

**Colossians 1**  
**The Image of God**

**1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God and Timothy our brother,**

Paul introduces himself as an apostle (a sent one) of Jesus Christ, not as being self- or people- appointed, but as being appointed by the will and action of God. This is a reference to his Damascus road experience. Apostleship was the highest calling in the early (or any) church. The apostolic ministry founded the church and was the foundation of the church's authority. Paul's apostolicity was challenged (1Cor 4:9;9:5;12:28;15:9; 2Cor 11:5;12:11; Gal 1:17) yet he always stood on the objective basis of God's action and call on his life, not on his subjective convictions about himself.

**1:2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colossae: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

This is a standard Christian greeting: grace and peace. Paul has a daily concern for the churches (2Cor 11:28). The Christian life is impossible without the grace of God and it manifests itself in the peace of God. These are signs of the church of God: grace and peace.

**1:3-4 We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ praying always for you since we heard of your faith in Jesus Christ and your love for all the saints;**

Paul is always praying for the believers and rejoicing in their faith in Christ and their love for the brethren. These are two more signs of the church (now grace, peace, faith, love).

**1:5 because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel,**

The reason for the faith and the love is the hope that is laid up for the believer in heaven which is revealed in the truth of the gospel. The Christian life is a provision of God which is complete and into which we walk by faith. The gospel asserts the truth of the heart of God. Here are two more signs of the church, namely hope and truth. So now we have six signs of the church: grace, peace, faith, love, hope and truth. Remember the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1Tim 3:15) where, through the gospel, the truth should always be honoured.

**1:6 which has come to you, as it has to the entire world and is bearing fruit and growing as it did in you from the day you first heard and knew the grace of God in truth [as a true experience];**

To Paul the gospel is spreading throughout the world, both growing and bearing fruit. Paul says that the gospel grows. In Acts it says that the Word of God grows (Acts 6:7;12:24;19:20). This may be interpreted as the number of believers growing but the text actually says that the Word of God grew. The gospel and the Word grow in the believer, from seed to plant to fruit and they produce a harvest. The seed is the Word of God (Lk 8:11) or, the Word of God is a seed which grows producing a harvest. May our ploughed up lives be planted with the Seed of the Word of God.

**1:7-8 as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the spirit.**

Epaphras is a fellow slave in the service of Jesus Christ who faithfully relates to Paul their love in the Spirit. One of the signs of the church is the devoted love between Christians. Jesus said that people would know that we are His disciples by the way we loved each other (John 13:35). Do not all people in mutually sharing groups love one another? The Christ-love of the Christian community is unique and it is a sign of the genuine church.

**1:9 For this reason we also, since the day we first heard of it, do not cease to pray for you and to ask that you be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;**

Paul's desire for the saints is that they be filled with the knowledge of the Will of God, that they be soaked in God purpose. God has a Will for His creation and He will bring His creation to His conclusion. We need to be part of that purpose. That is, we do not embrace self-imposed purpose but God-imposed purpose. I need to know what God wants, not what I want. Unless it is godly, what I want will be a snare and a deception. The single most important thing in the universe is the Will of God. To know the Will of God is not easy or casual information but very costly and character forming. To know the Will of God is active information which automatically involves our will also. To know God's Will is not just one alternative amongst other possibilities. God is not just another option. To know God's Will is to be changed by it. This is costly life-changing knowledge. The Will (Word) of God is a force that always accomplishes the reason for which it was sent (Is 55:11). Therefore we need all available wisdom and spirit understanding to grasp, correctly, this supernatural power in our life. People can twist the scriptures (and their knowledge of the will of God) to their own destruction (2Pet 3:16). The Word (Will) of God has power to destroy as well as to create.

**1:10 that you may walk in a way that is worthy of the Lord, always pleasing [to Him], bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God;**

Our Christian walk (conversation) should always give recognition to and honour for God. We should always seek to please God or, more generally, to have a pleasing (rather than offending/confronting) way of being. Christians are into good works. Good works are not for salvation but for honouring God and for promoting His Kingdom. Good works also lay up treasure in heaven for those that do them (Mtt 6:19-21, Eph 2:10, 1Tim 2:10, 1Tim 6:18, Titus 2:7,14; Titus 3:14, Heb 10:24, James 3:13, 1Pet 2:12).

**1:11 empowered with every ability according to the might of His glory for all endurance and long suffering with joy;**

As we grow in every good work we are enabled/ released into every ability, not according to our idea of ability but according to God's idea as it is conceived in glory. In this way we are prepared to endure and suffer at length with an underlying joy, not an increasing misery.

