

# PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY AT COLOSSAE

## *Greeting*

**1** From Paul, an apostle<sup>a</sup> of Christ Jesus by God's will, and from our brother Timothy. **2**To the holy and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae.<sup>b</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father!

## *Prayer of Thanksgiving*

**3**We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whenever we pray for you. **4**We've heard about your faith in Christ Jesus, and about the love you have for all the holy ones. **5**Because there's a hope<sup>c</sup> that's stored away for you in heaven. You heard about it before, in the true message of the good news, **6**which is still with you. It's been bearing fruit and growing among you—just like it is in the whole world. It's been bearing fruit and growing ever since the day you heard, and truly recognized, the grace of God. **7**Of course, you learned it from Epaphras,<sup>d</sup> our dear fellow servant.<sup>e</sup> He's a faithful servant of Christ on your<sup>f</sup> behalf, **8**and he's told us about your love in the Spirit.

**9**That's why we also haven't stopped praying for you, from the first day we heard about you. We've been asking that you'll be full of understanding about God's will—with total wisdom and spiritual insight. **10**That way, you'll live in a way that's worthy of the Lord. You'll please him completely, doing all kinds of good

<sup>a</sup> See "Bible Words."

<sup>b</sup> Prn. *col-loss-ee*.

<sup>c</sup> Lit. "...holy ones, because of the hope." Verses 3 to 8 are one long sentence.

<sup>d</sup> Prn. *epp-a-frac*.

<sup>e</sup> Or "fellow slave."

<sup>f</sup> Many mss have "our."

things.<sup>a</sup> You'll be bearing fruit and growing in your understanding of God.  
 11 You'll be strengthened with all kinds of strength, in line with the power of his glory. And so you'll be equipped for total endurance and patience. 12 You'll be thanking the Father<sup>b</sup> in the midst of it<sup>c</sup> for equipping you<sup>d</sup> to have a part in this calling—the calling of the holy ones who live in the light. 13 The Father has saved us from the realm<sup>e</sup> of darkness, and has moved us over into the kingdom of his dear Son. 14 In him we have our purchase from captivity: the forgiveness of our sins.

*A Hymn of Praise to Christ*

15 He's the image of the God who's unseen,  
 The firstborn of the whole creation.  
 16 Because in him everything has been created:  
 In heaven and on earth,  
 What's seen and what's unseen—  
 Whether thrones, or realms,  
 Or rulers, or authorities.  
 Everything's been created *through* him and *for* him,  
 17 And he's before them all,  
 And they all hold together in him.  
 18 And he is the head of the body, the community.  
 He's the beginning,  
 The firstborn from among the dead,  
 So that he himself will be first among all,  
 19 Because God was pleased for all the fullness of the divine to dwell in Jesus  
 Christ,  
 20 And through him to reconcile all things back to God.  
 God had made peace with all beings through the blood of Jesus shed on the  
 cross<sup>f</sup>—  
 Whether earthly beings or heavenly beings.<sup>g</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Lit. "...insight, to walk worthily of the Lord into all pleasingness, in every good work." "Lord" here, as in most places in the NT, refers to Jesus.

<sup>b</sup> Some mss have "God the Father."

<sup>c</sup> Many mss leave out the words "in the midst of it" (lit. "at the same time").

<sup>d</sup> Many mss have "us."

<sup>e</sup> Or "power," or "authority."

<sup>f</sup> Lit. "through the blood of his cross."

<sup>g</sup> Lit. "whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens." Many mss have, "Through him [or, "it," i.e. the cross], whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens."

*Reconciliation to God Through Christ*

<sup>21</sup>And once *you* used to be estranged from God, enemies in your attitude, living in your evil ways. <sup>22</sup>But now you've been reconciled<sup>a</sup> by Christ's physical body, through his death. Christ's goal is to present you in front of God as people who are holy, and free from all blame and accusation. <sup>23</sup>But that depends on you staying founded and grounded in your faith. You have to refuse to be bugged<sup>b</sup> from the hope you have in the good news that you've heard. It's the good news that's been preached in all creation under heaven—and I, Paul, became its servant.

