

**Colossians**  
**“A Worthy Walk”**  
**Introduction: 1:1-8**

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**“Food for sawdust”**

**I. Intro.**

**II. Vs. 1-2 God made people**

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**I. Intro.**

In a recent book by John S. Dickerson titled *“The Great Evangelical Recession”* the author offers a wake-up call for every born again believer in America. He cites **“The Barna Research Group”** that proclaims that American evangelicalism will continue to erode over the next few decades. Currently Evangelicalism is losing 2.6 million per decade which places the actual percentage of true evangelical Christians in the United States somewhere around 10%. At this rate the evangelical church is not winning enough new believers to keep up with the population growth. Extensive research by the *American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS)* shows the significant decline of religion and the rise of secularism in America. USA Today states, *“The percentage of people who call themselves in some way Christian has dropped more than 11% in a generation....everywhere, more people are exploring spiritual frontiers – or falling off the faith map completely.”* The Washington Post recently commented that, *“The only group that grew in every U.S. state since the 2001 survey, was people saying they had ‘no’ religion.”* Another study revealed that the *“Biblical Worldview”* of Americans finding that among *“born-again Christians”* only 19% had such an outlook on life and those from the ages of 18 to 23 is, *“less than one-half of one percent.”* The obvious

question is: “*What do we do about this?*” I believe that Paul’s letter to the Colossians offers the answer as Paul addresses the secular influence of the world among this church. His antidote is to offer this church the superiority of Jesus.

The story is told of a Roman colony in Northern Africa that was going through a severe famine during the reign of Caesar Nero. The starving people looked out upon the Mediterranean Sea and saw Roman ships on the horizon and rejoiced saying, “*Caesar has sent us ships.*” When the ships made it to port instead of grain they were full of sawdust to lie on the floor of the circuses. ***The people were longing for food and got sawdust; they craved substance and got a circus!*** That is what Paul faced in the church at Colossi as the folks longed for the Bread of life and had been only receiving the sawdust of false teaching, they craved the substance of Christ but the church had become a circus!

## **II. Vs. 1-2 God made people**

Vs. 1 Vs. 1 Right at the introduction by Paul we gain an important Christian principal: “*A person’s worth and value is not what they have made of themselves, but what God has made of them.*” Furthermore Christian authority and office is also completely different than what the world has as Paul uses a familial term to distinguish a person’s position, “brother” as that is what he calls Timothy! Timothy was not described by what he did but by the way he related to others. Family is what comes before talents and gifting a truth the modern church would do well to remember!

Vs.2 The letter is addressed to the “*brethren in Christ in Colossi*”; Colossi being the location geographically in Christ being their location spiritually. *Every Christian is a citizen of two worlds*: The earthly location and the heavenly location and the question is which one is going to influence the other. In this life we may move from one earthly location to another but God forbid that we ever move from our heavenly location of being “in Christ”. The church was probably about five years old when Paul wrote this letter and was located in what we now call Turkey, in the Roman province of Asia Minor, about one hundred miles south and east of Ephesus. Near the city of Colossae were two other cities, Laodicea and Hierapolis, located about ten miles apart on the Lycus River. The church at Colossae was the smallest and the least important. But this church at Colossae became the founder of other churches which started up in the nearby cities. This letter also is connected closely with the letter to Philemon, who was a businessman friend of Paul and a citizen of Laodicea. It seems as though Epaphras was the person responsible for bringing Jesus to this little town and based upon chapter 4 verses 12 may have been a native of this community. He also brought the gospel to neighboring larger cities of Hierapolis and the more familiar Laodicea all a part of the Lycus Valley. Epaphras is believed to have been a part of the group that heard the gospel during the 3 years Paul was in Ephesus as Paul taught daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus as all of Asia heard the Word of the Lord.

To Paul, “***Every person who is in Christ is a Saint but not every one of those may be a faithful.***” To these believers Paul offers the common greeting of grace and peace but places the common greeting in the ample supply of “*God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*” People everywhere are in need of grace and peace but the problem is

that most are looking for grace and peace outside of the only supplier God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

### III. 3-8 Four stages of the Christian life

Vs. 3-5a There are three words that are crucial here: **faith, hope, and love**. Love is what the world needs but according to this love comes from faith. These words mark what we could well call the qualities of authentic Christians. The important thing to notice is that hope produces faith, and faith in turn grows into love. **Hope is the root, faith is the plant, and love is the fruit**. What the Greek text actually says is, “*hope is available to you in the heavens*”---**plural**. This term is a reference not to heaven after death, but to the invisible spiritual kingdom that surrounds us on all sides right now. Paul also calls this gospel “*the word of truth*.” Dorothy Sayers, the Christian philosopher, said, “*The test of any religion is not whether it pleases us or is comfortable, but whether it is true.*” **Does it do what it says it will do?** That is the test. Paul traces the four stages of the Colossians:

- a. Vs. 5b-7 **Listeners**: We are told that these Colossians “***heard***” the word of truth of the gospel. Apparently Epaphras couldn’t wait to go back home and tell his family and friends about Jesus. Furthermore Paul outlines four things that the Colossians heard about the message:
  1. Vs. 4 **It centered upon a person – Jesus Christ**: The message wasn’t a philosophy, or religion. The message was on the person and works of Jesus the Son of God! You can’t remove Jesus from Church and still have Christianity, as the message is all about a relationship with Jesus!

2. Vs. 5 **It was the “Word of truth”**: The message they heard was “truth” that came from God and therefore could be trusted. No amount of lies can ever take away the truth. Everybody has faith in something but your faith is only as solid as the object it trusts. If your faith is in your education, money, religion it is only as good as that. But if it is in Jesus and the Word of truth that it is upon the Rock who calmed the storms, spoke and creation sprang into existence.
  3. Vs. 6a **It was for the whole world**: It is the one message that is suitable to every person, everywhere. The gospel can bear fruit in any climate, upon any soil, any time of season. Sometimes it will only one plant other times a forest but it can produce fruit in any heart that will believe.
  4. Vs. 6b **It was the message of grace**: The word they heard was God’s favor shown to those who didn’t deserve it and could never earn it or repay it. God is willing and able to save all who trust in Him.
- b. Vs. 4 **Believers**: It is possible to hear and not believe as many hear the truth but not all believe. But those believed did so not by having faith in their faith but rather by having faith in Christ. Just believing has never saved anyone but just believing Jesus has saved everyone!
  - c. Vs. 7 **Learners**: The word translated learned is the Greek word “disciple” and it reveals that believing in Jesus is only the beginning. We must never forget that even after we have trusted in Jesus that we need to continue to learn from Him day by day. The great commission isn’t just about decisions for Christ it’s about making disciples for Christ. Epaphras was faithful inasmuch that he didn’t just

win them for Christ he continued to teach them about Christ. The word disciple is found 260 times in the Gospels and Acts and in this time meant more than just listening it meant who lived with the teacher and learned by listening, looking and living! The closest we have to this today would be an apprenticeship.

- d. Vs. 8 **Doers**: Finally Paul declares that many of these Colossians had become doers of the Word as Epaphras had told Paul about their love. That is the cycle of life as we go from a hearer to a doer, from being sown to a sower.

At Colossi a small community of people experienced hope and that caught the attention of others who shared the reason for their new found hope. That's God's favorite way of evangelism. God chooses to use people who have been impacted by Christ to touch lives of those who are need of that same impact. That is how the gospel spread throughout the Roman province of Asia, and hundreds of churches came into being and that is how God will reach the Bitterroot Valley and make it the Better Root Valley!