**1:12 giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you for the share of the inheritance of the saints in the light.**

God the Father is the One who has made it possible for the believers to receive an inheritance in Christ. There is something laid up for us in Christ (Acts 20:32, 26:18, Eph 1:11, 14, 18) that is incorruptible, undefiled, does not fade away and is reserved in heaven for the believer (1Pet 1:4). This is a profound spiritual blessing. It is our inheritance.

**1:13 he has rescued us from the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son.**

God has moved us from the realm and control of darkness into the realm and responsibility of light. In darkness we cannot see where to go. If we move we are really being moved, because we cannot see what to do. In the light we can see what to do and we can act under our own control and be responsible for our own movements.

**1:14 in whom [Christ] we have redemption [through His blood], the forgiveness of sins.**

The basic ability (freedom) of the Christian is to be free from the power of sin. This is the colossal redemption obtained for us at Calvary by the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ. People claim many freedoms but the freedom in which we walk is the freedom to be free from the power of sin. What freedom do you seek most of all? To be free to love, free to work, free to choose, free to grow, free to travel, free to relax, free to worship? To the Christian sin is the deepest bondage and therefore, its defeat is the greatest liberation.

**1:15 [Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation,**

In Judaism there is no image of God (graven image Ex 20:4). Even the name of God (YHWH) is not fully written. In some Jewish writing to-day God is written G-d. This can be taken to an extreme. Making God the opposite of everything we can understand (immortal, invisible, eternal, incomprehensible and ineffable) pushes God away. Whereas making God comprehensible brings God near, at least to our understanding. Paul explains that God is fully known in Jesus Christ (Col 2:9). All that we can understand about God can be known in Jesus Christ. We can invent other ideas about God but these need not be correct. We need revelation not philosophy (Col 2:8). 'Firstborn' means the first of a new creation. Jesus is not a creature: there was not a time when He was not. But He represents the new resurrected humanity.

**1:16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities (rulers) or powers (authorities). All things were created through Him and for Him.**

Jesus Christ is the agent of creation. He is the one through whom all things were created. The Father is the creator. The Son is the means of creation. This means that He can also judge it, because He knows the creation. Jesus thoroughly knew human nature. All things are created through Him and for Him but not by Him as Creator.

**1:17 He is before all things and in Him all things consist [hold together].**

Jesus Christ has total pre-eminence. He is not only above all things (Eph 1:21) He is before all things. Everything coheres in Christ as an intelligible whole. He is the 'Logos' (John 1:1), the rational principle of the universe.

**1:18 He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead that in all things He might have the pre-eminence [first place].**

Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. Once again we see Him as the first of a new creation: the firstborn from the dead.

**1:19-20 For in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven having made peace, through Him, by the blood of His cross.**

Everything [desirable] is in Jesus Christ. He has reconciled everything to Himself. The power of the Cross is to destroy the marks of sin and hence remove the enmity and hostility between warring ideas and allegiances (Jews and Gentiles Eph 2:11-18).

**1:21-22 And you who were once alienated and enemies in the mind because of evil works, He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death to present you holy and blameless and without reproach before Him.**

Paul is profoundly aware of the natural hostility to the grace of God, which he himself experienced (1Tim 1:13). 'For the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him. Nor can he know them for they are spiritually

discerned' (1Cor 2:14). Yet Jesus Christ has placed us in that blameless position before Him whereby the bitter become sweet and the alienated become acceptable.

**1:23 If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.**

The benefits remain if only we remain in faith. The power of the gospel has to take root in our lives as a hope in which we are established. It is character that produces the hope that we hear in the gospel (Rom 5:4). This is not fantasy but hope built out of our character.

**1:24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you and I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of His body which is the church of which I became a minister according to the stewardship [responsibility] from God which was given to me for you to fulfil the word of God**

Paul's responsibility from God was to fill up the measure of God's Word which becomes a ministry in the church. Paul's involvement in ministry leads to suffering which he regards as completing the sufferings of Christ on the Cross. Paul cannot add to the atonement of the Cross but he can enter into the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ, and so can we.

**1:26-29 The mystery which has been hidden for ages and from generations but has now been revealed to His saints. To them God desired to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we announce [preach] warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man complete [mature] in Christ. For this I toil and strive with all the energy that He powerfully works within me.** Key words: mystery, revelation, riches, glory, hope, wisdom, maturity, toil, energy, power, work = ability.