

Colossians 1:1-2

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/col/col-1/colossians-11-2/>

Paul and Timothy set the stage for the book of Colossians by establishing their authority and celebrating their recipients.

This letter, or epistle, is written by *Paul*, who identifies himself as *an apostle of Jesus Christ*. *Paul* is one of the most well known of the first century church apostles. He traveled extensively throughout Asia Minor (or Anatolia), the protrusion of the continent toward the west that forms the peninsula of modern-day Turkey.

An *apostle*, the Greek word “Apostolos,” is a *messenger* or a *delegate*. Like an ambassador. Perhaps the best definition is “a messenger that is sent,” which would certainly describe Paul and his efforts in Asia Minor.

Paul is an ambassador of *Jesus Christ*. Throughout Chapter 1, he will show what this means. He is a witness-bearer, proclaiming the gospel and espousing the Kingdom of Heaven, of which *Jesus* reigns as king.

Like all of *Paul*'s letters, he is writing to a church that is experiencing a challenge. In order to speak to that challenge, *Paul* needs to remind everyone of their shared purpose. So, *Paul* starts here by establishing his apostleship unto *Jesus Christ by the will of God* to emphasize the reason and the authority from which he writes.

Paul serves in the role of apostle *by the will of God*. *Paul* will explain later that he is imprisoned as he writes this letter to the Colossians, sharing in the suffering of *Christ* (which is the only way to truly participate in His glory; Romans 8:17b). The heart and purpose of this writing is not *Paul*'s self-seeking agenda or some other pressure, but *the will of God*. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, *Paul* says this about the *will of God*:

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality...”

(1 Thessalonians 4:3)

In each case, the word translated *will* is the same Greek word that indicates desire. God desires each of us to choose to be sanctified, but leaves it to our choice whether to do so. In *Paul*'s case, *Paul* was appointed by God to be an apostle. But it was up to him whether to fulfill that appointment. *Paul* writes about this in 1 Corinthians 9:

“For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward...”

(1 Corinthians 9:16-17a).

Clearly *Paul* is fulfilling his apostleship, and following in faithfulness, even in persecution.

Paul is not alone in his faithfulness. In fact, there is a cast of characters he will mention as co-laborers in this mission. There is no explicit mention within *Colossians*, or anywhere else, that *Paul* has been to *Colossae* and visited the church himself. Some of the people he will evoke are those likely more familiar with the city.

The first of these is *Timothy our brother*, a constant companion of *Paul*. *Timothy* was a half-Jewish, half-Greek believer from *Galatia*. *Paul* met *Timothy* on his second missionary journey:

“*Paul* came also to *Derbe* and to *Lystra*. And a disciple was there, named *Timothy*, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in *Lystra* and *Iconium*. *Paul* wanted this man to go with him.”
(Acts 16:1-3a)

Timothy joined *Paul*'s ministry and faithfully served alongside (or on behalf of) his mentor. *Timothy* was *Paul*'s disciple and his protégé. They shared a close relationship in ministry together. *Timothy* helped *Paul* write no less than six letters (2 *Corinthians*, *Philippians*, 1 and 2 *Thessalonians*, *Colossians*, and *Philemon*). Additionally, *Paul* addressed two personal letters to *Timothy* (1 *Timothy* and 2 *Timothy*), which indicate *Paul*'s close personal connection with *Timothy*.

These two, *Paul* and *Timothy*, are therefore presented as the contributing authors of this letter to the *Colossians*. *Timothy* was with *Paul* while he was a prisoner in *Rome*. They were able to continue meeting and collaborating for the Gospel's sake during *Paul*'s imprisonment. *Timothy* sometimes served to deliver messages to and from *Paul*.

Paul and *Timothy* are writing their letter to the saints and faithful brethren in *Christ* who are in *Colossae*.

Colossae is located in modern day *Turkey*, about 350 miles due south of *Istanbul*. The word *Colossae* literally means “monstrosities.” It was once one of the grandest cities in the world, but by the time *Paul* is writing this letter, *Colossae* has begun to lose some of its historical luster. In *Paul*'s era, *Colossae* was a Roman city, in what was then the Roman province of *Asia*.

While there is no affirmative historical evidence *Paul* had been to *Colossae*, his missionary journeys took him to the surrounding areas. He (and *Timothy*) wrote another book in the New Testament that was aimed at the church in *Colossae* (The Book of *Philemon*).

The text itself does not explicitly say why *Paul* is writing to *Colossae*, but the contents of the letter suggest it is in response to a report he received concerning issues among the community of believers located there. The most likely candidate for such a report is *Epaphras*, who *Paul* mentions as being a founder of the church community in *Colossae* (*Colossians* 1:7) as well as someone who is with *Paul* during his imprisonment (*Colossians* 4:18), and who sends his greetings at the end of the letter (*Colossians* 4:12).

Just as *Paul* established the authority by which he writes, referring to himself as an *apostle*, he addresses the believers in *Colossae* as *saints* (or “holy ones”) and *brethren*. He begins by

celebrating the spiritual identity of the community of believers in Colossae, making it clear they are valuable, capable, and adored. Key contributors to the Kingdom of God. To be a “saint” as the Bible uses the word in this context only requires someone to have believed and been born again (John 3:14-15). Accordingly, this letter is addressed to the community of believers in *Colossae*.

Paul further compliments the Colossian believers by this exhortation: *grace to you and peace from God our Father*. The word for *grace* in Greek, “charis,” can mean “favor,” “gratitude,” or “acceptable.” The Greek word for *peace*, “eirene,” is a synonym for “rest” or “tranquility.”

Paul is setting up the letter to the Colossians by calling out the best in them. Their holiness (*saints*) and place as important members (*brethren*) in the community of Christ is a matter of their position as members of God’s family. As Paul will point out, their righteousness is derived from having been reconciled to God through the body of Christ (Colossians 1:22). He showers them with an admonition of *grace* (favor) and a call to be at rest (*peace*). Paul further notes that they are not only *brethren* by virtue of having believed, they are also *faithful brethren* by virtue of the good choices they have made.

He is complementing them, showing that he values who they are, and that *Paul/Timothy* and the *saints* in *Colossae* are all on the same team. He wants to make it clear he does not write in anger or out of aggression. They are not antagonists, but friends. Brothers. Paul’s aim is to accentuate the already-present goodness within the believers in *Colossae*.

All of this comes not from Paul himself, but *from God our Father*. *Paul*, after all, is writing as the ambassador of Christ. Paul is Christ’s emissary. His *apostle*. The compliments are not just how Paul feels about the Colossians, but how the Lord of All sees them.

These two verses are a powerful introduction to the book of Colossians, establishing the authority of *Paul* and the intrinsic value of the *Colossae* believers, all while revering the supremacy of *Christ*. It is an explicit way to say, “we are on the same team, working for the same Master toward the same goal.” This introduction is meant to connect author and reader, binding the two together under a shared purpose.

Biblical Text

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

² To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.