



Colossians 1:1-14; Psalm 25:1-10; Luke 10:25-37

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The Apostle Paul presumably¹ wrote this letter to the church at Colossae, a small city located on the Lycus River in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), known for its production of wool and woolen goods. The city was destroyed after an earthquake.

Paul did not establish the community of Christ-believers in Colossae. Rather, they seem to have been evangelized by a man named Epaphras (1:7; see also 4:12), whom Paul also names as a fellow prisoner in Philemon 23. Paul is, therefore, removed from the Colossians' experiences, and he writes based on what Epaphras reported to him (1:8).

In the greeting (1:1–2), Paul refers to himself as “**an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God**” perhaps in anticipation of the teaching on Christ he is about to deliver. Paul writes this letter to help the Colossians to deal with some serious theological problems. He encourages the Colossians to stick with the truth of the gospel and not to fall prey to a different teaching.

Concerning such teachings, Paul writes, for example, about the possibility of the Colossians being deceived by “plausible arguments” (2:4). He warns them not to be taken “captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (2:8).

Paul opens his letter with a **prayer of gratitude** for their faith in God and for the love of the Colossians “for *all* the saints” based on the hope of the gospel

¹ This letter includes a number of words not found elsewhere in Paul's writings and some other stylistic differences as well. As a result, some modern scholars have questioned Paul's authorship.

(Col 1:4-5). The gospel is at work in their midst just as it is at work in the universal (i.e., catholic) church and producing visible fruit. (v. 6)

There is no greater reward for an apostle than the realization that all the work has not been in vain. Once Paul and his companions have learned about the progress in the faith of the Christians in Colossae they offered an enthusiastic prayer on their behalf. The apostles' prayer is a request for wisdom and understanding so that the Colossians may grow in the knowledge of the will of God. (v. 9) The apostles' aspiration for the Colossians is the blessing to "walk worthy of the Lord," to "bear fruit in every good work," to grow "strong" in the Lord's power, to "have all endurance and patience" and to joyfully thank the Lord for the gift of faith.

Paul acknowledges that the Christians of Colossae can practice the faith and bear fruit because they have based their lives on the **hope** gleaned from "the word of truth." (v. 5) He emphasizes the transformative power of the gospel in those who are willing to surrender and let the teachings of Jesus take hold of them.

Reading through the lines, the Colossians face their own spiritual challenges. Yet, Paul celebrates the grace by which they demonstrate their **faithfulness** as they navigate the potential divisions. He encourages them to endure on, grounded in the gospel of salvation they have received.

The Colossians display not optimism but pure hope.² Fr. Henri Nouwen thus explains the difference:

"While optimism makes us live as if someday soon things will go better for us, hope frees us from the need to predict the future and allows us to live in the present, with the deep trust that God will never leave us alone but will fulfill the deepest desires of our heart. When I trust deeply that today God is truly with me and holds me safe in a divine embrace, guiding every one of my steps, I can let go of my anxious need to know how tomorrow will look, or what will happen next month

² Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 8:24-25; 12:12; 15:13; 1 Peter 1:3

or next year. I can be fully where I am and pay attention to the many signs of God's love within and around me.”³

Hope is borne of trust in God, operates on trust and leads one to continue to trust, allowing for more spiritual growth.

It's that constant conviction that **God is present** that moves us. We make the presence of God manifest by the way we love and reveal genuine interest especially to those the world refuses to acknowledge and deprives of love.

Yet, we are at an **historical intersection** where we are constantly asked to be selective in our love, exclusive of those “others” who don't “belong.” In our merciless world, we are instructed even by those who profess to be Christian not to display too much empathy and compassion. Two thousand years later, just like the lawyer of today's gospel, we still attempt to justify our selfishness and challenge God's commandment: “Who is my neighbor?” (Lk 10:29)

With the invitation to consider the story of the “Good Samaritan,” Jesus does not lecture the young lawyer, nor does he give him a textbook definition for “neighbor.” Jesus pedagogically encourages him to observe the dynamics and to come up with his own conclusion. Jesus is very clear about the universal meaning of compassion and does not accept a parochial appropriation of it. The lawyer gets it!

What about you?

Let us consider the story. With whom do you identify? The busy dudes who ignore the guy in the ditch? The bitten-up victim left half dead by the roadside? The helpful foreigner, who happens to be a Samaritan, a national “threat” to Jews? The honest and trustworthy innkeeper? The bandits, who take advantage of their number and strength to overtake the unfortunate traveler? Or the bandits' friends and family who ignore or maybe benefit from the bandits' actions?

Both the priest and the Levite, who came across the stripped and injured man, didn't hurriedly extend their stride: they made the conscious decision to pass

³ Henri Nouwen, Here and Now: Living in the Spirit

him by the other side; they chose not to look at him, pretending he weren't there.

I wonder what prevented them from helping him? Were they worried about lingering too long in that area? Were they afraid of showing concern and being assaulted themselves? Were they blocked by the judgments they had of the victim, perhaps thinking that he must have somehow deserved the treatment, that he was a sinner and cursed by God, or that he didn't belong here. Was the victim irrelevant to them?

The Samaritan, on the other hand, saw a victim of violence and was moved. In his eyes, the half dead man was a human being that shouldn't be dismissed or disregarded. He was not numb to his pain and could empathize with his suffering. He didn't just see him, he had **compassion**. In Greek, the word compassion describes an intense emotion. It's a gut feeling of identification with another that you physically yearn for what the other needs. **Through compassion the other is not a burden but a neighbor.**

When we make political and economic choices, we need to ask ourselves whether we are capable of seeing our vulnerable neighbor in need: Whom are we throwing under the bus? How are we showing compassion? May God enlarge our world. Amen.