

Colossians 1:1-2

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Form and structure

- ❖ 1:1-2 constitutes Paul's greetings to the Colossians

Exposition

- ❖ Comments on reading these verses
 - Often the reading of these verses is taken for granted. Some see the greeting as the standard way Paul starts writing his letters. If it is just a standard way Paul writes his letters, did Paul give any value or meaning to his greetings? Such a thought fails to take into consideration the following:
 - The first readers of this letter to the Colossians did not have the privilege of a bible as we do; they were not able to read all the letters of Paul. They would not know that this is Paul's standard procedure of writing his letters. So let us try to read this letter as the Colossians read it. To them, it is the first time they have received a letter from Paul so these words had real meaning and impact, and we should understand this as we read this letter. The second letter they may read from Paul is the letter they were to receive from the church in Laodicea – see Col. 4:16. Besides that, we do not know if they read any other letter from Paul.
 - We should also take into consideration that Paul did not write his salutation in the same way as other letters. There are differences in sentence structure and choice of words. This means Paul put a lot of thinking into the words he used in his greeting to address each church. To the church in Colossae, this is very important, as Paul never had the opportunity to know this church personally. This is in terms of working

among them or visiting with them. Therefore, these thoughts and meaning must govern our reading of these two verses.

Verse 1a: Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

- ❖ **Paul** is the name he was probably known by among the Greeksⁱ. He introduces himself as the author of this letter. Like typical letter writing during the time of Paul, the letter has three parts – the sender, the recipients and the greetings. By identifying himself as the apostle of Christ, Paul indicates the grounds he is using to write to the Colossians. Paul is writing as the apostle of Christ. By this phrase, he shows that he owes his apostleship and authority to Christ.ⁱⁱ
- ❖ The word **apostle** generally has a range of meaning in Paul's letters. It may refer to a messenger and at other times an accredited missionary. This was especially in times when Paul had to defend his apostleship. In the context of this letter, the word apostle should be taken to mean a person called by Christ Himself, to represent Christ and proclaim Christ and this proclamation serves as the foundation of the new people of God.ⁱⁱⁱ
- ❖ Significant to this word, apostle is that it denotes the authorization the individual to fulfil a particular function, with emphasis on the one who sends, not on the one who is sent. This was not uncommon in that period of history. For Paul it means that he does what he does, not with his own authority but with that of God Himself.^{iv} He introduced himself in the same way in 1 and 2 Cor 1:1, Eph 1:1, and 2 Tim 1:1. It is a reflection of the truth that Paul saw himself like a public official with the authority to represent and act on behalf of the one who has sent him.^v What it means is that Paul does not address the believers on his own terms, but on the terms of the One who sent him.
- ❖ The phrase '**of Christ Jesus**' supports the above conclusion. Through it, Paul indicates the source of his apostleship. It speaks about his relationship to Christ. Paul is writing as one who is now possessed by Christ. Christ has taken ownership of Paul. It is clear that this has reference to the event of Acts 9. It is well noted that his greetings bear some theological meaning.^{vi} In this phrase, we see his relationship to Christ. This is what he means by using the word **of...** He is owned by Christ.
- ❖ He is owned by **Christ Jesus**. What did Paul want the readers to think about when he referred to Christ Jesus? Did Paul have in mind the whole theological meaning behind this Name? Christ refers to the Anointed One and Jesus refers to the one coming to save His people, a Saviour. Is this what Paul means? It will be proper to say that it is clear that by using this title, Paul wanted to remind the believers in Colossae of their Old Testament roots of their faith.^{vii} The name cannot really be separated from the person it refers to, therefore the implication behind the theological meaning of this title of **Christ Jesus** cannot be denied. Paul is writing for the Saviour of the church. Christ Jesus is speaking through Paul, He who sends this message to them is no one else but the Promised Messiah who came to establish God's kingdom. It is Christ Jesus...

Paul an apostle...by the will of God

- ❖ **By the will of God** - After explaining his status that he is an apostle and belongs to Christ, Paul then turns to how he has received this status. How did he come to be an apostle of Christ Jesus? Paul is saying it is not something he chose out of his own will. I think if we were to ask Paul, he would tell us that he did not dream of being a messenger of this Christ Jesus. Paul becoming an apostle, only happened by the decision of God. His calling by Christ was in line with God's will. Paul is not defending his claim to authority, he is saying, that his calling happened by the command of God.
- ❖ This phrase, 'by the will of God' gives us Paul understands of his person and call. His entire theological perspective is based on these words. In Acts 18:21, Paul used the phrase in a different manner when he said farewell to the Ephesians. It was on the basis of God's will that he hoped to see the believers in Rome – Romans 1:10, 15:32. So Paul's entire theological perspective was shaped by the conviction of God's will as the grounds for his ministry.

