

February 2009



Dear Friend:

Now more than ever our political leaders need to hear and embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, I'm pleased to report an exciting development in the life of Capitol Ministries.

After 12 years of ministry among California's political leaders, Danielle and I are transitioning out of ministry in the California Capitol to focus on the many new and expanded ministry opportunities the Lord is providing, including the future launch of a ministry in Washington, D.C.

To this end, we are now focusing our energies on three primary objectives:

- Developing relationships with key senators and congressmen in Washington, D.C., relative to starting a future ministry there
- Recruiting, training and launching new ministries, while encouraging and bolstering existing ones
- Seeking the necessary resourcing for ministry expansion to all 50 states, Washington, D.C. and the world

We are grateful that God has raised up Frank Erb to take my place in the California Capitol. Frank is a native Californian and a graduate of Talbot Theological Seminary. A former pastor of a church in Northern California, he is a shepherd, an expositor and disciple-maker. (Enclosed is a study Frank recently taught in the Capitol; please see www.capmin.org for more.)

We thank God for your partnership in this important work. Please be praying for Frank and his wife Valerie as well as the rest of our ministry team as we strive to proclaim Christ to every political leader in America and around the world.

Warmly,

Ralph Drollinger
President and Founder

Enclosures

"I will also speak of
your testimonies
before kings, and shall
not be ashamed."

-PSALM 119:46-

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Everything We Need in the Capitol

TO: **LEGISLATORS, STAFF, OTHERS**

FROM: **FRANK ERB**

DATE: **JANUARY 14, 2009**

As the new California state director for Capitol Ministries, I can't help but notice some of the "God talk" that has been floating around inside the Capitol lately. Governor Schwarzenegger recently warned that we could be headed for "financial Armageddon,"¹ and Armageddon, is, of course, a biblical term.² Then, last week, Senate President pro Tem Darrell Steinberg argued that funding for a particular state program should not be cut because it supports people who are "doing God's work."³ I may be reaching, but this sort of talk gives me a glimmer of hope that the present financial crisis and its accompanying frustrations might prompt more of our political leaders to actually look up for help. I hope so, because I believe that if they do, God will respond and may even graciously grant them and their associates the wisdom, integrity, and unity needed to remedy our fiscal challenges.

With this in mind, I would like to invite you to join me as we begin a new weekly study through the Bible book known as Paul's Letter to the Colossians. This ancient letter was penned way back in the first century, and yet as we study it carefully, we see that it still has tremendous relevance for us today. **In short, this portion of Scripture boldly asserts that God does indeed want to help us, and in fact has already given us everything we need through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.**

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF COLOSSIANS

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians in about A.D. 60-62 during his first imprisonment in Rome. At the time Paul was under house arrest because he refused to stop preaching publicly about Christ. Though under the constant watch of guards, he was still allowed freedom to meet with visitors and write letters, which he did regularly (*Acts 21:27-36; 28:16, 30-31*). In addition to this letter to the Colossians, he also wrote the other so-called "prison letters" during this time, which include the epistles to the Philippians, the Ephesians, and Philemon.

Paul addressed his letter to the Christian church in the city of Colossae, which is in modern day Turkey. Colossae was located about 100 miles inland from Ephesus, which at the time was the capital city of Asia Minor. It was situated along

the Lycus River, in a rich valley with green pasturelands filled with grazing sheep, with 8,000 foot Mt. Cadmus rising in the distance.

At the time of Paul's writing, Colossae was not a particularly influential city. In earlier years it had been growing and prosperous, but by the middle of the first century, it had lost much of its influence to the neighboring cities of Laodocia (*Colossians 2:1; 4:13, 15, 16; Revelation 1:11; 3:14*) and Hierapolis (*Colossians 4:13*) which were each about 12 miles away.

GOD DOES INDEED WANT TO HELP US, AND IN FACT HAS ALREADY GIVEN US EVERYTHING WE NEED THROUGH OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST.

Though Colossae was not a prominent city, it was situated in an area that was an important trading crossroads, with the major highways from east to west and north to south converging there. As a result "all kinds of philosophies still came together on these roads ... and religious hucksters abounded." As such, the area "was fertile ground for religious speculations and heresies."⁴

It was within this religious milieu that the first Colossian church sprouted and struggled. The church in Colossae was not founded by Paul, but by a man named Epaphras (*1:7; 4:12*). Paul himself had in fact apparently never even been to Colossae (*2:1, Philemon 1:22*). His heart went out to them though as he heard stories of their faith that survived amidst a steady stream of false teaching (*1:3-4*).

