

# Bible Studies for Life: April 28

*Growing in Christ • Colossians 1:9-14, 21-29*

*By Carl M. White*



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### **What was the problem?**

Biblical scholars love to debate the exact nature of the heresy at Colossae, but no one knows for certain what it was. It seems clear that it was a human tradition, it was elementary, and it was non-Christian.

Colossians uses a very different vocabulary than the other writings of Paul. It has 34 words that are used nowhere else in the New Testament, and 64 words which occur less than five times. Eighty three percent of these unique words are found from 1:9 to 3:17, which is the heart of the letter. Could it be that Paul was using the vocabulary of the heretics to counter their own arguments?

Most likely the heresy was an attack undermining the sufficiency of Christ. Thus, the main teaching of Colossians is the sufficiency of Christ. (See The New American Commentary, Volume 32, pages 171-183, for a more detailed discussion.)

### **Paul's prayer for the Christians at Colassae**

His prayer for them begins with his hearing about them. In the previous verses (4-7) he mentions four times how he heard or learned about them. Hearing of them prompted his prayer for them. This is why we share prayer request!

His prayer is without ceasing, meaning he is very attuned to them and their needs. His prayer is specific, that they be filled by the Holy Spirit with a particular knowledge – God's will for them. (vs 9)

The will of God is first and foremost a relationship by faith through Jesus Christ. This is not knowledge you gain by reading a book or listening to a lecture. This is a knowledge that comes from God, that requires spiritual wisdom and understanding. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, reading, listening, and hearing leads to faith. (Romans 10:17)

With that faith relationship we can individually and collectively experience seven distinct realities.

1. Live worthy of him. (vs 10)
2. Please him in every way. (vs 10)
3. Bear the fruit of good works. (vs 10)
4. Grow in knowledge of God. (vs 10)
5. Gain strength and power through his might. (vs 11)
6. Attain greater patience and perseverance. (vs 11)
7. Achieve an attitude of joyous thanksgiving to the Father. (vs 12)

Notice that these realities enjoy a close similarity to the fruit of the Spirit given by Paul in Galatians 5:22-23. When we have found redemption, the forgiveness of our sins, we began to reflect the character of Christ, and it is harder to be misled.

In a sense, Paul is describing for us the work of the church. In the common bond of spiritual fellowship, encouragement can be found to avoid the false teachings of the world and culture around us, helping us stay true to the Gospel.

We need the church!

## **The sufficiency of Christ**

If indeed the heresy was denying the sufficiency of Christ for our salvation, then it is important that we understand what Christ did for us.

Our previous status was one of alienation from God, even hostility toward the things of God. (vs 21) We are reconciled (made right) with God but not in the way many suppose. Sadly, many people, even in the church, have the idea that they can be good enough to earn God's favor, but we can't.

A family ordered pizza. The pizza arrived while mom was in the bathroom. She told her son to get the money and the \$4-off coupon off the kitchen counter and pay the delivery boy.

When she came out the boy was sitting on the couch eating pizza. "Did you pay the delivery boy?" she asked.

"Yes ma'am, but I didn't need the coupon. You had enough money!"

Well, you don't have enough righteousness. It requires Christ Jesus' bodily death on the cross. His righteousness comes to count before the Father as yours. In Christ you are presented holy and blameless. (vs 22-23)

This is the mystery we must never shift from and never cease to proclaim. This is the great mystery of the ages; Christ in us, our only sufficient hope for eternal life. (vs 27)

*White is a member of Pineview Church, Clinton.*