Verse 1b. and Timothy our brother

- ❖ There is no record that both Paul and Timothy were either involved or visited the church in Colossae. Why does Paul mention Timothy in this letter? There are three views to this:

First, is that Timothy was with Paul when this letter was written and Timothy was the one who wrote the letter while Paul did the authorization of the letter. However, the personal reference throughout the letter does not support this theory of joint authorship.

Second, is that Timothy may have been well known to the Gentiles churches there, so by associating himself as brother with Timothy, Paul may also have in mind that this brotherhood will connect him with the brotherhood of the Colossian believers. This theory implies that Paul may need Timothy's acknowledgement to address the believers in Colossae. This theory does not go along with what Paul said about himself already.^{viii}

Third, is the theory that Timothy was with Paul when this letter was written. Col. 2:1 gives the possibility that there may be some believers among the Colossians who may have met Paul face to face, perhaps as a result of his ministry. Therefore knowing that Timothy was involved with Paul in his ministry, these believers were known to Timothy also. Hence then if by the writing of this letter Timothy was with Paul those believers will also recognize Timothy.^{ix}
- ❖ What is crucial here is how Paul addressed Timothy. He calls Timothy, our brother. Position wise, Paul is the apostle, and also a brother to Timothy. In other contexts, Paul considers Timothy to be his son in faith, or co-worker. Here, Paul puts Timothy as his equal; emphasis is not on position but on identity.

Verse 2a. To the saints and faithful brothers in Colossae in Christ

- ❖ After giving a reflection of how he thinks about himself. Paul gives us a reflection of what and how he thinks about these believers, this church in Colossae.
- ❖ They are **holy** (a`gi,ojj). The meaning of this word 'holy' cannot be separated from the OT background. At the core meaning of this word is that of being separate. What should come to mind is the idea of dedication. It conveys being set apart for the work and worship of God.^x We need to make this clear. Often when we hear the word holy, we tend to read morality as the core meaning, this is not necessarily true. If you think of the OT context, think about the utensils in the temple, which were regarded as holy. They were not holy because they had the ability to sin or to be good or bad. They are holy in a sense that they were set apart from the rest and dedicated to God for His service.

The same concept applies when this word was used of Israel. As God's people, they were set apart from all others as people belonging to God.

However, it is also true that the person set apart for God who is of absolute moral purity must of necessity take something of God's character. This is how Paul thinks about these believers; they are the people of God. They are set apart by Him. The use of this term as it was applied to God's people in the Old Testament is now applied to Gentiles also, indicating that they also are part of the complete people of God^{xi}.

- ❖ Not only are they holy they are **faithful**. There are two ways of translating this term (pistoij); it can be translated as believing or faithful.
 - If taken to mean believing, the emphasis is more on distinguishing the believers from the unbelieving in Colossae.
 - When it is translated as faithful, then the emphasis is more in encouraging the Colossians in holding on to the truth of God's word. This translation makes more sense when comparing it with how Paul greeted the church in Eph 1:1. Secondly in the context of the Colossians as there is false teaching encroaching into the church. The need to be faithful to the true biblical doctrine is essential. So they must then hold on to the truth of God's word.
- ❖ **...brothers**. On what grounds is Paul calling these people brothers? He has not met most of them. There are two things that help us to understand how Paul came to this conclusion. In the next sentence he refers to God as our Father, and in verse 7 we learn that these believers came to know Christ from Epaphras who was with Paul and Epaphras told Paul about them.
 - By saying, 'brothers' Paul acknowledges the bond he has with the Colossians. It is not based on physical things to start with; it has all to do with God being their Father. They all share the same Father and they are all part of God's family. Truly they are brothers.
 - This being part of the family came as a result of the gospel preached to them.
So this is how Paul viewed these believers and this is how we should view one another.

