

## Colossians

**1:2.** “saints and faithful brothers.” These are not two different groups—one group of saints and another group of faithful brothers. Rather this salutation is directed at the one and same group of Christians at Colossi.

**1:3.** “we give thanks... when we pray for you.” Although there is no corresponding word for “when” in this verse, its sense comes from the present participle “praying,” *proseuchomenoi* (from #4336 προσεύχομαι). It is the temporal use of the participle, answering the question, *when?* The main action of this sentence is “we give thanks” and the present participle elaborates both the time when and manner by which thanks is given—“we give thanks when we pray.” This is because “the *present* participle is normally *contemporaneous* in time to the action of the main verb. This is especially so when it is related to a present tense main verb,” as it is here, since the verb for “we give thanks” is also in the present tense (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 625). In other words, the action of giving thanks occurs simultaneous to the action of praying. This fact is missed in translations that do not read “when we pray,” (e.g., KJV, ASV, NASB). The reading, “we give thanks to God...praying always for you,” does not necessarily communicate that the actions of giving thanks and praying are contemporaneous. Better are translations such as the REV, ESV, NIV, NET, and HCSB, which accurately translate the participle in its temporal sense by employing the word “when.”

**1:4.** “since.” This is coming from the causal sense of the participle (Cp. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 631). Although there is no actual word for “since” in the Greek text, it is implied in the use of the participle. Other translations read, “because,” or “for.” The hearing of the Colossians faith and love marks the causal grounds for Paul’s giving thanks in verse three.

“of your faith... of your love.” In the Greek these are not genitive phrases, even though they are translated with the “of” formula. Rather, the words “faith” and “love” are simply the direct objects (in the accusative case) of the verb “heard.” The Greeks were comfortable saying “We heard your faith and love,” but in English we say, “We heard *of* your faith and love.”

**1:5.** “is being stored up.” This is the present participle of *apokeimai* (#606 ἀπόκειμαι). Our hope is presently in the process of being “stored up,” “put away as safekeeping,” “reserve[d] as reward or recompense” (BDAG). This corresponds to the Lords teaching in Matthew 6:20, “store up [*thesaurizo* (#2343 θησαυρίζω)] for yourselves treasures in heaven.” Because we are continuously earning rewards, our hope is continually being stored up. The theology of most translators is that, once you die, going to heaven is our reward, and since that hope is the same for all Christians, it makes no sense to speak of storing up more hope. This is perhaps why a majority of versions read, “the hope laid up for you in heaven,” expressing a onetime action, rather than acknowledging the continual process of the storing up. But salvation is not a same-hope-for-everyone-ticket-to-heaven; rather, some are storing up for themselves a greater hope by the actions of obedience in this life, a hope to be delivered when the Lord pays back what is due for the things done in the body (2 Cor. 5:10). If Christianity were without the concept of rewards, with the equal payment of simply eternal life for all regardless of who strove to put off the flesh and who just “got in,” then we should expect this verse to have the aorist participle, reflecting a onetime salvation-only hope. But it is present, not aorist, meaning we are still

continuously in the process of storing up our hope now. This fact is in contrast to the unrepentant, whose deeds are “storing up wrath” for themselves (Rom. 2:5).

“word of truth, namely, the gospel.” The Greek reads, “the word of the truth of the gospel.” The phrase “of the gospel” is the genitive of apposition, which is when the word in the genitive is equated with the same thing to which it stands in relation to (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 95). In this case the gospel is related to the word of truth, and the word of truth *is* the gospel.

**1:6.** “in truth.” Paul says the Colossians understood the grace of God “in truth.” The meaning of this phrase is not that they “truly, really did understand” but that their knowledge was true knowledge (cp. Meyer; Lange). In other words, it is describing the qualitative character of their knowledge. The other interpretive option is to understand this phrase to mean, You know the grace of God in its *genuine character*, that is, you know it as it *truly is* (Kistemaker; NJB). The difference between the two is slight, one primarily of focus. “True knowledge” emphasizes the *knowledge* of the grace, while knowing the grace as it truly is emphasizes the character of the *grace* that is known.