*Paul's Current Sufferings and His Calling as an Apostle*

<sup>24</sup>Now I'm celebrating<sup>c</sup> in my sufferings on your behalf. Because<sup>d</sup> in my flesh, I'm filling in what's unfinished in Christ's sufferings<sup>e</sup> on behalf of his body—in other words, the Christian community.<sup>f</sup> <sup>25</sup>I became a servant of the community in line with the divine commission<sup>g</sup> that was given to me: I was to bring God's full message to you.<sup>h</sup> <sup>26</sup>The secret that's been kept hidden from ages and generations past has now been revealed to his holy ones. <sup>27</sup>God wanted to use the holy ones to tell the Gentiles about the glorious richness of this secret.<sup>i</sup> And this is the secret: Christ in you Gentiles—the glorious hope!<sup>j</sup> <sup>28</sup>It's him that we proclaim to everyone. We counsel every person and teach every person with all our wisdom. That way we can present every person complete in Christ. <sup>29</sup>And that's what I'm working hard for. I'm striving for it, with the active power of God working strongly in me.<sup>k</sup>

**2** Now, I want you to know what a struggle I'm having on your behalf—and on behalf of the people in Laodicea,<sup>1</sup> and everybody that hasn't met me in person.<sup>a</sup> <sup>2</sup>I want their hearts to be encouraged, drawn together<sup>b</sup> in love. And I want them to be drawn together into full and total confidence<sup>c</sup> in their

<sup>a</sup> Many mss have "But now God has reconciled you."

<sup>b</sup> Lit. "not being moved."

<sup>c</sup> Or "happy."

<sup>d</sup> Lit. "And."

<sup>e</sup> Lit. "troubles" or "persecutions."

<sup>f</sup> Traditionally: "the church."

<sup>g</sup> Lit. "...the community, according to the commission of God."

<sup>h</sup> Or, more literally, "to fulfill God's word among you."

<sup>i</sup> Lit. "...holy ones, by whom God willed to make known what the riches of the glory of this secret is among the Gentiles." I think Paul is referring to his belief that God's will was to appoint apostles, i.e. missionaries or emissaries, from among the Jewish believers in Jesus, to bring the first wave of the good news to the whole Gentile world. Similarly, see Eph. 1:9-16.

<sup>j</sup> Lit. "the hope of glory." See, e.g., Hos. 1:10; Rom. 9:24-26; 15:7-12.

<sup>k</sup> Lit. "...Christ, for which I'm also working hard, striving according to his activity that's working in me in power."

<sup>1</sup> Prn. *lay-oh-dis-see-a*.

understanding—into a deep understanding of the secret of God: Christ.<sup>d</sup> <sup>3</sup>In Christ, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. <sup>4</sup>I’m saying this so that nobody will mislead you with clever arguments. <sup>5</sup>Because even if I’m not there in person,<sup>e</sup> I’m still with you in the Spirit. I’m happy to see your discipline and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

*Encouragement to Live in Christ*

<sup>6</sup>So, since you’ve taken Christ Jesus as your Lord, live in him. <sup>7</sup>Be rooted in him and built on him. And be firmly committed to the teaching that you’ve received. Be full of thankfulness.<sup>f</sup> <sup>8</sup>Make sure nobody kidnaps you using philosophy and empty lies. Their arguments will be in line with human tradition, in line with the ruling spirits<sup>g</sup> of this world, not in line with Christ. <sup>9</sup>Because in Christ the full totality<sup>h</sup> of God’s nature<sup>i</sup> resides bodily. <sup>10</sup>And you’re filled up with him—the one who’s the source of every rule and authority. <sup>11</sup>And you’ve been circumcised<sup>j</sup> in him—with a circumcision that’s not of human making<sup>k</sup>—by the removal of your fleshly body. You’ve been circumcised with Christ’s kind of circumcision. <sup>12</sup>You were buried with him in your baptism, and in baptism you rose with him, through your faith in the active power of God, who raised him from among the dead. <sup>13</sup>When you were all dead in your offenses, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he brought you<sup>l</sup> to life together with Christ. He has forgiven us all our offenses: <sup>14</sup>he has cancelled<sup>m</sup> the statement of unpaid debt that was against us and hostile to us. And he has publicly taken it away and nailed it to the cross. <sup>15</sup>In that way, he has publicly disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities, and has paraded them as defeated enemies<sup>n</sup> through Christ.<sup>o</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Lit. “who hasn’t seen my face in the flesh.” Paul never personally visited those cities.

