



# CAPITOL COMMISSION

## What We Need Most

JANUARY 19, 2010

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*2010 is well under way. How are you doing so far? I know some people who are feeling overwhelmed by sadness as they struggle to process the steady stream of painful news about the recent earthquake in Haiti. Others are personally grieving the departure of their friend, chief-of-staff Will Smith, who was suddenly called home by the Lord last week. Furthermore, in the back of our minds we are all aware that more state budget drama looms on the horizon. In the midst of such challenges, we would do well to remember that God is still on the throne, and He is loving and merciful to all who seek Him. May we look to Him now more than ever and have our eyes opened to the many blessings He surely has in store for us this year.*

*The best way to seek God is to devote ourselves to the study of His Word, the Bible. With this in mind I invite you to join us each week for our Capitol Bible Study. See below for the time and location. We are currently resuming our weekly study through the New Testament book called Paul's Letter to the Colossians.*

### INTRODUCTION

Paul's Letter to the Colossians was penned long ago in the first century A.D., yet it still has tremendous relevance for us today, as we shall see. This portion of Scripture boldly asserts that God greatly loves us and that He has tremendous blessings for us through His Son, Jesus Christ, as long as we stay focused on Him.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians in about A.D. 60-62 during his first imprisonment in Rome. At the time he was under house arrest because he refused to stop preaching publicly about Christ. Though under the constant watch of guards, he was still allowed freedom to meet with visitors and write

letters, which he did regularly (*Acts 21:27-36; 28:16, 30-31*). In addition to this letter to the Colossians, he also wrote the other so-called "prison letters" during this time, which include the New Testament epistles to the Philippians, the Ephesians, and Philemon.

Paul addressed his letter to the Christian church in the city of Colossae, which is in modern day Turkey. Colossae was located about 100 miles inland from Ephesus, which at the time was the capital city of Asia Minor. It was situated along the Lycus River, in a rich valley with green pasturelands filled with grazing sheep, with 8,000 foot Mt. Cadmus rising in the distance.

At the time of Paul's writing, Colossae was not a particularly influential city. In earlier years it had been growing and prosperous, but by the middle of the first century it had lost much of its influence to the neighboring cities of Laodicea (*Colossians 2:1; 4:13, 15, 16; Revelation 1:11; 3:14*) and Hierapolis (*Colossians 4:13*) which were each about 12 miles away. Paul's letter though was really to this whole region, as he requested that they circulate it from city to city. (*Colossians 4:16*).

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Though Colossae was not a prominent city, it was situated in an area that was an important trading crossroads, with the major highways from east to west and north to south converging there. As a result "all kinds of philosophies still came together on these roads ... and religious hucksters abounded." As such, the area "was fertile ground for religious speculations and heresies."<sup>1</sup>

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**YOU ARE INVITED TO A WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY/FELLOWSHIP HOUR  
LEGISLATORS: WEDNESDAYS @ 8:00 AM, ASSEMBLY RULES COMMITTEE ROOM  
STAFF/LOBBYISTS/OTHERS: THURSDAYS @ 12:00 NOON, CAPITOL ROOM 125**

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It was within this milieu that the first Colossian church (meeting in homes, no doubt) sprouted and struggled. The church in Colossae was not founded by Paul, but by a man named Epaphras (1:7; 4:12). Paul himself had in fact probably never even been to Colossae (2:1, *Philemon* 1:22). His heart went out to them though as he heard stories of their faith that endured amidst a steady stream of false teaching (1:3-4).<sup>2</sup>

### THE COLLOSSIAN CHALLENGE

The great challenge for the Colossian Christ-followers was to clearly distinguish truth from error, which was no small task given the variety of beliefs and the religious relativism that permeated their area. Many of them naively combined elements of pagan/folk religions and secular philosophy with Jewish tradition/mysticism and Christian doctrine.<sup>3</sup> The resulting mixture was invariably far from the pure gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul, greatly concerned for their spiritual and even eternal wellbeing, strongly confronts this syncretism and throughout his letter eloquently affirms the sufficiency of Christ. First, in Chapters One and Two, he makes some of the greatest declarations of the deity of Christ found anywhere in Scripture (1:15-16; 2:9). Then, in Chapter Two, he explains the utter incompatibility of many other belief systems (such as legalism, asceticism, traditionalism and mysticism) with the teachings of Christ. Finally, in Chapters Three and Four, he urges his readers to eagerly pursue honoring Christ in every area of their lives.

### APPLICATION FOR US

The religious culture surrounding the early Colossian Christians was in many ways similar to the environment that we in California find ourselves in today. Like the Colossians, we also regularly interact with people who prefer to concoct their own personal spiritual cocktail by picking and choosing from a vast selection of religious beliefs and philosophies. It is not difficult to find even self-proclaimed Christians who blend biblical truth with all sorts of beliefs that cannot be logically

reconciled with the teachings of the biblical authors. Those doing so may be well-intentioned but biblically illiterate and thus unaware of their syncretism. Even more concerning are those who realize what they are doing and show no remorse. Some may even boast that they have discovered a belief system better than historic Christianity in that it is deeper or less judgmental. As one author warns, even in our churches some people “are trying to harmonize and unite many different schools of thought and come up with a superior religion. Our evangelical churches are in danger of diluting the faith in their loving attempt to understand the beliefs of others. Mysticism, legalism, Eastern religions, asceticism, and man-made philosophies are secretly creeping into churches. They are not denying Christ, but are dethroning Him and robbing Him of His rightful place of preeminence.”<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, such a practice inevitably leads one away from the abundant and eternal life God promises. (John 10:10)

Like the Colossians, then, we also must see to it that no one takes us “captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ” (2:8). Then, we too can enjoy being “complete in Christ” as God has made us to be (1:28).

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**EVERYTHING THAT WE NEED MOST IN LIFE HAS ALREADY BEEN GIVEN TO US THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.**

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Above all, one thing is clear in Colossians: everything that we need most in life has already been given to us through Jesus Christ. He was not merely a historical figure, a wise teacher, or even a prophet, but was the one true and living God in human form. Through His death on a cross, He provided the only payment for sins that God will ever accept. Because He rose again, He still lives. Because He lives, He is still able to help all who look to Him, including those of us in

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Sacramento. When we call upon Him and submit to His leadership over our lives, we are saved from eternal separation from God and enjoy His practical, daily, help and abounding love now and forever. Please join me in seeking Him this week.

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, New Testament Volume 2* (Colorado Springs: Cook, 2001), 102.

<sup>2</sup> See *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992) or a concise and readable background of Colossians.

<sup>3</sup> An excellent analysis of the Colossian heresy is found in Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 46-60.

<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe, 102.