SUMMARY OF COLOSSIANS

The challenge for the Colossian believers was to clearly distinguish truth from error, which was no small task given the variety of beliefs and the religious relativism that had infiltrated their region. Many of them ended up combining elements of pagan religions and secular philosophy (especially

All in the Capitol community are invited to participate in our weekly Bible study.

LEGISLATORS' BIBLE STUDY:

WEDNESDAY MORNINGS AT 8:00 AM, ROOM 125

STAFF AND LOBBYIST BIBLE STUDY:

WEDNESDAYS, 12:00 NOON, ROOM 125





Everything We Need in the Capitol

early forms of gnosticism) with Jewish tradition and Christian doctrine. The resulting mixture was invariably far from the pure gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul, greatly concerned for their spiritual wellbeing, strongly confronts this syncretism and throughout his letter eloquently affirms the sufficiency of Christ. First, in Chapters One and Two, he makes some of the greatest declarations of the deity of Christ found anywhere in Scripture (1:15-16; 2:9). Then, in Chapter Two, he explains the utter incompatibility of many other belief systems (such as legalism, asceticism, traditionalism and mysticism) with the teachings of Christ. Finally, in Chapters Three and Four, he urges his readers to eagerly pursue honoring Christ through their relationships, their work, and in every other area of their lives.

APPLICATION FOR US TODAY

The religious culture surrounding the early Colossian Christians bore frightening similarities to the environment that we in California, including in the Capitol, find ourselves in today. Like the Colossians we also live in a time and place where many people like to concoct their own personal spiritual cocktails by picking and choosing from a vast assortment of diverse religious beliefs and philosophies. It is common to meet people who identify themselves as Christ-followers, but upon closer scrutiny one often finds that they have replaced foundational biblical doctrine with all sorts of philosophies that cannot be reconciled with the teachings of the historical Jesus or the inspired biblical authors. Moreover, these people may have no misgivings whatsoever about this syncretism, since they have already demoted Christ to the ranks of but one wise teacher among many. They may even boast that that they have discovered a faith that is superior to historic Christianity in that it is deeper or less judgmental. As one author warns, even in our churches some people *“are trying to harmonize and unite many different schools of thought and come up with a superior religion. Our evangelical churches are in danger of diluting the faith in their loving attempt to understand the beliefs of others. Mysticism, legalism, Eastern religions, asceticism, and man-made philosophies are secretly creeping into churches. They are not denying Christ, but are dethroning Him and robbing Him of His rightful place of preeminence.”*⁵ Unfortunately, such a practice inexorably leads one away from the truth of God and the abundant, eternal life He promises.

Like the Colossians, then, we also must see to it that no one takes us *“captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ”* (2:8). Then, we too can enjoy being *“complete in Christ”* as God has made us to be (1:28).

JESUS IS NOT A DISTANT HISTORICAL FIGURE, BUT A LIVING LORD WHO IS EAGER TO HELP THOSE WHO SEEK HIM, EVEN THOSE OF US IN SACRAMENTO.

Above all, one thing is clear in Colossians: we may be tempted to think we need this or that, but in fact everything that we really need has already been given to us through Christ. Jesus was not merely a wise teacher, or even a prophet, but was the one true and living God in human form. Through His death on a cross, He provided the only payment for sins that God will ever accept. Because He rose again, He still lives. As such, He is still able to help all who look to Him today. When we call upon Him and submit to His leadership over our lives, we are saved from eternal separation from God and enjoy His practical help and amazing love each day and forever. Jesus is not a distant historical figure, but a living Lord Who is eager to help those who seek Him, even those of us in Sacramento.

I INVITE YOU TO JOIN ME AS WE CONTINUE OUR STUDY THROUGH THE INSIGHTFUL BOOK OF COLOSSIANS, EITHER THROUGH THESE WEEKLY NOTES OR BY JOINING ME AT THE BIBLE STUDY HELD EACH WEDNESDAY INSIDE THE STATE CAPITOL.

¹ Capitol Press Conference, 12/10/08.

² Revelation 16:16

³ *Sacramento Bee* Capitol Alert, 1/8/09, “Steinberg talks budget, ‘God’s work’ and ghosts”

⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, New Testament Volume 2* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications, 2001), 102.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.