

Colossians Bible Study

1:1-2

Questions will be posed and space will be allowed for a written response. Make every effort to answer the questions before looking below for the answer. **The answers will be in bold print at the end of the “questions” section.**

Details:

- Colossae was about 100 miles from Ephesus (Map). Several hundred years before Paul's day, Colosse had been a leading city in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). It was located on the Lycus River and on the great east-west trade route leading from Ephesus on the Aegean Sea to the Euphrates River. By the first century A.D. Colosse was diminished to a second-rate market town, which had been surpassed long ago in power and importance by the neighboring towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis. (CSB)
- Epaphras (1:7) What gave Colosse NT importance, however, was the fact that, during Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus, Epaphras had been converted and had carried the gospel to Colosse (cf. 1:7–8; Ac 19:10). The young church that resulted then became the target of heretical attack, which led to Epaphras's visit to Paul in Rome and ultimately to the penning of the Colossian letter. (CSB)
- Colossians was probably written from Rome in A.D. 60 or 61.
- Paul wrote it from prison.

Problem:

One of the most dangerous heresies of the first two centuries of the church was Gnosticism. Its central teaching was that spirit is entirely good and matter is entirely evil. From this unbiblical dualism flowed five important errors:

1. Man's body, which is matter, is therefore evil. It is to be contrasted with God, who is wholly spirit and therefore good.
2. Salvation is the escape from the body, achieved not through faith in Christ but by special knowledge.
3. Christ's true humanity was denied in two ways: (a) Some said that Christ only seemed to have a body, and (b) others said that the divine Christ joined the man Jesus at baptism and left him before he died.
4. Since the body was considered evil, it was to be treated harshly. This led to one denying every kind of pleasure and brought about an extreme form of religious devotion.
5. Paradoxically, this dualism also led to a lack of moral discipline. The reasoning was that, since matter—and not the breaking of God's law (1Jn 3:4)—was considered evil, breaking his law was of no moral consequence.

The Gnosticism addressed in the NT was an early form of the heresy, not the intricately developed system of the second and third centuries. In addition to that seen in Colossians and in John's letters, acquaintance with early Gnosticism is reflected in 1,2 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Peter and perhaps 1 Corinthians. (CSB)

Questions will be posed and space will be allowed for a written response. Make every effort to answer the questions before looking below for the answer. **The answers will be in bold print.**

1. What are some issues with the statement in Problem 1?
2. What are some issues with the statement in Problem 2?
3. What are some issues with the statement in Problem 3?
4. What are some issues with the statement in Problem 4?
5. What are some issues with the statement in Problem 5?
6. Verses 1-2 are a salutation to this letter. The salutation was a standard part of any Greek letter in the first century A.D. It was customary to put the writer's name at the beginning of a letter for the convenience of the addressee(s), since letters were written on scrolls. Almost always Paul identifies himself as an apostle of Christ. Why was that so important?
7. Paul also names Timothy. What do we know about him and the role he played in Paul's ministry?
8. What might "brother" have meant in this text and what word or phrase might we say today?
9. With rare exception Paul greets the audience of his book with a kind approach even though many of them had problems that he would address. He does this in verse 2. Despite the heresies that threatened the Christians at Colosse, Paul still call them "holy and faithful brothers in Christ" What do Paul's words say concerning what we should think about other Christians – even those who have fallen prey to some false doctrine?
10. The addressees of this letter are said to be "in Christ." This refers to an important concept in the letters of Paul, as seen both from the frequency of "in Christ" or equivalent phrases, such as "in him" or "in whom," referring to Christ (by one count some 170 times in the thirteen letters by Paul). Paul mentions the spiritual union with Christ 13 times in Colossians. a. Why is so important?

Those who are in Christ partake of everything Christ has accomplished by his redemptive work (1 Cor 1:5, 7; Eph 1:3). In this letter, the apostle often designates one or more benefits which believers enjoy because they are in Christ (Col 1:4, 14, 28; 2:3, 10, 11, 15). b. What is the comfort in this for us?
11. "Grace and peace" are a part of Paul's greeting in each of his 13 letters. Why is that so important?

Faithful Epaphras established a tiny foothold for the kingdom of God at Colossae and nearby cities. Now this young church is threatened by false belief, which directs people away from Christ and His work to themselves. But God does not give up. He uses Paul, Timothy, and other

faithful servants to establish the truth and love of Christ in their hearts. God does not give up on us either, when we or those we love are tempted by false teachings. • O Lord, send from heaven and save me; put to shame him who tramples on me. Send out Your steadfast love and Your faithfulness! Amen. (paraphrase of Ps 57:4). (TLSB)

Some Answers to the above Questions:

1. Texts and examples follow below:

a. We are made in the image of God. The explanation to the First Article says in part: “I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them.” We are so precious to God that He sent His Son to earth to die for us.

b. This type of belief plays a part in young people who take drugs, are a part of gangs and commit murder.

2. Texts and examples follow below:

a. We are saved through Christ’s life, death and resurrection already now when we are still in our earthly body. Having faith in “knowledge” is wanting to be saved by our own works.

b. This is somewhat like Islamic extremists who say they are going to heaven after they do a suicide bombings.

3. Texts and examples follow below:

a. Portions of the Second Article say it well: “I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The Third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

b. John 1:14 states: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (NIV)

4. Texts and examples follow below:

a. First Corinthians 3:16 says: Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? (ESV)

b. Luther was into this before he discovered being saved by grace.

c. Philippine people walk in procession whipping themselves on Good Friday.

5. Texts and examples follow below:

a. Titus 2:11-12 “¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.” (ESV)

b. Genesis 39:9 “How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” (ESV)

c. Ephesians 5:3-4 “³ But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.”

d. Romans 6:23 – “The wages of sin is death.”

e. Many criminals have no consciences and feel no remorse except for being caught.

6. In almost all of the settings Paul addresses are Gentile situations. They were often new converts to Christianity and may still have been influenced by their past beliefs. Paul needed to give his message a sense of authority.

7. Timothy was one of the apostle’s most beloved co-workers. Although the son of a Gentile father and a Jewish mother, he was a devout adherent of the OT faith. A favorite co-worker of Paul. He often worked alongside Paul or was sent as his representative.

8. From the OT and Judaism, the early Christians took over the practice of addressing their co-religionists as brothers. Today we might say “fellow Christian.” The term takes on added significance in light of all believers being identified as brothers of Christ (Rom 8:29; Heb 2:11–17).

9. God has placed faith in Him in the hearts of all believers. No Christian is safe from Satan’s temptations while living here on earth. Rather than looking down on those whose Christian faith may be threatened by heresy or ignoring such threats, we need to pray that God would guard and protect all Christians against all falsehood. In a spirit of gentleness and loving concern, we will also want to discuss with them what true doctrine is, based on God’s Word.

10a. Repetition is vital for all learning to take place. The Colossians needed to learn that the heresies were leading them away from Christ.

b. Answers will vary. It is important that we are reminded from time to time of the benefits we have by being “in Christ.”

11. Grace is the undeserved gift from God that forgives our sins and make us His own dear children. Without this there can be no peace with God. God’s gift of “peace” summarizes the blessings of God’s gracious favor, protection, and light from his face, in conjunction with God placing his name on His own people.