- ❖ By calling them brothers, it does not mean that Paul is excluding the sisters. Paul incorporates them in this word.
- ❖ **...In Christ at Colossae.** Colossae was located on a major trade route about 193 km east of Ephesus. It was a cosmopolitan city, exposed to diverse cultural and religious movements including Judaism, which had a significant presence in the city.^{xii} Therefore, the essence of what Paul is communicating to these believers is that as much as they are in Colossae geographically, so they are in Christ. To use the words of another, let me put it this way: “To speak of Paul’s sense of geography is an attempt to describe the ‘place’ where he thought Christians live. In Paul’s mind, just as these Christians live literally in the region near Colossae, they also live in Christ. The terrain, climate, values and history in which people grow up and live helps to define who they are. As this region near [Colossae] defines who they are, Christ defines who believers really are. Christ is the sphere of influence or power field in which they live and from who they benefit and are transformed. That is, with his Spirit, their values, character, history, and purpose shape their lives. Christians live in Christ. Jesus Christ must never be depersonalized by such language, but we will not understand Paul unless we learn to think of life as lived in Christ.”^{xiii}
- ❖ Words in themselves are not enough to explain what Paul has in mind through the use of the word in Christ.

Verse 2b. *Grace and peace to you from God our Father*

- ❖ Through the combination of using the salutation **grace** and peace, Paul is borrowing from both the Greek and Jewish worlds. Hail (chaire) was a common Greek salutation. However, Paul modified this and spoke almost the same sound but different a meaning by the word grace (charis).^{xiv} Grace is a key theological concept for Paul. It expresses a fundamental characteristic of God’s new covenant people: that their status is ultimately dependent on God’s own unmerited intervention on their behalf.^{xv}
- ❖ The word **peace** is rooted in the greeting that Jewish people said to each other by saying the word shalom. Its meaning is reflected in the OT prophetic hope for an era of peace (shalom), when God’s people would be delivered from their enemies and enjoy both physical and spiritual well-being.^{xvi} The word has to do with expression of the way things should be, the harmony that is to exist among God’s people and His creation.
- ❖ Pointing to God the Father as the source of grace and peace, Paul acknowledges that this is not something he can give them or command. It is only God who can grant this grace; therefore, Paul expresses his wish for the believers in Colossae through these words. It is as if he is saying to them, I wish that God’s grace and peace could reign among you as God’s people.
- ❖ The richness of this meaning is expressed well by John Piper: “at the beginning of his letters Paul has in mind that the letter itself is a channel of God’s grace to the readers. Grace is about to flow from God through Paul’s writing to the Christians. So he says, ‘grace to you’. That is, grace is now active and is about to flow from God through my inspired writing to you as you read – grace be to you...thus we learn that grace is ready to flow to us every time we take up the inspired scriptures to read them...”^{xvii}

Application

Verse 1a-b: the fact that Paul addresses the believers on Christ's terms draws a conclusion on two things:

- ❖ The way they view Paul and the message he is writing to them. Paul is not delivering his personal opinion; he is delivering the message of Christ. He is the messenger of Christ and on that basis; he is addressing these believer as the one sent by Christ. Think a bit, about how the church should view the pastor as he delivers God's word to his people. On what terms is he speaking to the people?
 - In the celebrity culture in which we live where popularity is the norm, it has become a common practice to say whatever will please people. Many people think the pastor is speaking his own opinion. This text applies well in this context. The pastor is not accountable to people. The church does not own the pastor. He is accountable to God.
 - For the pastor to be faithful in bringing God's word to His church, the pastor also needs a correct view of himself and the office he is called into. Christ is the one who called you to the ministry. Therefore, the test is not what works, but the faithfulness in delivering the message entrusted to you. It is based on being sent by Christ and the call to deliver Christ's message that the congregation should listen. Meaning if you deliver God's message as intended by Him, the church is bound to listen, the pastor is speaking on Christ's behalf. However if you sugar coat the word and flavour it, please pray that God may set the consciences of his people free from such novelties.
- ❖ The second conclusion that can be drawn is how the Colossians will listen to this message. What will be their attitude to the word that is delivered to them by Christ's messenger? Does this have the same impact as to how the church should listen to the Gospel preached to them?
 - If you come to church with the understanding, that the word you listen to is not the pastor's opinion, that he is not coming in his own authority, but that the pastor is sent by Christ the King, this will affect the manner in which you listen to the word of God.
 - It is essential to note that the congregation needs to be taught how to listen to God's word. Think of possible attitudes that can help the people in making the best of the sermon. This is how the congregation can be helped to listen to God's word:
 - Let them listen with understanding and a tender conscience – pray that your heart can be a fertile ground for the word to germinate and grow in it. Do not be a superficial listener. Do not come with a resistant heart, no you are coming to hear the message of the King through His messenger.
 - Listen attentively to the preached word - Too many people come to church expecting to be spoon-fed. They have no desire to think or learn or grow; they simply want to hear familiar preaching. They are not anxious to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. You are not a spectator; you have to participate through listening attentively and allow God's word to speak to you

emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. Allow it to arouse in you repentance, praise, prayer or service to others.

