

## **Colossians 1:1:14- A Foundation of Faith- By Amanda A. Nevin**

**Introduction:** (\* This is written in outline form)

Our sermon series this August is on the book of Colossians which is one of the 4 Prison Epistles that Paul writes while he is imprisoned in Rome. The four Prison Epistles are Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon. Each of the four letters are considered the “anatomy of the church because their subjects cover all aspects of the Christian faith.” This letter was to a community in Colossae a city which was located about 100 miles east of Ephesus in modern day Turkey. (*Show Map*) Colossae was at one time a very wealthy community whose industry consisted of wool and was more or less a door to the Orient, to the East- it was called the Gates of Phrygia. Colossae along with Laodicea, Philadelphia, Sardis, Thyatira and Pergamum were great fortress cities that were a great defense against invasions from the East. But by the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD Rome had control over much of the area, the danger from the east was no longer great and trade was an important part of the economy of the area, the exchanging of ideas, cultures, and information became a huge influence on the cities of that area. Within a century after this letter was written, a huge earthquake hit the area and while the other surrounding cities rebuilt and started over again, Colossae never recovered and eventually became an obsolete city. During the period of time in which this letter was written however the community of Colossae consisted of many Phrygians, Greek, Syrian and Jewish settlers. It was here that very diverse cultures and religions met and mingled so to speak. The religion of Colossae was “syncretistic” in nature- meaning that this church took a little philosophy and practices from the religions and culture around them. The church was influenced by a lot of the pagan traditions & other religions. The church on Colossae was mixing some of their beliefs about Christ with beliefs & practices from other religions, allowing cultural influence to inform their belief and in many ways began practicing a very “messed up” form of Christianity.

Paul is concerned then that the church in Colossae was being exposed to false teachings that were both subversive and hostile to the Christian witness. Paul is deeply concerned about a growing heresy in the church that questioned 1) the uniqueness of Christ, 2) his work on the cross to redeem and reconcile God’s creation to the Father and 3) the spiritual freedom we find in Christ. There was a lot going on in Colossae that was distracting the believers from the real truth and in a way became lies that the church was following. First the church thought that they had an exclusive hold on the Spirit of God. They felt as if they were the people who had all the knowledge and in a sense had a monopoly of all the wisdom and faith, and considered themselves better than any of the apostles (in other words they had it all figured out and didn’t need any more instructions or teachings)- Paul will warn them against this thinking. Second they taught that God did not create the universe directly but created a creature who in turn created another creature until one creature finally created the physical universe- which Paul will argue isn’t the case that Christ was with God at the beginning of creation and that God and Christ together created the universe. Paul is addressing an erroneous teaching that is spreading throughout the church, a teaching that salvation is offered through knowledge of spiritual powers and observance of religious practices, and not faith in Christ and in the work of

Christ. For Paul the over arching theme for this book is simply this Christ is all, He is all I need, he is everything and should be at the center of our lives.

Russ is going to come up now and read for us our passage this morning  
Read Chapter 1: 1-14

How many of you have ever written a love letter or had a pen pal? In the third through 5<sup>th</sup> grade I had a pen pal named Fiona from Norway. I always looked forward to receiving a letter, hearing the news of life in Norway, sharing photos and family adventures with someone across the globe. Of course this was pre-internet so learning about Fiona's life took a little more time than the instant click of a button or facebook sharing. How did you begin your letters?...

1<sup>st</sup>-

- ◆ Maybe the first time - introduce yourself.
- ◆ Paul does a similar thing.
- ◆ Greets the church w/ an introduction he has heard of them and they of him,
  - It is believed that Paul never visited Colossae himself but heard of the church through Timothy and the leader of the church Epaphras who was instructed to take the letter to the church.
- ◆ Gives foundation for his authority and leadership in the missionary movement- that is that his ministry was given to him by God himself through the working of Christ and the Holy Spirit. He needs to put forth his identity and his authority because the letter itself will call attention to the church's wayward beliefs and in order to call attention to what is going he needs to establish upfront where is authority comes from by which he is speaking

2<sup>nd</sup>-

- ◆ A greeting, or a recognition of the persons relationship,
  - perhaps my dear friend, dear so and so, maybe even a "greetings from sunny California."
- ◆ Paul's greeting is an important one
  - Addresses the people as the saints, the faithful ones at Colossae who are in Christ. These readers are located in a specific environment, shaped by religious, social and political realities which will become part of the issue later on in the letter and these are those saints- those people who are literally set apart for God's work because of the work of Christ, they are now the ones identified as Christ's own beloved ones. Why is this little statement important? It sets the tone for the rest of the letter. It is a simple reminder to the church that they are called by God and known by him. Before Paul gets too critical and corrective towards the followers he wants to remind them of who they are in Christ. We wants to assure them that they are loved by God are still his beloved children even though they have been a bit wayward at times. Paul wants to establish their id. first as he will begin to steer them in the proper direction later on in the letter.

