

Studies in the Epistle to the Colossians
Chapter Two

The Struggle in Our Responsibility to the Lordship of Christ

“¹ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus *our* brother, ² To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴ Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love *which ye have* to all the saints, ⁵ For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; ⁶ Which is come unto you, as *it is* in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as *it doth* also in you, since the day ye heard *of it*, and knew the grace of God in truth: ⁷ As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; ⁸ Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit” (Colossians 1:1-8).

Problems in local churches are nothing new. We might even go so far as to say these problems could be called a historical constant; something that happens constantly throughout history. The great struggle of “the faith” and “for the faith” is twofold. These two struggles are both pastoral and parental. Pastors struggle with congregations in these two areas and parents struggle with their children in these two areas.

1. There is the struggle to get people to know the truth and accept the truth; to believe it
2. There is the struggle to get people to live and obey the truth they know and profess to believe

Therefore, the first thing we want to establish about the Epistle to Colosse is that it comes with the authority of God (Colossians 1:1). Therefore what we read is the Word of God. The Bible is an instruction book for living that comes from God, not men. A central purpose of the epistle is to warn believers about false teachings that might lead them away from their submission to the Lordship of Christ and pervert the focus of their ministry from others on to themselves.

In verse 1, when Paul says he is an “Apostle of the Lord,” he is proclaiming his authority to speak for God. He is a voice of God to the people. He is expecting opposition to what he is going to say. “I Paul am made a minister . . .” (1:23).

Paul understood the work that he was doing was a response to a divine directive. He could not do anything else and remain in the will of God (see v 1, “by the will of God”). The fact of Paul’s Apostleship was the criteria that gave absolute authority to the words He wrote and spoke. In order to refute what Paul said, those who disagreed with him questioned his calling and therefore the credibility of what he said.

The second thing we want to establish is that the letter is addressed to the “saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse.” The word “saints” is from the Greek word *hagios* (hag'-ee-os). It does not imply moral excellence. It signifies a distinctive people set apart from the world through regeneration and the work of Christ on their behalf. It is a word that refers to a people who have benefited positionally by accepting and confessing Jesus as their Lord. “Saints” is a word that describes our position and our **IDENTITY** as believer/priests before God.

In doing so, they recognize themselves as having been redeemed by Jesus Christ and therefore distinctively belonging to God. They also recognize they have been set apart from the world to serve Him through ministry to others. “Saints” is a word that describes a position of **RESPONSIBILITY**.

“¹⁹ What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? ²⁰ For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in

your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Corinthians 6:19-20).

“²² For he that is called in the Lord, *being* a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, *being* free, is Christ's servant. ²³ Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men" (I Corinthians. 7:22-23).

The word “faithful” is from the Greek word *pistos* (pis-tos'). “Faithful” describes the way in which a believer maintains his identity with Christ and fulfills his responsibilities in service as a believer/priest. The use of the word “faithful” to describe these believers means that they could be relied upon to do what the Word of God directed them to do. Loyalty to the Lordship of Christ was their priority.

The words “at Colosse” tell us this was an epistle written to a local church. Although this may seem insignificant, the implications are very broad. It is difficult (if not impossible) to remain distinctively Biblical without a support group to re-enforce those distinctives. A large part of the purpose of the local church is personal accountability to a peer group (positive re-enforcement). Therefore God established an organization to polarize and reinforce the corporate values of that organization (the local church). Read I Kings 19:4-21 for a negative comparative example.

“⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I *am* not better than my fathers. ⁵ And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise *and* eat. ⁶ And he looked, and, behold, *there was* a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. ⁷ And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise *and* eat; because the journey *is* too great for thee. ⁸ And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God. ⁹ And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? ¹⁰ And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, *even* I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. ¹¹ And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; *but* the LORD *was* not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; *but* the LORD *was* not in the earthquake: ¹² And after the earthquake a fire; *but* the LORD *was* not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. ¹³ And it was *so*, when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, *there came* a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? ¹⁴ And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, *even* I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. ¹⁵ And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael *to be* king over Syria: ¹⁶ And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint *to be* king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint *to be* prophet in thy room. ¹⁷ And it shall come to pass, *that* him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. ¹⁸ Yet I have left *me* seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him. ¹⁹ So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who *was* plowing *with* twelve yoke *of* oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. ²⁰ And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and *then* I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee? ²¹ And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the

people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him” (I Kings 19:4-21).

According to verse 4 Elijah was defeated, discouraged and ALL ALONE. The words “it is enough” essentially say, “I have had enough. I quit.” According to verses 10 and 14 Elijah believed that no one would stand with him in opposing evil and promoting truth. In verse 18 God revealed to him that he was only a part of a larger whole. He was part of a collective and distinctive group of believers with the same identity and purpose, experiencing similar trials and temptations. In verse 19-21 God gives him a partner (Elisha).

The third thing we want to see is that there was a sense of mutual obligation between believers (Colossians 1:3). They prayed for one another. They were not in competition with one another. There was a sense of family among this congregation of “saints.”

