

## An Open Letter to Pastors ~

Colossians 1:1 – 2

~ Our Spiritual Safari returns to a dank, dark, Roman Mamertine prison cell with Paul the apostle as we begin to follow an entirely new path in this report. Paul had never been to Colosse when he wrote this epistle to the far-away church. Colosse was about a hundred miles east of Ephesus. Visitors from Colosse had heard Paul preach the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ before, and had come to know Christ as their Savior as a result. Apparently, Philemon was one of them. A genuine church came into existence in Colosse as the result of Paul preaching elsewhere. Epaphras was their minister. And Paul never traveled to Colosse as far as we can tell. He certainly intended to visit when he was released from prison – which was never to happen. But, even so, Paul wrote to this church at Colosse as though it were his own.

The biggest problem in Colosse society, which was located in southwest Phrygia in Asia Minor near Laodicea, was that it was beset with oriental mysticism. Gnosticism had evidently intruded via Greek pantheistic philosophies of demiurge. They believed they had an exclusive spirit of understanding and wisdom; as if they had the jar of knowledge in one hand and the dispensational lid to said jar in the other. They were agnostics who professed themselves wiser than the apostles. They held speculative tenets regarding creation, i.e. that God did not directly create the universe, but created a creature who created a creature who created a creature – until finally one day the creature created the universe. These people regard the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as just another creation in this long series of creations. Their ethical practice was, and still is, asceticism. They were completely influenced by Greek Stoicism. Unrestrained licentiousness in the name of self-righteousness and a sinlessly-perfected religion was, and is, their Epicurean motto.

The theme of the epistle to the Colossians is a chart and compass enabling the believer to sail between an ever-present Scylla and Charybdis in our spiritual lives. Pure Christianity lives between two ever-present dangers: the danger that it will evaporate into a philosophy of Gnosticism; or the

other, a danger that we will develop a feeling of exclusive and superior spirituality – a philosophy that necessarily entails asserting a state of sinless perfection – both of which are absolutely deadly to our souls.

When one declares a self-righteousness in sinless perfection, they freeze their spiritual existence in the form of daunting ritual. Those people go through a ceremony and – that's it. It means nothing in their lives. Jesus said He is the water of life. He did not say that He was the ice of life; He did not say that He was the steam of life. We need drink from the Word of God at the temperature of life; neither freezing nor boiling. We are not told to add something to Christ nor subtract from Him. The oldest heresy is always the newest heresy! Christ is not some mathematical equation to be worked out. Christianity means Christ. In Christ dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. That means Pleroma. Alright, that's a nice beginning – but the epistle to the Colossians is going to get down to the basest of nitty-gritty as our safari continues.

Colosse was typical of any city in that day. Rome was attempting to tame the east and bring them into subjugation. Colosse was no different than any of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation. Interestingly, all of those eight combined cities were critical, defensively strategic cities; poised against invasion of western culture — until the Roman Empire came along and dominated, controlled, and ruled the known world at that time. Well, the city of Colosse had lapsed into gross immorality and paganism; which led to an abjectly heathen society. It was bad. I'll spare you the lurid details.

There are several wonderful works the Holy Spirit performed for us, and *in* us, when we trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. When we receive His works in obedience, then He can begin to regenerate our hearts and make us complete as children of the Father. Only when those tenets of truth actually mean something to us in our everyday lives will we ever truly desire to be empowered to live for Christ *AND* have joy in our personal lives. The Holy Spirit indwells us and leads every step our camel train takes – or we aren't Christians. We become Christians by trusting Christ with the issues of our lives. That means going where He wants us to go and doing what He wants us to do. We are also baptized by the Holy Spirit; meaning we are placed into the body of believers. That makes us all the church. We

are, as individuals, members of the body of Christ. Christ is all we need – He is everything to sustain us. That’s where Paul’s prison epistles reach profound importance.

Well, with all of that on his mind, and a possible looming execution at the hands of madman Nero, Paul wrote four prison epistles and sent them out of Rome by four different men. Each had either visited him in prison, or were fellow prisoners that had been set free. Tychicus went to Ephesus, bearing the epistle to the Ephesians, where he was the leader of the church – and may have been the pastor there, too. Epaphroditus was carrying the letter to the Philippians, and he was the pastor there. Epaphras took the epistle to the Colossians, and Onesimus brought a very personal letter entitled Philemon to his master. Within these four prison epistles we have an anatomy of Scripture, ad infinitum. Ephesians presented the body of Christ. Colossians presents Christ as the head of the church. Philippians was a picture of the church walking on earth in experience; and Philemon is Christianity in action. That boils it all down to where the leather of these men’s sandals touched the Roman roads. Today, we still see all of this being worked out in a pagan society.

Well, we either believe the Bible is the Word of God, or we don’t believe the Bible is the Word of God. Christ is the theme of our lives, the center of our vision, the periphery of the sphere of our spiritual sight, and Jesus is where Christian living takes place. That’s where we break our alabaster box of ointment in this world. Let’s cut out the pseudo-intellectual approach to the Bible religion has developed today – it’s no good. We need genuine Christians who can help feed sheep. I don’t feed lions, tigers or bears — and no giraffes — only sheep are fed on this safari. Well, as with all of Paul’s epistles, there are two sections: doctrinal and practical. Chapters one and two of Colossians are doctrinal, and chapters three and four are the practical section. We’ll do well to keep that in mind as we examine this Spirit-filled epistle....

***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.***

~ We've had this introduction several times – and it's always very close to being the same. Paul's specific wording is worthy of attention. He calls himself an apostle by the will of God. Paul was in the will of God — in a prison cell, friends. Are you in the will of God when you are serving Christ? Are you sure you are in the proper place doing the proper thing for the proper people? If you aren't sure, then you aren't functioning in the body of believers – because that would be impossible. We have too many active “missionaries” who are not yielding a return. They are doing things they aren't supposed to be doing. They think they're fine doing whatever brother so-and-so is doing; or whatever they just want to do – and calling it the will of God for their lives — but they aren't fine. That's not the way we determine the will of God for our lives. God made Paul an apostle. The believing brethren are the saints spoken of. We're not saints because of what we do, but because of our position in Christ; being set apart for His use to serve our fellow believing brethren with the best we have ~

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