- Listen with submissive faith - seek to believe and put yourself under the authority of God's word. Pray for the Holy Spirit to work this gift in you.
- Listen with humility and serious self-examination – put yourself under the truth of God's examining light. As the word of God is preached examine yourself in humbleness.^{xviii}

- After the word is preached
 - Strive to retain and pray over what you have heard
 - Familiarize yourself with the truths you have heard
 - Put the sermon into action
 - Thank God for all that you receive from the sermon
 - Lean upon the Holy Spirit^{xix}

❖ Why teach the church to go through all this trouble of listening to God's word? A worthwhile example to think about is you answer a telephone call, and you realize that the caller is not looking for you and is looking for someone else in the house. Then you run to call the person. If you say there is a call for you? Often the person will respond by asking who is on the phone. There you have it, Paul is writing this letter, he is telling the Colossians that the one writing to them is Christ Jesus – their Saviour. Does this change the mood and attitude on how this letter must be received by the Colossians? How will each message be if it was received in that way by God's people?

- This means that in every true preaching that you hear, you are confronted by Christ Himself. In your response you are responding to Christ himself. Paul is writing as one who is owned by Christ Jesus. He is the channel; the crucial thing is the person behind Paul. Christ Jesus. He is the one proclaiming His message to you.
- Remember that this proclamation of Christ Jesus has one goal – your salvation. This is what the name reminds the church in Colossae of. Their Saviour, the promised one who calls His people for their salvation. You did not come to hear good advice on how to live better; you have come on business that is more serious. Christ Jesus calls to save you.

❖ The truth that Paul did not make himself an apostle, serves as a sobering reminder to so many who claim to be pastors on self-proclamation. For Paul, the call was God's will. This was not just a matter of Paul and God, now. It was Paul, God and God's church. It is God's will revealed to Paul and it was revealed to God's church through Ananias as God also communicated this to him. Paul can write this phrase because he knows that the churches can attest to this. It was

something than can be tested and attested to be true. It is still the same today that God works through his church in calling ministers, then the internal call or personal call, must be affirmed by God's church, and God has given his church the standard for doing that in His word.

- ❖ How often then do we look at each other in terms of positions in the church? Our identity is not in what position we have, it is found in this language of brotherhood. It is brotherhood that expresses who we are.

Verse 2a:

- ❖ What is important to note here, which comes out without really being said, is the words that are used. We need understand that which words we use are very important in how we talk about each other. Let me explain this by using an example, I once overheard two boys after church referring to a sister with this language: did you see that 'chick.' If these brothers were looking at their biological sister, they would not use this word.

Think of someone who believes that they come to church to hear God's word for themselves. How does this kind of thinking shape the way we see others at church?

Therefore, the first thing that must change is our words and our thinking. How we talk about one another, words we use to describe one another form how we think about each other. The first change then is that we are called to change the way we think about one another as portrayed by the words we use.

- ❖ It has been noted that one of the attractions that drew people to the church in the early church was a sense of community they had. It is noted that the 'Christian community was a powerful force. Christians helped and supported each other...Those who joined the church found a new family with strong shared convictions and values.^{xx} This is how this bond was so powerfully expressed by Justin Martyr:

"(...) we who formerly delighted in fornication, but now embrace chastity alone; we who formerly used magical arts, dedicate ourselves to the good and unbegotten God; we who valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possessions, now bring what we have into a common stock, and communicate to everyone in need; we who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live with men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies..."^{xxi}

It is based on the understanding of the words spoken by Paul, 'To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae' that the church was able to speak in this way.

- ❖ The truth that holiness has reference to God's people as to how they are separated to him is still an applicable truth today. This should shape how we see each other. The church is set apart for God as his people. Remember the first reference is not to morality, but to the uniqueness of being a part of God's people. This does not deny though that it is essential that we are to live in the reflection of this holiness. Paul is calling them 'the holy brothers' – the saints. Think each

person in church in this way. It does not matter where he comes from, what he did; seethe is now set apart in God, together with you. It is this posture that should shape how we look at one another. This posture allows the shaping of our minds, emotions and the intellectual thoughts, which are reflected in our behaviour.