Paul was thankful “to God” for their faithfulness. We need to pray for one another and for other local churches to be faithful. When any local church fails in its faithfulness to the Lord, that unfaithfulness brings reproach upon the Lord and all other local churches. When any local church falters or fails it affects all believers.

Paul’s prayer was **INTERCESSORY**. He met with God and spoke with Him on the behalf of this local church. According to verse 4, he had been doing so since these people first believed and formed the local church at Colosse even though Paul was not a member or that he knew any of the members personally other than their Pastor, Epaphras. Therefore, praying for the success of other local churches was a habitual and regular part of Paul’s prayer life.

The substance of Paul’s prayer for this local church shows his intent to provide theological reinforcement for their continued distinctiveness and faithfulness to the gospel message. According to verses 5-6, the gospel provides **SOLIDARITY** for fellowship between local churches. It is the central focal point for the basis of that fellowship. The erosion and distortion of the truth of the gospel message has historically destroyed fellowship between local churches. No local church can be said to be faithful to the Lordship of Jesus Christ which is unfaithful to the propagation of His gospel of salvation by grace (alone) though faith (alone) in Christ (alone). As we will see later, this epistle carries warnings against certain perversions of the gospel of grace (2:8-23).

The fourth thing we want to emphasize is that when a pure gospel of grace (“grace of God in truth”) is MAINTAINED in its purity, it will advance and bring forth fruit (Colossians 1:6). This principal was substantiated evidentially in the local church at Colosse. The gospel of grace continued to bring forth fruit. Only the gospel of grace detailed in the finished work of Christ is the gospel that “bringeth forth fruit.”

The true gospel that “bringeth forth fruit” MUST be understood from the perspective of the “grace of God in truth.” When the truth (the details of what Christ has accomplished in His death, burial and resurrection) is taken out of the gospel (or perverted) the power of the gospel to save is removed because it is no longer the gospel (Gal. 1: 6-7, “which is not another”).

Paul was writing this epistle to support what their Pastor (Epaphras) was trying to teach them and warn them about (Colossians 1:7-8). Paul calls Epaphras his “dear fellowservant” (co-laborer in the gospel). Paul joins himself with Epaphras and identifies himself with Epaphras’ ministry to establish these people in Biblical truth. The foundation of that truth was being undermined by a perversion of the gospel.

In doing so, Paul re-enforces the authority of Epaphras. The stability of future generations of believers in this church would depend upon their following the spiritual leadership of Epaphras as he taught truth. From that perspective, read I Corinthians 3:9-11.

“⁹ For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, *ye are* God’s building. ¹⁰ According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. ¹¹ For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 3:9-11). Stone

masons built upon a foundation to construct a building. The foundation was the most critical part of a building of stones. It needed to be absolutely solid, level, true and laid upon solid ground. I Corinthians 3:9-11 is a metaphor referring to the building of a local church. The layers of stones are different generations of believers. Each generation must be stabilized and grounded in the same truths (anchored upon the foundation) before there can be stability for the next generation of believers. The danger is that each generation will be tempted to compromise to some degree creating instability in the succeeded generations depending on the degree of their compromise.

Paul calls Epaphras a “faithful minister.” He was loyal and faithful to the established truths of God’s Word and to the gospel of grace. He faithfully preached these truths. He was committed to teaching truth regardless of what it cost him personally. He refused to compromise the truth of the gospel of grace to make it culturally acceptable.

Epaphras was a **SEED PLANTER**. He knew if he sowed a perverted and corrupted seed of truth in someone’s life, he would reap a perverted and corrupted life. Any **SEED PLANTER** knows you can only be sure of the crop you harvest if you are sure of the seed you sow. Don’t be upset with a seed planter if he disagrees with you over what you think is a minor point of doctrine. Listen carefully. He just may be trying to make sure of the seed he is planting.

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1. Why is it important for the Apostle Paul to establish that the Epistle to Colosse comes with the authority of God? _____

2. What are two reasons why Paul states he is an “Apostle of the Lord”? _____

3. What does the word “saints” imply about the people it describes? _____

A. It is a word that describes our position of _____
B. It is a word that describes our position of _____
4. What does the word “faithful” describe about the above two things? _____

5. Discuss the significance of the words “at Colosse”? _____

6. Read 1 Kings 19:4-21. How is this portion of Scripture an example of the problem that might result when believers ignore the things discussed in question 5 and how did God help Elijah in his defeated spirit? _____

7. Read Colossians 1:3. What was going on that shows a sense of mutual obligation between believers? _____

8. Read Colossians 1:5-6. What was the central focal point that provided solidarity for fellowship between local churches? _____
9. When a pure gospel of grace is maintained in purity of truth, what will be the result according to Colossians 1:6? _____
10. According to Colossians 1:7-8, who was Paul seeking support and what was he seeking to support in the writing of this epistle? _____
11. Discuss the building metaphor of I Corinthians 3:9-11 in regard to this struggle? _____

12. Epaphras was a SEED PLANTER. Why shouldn't believers get upset when a seed planter labors over what seems to be a minor point of doctrine? _____
