

# ***The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians***

## Christ In You, The Hope Of Glory

### Colossians 1:1-2 | Apostles and All Who Are In Christ

#### Colossians 1:1 | Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ

**Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ.** The English word *apostle* is a transliteration of the Greek word *apostolos*. Apostle is the usual translation, but sometimes it is translated as a *messenger* and even one who is *sent*. In Acts 1:2, the word *apostle* refers to the eleven disciples Jesus had chosen<sup>1</sup>. Later, a replacement for Judas was chosen, bringing the number to twelve (See Acts 1:26).

But there were others designated as apostles besides the immediate circle of twelve. In Acts 14:14, Barnabas is called an *apostle*. There were also false apostles, "*deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ*" (2 Corinthians 11:8).

Paul acknowledges at the outset of this letter that he was also an ***apostle***. In another letter, he said he didn't deserve to be called an apostle because he persecuted the church of God (1 Corinthians 15:9).

Paul certainly was a persecutor of the Church of God. He first comes on the scene of Scripture in the Book of Acts. In chapter seven, the Jews were putting Stephen to death. Stephen was one of the early believers in Jesus as Messiah and the first Christian to be martyred for his faith. He was stoned to death. Acts 7:58 records that those who were throwing the stones *laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul* (Acts 7:58). Later, his name was changed to Paul. He *consented* to the death of Stephen, and Saul "*made havoc of the church*" (Acts 8:1,3).

But Paul states here, in his letter to the Colossians, that he became **an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God**. Paul didn't choose his profession, it chose him.

In our dispensation of grace, no one enters the ministry or any profession *by the will of God*. We can and should certainly pray about areas of ministry or jobs we desire to take, but our decision does not appear to be directed by God. Prayer gives us peace that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7). We want to have peace about the vocation we choose, but this differs from what Paul experienced.

According to First Corinthians 12:28, God has chosen certain individuals for various positions in the church, with the apostles being the first. First Corinthians was one of the earlier letters written by Paul. Later, when he wrote Ephesians, Paul seemed to show that these positions were in the past. Ephesians 4:11 uses the past tense "gave" when referring to the assignment of apostles and prophets. The Greek does not have past, present, or future tense, rather they use the *aorist* tense, which means a *point in time*. Seven different translations I looked at used the past tense verb, "gave. Usually, the aorist tense refers to a point in time in the past. I think it is here as well.

God chose Saul (later changed to Paul) while he was traveling from Jerusalem to Damascus. Acts chapter nine describes Saul's encounter with Jesus Christ and his conversion on the road. He was on his way to persecute and kill believers in Christ. On the way, Jesus Christ confronted him, and Saul's life took on a new course (Acts 9:1-16).

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<sup>1</sup> Eleven disciples because Judas, the twelfth, had betrayed Jesus and was dead.

From that moment, his life was changed forever. Paul gained the authority to preach the saving Gospel to the Gentiles through his encounter with the living Christ.

Not only was Paul an apostle, but he was also *separated unto the gospel of God* (Romans 1:1), which means he was set apart or marked off from other apostles **by the will of God**. He differed from the twelve apostles. God set him apart for a specific purpose. We get a hint of that purpose in Acts 9:15,16. God revealed to the prophet Ananias, **“He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”** Paul was given a great ministry and would carry the name of Christ to the Gentiles, to kings, and to Israel, and he would suffer for it.

The Gospel of God has always pertained to the death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The *gospel of God* is found and was promised by the Old Testament prophets. Paul was separated from the twelve apostles in that Jesus Christ gave him a revelation. But the revelation given to him, which had never been shared before, was new and unknown. Paul called it *a mystery*. The mystery was the Gentiles would be in the same body as the Jews (Ephesians 3:6).

The Church/assembly of believers, which began in Acts 2, was made up only of Jews (Acts 2:46 *in the temple*). This church would later be joined by Gentiles who did not have to be circumcised or follow the Law of Moses (Acts 13:39; 15:20). This would have been shocking to the Jews. Prior to this new revelation, the only way a Gentile had any hope was to become a Jew, be circumcised, and follow the Law of Moses. But now, the Gentiles, who previously *were without hope and without God*, could be justified (made right with God) and come into the Church by belief alone, not by the Law (Ephesians 2:12; 3:6; Acts 13:38,39). With this newly formed *body of Christ*, *there would be neither Jew nor Gentile*. All are one in Christ, and that is called the grace of God.

**And Timotheus our brother.** Paul traveled with others and included others in the writing of his letters. We find his name in several salutations in Paul’s letters: Philippians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; and Philemon 1. Timotheus, or Timothy, was a **brother** “in Christ.” Paul also refers to him as his *faithful son in the Lord*, and *my true child in faith*, also *my beloved child* (1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2). I think that gives us evidence Timothy was one of Paul’s converts from Judaism to belief in the Jesus as the Messiah. Paul wrote two letters, specifically addressed to Timothy. While we could spend a great deal of time studying the life of Timothy, he was a trusted companion of Paul’s and a loyal friend and brother.

## Colossian 1:2 | Grace and Peace to All Those in Christ

Notice the conjunction “and” between **the saints and faithful brethren in Christ**. It is possible that Paul is addressing two groups of people. The word **saints** is translated from the Greek word *hagios*. That word should sound familiar since it is often translated as *holy*, as in *hagios pneuma*, *Holy Spirit*. Is Paul distinguishing **saints** from **faithful brethren**?

The **Saints** could refer to Jewish believers in Jesus as Messiah; those who were **in Christ** before Paul (See Romans 16:7). The **faithful brethren** could be Gentile believers, and/or those saved after Paul began his ministry. However we look at it, the message Paul writes in the book of Colossians is for all believers. It is for those **in Christ** who have been *delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son* (Colossians 1:13).

The Book of Colossians is one of the four so-called Prison Letters, sometimes called Captivity Letters, written by Paul<sup>2</sup>. Paul stated in chapter 4:3 that he is writing this letter from prison; *“Pray for us, that God would open the door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds.”* He doesn’t explicitly say he is writing from prison, but that he is in bonds would confirm it. The Golden Rule of Interpretation should be applied: *“When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense.”* Which prison is unknown, but there are a few of possibilities.

1. **Caesarea.** Paul was imprisoned there for two years (Acts 24:27).
2. **Rome.** It was in Rome where Paul spent a couple of years under some sort of *house arrest* (Acts 28:16,30). This is the traditional view that most scholars take.

This church of believers is in the ancient city of Colosse. It is likely Paul did not establish this church through his own ministry and he does not mention preaching the Gospel to them directly in the letter. He gained his knowledge of this church from reports he had received: *“Since we heard of your faith”* (1:4), *“Epaphras...Who declared unto us”* (1:8), and *“Since we heard”* (1:9). Epaphras might have started this church. He was a local *“Epaphras, who is one of you”* (Colossians 4:12). He may have traveled to Rome (if that is where Paul was in prison) and brought the report to Paul. Although it is possible, Epaphras could have written a letter to Paul. All we know is that Paul is in *bonds* and somehow he received a report about this loving church (1:8). Everything else is speculation.

The Church in Colosse and neighboring Laodicea had probably never seen Paul face to face if we are interpreting (2:1) correctly. It is possible that Paul stopped in Colosse on this third missionary journey (See Acts 18:23).

The letter was likely delivered from Paul to the Colossians by two men, Tychicus, and Onesimus (4:7-9).

**Grace be unto you, and peace** is a familiar greeting in many of his letters: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians. Paul is extending a blessing of goodwill and peace **from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. We can pray for that same blessing in our church and for our friends and family.

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<sup>2</sup> Three others are Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon