith in Christ. Paul's focus was on the exciting Gospel message centering on a Person—Jesus. Paul left the work of conviction of sin to the Holy Spirit.

Paul wrote this letter no more than 35 years after the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul spoke of the gospel bearing fruit *in the whole world*. There were no airplanes, no television, no Internet. Rapid transportation and rapid communication did not exist. They traveled by foot and camel and donkey. They wrote on papyrus scrolls. They spoke without microphones. Yet, believers in that day were taking the gospel to their world and the word of truth was changing lives. We have the same good news. Jesus is enough even in our darkest hour. 'Church people' are always talking about what a mess our world is today. Maybe we should do something about it and begin sharing the gospel story instead of criticizing all the time.

Epaphras went to visit Paul. His trip likely had a two-fold mission: (1) to visit and comfort Paul the prisoner and (2) to seek advice from Paul the Apostle concerning his church that was under attack. Paul wrote the compelling and powerful word of truth that still speaks to hearts today.

### **What Should We Pray?**

In so many circumstances, we do not know what to pray for others. Sometimes, we don't even know how to pray for ourselves. Paul's prayers center on spiritual blessings, not on material or physical things. Of course, it is not wrong to pray about physical or material needs. We should. But, realizing that spiritual needs are vastly more important should influence how we pray.

**Read Colossians 1:9 (ESV)** <sup>9</sup> *And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,*

Often in our prayer times we are asked to pray for people we do not know or never will meet. Paul had never met the Colossians, but he faithfully prayed for them and he asked the Lord to give them spiritual intelligence. The Gnostics boasted that they were the ones with superior knowledge. Paul prayed that the Colossians would be filled with God's knowledge. Gnostics thought the gospel of Jesus was too simple and wanted to convolute it with their own additions. Paul boldly prayed the Colossians would be filled with knowledge of God's will. Knowledge of God's will most likely went beyond a personal knowledge of God's will for an individual's life. Spiritual knowledge involves understanding the eternal purpose of God. Paul wrote in ***Ephesians 3:9-11 (ESV)*** <sup>9</sup> *and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things,* <sup>10</sup> *so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.* <sup>11</sup> *This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,*

***Read Colossians 1:10 (ESV)*** <sup>10</sup> *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.*

So-called Christian Gnostics taught that Christ, the divine spirit, inhabited the body of the man Jesus and did not die on the cross but ascended to the divine realm from which he had come. The Gnostics thus rejected the atoning suffering and death of Christ and the resurrection of the body. Beliefs such as this may use words sounding 'super intelligent' but they are not words that change lives. They are not the truth. Paul did not want the Colossians to be confused by false teachers so he prayed that they would *walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him*. It is easy to be judgmental and determine that other Christians are not 'living right'. Instead of being judgmental we should pray that they will bear fruit and increase in their knowledge of God. We can pray the same for ourselves.

***Read Colossians 1:11 (ESV)*** <sup>11</sup> *May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy,*

When we try to do things in the flesh, we will quickly become tired, worn down, and defeated. Paul prayed that the Colossians would be strengthened in the power of God's glorious might. What an awesome prayer. How wonderful to know that someone is going to the throne of grace on our behalf asking that we be empowered to live in God's glorious might enabling us to endure with patience and joy.

***Read Colossians 1:12 (ESV)*** <sup>12</sup> *giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.*

Next, Paul prayed that the Colossians would be thankful people. Christians who are filled with the Holy Spirit will be joyful and thankful. When we lose our joy, we start complaining and become critical. So when we see that happening in others or ourselves, it is wise to ask the Lord to make them and us thankful since we share in the inheritance of the saints of light.

How smart are you? Are you smart enough to realize that Jesus is enough for your life and to know that whoever wins souls is wise. (***Proverbs 11:30***)