3<sup>rd</sup>

After a greeting you get into the body of the letter

- ◆ Questions of how the person is doing?
  - What is the exciting news from your neck of the woods?
- ◆ Salutation of sorts-
  - hope all is well with your family, that life is treating you well,. If you were pen pals maybe a statement or two following up with a conversation you are in the middle of.
- ◆ Then “catch up mode” of all that you are doing and what is happening in your world.

Paul sets out his letter in a similar fashion. After these first 14 verses we will get into essentially the catch up mode.

- ◆ Paul is passionate about his faith and these faithful followers of Christ. this opening part drips with passion and love for these fellow believers in Christ. Excited to hear about what they are doing & that they are fellow believers.
- ◆ Wants to show them his care and concern for them so he reminds the church that he is praying for them
  - their ministry, their faithfulness to God
  - their faith in Christ
  - when Paul says he is praying, he is praying- it isn't a flippant “oh I will pray for you and then forget to follow through” Paul means what he is saying
  - Paul is praying for their faith to be strengthened, their hope to have its foundation in Christ, courage to go share their faith & to remain strong when outside sources, beliefs, philosophy press in
    - What if we were a church of prayer? (not saying we don't pray individually and that we all may have some sort of prayer life); but what if as a whole church prayed for
      - this community to know Christ more, to have a spiritual hunger & passion to grow in faith
      - courage for all of us to invite a friend
      - HS to inspire us to reach out in new ways to the Novato community & world beyond
      - to be strengthened in faith
      - God help our fellow brothers/sisters (whether by name or in general) to find hope when all seems to hopeless
      - our children and youth would have a strong foundation of faith & feel like part of the membership of this family, welcomed in all aspect of the life and ministry of this congregation?
    - If all took up these prayer requests even in general terms we might see our church grow spiritually, through our giving of our time, people being brought into fellowship & lives might be changed
    - Paul's prayers & his constant encouragement and instruction helped inspire a movement of the Christian faith that we are apart of today.
    - What if we had those types of prayers & that type of passion?

- First verses Paul is
  - reminding the people of their foundation of faith who is Christ
  - they have
    - heard of the hope they have through God's word- God's truth
    - They are bearing fruit and growing
      - which is done when we put our faith and trust in Christ, when we seek his will and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit
      - when we actively engage in our faith through study, worship, fellowship, mission and in this sense the giving of our time and service to God and his kingdom work
      - all of this is happening b/c they have truly comprehended the grace of God
    - How many of us truly comprehend the grace we have been given and the hope we have in Christ
  - vs. 9 – read
    - Paul hasn't stopped praying for Colossae simply b/c they have a little church up and running
    - continually prays that they may be filled with God's holy spirit, God's wisdom and understanding that God's will may be done in their midst.
    - Praying that they may lead lives worthy of the Lord, pleasing to him, & bearing fruit (which means sharing God's love with the world, bringing people to Christ so that they might experience faith first hand)
    - praying that they may be strong in faith, may be able to endure everything
      - endure hardships, falsehoods that we will discover later on they are following, endure doubt and frustration, endure the lies the culture around them is tempting them with; endure against untruths
      - trust that Christ is the one in whom we have redemption, grace and forgiveness
- ◆ First part of this letter is a reminder to the people of who they are and whose they are. It is a powerful prayer to them to remember what they have learned, to have a firm foundation of faith in Christ and what they know and it is a gentle warning of what is to come in the rest of the letter- the ways that they have strayed.
- ◆ For us today
  - great way to remind us of whose we are- Christ's beloved children
  - great example of what we should be praying for individually and as a church community
  - reminder to us that our foundation of faith is Christ, it is the Holy Scriptures, it is our faith

- reminder that our strength, our courage, our faith, our work, the grow of God's kingdom comes from our willingness to put our faith, our trust and our prayers in God. Call to action.
- May our challenge be today, tomorrow and long into the future to be a church that is deep prayer; prayer for each other, for the strengthening of our faith, for passion to be ignited for Christ, that we might see this congregation grow spiritually and with more people coming to know Christ, we might have the hearts to go out and serve, that youth may come to know Christ in a deep way and have a faith that lasts a lifetime; may this be our prayers from this day forward.