- ❖ With this, the encouragement is to remain faithful. Amidst so many assaults that face Christians in terms of wrong teaching, there is a call to remind each other that we are to persevere in the truth of God's word. We should not despair, but encourage each other to faithfulness in the faith we profess.
- ❖ This is important because in the end we are brothers and sisters. We are called to a new family as God's people. It is through the gospel that the saying blood is thicker than water is made untrue. The gospel brings you and me into God's family. Remember in Matthew 12:48-49 how Jesus demonstrated this when he said to his brothers and mother, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!"
 - This has to do with how you set your priorities – that God's Family must come first
 - It has to do with how you think about helping others, and again that God's Family comes first Gal 6:10
- ❖ We also need to be reminded of the reality we live in. As much as the believers in Colossae lived in Christ. "They worked, served, kept the house, followed the business, met the neighbours, entered into their sorrows and joys, and suffered their abuse and insults when such things came – all in Christ. They carried about with them a private atmosphere, which was not of Asia but of heaven. To them Christ was the inner home, the dear invisible but real resting place..."^{xxii}
- ❖ The richness of being in Christ is partly expressed by John Piper when we said:

"Being "in Christ Jesus" is a stupendous reality. It is breath taking what it means to be in Christ - united to Christ. Bound to Christ.

If you are "in Christ" listen to what it means for you:

In Christ Jesus you were given grace before the world was created. [2 Timothy 1:9](#), "He gave us grace in Christ Jesus before the ages began."

In Christ Jesus you were chosen by God before creation. [Ephesians 1:4](#), "God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world."

In Christ Jesus you are loved by God with an inseparable love. [Romans 8:38-39](#), "I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In Christ Jesus you were redeemed and forgiven for all your sins. [Ephesians 1:7](#), "In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses."

In Christ Jesus you are justified before God and the righteousness of God in Christ is imputed to you. [2 Corinthians 5:21](#), “For our sake God made Christ to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

In Christ Jesus you have become a new creation and a son of God. [2 Corinthians 5:17](#), “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” [Galatians 3:26](#), “In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.”^{xxiii}

This is just scratching the surface of what it means to be in Christ.

Verse 2b – grace and peace from God our Father

- ❖ As we think about this wish of Paul upon the church, we realise how the life among God’s people is dependent on God. It is also as God gives His grace and peace that life can be possible among God’s people. However, this God is not far from us, He is our Father. Hence, Paul wishes what he knows lives in God’s heart. As our Father, He also wants to give us His grace and peace.
- ❖ Paul wishes for grace and peace as this letter to the Colossians will be read. This connection is beautiful, that God’s grace and peace does not work like magic. It comes to us through God’s truth. As we heed God’s word, as we live in repentance and obedience to God’s truth, God works his grace and peace within us. By pursuing true preaching, upholding God’s truth and biblical doctrine, this is how we live in the sphere of God’s grace and peace. Peace will not come through compromise, but by loving and upholding God’s truth.
- ❖ One more thing to note is that as Paul wishes this upon God’s people, he is in fact saying to the church, I wish that God’s grace and peace can rule among you. Implied in this is the truth that God’s church is the arena of this grace and peace. The coming together of God’s people is a form of witness in itself. It is the testimony to this reality, though not in a complete sense, however it there in two ways – in the existence of the church and in the life of God’s people.
 - The first aspect then is in the existence of the church. Have you dreamt of being among people like the ones you are with in this church? How do we explain this group of people who see each other as they do? None claims to be better than the other, but all are equal. This is what grace does when it rules on God’s people. Grace removes all boundaries that divide God’s people, in terms of race, economy, nationality, etc. It reminds us that we are here as a result of God’s work. Behind all these divisions, we are the same in nature, sinners in need of grace, and the church is a group of sinners who have witnessed such grace, and treat each other out of the same grace. Grace to you from God our Father
 - The second aspect is the life of God’s people. Look at this whole world, what is it struggling with? We need peace. The main challenge facing the world is that we do not know how to cope with our differences. In fact because of sin things are not the way they are supposed to be. Our differences have become burdens, there is no harmony. It is in the church, where this harmony is restored. This is what is at the heart of this word peace. It is among God’s people where true harmony must be experienced. Young and

old, more gifted and less gifted, highly intellectual and less so, rich and poor, men and women, black and white. You see, God works his peace in giving us this harmony. There is peace, there is living together. May the grace and peace from God our Father, remind you of this community which God has made it the witness of this wish. May the world come and taste the beauty of it all

Failure to live in this way is a denial of who and what we are.

- ❖ This is worthwhile to reflect on, especially in those churches where there is the tradition that at the beginning of the service with the pronouncement of the vatum and salutation these words will be spoken by the pastor upon God's people. Do you know the richness of these words in your life?

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