**1:7.** “your.” On whose behalf was Epaphras a minister? Our text reads, “On your behalf,” that is, Epaphras serves as a minister on the behalf of the Colossians (cp. ESV; NRSV; HCSB; NAB; KJV). There is a variant, however, that reads “our” behalf, as though he were sent from Paul and company as a minister on Paul’s behalf (cp. NIV; NASB; NET; ASV). But the reading “your” is more likely. The translation “on behalf of” comes from *huper* (#5228 ὑπέρ), which means “for your sake,” “for your advantage.” Paul is saying Epaphras was a minister for the Colossians advantage, his ministry was for their sake.

**1:8.** “in spirit.” The Greek has no definite article; it has only the word for spirit, *pneuma* (#4151 πνεῦμα), in the dative case. The most likely meaning of the dative is to show the association between love and spirit: love “in connection with” the spirit. The spirit of God works within us in many ways to the end that we are loving. There is the fruit of the spirit love and God can energize our love by revelation via the spirit.

**1:9.** “through.” The Greek is *en* (#1722 ἐν), which is to be understood here in the sense of “means” or “instrument” (cp. BDAG, def. 5). Spiritual wisdom and understanding are the *means through which* the Colossians are filled with the knowledge of the will of God.

**1:10.** “clear knowledge.” Cp. Hendriksen’s translation, “clear knowledge.” The Greek is *epignosis* (#1922 ἐπίγνωσις), which is composed of the Greek word for “knowledge” with the prefix *epi* as an intensifier—*full and clear knowledge*. Luow-Nida define the term as, “To possess more or less definite information about, possibly with a degree of thoroughness or competence—to know about, to know definitely about.” The Colossians already have knowledge of God, Paul only prays that such knowledge would be ever increasing in its fullness and clarity, that they would know “definitely” about Him.

**1:11.** “glorious might.” The Greek reads, “might of his glory.” It is the attributive genitive, which is when the word in the genitive case (“glory”) acts as an adjective describing the head noun (“might”). So “might of his glory” becomes “his glorious might.” It is beneficial to translate the genitive phrase as what it means rather than to retain the reading “might of his glory,” because the English reader can easily misunderstand the phrase. Can glory have might? The phrase as it stands literally puts *glory* as the thing which we are strengthened by, rather than by God’s strength, i.e., His might.

“endurance.” This Greek word *hupomone* (#5281 ὑπομονή) is usually translated “patience.” However, the word can also have the meaning of endurance, which best fits the context here.

**1:12.** “giving thanks with joy.” The phrase “with joy” goes with “giving thanks” rather than with “patience” in verse 11. Grammatically, it could go with either, so why then is our rendering to be preferred? The answer lies in considering the parallel structure of participles beginning in verse 10. In the Greek the words “bearing fruit,” “growing,” and “being strengthened” are all participles that have their modifiers preceding them in the text: “in every good deed, bearing fruit and growing; “in all power, being strengthened,” and likewise here in verse 12, “with joy, giving thanks.” (Cp. Lenski).

“qualified.” The word for “qualified” is *hikanoō* (#2427 ἱκανόω), which the versions translate as either “qualified” or “enabled”/“made fit.” The word really means both. It points to a making sufficient and fitting out so that one is hence qualified.

“you.” There is a textual variant that reads “us” rather than “you” (cp. KJV; ASV; NASB). The word “you” is the best reading, however. It is much more likely the reading “us” arose as a scribal assimilation to match the “us” in verse 13, than for a change from “us” to “you” (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*).

“part.” The Greek word is *meris* (#3310 μερίς), which can mean a “part” or a “share.” While either translation is quite good, the word “share” usually indicates ownership in part, such as when children have to “share” a toy. In the Millennial Kingdom that is coming in the future, the earth will be divided up to those who deserve an inheritance, and each person will get a “part,” according to what they deserve. Thus, for example, “Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree” (Micah 4:4).

**1:13.** “authority.” The Greek word is *exousia* (#1849 ἐξουσία), and means “authority,” not “power” which would be *dunamis* (#1411 δύναμις) or perhaps *kratos* (#2904 κράτος). Each Christian has been bought by the blood of Jesus Christ, and now legally belongs to God. We are not our own (1 Cor. 6:19), and we have been redeemed (bought back) from sin and death, and transferred to the Kingdom of the Son (Col. 1:14). Since we are not under the authority of darkness (the Devil), he cannot legally afflict us. Nevertheless, Christians are regularly mistreated and even killed by the “power” of darkness that controls this world. The Devil is a liar and murderer, and he does not recognize God’s legal authority. However, even though we are not under the legal “authority” of darkness, because we live on earth, we are still greatly affected by the powers of evil.

