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

Welcome to the book of Colossians! It is comprised of 95 verses and I hope you will be blessed with new insights into this beautiful epistle from the mind of God and through the hand of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

He begins by introducing himself right off the bat. The letter bears his name, and though the authenticity of his authorship has been challenged in this, and as in almost all of his letters, there is no valid reason to suggest that he is not the true author. He is the Apostle to the Gentiles, and the letter is written to a Gentile-led church.

He next identifies his apostleship with the words, "an apostle of Jesus Christ." He is a messenger of the Lord, having been called by Him personally to perform this weighty duty which has been so amazingly fruitful for the past two thousand years. This is his one claim to the authority of writing a letter of doctrine to them, and it is with this authority that he thus writes.

After this, he notes that his apostleship is "by the will of God." This is the same phrase as is seen in 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Philippians, and 2 Timothy. It is what further defines his calling, and which affirms his authority. It also is a note of humility in that he was selected, and therefore it was not of his own merits. Instead, it was by the sovereign decision of God that he is so designated an apostle.

In his letter to the Romans, he gave a more formal declaration of his commission, and in Galatians the opening statement was considerably more direct and even abrupt. In other letters, the opening varies as well. The opening statement is given in each epistle to set the tone for the rest of the letter.

Finally, he adds in the words, "...and Timothy our brother." This does not mean that Timothy is participating in the writing of the epistle, but that Timothy is with Paul and

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sending on his greetings to those in Colossae as will be noted in verse 2. Timothy referred to here is certainly the same Timothy to whom two epistles which bear his name are written.

Timothy is highlighted here and elsewhere, giving him much credence within the church, and setting the stage for him to be recognized as an authority within the church in the future. However, Paul is careful to make him out as a “brother,” and not as an “apostle.” The term is never applied to Timothy, because he did not meet the necessary requirements of being an apostle of Jesus Christ. Only a select group of people were called Christ’s apostles. After their deaths, the apostolic age ended, taking the title of “Apostle of Jesus Christ” with them.

Life application: As Paul wrote, he probably didn’t think that we would be reading his words two thousand years later, but the glorious words in the epistle still resound to this day. It is a letter directed to each person as an individual who is willing to pick it up and read it. Consider the magnitude of this as you read it, or truly any portion of Scripture.

To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ *who are* in Colosse:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:2

Paul states that the letter is written specifically “To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ, *who are* in Colosse.” They are then the initial recipients of this majestic letter of doctrine, and they are to be blessed with having been the first to read the subject matter which Paul deemed necessary to put into writing for the instruction and edification of those in the church.

However, the intent of Paul’s letter is certainly not that it would only be read by the Colossians and then secreted away. Rather, the anticipation is that it would be circulated among the churches, having copies made and having sessions where the content could be repeated and analyzed. This is certain, because the letter was copied and analyzed until the time it was finally incorporated into the final canon of Scripture.

This letter became well known enough to be considered for inclusion in the Bible, and its contents made it rightly selected for that same purpose. Each step of the process was guided by the Holy Spirit to ensure that we have the sure and perfect word of God to refer to.

After his words of verse 1 and the initial words of this verse, Paul now gives the standard greeting which is found in most of his epistles, “Grace to you and peace...”

ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν·

Grace is unmerited favor; it cannot be earned. This was the common greeting among the Greek people. Peace however was and still is the common greeting among the Hebrew people. In their language, the word is *shalom*. This is more than a greeting for calm or quiet, but is a state of wholeness and completion in all ways. Paul unites the two terms just as the church is being united between Jew and Gentile during his time. This grace precedes the peace because only after receiving the grace of God can a person experience the peace of God.

Paul extends this wonderful blessing to them “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” It is a greeting from the eternal God – both the unseen Father and His Son who reveals the Father to us. Rather than being an argument against the divinity of Jesus Christ, it is an argument for it. He is tying the two in as one - Jesus being a member of the Godhead. He is not making some type of great division, but a harmonious blending of the two.

Throughout Paul’s letters, as with the entire Bible, the deity of Jesus Christ is a concept and a precept which is on evident display. It is the very heart of what God has done for the reconciliation of the people of the world. As a side note, some translations leave off “and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Which is the true original is hard to say. Scholars argue over this, but either way, Christ Jesus is on prominent display throughout the book. His deity is so evident in the book of Colossians that only a person with a presupposition that He cannot be God could find any other interpretation of who He is.

Life application: In order to understand God, one must know Jesus Christ, and one cannot understand Jesus Christ unless he knows his Bible. Know your Bible.

We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,
Colossians 1:3

This is a greeting which, even if slightly amended for the occasion, is common to Paul’s letters. In some letters, the stress is on the thanks, in others is it on the prayers. However, when he wrote his letter to the Galatians, he noticeably skipped over such a general sentiment. He had greater concerns with them that he had to deal with.

Here he notes that he and Timothy “give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” His prayers are lifted to God, who is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. As always, this in no way diminishes the deity of Christ, but rather highlights it. There is the human Jesus, and there is the Christ of God. He is the Lord Jesus Christ who issues from God the Father. It is to God the Father that their thanks are directed at this point. The reason for this specific wording will be realized as he continues on with the epistle. It is a letter which highlights the deity of Christ in a most unique way.

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In their thanks, he then notes that they are “praying always for you.” Paul’s idea of “praying without ceasing,” which he penned to those in Thessalonica, is evident in words such as these to the Colossians. Whenever the thought of one of his beloved churches came to mind, he and Timothy would utter forth a prayer to God on its behalf. When they talked about one of the churches, they would probably issue forth a quick prayer of both thanks and petition for it. To them, praying was certainly a normal extension of their regular lives and conversations.

Life application: God already knows the end from the beginning. His plan is also complete in His mind. Despite this, we should not have a fatalistic view of life where we ignore prayers. Instead, God figures our prayers into the plan, just as our free-will calling on Jesus is figured into the plan. If we don’t receive Jesus, we will not be saved. Likewise, prayers that are not uttered are not heard. God’s foreknowledge of all things outside of time factors in our actions within the stream of time. Pray!