<sup>b</sup> Or “instructed.”

<sup>c</sup> Lit. “into all wealth of certainty of understanding.”

<sup>d</sup> There are a number of variations among the mss at this place, which seem to be trying to soften this abrupt statement—e.g. “the secret of God, that is, Christ,” “the secret of God that is in Christ,” and “the secret of God the Father and of Christ.”

<sup>e</sup> Lit. “in the flesh.”

<sup>f</sup> Some mss add “in it,” or “in him.”

<sup>g</sup> Lit. “elements.” See Gal. 4:3, 9 and the nts. there.

<sup>h</sup> Lit. “all the fullness.” Paul may be arguing against certain philosophers who speculated about a long chain of “emanations” from God’s pure and distant essence of light down to the dark and dirty physical world. In such schemes Christ might be placed well down the chain of emanations. Paul is saying there is no such chain—Christ fully embodies God’s essence.

<sup>i</sup> “God’s nature”; or “divinity,” or “deity.”

<sup>j</sup> See “Bible Words” under “circumcise.”

<sup>k</sup> Lit. “not done by human hands.”

<sup>l</sup> Some mss have “us.”

<sup>m</sup> Or “erased.”

<sup>n</sup> Or “publicly humiliated them,” or “triumphed over them.”

<sup>o</sup> Or “by the cross.”

*Don't Get Drawn into Legalism*

<sup>16</sup>So don't let anybody judge you about what you eat and drink—or about a festival, or a new moon, or a Sabbath. <sup>17</sup>Those things are shadows of what's coming. But Christ is the real thing. <sup>18</sup>Don't let anybody try<sup>a</sup> to disqualify you—by supposedly being humble and worshiping the angels, giving detailed accounts of their visions.<sup>b</sup> They're puffed up for no reason by their own human mind,<sup>c</sup> <sup>19</sup>and they're not staying connected to the Head.<sup>d</sup> From him the whole body grows with God's own growth, supporting itself and drawing itself together through all its ligaments and connections.

<sup>20</sup>Haven't you died with Christ, and gotten free from the ruling spirits of the world?<sup>e</sup> How is it that you're letting yourselves be put under obligation, like people living in the world? <sup>21</sup>*“Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!”*<sup>f</sup> <sup>22</sup>These are things that get used up and disappear! These people are talking according to human rules and teachings. <sup>23</sup>Such things appear to be wise to those who want to be religious and humble and harsh to their bodies,<sup>g</sup> but they're of no particular value against overindulgence<sup>h</sup> of the flesh.

*Done with Old Ways, Alive with Christ*

**3** So, if you've been raised with Christ, search out the things above—where Christ is, seated at the right side<sup>i</sup> of God. <sup>2</sup>Think about the things above, not about earthly things. <sup>3</sup>Because you've died, and your lives are hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ appears, your<sup>j</sup> lives are going to appear too. Then you'll be revealed with him in glory.<sup>k</sup>

<sup>5</sup>So kill off the earthly parts of you: sexual immorality, filthiness, lust, evil obsessions, and greed, which is a form of idolatry. <sup>6</sup>God's wrath is coming<sup>l</sup> because of all these things. <sup>7</sup>You used to have those habits once too—when you used to live in them. <sup>8</sup>But now get rid of them all: anger, rage, nastiness, blasphemy, and insults. Keep them out of your mouth. <sup>9</sup>Don't lie to each other.