**1:14.** This verse in the KJV and YLT go along with a textual variant, which adds the words “through his blood.” This phrase was most likely an interpolation from Ephesians 1:7. We believe it probably originated as a marginal note added for clarification by a scribe, which subsequently got copied into the text. If the reading with “through his blood” were original, there would be no reason for scribes to omit the phrase (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*).

“redemption.” This is the figure of speech prophetic perfect—speaking of a future event as past to emphasize the certainty of its occurrence. Although, through Christ’s atoning work we have been presently redeemed, the fullness of our redemption is yet future, as there are other verses that speak of our redemption as a future act (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 4:30). See also, *The Christian’s Hope*, pg. 239; and commentary on Ephesians 2:6 for more on the prophetic perfect.

**1:15.** “The firstborn of all creation.” This phrase refers to Christ being the firstfruits of those raised from the dead (cp. 1 Cor. 15:20).

**1:17.** “before all things.” The Greek word translated as *before* is the preposition *pro* (#4253 πρό). *Pro* can mean “before” in the sense of either space, time, or priority (see appendix on prepositions). The meaning here is that of rank or priority; Christ is *before* all things in that he holds priority of rank above everything and everyone else.

**1:18.** “*he* who is *its* beginning.” The Greek word “beginning” is *arche* (#746 ἀρχή), which has several meanings, including, “beginning, origin, or first cause.” Jesus Christ is the “beginning” of the Church, which is his Body. There are many events in the Bible that are referred to as the “beginning,” so what the word “beginning” refers to in any given verse depends on the context. Although most English versions read, “he is the beginning” (NIV), the word “the” is not in the Greek text. Some translators lean towards the translation “**the** beginning” due to their Trinitarian theology, saying that Christ was the beginning of the Church before the world began (“the beginning... goes back to creation...;” Lenski). However, there is no reason to connect “beginning” with the creation here, because the context of the verse is speaking about the Christian Church, and his being the firstborn from the dead, which happened just prior to his starting the Church on Pentecost (Acts 2). Jesus Christ is the beginning of the Church because he is its start and foundation, and his resurrection is the foundation upon which our hope rests. William Hendrickson gets it right when he writes: “By his triumphant resurrection... Christ laid the foundation for that sanctified life... This resurrection is also the beginning principle, or cause of their glorious physical resurrection” (W. Hendrickson; *New Testament Commentary*).

“*the* firstborn out from among the dead.” Jesus Christ is the first person to be raised from the dead to everlasting life. To fully understand this, it is necessary to understand that before the resurrection of Jesus Christ, no one received everlasting life (see, *Is There Death After Life* by Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit).

“out from among the dead.” The Greek reads, *ek tōn nekrōn* (ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν). Scripture teaches that when a person dies, he is dead and in the ground awaiting the resurrection, and since neither the Rapture or any of the resurrections have occurred yet, everyone who has died is still in the ground awaiting being raised. Jesus, however, was raised, so he was raised “out from among” (*ek*) “the dead *people*” (*tōn nekrōn*). For a much more complete explanation of the phrase “out from among the dead, see the commentary note on Romans 4:24.

**1:22.** “without blemish.” See note on Ephesians 1:4.

**2:2.** The last phrase of this verse is best translated, “the secret of the Christ of God,” or “the secret of God’s Christ.” See *One God & One Lord*.

For the parenthesis, see Lenski.

**2:9.** The Greek word *theotes* (#2320 θεότης) is better translated “divine nature.” See *One God & One Lord*

**2:12.** “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among the dead.”

**2:14.** “decrees.” The Greek is *dogma* (#1378 δόγμα), see note on Acts 16:4.

**2:18.** “disqualify you for the prize” (See Lightfoot, Colossians). The Christian’s career is in the contest of the stadium (*dromos*; Acts 20:24; 2 Tim. 4:7); Christ is the umpire; the dispenser of rewards (2 Tim. 4:8); Everlasting life is the victor’s wreath and prize (*brabeion*; 1 Cor. 9:24; Phil. 3:14) (Cp. Lightfoot)

**2:19.** “the Head,” a title; suggests a person.

“joints and ligaments.” The Body owes its functionality partly due to its articulation (joints), partly to the way it stays together (ligaments). The joints and ligaments join and hold together the members of the body.

