"Revival is messy. As much as we would love for it to come in a neat and orderly package, history teaches us that outbreaks of the Holy Spirit are often accompanied by holy chaos. There may be conversions and healings in one corner and demonic manifestations in the other. In seasons of revival you can have miracles and mayhem. Holiness and heresy can erupt simultaneously…"
Lee Grady

Prayer Study #473
COLOSSIANS 1
First Love Ministries, Inc., of Perry, Georgia USA

Introduction

Paul wrote four letters from his prison in Rome. These were Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon, and Colossians. He wrote to the Colossians, a people and city he never visited, because he wanted to correct some wrong teaching that kept cropping up in the Colossian church. His desire was to put all the emphasis on Jesus as the true head of the Church and the only Lord of the universe and the only One through whom forgiveness could come. There is little doubt among scholars that Paul was the author of this letter because he says so and because the letter follows the theological and grammatical patterns of other known Pauline writings.

The church at Colossae was established by Epaphras, who was a Christian sent by Paul to spread the gospel. The church was mostly composed of Gentiles but did have some Jewish members. Epaphras notified Paul of some heretical beliefs that were trying to take root in the Colossian Church. Paul wrote the letter to correct these errors. He called these errors the "Colossian heresy." This false teaching was based on Greek traditions combined with Jewish elements such as the necessity for circumcision, Sabbath observance, food regulations, festival participation, and the worshipping of angels.

The heretical teaching also indicated that either the teachers of this philosophy did not consider Jesus to be fully divine or did not consider Him to be the only way of salvation. These false teachers did not believe that Jesus alone could defeat demonic principalities and spirits, which they saw as a prominent part of the world. Furthermore, these false teachers taught that they had special revelations, which made them, rather than the apostles and the Scriptures, the ultimate source of truth.

Colossians gives one of the best passages of scripture on the deity of Christ (1:15-20). Paul shows that Christ is the image of the invisible God, the Creator of the Universe, and the head of His body, the church. Colossians also is one of the best books in the Bible for believers to read in order to know how to conduct themselves as Christians.

The city of Colosse was about 100 miles from Ephesus but only 12 miles from Hierapolis and Laodicaea. All three towns were in the Lycus Valley and were part of the Roman province of Asia. This part of the world was notorious for earthquakes and volcanoes. It was also known for the River Lycus, which was impregnated with chalk. While wherever the chalk was made it impossible to farm, the volcanic acid, on the other hand, made the land that was not cover in chalk very fertile. This led to green pastures with large flocks of sheep, making this the greatest center of the woolen industry in the world. Also, the chalky water had something in it that made it particularly suitable for dyeing the wool.

When Paul wrote his letter to Colosse, the great city had fallen on hard times, and Colosse was a small town. It is said to have been the most unimportant town to which Paul ever wrote.

Colossians 1 New King James Version (NKJV)

Greeting

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

2 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.

Paul follows his usual pattern by introducing himself as the author of the letter and reminding the Colossians of his authority because he is an apostle of Jesus Christ by God's will. He mentions his beloved spiritual son Timothy who was with him in Rome, and he recognizes these brothers whom he had never met or known as faithful. Then he extends to them grace and peace from Father God and Jesus.

Their Faith in Christ

3 We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; 5 because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; 7 as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, 8 who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.

Paul is giving thanks and prayers for these people who have come to faith in Jesus because they have heard the Gospel message and responded. This passage is a kind of description of the Gospel:

a. It requires faith In Christ Jesus.

b. It requires love for all the saints.
c. It gives hope of eternal salvation in heaven.
d. Its truth comes from the Word.
e. It is for everybody in the world who will hear and respond.
f. It brings forth fruit borne by those who have heard and know the grace of God.
g. It is humanly transmitted to others (i.e., normally, that which is divinely given must be humanly passed on).
h. It witnesses love in the Spirit.

Here we meet Epaphras who is the human instrument who has carried the Gospel, for Paul, to the Colossians.