<sup>a</sup> Lit. “wanting.”

<sup>b</sup> It's not certain what's being said here. But Paul may be referring to people who asserted that it was humbler not to try to approach the “unapproachable” God, but that human beings were appointed to have the divine mediated through many layers of angelic beings. See the nt. on Col. 2:9.

<sup>c</sup> Lit. “by the mind/intellect of their flesh.”

<sup>d</sup> That is, Christ.

<sup>e</sup> Lit. “If you have died with Christ from the elements of the world.”

<sup>f</sup> He's quoting the legalistic approach.

<sup>g</sup> Lit. “which things are a matter having wisdom in would-be religiousness and humility and asceticism.”

<sup>h</sup> Lit. “satiation.” Interpreters and copyists have been unsure what this means from very early on.

<sup>i</sup> Lit. “hand.” That is the place of greatest honor and responsibility.

<sup>j</sup> Some mss have “our.”

<sup>k</sup> Or “When Christ appears, who is your life, then you'll also be revealed with him in glory.”

<sup>l</sup> Some mss add “on people who are disobedient by nature” (making this verse match Eph. 5:6).

Shed the old person, with its habits, <sup>10</sup>and put on the new person—the one that’s being totally renewed in knowledge, in line with the image of its Creator. <sup>11</sup>In that renewal process,<sup>a</sup> there’s no Greek and Jew, circumcision<sup>b</sup> and lack of circumcision, Barbarian, Scythian,<sup>c</sup> slave, or free. Christ is *all* of them, and Christ is *in* all of them!

*Positive Habits and Attitudes to Strive For*

<sup>12</sup>So, as God’s chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion and kindness. Put on humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with one another, and be gracious to one another when you have a complaint against somebody. Just as the Lord<sup>d</sup> has forgiven you, you do the same.

<sup>14</sup>And on top of all these qualities put on love, which ties them together and completes them. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ be the referee in your hearts. That peace is what you’re called to, as<sup>e</sup> one body.

And be thankful! <sup>16</sup>Let the message of Christ<sup>f</sup> live richly in you. Teach and counsel one another with all kinds of wisdom. Sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, whether in speech or in action, let it be in the name of Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

*Advice about Relationships*

<sup>18</sup>Wives, submit to your husbands’ authority, as is appropriate in the Lord. <sup>19</sup>Husbands, love your wives, and don’t be harsh with them. <sup>20</sup>Children, always obey your parents, because it pleases the Lord.<sup>g</sup> <sup>21</sup>Parents, don’t pick fights with<sup>h</sup> your children, so they don’t get discouraged. <sup>22</sup>Slaves, always obey your human masters. Don’t just serve for the sake of appearances, for human approval. Just the opposite: do it wholeheartedly, out of reverence for the Lord.<sup>i</sup> <sup>23</sup>Whatever you do, put your whole self into it<sup>j</sup>—as though you were doing it for the Lord, not for people. <sup>24</sup>Do it because you know you’re going to get your inheritance as your reward<sup>k</sup> from the Lord. Serve the Lord Christ. <sup>25</sup>Because the person who does

<sup>a</sup> “In that renewal process”: lit. “where.”

<sup>b</sup> See “Bible Words” under “circumcise.”

<sup>c</sup> Pm. *sith-ee-an*.

<sup>d</sup> Some mss have “Christ.” It means Christ in any case.

<sup>e</sup> Lit. “in.”

<sup>f</sup> Some mss have “God” or “the Lord.”

<sup>g</sup> Lit. “for this is pleasing in the Lord.”

<sup>h</sup> Lit. “don’t provoke.”

<sup>i</sup> Lit. “revering the Lord.”

<sup>j</sup> Lit. “carry it out from the soul.”