**2:20.** “Since” is the “if of reality” (Lenski). The Greeks used “if” when the condition was not in doubt, in the sense of “since.” (Cp. NIV translation of Eph. 3:1; “Surely...”

“pestered by.” This is a passive verb. It is not middle as most versions translate it. The Colossians were not “submitting themselves” (middle) to regulations. They were being pressured to submit to them (passive), as we all often are (Cp. Lenski).

**3:1.** “Since” is the “if of reality” (Lenski) and see note on 2:20.

**3:5.** “and especially covetousness” (see Lightfoot; *Colossians*). The definite article before covetousness is important, and is translated “especially” here because that is its force in the context. It is not the entire list that is idolatry, but only covetousness (Lenski).

**3:6.** “upon the sons of disobedience.” This phrase is omitted in many early manuscripts, and thus left out of many versions. Its omission would cause reader to want to complete the thought, and the parallel in Eph. 5:6 is a ready source for completion, which would explain how it could have been added if the original did not have it. However, there is enough evidence for it that it is left in brackets in the UBS and NA Greek texts, and it does seem to need to be there since verse 7 has “you also.” We have left it in brackets, as the Greek committees do.

**3:8.** “slander” = blasphemy in the Greek, but in Greek culture, “blasphemy” was evil speaking against another, while today it is almost exclusively thought of as about God, making it a poor choice here.

“shameful speaking.” The Greek word is hard to define, and this verse would be a good place to argue for an expanded translation. (#148 *aischrologia*; αἰσχρολογία).

Vulgar, low, obscene, abusive, shameful, foul, abusive, etc. all fit, and the original ASV “shameful speaking” is very inclusive and appropriate. (Louw-Nida) Obscene, shameful speech involving culturally disapproved themes - vulgar speech, obscene speech, dirty talk. (BDAG) Speech of a kind that is generally considered in poor taste, *obscene speech, dirty talk*. Aristotle (EN 4, 8 [1128a]), contrasts the preference for obscenity in older drama with the more refined taste of later times and argues that *aischrologia*, obscenity, can be expected from those of servile nature but not from a cultured gentleman. *aischrologia* might properly be defined as story-telling involving such unseemly deeds as adultery or pederasty.

**3:11.** The Greeks were very proud and prejudiced, and thought of others who did not speak Greek as only saying, “bar-bar.” Hence the onomatopoeic word, “barbarian” to describe one who was not familiar with Greek language and culture, and thus “uncivilized,” no matter how highly educated or morally cultured they actually were. Thus, “barbarian” as an English translation does a disservice. “Foreigner” will usually do, but in this case, it is contrasted with “Scythian” who were considered savage and barbaric even to “uncivilized” foreigners. “The savageness of the Scythians was proverbial” (Lightfoot, *Colossians*, p. 218).

**3:12.** “clothe yourselves.” The Greek means to put on clothes, or apparel, to dress, and the middle voice indicates that we are to clothe ourselves. We have freewill, and if we are going to be like Christ by being compassionate, kind, humble, etc., we have to make a

diligent effort. We can pray all we want to for God to make us like Christ, and He will help, but we have to do a lot of work to.

**3:14.** “perfect bond.” The Greek reads literally, “bond of perfectness,” which is the figure of speech *antimereia*, in this case where a descriptive word (an adjective) is put in the nominative case as the subject of a genitive phrase for emphasis. “Bond of perfectness” puts the emphasis on “perfectness,” but it is hard for English readers to understand. See Bullinger, *Figures*.

**3:22.** “not only to win their approval when their eye is on you.” See note on Ephesians 6:6, where the same phrase is used.

**3:24.** “the reward, namely, the inheritance.” The Greek reads, “the reward of the inheritance,” which is a genitive of apposition. The NIV gets the sense of this passage, and it reads, “you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.” In this verse, the “inheritance” we receive from God for the good works we have done is called an “inheritance.” This helps explain difficult verses such as Galatians 5:21 that says that flagrant sinners will not “inherit” the kingdom of God. It is not that they are saved, but that they will have no inheritance in Paradise.

**4:5.** “making the best use of.” See note on Ephesians 5:16.

**4:13.** “deep concern.” The Greek word can either refer to mental or physical work. In this context, the mental is preferred. (Cp. Lenski; Lightfoot, *Colossians*, p. 240).

**4:16.** “read.” Read out loud. Since only a small percentage of the people could read, it was very important that letters be read to the people so they could learn the Scripture.