Preeminence of Christ

9 *For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;* ***10*** *that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;* ***11*** *strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;* ***12*** *giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.* ***13*** *He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,* ***14*** *in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*

15 *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.* ***16*** *For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth,*

visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ***17*** *And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.* ***18*** *And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.*

This, in essence, is a prayer of a saint for his friends. Although Paul never went to Colossae, as far as we know, he had a spiritual bond with these people and considered them brothers and sisters in the faith. C.F.D. Moule says that prayer has two great requests. First, prayer seeks for understanding and insight into God's will, and secondly, it asks for the power to perform that will. The first request is not about speaking to God but about God speaking to us. Therefore, we must begin our prayers listening rather than speaking. In order to do this, we need to know the Lord. Then we can know wisdom and spiritual understanding. This spiritual wisdom and understanding helps us apply the great truths of Christianity in our daily lives. We must use this knowledge, wisdom and understanding to conduct ourselves as Jesus would want us to live. It takes power to do this, and we receive that from the Lord through prayer.

Paul's prayer for the Colossians contained the following requests:

a. That the Colossians be filled with knowledge of Jesus
b. That they may please the Lord, because of the worthiness of their walk
c. That they be strengthened by His power

d. That they have patience with joy
e. That they give thanks to the Father for their inheritance
f. That they be redeemed by the blood and forgiven of their sins

Paul closes this section with one of the best passages of the deity of Christ in the Bible. (The major difference between Mormans, Jehovah Witnesses, and most all other cults, is Christians believe Jesus is God the Son, whereas none of the others recognize Jesus as God.) Paul tell us that Jesus is the image of God, the creator, the beginning of the Church, the head of the Body of Christ (i.e. the Church), and the firstborn from the dead (because of the Resurrection). *Firstborn* does not mean He was the first person born. *Firstborn*, to the Jews, meant Jesus was the most favored child of God and the highest honor of all creation belongs to Him. Therefore, He has the supremacy in all things

To see what God is like, we must look at Jesus. He perfectly represents God to men and women in a form that they can see and know and understand.

Reconciled in Christ

19 *For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell,* ***20*** *and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.*

21 *And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled* ***22*** *in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—* ***23*** *if indeed you continue in*

the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

In verse 19 Paul completes this identity of Jesus to God. He says Jesus is the fullness or completeness of God. Therefore, Jesus is not just an analogy or sketch and summary of God, He is the full revelation of God, leaving nothing out.

The objective of Jesus' coming the first time was reconciliation. He came to reconcile fallen man with a holy God. The medium through which this reconciliation came was the payment for our sins, the blood of Jesus. This reconciliation involves not only mankind but living creatures and even inanimate creation. (Here Paul must be thinking about the Gnostics, which we discussed earlier, who believed that the world and all matter, including the human body, is evil.)

Why would things in heaven need to be reconciled? Barclay gives us four possibilities for this:

a. Some believe even the angels were under sin. Job 4:18 says, "*His angels he charges with error,*" and Job 15:15 says, *"The heavens are not clean in his sight."*
b. Origen, a third-century theologian and universalist, believed that even the devil and his angels would be reconciled to God in the end.
c. Perhaps Paul was using heaven and earth as a way of saying that the reconciling work of Christ was completely adequate and he uses heaven not because it needed any reconciliation but

just to illustrate that, if it had, Christ was enough.

d. Eramus and the 5th Century Bishop Theodoret believed that the angels needed no reconciliation with God but did with human beings because the angels were angry with men and women for what they had done to God and wanted to destroy them. This theory holds that their wrath left them when they saw how much God loved the world and mankind as shown by His giving of His only son to die for mankind.

The final purpose of reconciliation is two fold: 1) Holiness or to bring mankind to God consecrated and blameless. 2) To bring mankind to a place of faith and hope in the Gospel so that we should never lose confidence in the love of God for us and should loyally follow Christ, even in difficult times.

Sacrificial Service for Christ

24 *I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,* ***25*** *of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God,* ***26*** *the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.* ***27*** *To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.* ***28*** *Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.* ***29*** *To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily*

There are those who believe that part of the privilege of being a Christian is to be baptized into His sufferings. Paul does see suffering for Christ as a privilege and a sharing in the very sufferings of Christ Himself.

There are, I believe, two parts to this mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generation: 1)The blood of Jesus saves us from sin, and if we believe this in our hearts and confess with our mouths, we are justified, just as if we had never sinned, and redeemed and made holy so that we can approach a holy God with boldness, and 2) this salvation is open to whosoever will come, to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. In fact, Barclay says, "The only thing in this world which is for everyone is Christ….Open to everyone is the good news of the gospel, the love of God in Christ Jesus, and the transforming power which can bring holiness into life."