<sup>k</sup> Or “compensation,” or “pay.”

wrong is going to be paid back for what they've done wrong, no matter who they are.<sup>a</sup> <sup>4</sup>Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly. Because you know that you also have a master—in heaven.

*Be Prayerful and Spiritually Alert*

**4** <sup>2</sup>Be devoted to prayer—be alert and thankful.<sup>b</sup> <sup>3</sup>And pray for us at the same time. Pray that God will open a door for us to speak the message, the secret of Christ—which is why I'm in prison.<sup>c</sup> <sup>4</sup>Pray that I'll reveal it—that I'll express it the way I should.

<sup>5</sup>Behave wisely around those who are outside the community: make the most of each occasion.<sup>d</sup> <sup>6</sup>Your conversations should be always be courteous and stimulating. Know the best way to answer each person.<sup>e</sup>

*News from Prison, and Final Greetings*

<sup>7</sup>Tychicus,<sup>f</sup> my dear brother and faithful servant, my fellow slave in the Lord, will let you know all about my circumstances. <sup>8</sup>I've sent him to you for that exact reason: so that you'll know what's going on with us, and he can encourage your hearts. <sup>9</sup>I'm sending him with Onesimus,<sup>g</sup> my dear and faithful brother, who belongs to your community. They'll tell you about everything going on here.

<sup>10</sup>Aristarchus,<sup>h</sup> my cellmate, says hello to you. So does Mark, Barnabas's cousin. (You've received instructions about him: if he comes to you, welcome him.) <sup>11</sup>Jesus, who's known as Justus, also says hello. These three have been my only Jewish co-workers for the Reign of God. They've been a comfort to me. <sup>12</sup>Epaphras,<sup>i</sup> who belongs to your community, says hello. This servant<sup>j</sup> of Christ Jesus is always exerting himself in prayers for you. He keeps praying that you'll stand as people who are mature and totally convinced of God's will in everything. <sup>13</sup>And I'll testify this about him: he suffers a lot<sup>k</sup> for you, and for the people at Laodicea<sup>l</sup> and Hierapolis.<sup>a</sup> <sup>14</sup>Luke, my dear friend the doctor, says hello, and so does Demas.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Or "...what they've done wrong, and there's no such thing as special status."

<sup>b</sup> Lit. "keeping watch in it in thanksgiving."

<sup>c</sup> Lit. "chains."

<sup>d</sup> Lit. "redeeming the occasion."

<sup>e</sup> Lit. "...courteous, seasoned with salt, knowing how it is necessary for you to answer each one."

<sup>f</sup> Prn. *tik-ik-us*.

<sup>g</sup> Prn. *oh-ness-im-us*.

<sup>h</sup> Prn. *arr-i-stark-us*.

<sup>i</sup> Prn. *epp-a-fras*.

<sup>j</sup> Lit. "slave."

<sup>k</sup> Or "he works very hard"; lit. "he has much pain/hard work."

<sup>l</sup> Prn. *lay-oh-dis-see-a*.

<sup>15</sup>Say hello to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha<sup>c</sup> and the community that meets in her house.<sup>d</sup> <sup>16</sup>And when this letter gets read by your community, make sure it gets read by the Laodicean<sup>e</sup> community too—and you should read theirs. <sup>17</sup>And tell Archippus,<sup>f</sup> “Take care of the ministry<sup>g</sup> that you’ve received in the Lord—make sure that you finish it.”

<sup>18</sup>This hello is in my own handwriting: Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

<sup>a</sup> Prn. *higher-app-a-liss*.

<sup>b</sup> Prn. *deem-us*.

<sup>c</sup> Prn. *nim-fa*.

<sup>d</sup> Some mss have “Nymphas and...his house.” It’s not totally certain that this person was a woman.

<sup>e</sup> Prn. *lay-oh-dis-see-an*.

<sup>f</sup> Prn. *ar-kipp-us*.

<sup>g</sup> Or “See to the task.”