

Making The Journey

Colossians 1:1-10

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Colossae was situated in the Lycus valley between the prosperous communities of Laodicea and Hierapolis, situated in what we now know as Turkey.

While the ruins of the other two cities are still visible, nothing remains of Colosse except ancient memories. If it wasn't for the fact that it's the 12th book of the New Testament, nobody would remember it all.

Bishop J. B. Lightfoot wrote, "*Colossae was the most unimportant town to which Paul ever wrote a letter!*"

It was a dinky little town, and the Christians there were losing their way. They were kind of the middle child.

If you're a middle child, then you know what I mean. If you're not a middle child, you've probably never even realized there were middle children.

One of the traits of a middle child is that they are rebellious. They're also less religious than their siblings and parents.

Now, the author and the intended audience of this letter is spelled out in the first two verses.

Colossians 1:1–2, "*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.*"

Even though we can see that this letter was written by Paul and his friend and protégée, Timothy, scholars also tell us it was probably written around 62 AD.

If that was the case, then Paul was under house arrest in Rome, awaiting trial in front of Nero.

In the King James Version of the Bible it reads, *“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.”*

The term “saints” expresses their relationship with God. “Faithful brethren” shows their relationship with other Christians.

Now remember, we’re reading someone else’s mail. There are things in this letter that apply directly to the people who’re reading it.

However, the fact that it’s been preserved for over two thousand years means there’s a message in the letter for us as well. This goes back to the premise that the Bible was written for us, not to us.

From this letter we also discover that Paul never actually visited the church, but he had heard about it and apparently was asked to write them to address some issues that had cropped up.

So, to this church, which seems to have lost its way, Paul offers some practical suggestions. Suggestions that will help us when we lose our way, and hopefully suggestions that will help keep us on track spiritually.

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Paul begins his letter by reminding the Colossians of their starting point, from where they had come.

Colossians 1:3–6a, “*We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God’s people—the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you.*”

Paul was pointing to their salvation experience, about the faith they had placed in Jesus, the hope they had for eternal life, and how that had expressed itself in their love for one another.

It hadn’t just been an emotional experience; it was evidenced in changed attitudes and behavior.

They had experienced the reality of Paul’s words in Ephesians 2:8, “*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.*”

One preacher said that you had to know when your salvation experience happened, because if you can get it and not know you got it; you can lose it and not know you had it.

Through the years, I’ve had people tell me they can’t pinpoint the day or place of their salvation experience.

It had always been a part of who they are, and it shouldn’t negate the reality of their salvation, and it doesn’t.

But it does highlight why believer’s baptism is so important. It gives you that milestone marker of the day when you publicly stated that you were a Christ follower, a new creation.

So, for the Colossians, it was important to know not only from where they had come, but that from where they had come wasn’t where they were now.

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The second thing Paul tells them is that they needed to know where they were. The same is true for us today, we need to know where we are.

This is spelled out in Colossians 2:8–9, “*See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.*”

They didn’t realize how far they had drifted from where they should have been to where they were now.

Some scholars believe Paul was writing this letter as an attempt to address the “*The Colossian Heresy*,” but that isn’t the term Paul used.

The term “*Colossian Heresy*” refers to the specific false teaching addressed by Paul in this letter.

The Colossian Heresy diminished the pre-eminence of Christ and the sufficiency of His sacrifice on the cross to forgive sins.

This false teaching emphasized adherence to rules and regulations that are powerless to truly change lives.

Paul was concerned that where the Colossians had started, wasn’t where they had ended. They didn’t realize how far they had drifted off course.

Now, I could expand on the various aspects of the Colossian Heresy, what they are and how they might relate to how we can drift from our faith today, but that would require me to develop a new series.

Drifting off course is something that can happen to each one of us in our Christian experience.

We can drift from where we started, and instead of being where we ought to be, we're somewhere else, and we don't even know it.

Suffice to say, if we aren't careful, errors and heresies that can creep into our Christian lives, things from culture and social media.

Trust me, Facebook, X, TikTok or YouTube are not reputable sources of spiritual enlightenment.

Those things can take us far from where we should be, and if we aren't careful, we won't even know it.

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This is why we need a plan to get to where we ought to be.

Colossians 3:1–2, “*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*”

In the book of Revelation Jesus admonished the church in Ephesus with these words:

Revelation 2:4–5a, “*Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.*”

The church in Ephesus was told they needed to remember from where they had started, and they needed to return to their first love.

There are times that we need to do a spiritual reset and remember where it was that we started our relationship with Jesus so we can return to our first love.

We need to remember what brought us to that place; realizing that we couldn't do it on our own.

We need to remember how we accepted the forgiveness that was freely offered to us through Christ, and how we let Him have control of our lives, but that isn't where we're supposed to stay.

Hebrews 6:1–3, *“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.”*

In other words, stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Instead, we need to become mature in our understanding.

Surely, we don't need to start over again with the fundamental importance of repenting from evil deeds and placing our faith in God.

We don't need further instruction about baptisms, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment because, God willing, we should be moving forward to further understanding.

Throughout the New Testament, our Christian experience is quantified as a journey.

The Bible talks about us growing in our Christian faith and maturing as Christians, running the race, fighting the good fight and walking the walk. All verbs, action words.

But sometimes we get stuck at the beginning, reliving our spiritual birth, over and over again.

I love the story about the old farmer who used to stand up in church every Sunday and testify saying, *“I’m not making much progress, but I’m firmly established.”*

One day a couple of young men from the youth group were passing the old man’s farm and saw him sitting on his tractor completely bogged down in the mud.

One of them yelled, *“Hey Brother Smith, you’re not making much progress, but you are firmly established.”* He had been stuck in the mud for years and didn’t know it.

A.W. Tozer wrote, *“Complacency is easy...and it is a deadly foe of spiritual growth.”*

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Conclusion

Paul challenged the believers in the Corinthian church with these words, 1 Corinthians 3:1, *“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.”*

Paul was saying that when I was with you, I couldn’t talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ.

Paul wasn’t questioning the salvation experience of the early believers. He was just telling them they needed to grow up.

If you aren’t sure what spiritual growth is supposed to be like, or what we’re supposed to be growing toward, Billy Graham said, *“Do you want to know what God’s will is for you? It is for you to become more and more like Christ. This is spiritual maturity, and if you make this your goal, it will change your life.”*

Paul addresses this in Colossians 2:6–7, “*So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*”

Do you see the action words there? Let your roots grow down into Him. Let your lives be built on Him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught.

Pastor Mark Batterson said, “*Half of spiritual growth is learning what we don't know. The other half is unlearning what we do know.*”