

## Paul's Letter to the Colossians Study

### Bible Study Session 01

#### Colossians 1:1-2: Topic 1.0

Study By  
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#### Greek NT

1.1 Παῦλος ἀπόστολος  
Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ  
θελήματος θεοῦ καὶ  
Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφός

2 τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαίς  
ἀγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς  
ἀδελφοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ·

χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη  
ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν.

#### Gute Nachricht Bibel

1 1 Paulus, Apostel von  
Jesus Christus nach dem  
Willen Gottes, und der  
Bruder Timotheus schrei-  
ben diesen Brief.

2 Er richtet sich an alle  
in Kolossä, die Gott für  
sich ausgesondert hat, die  
Brüder und Schwestern,  
die durch Christus zum  
Glauben an Gott gekom-  
men sind.

Gnade und Frieden sei  
mit euch von Gott, unser-  
em Vater!

#### NRSV

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

2 To the saints and  
faithful brothers and sis-  
ters in Christ in Colos-  
sae:

Grace to you and  
peace from God our Fa-  
ther.

#### NLT

1 This letter is from  
Paul, chosen by God to  
be an apostle of Christ  
Jesus, and from our  
brother Timothy.

2 It is written to God's  
holy people in the city of  
Colosse, who are faithful  
brothers and sisters in  
Christ.

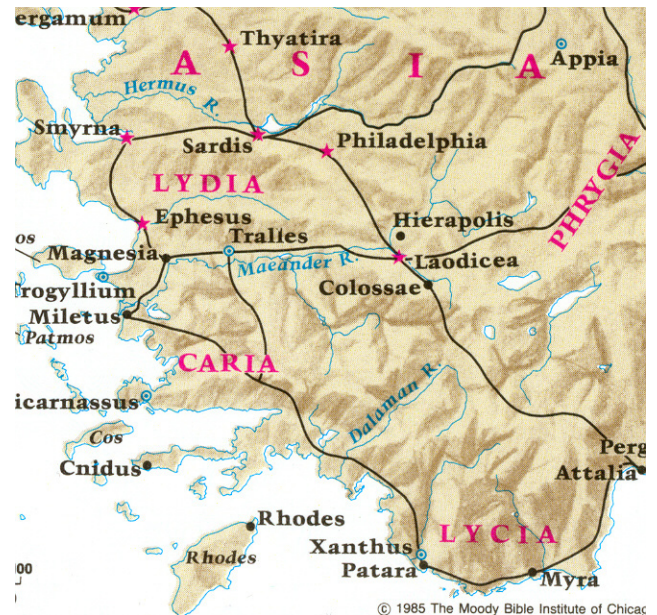
May God our Fa-  
ther give you grace and  
peace.

### The Study of the Text:<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

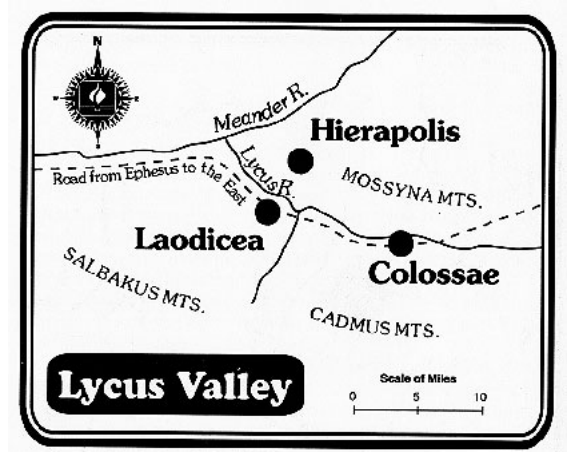
Paul's Letter to the Colossians is one of the so-called Prison Letters because the document was written while the apostle was under imprisonment by the Roman authorities. The exact time and location of that imprisonment for this particular letter is a matter of discussion and debate among modern scholars. The history of the city during the middle of the first Christian century raises important issues for dating etc. of the letter. This letter was written to a church that the apostle had not visited prior to writing this letter. Out of this comes the question about the origins of the Christian community in Colossae. From an analysis of the contents one becomes aware that false teachers were present in the Christian community, but exactly who were they and what were they teaching? One can only surmise a profile from the data provided inside the letter, and this doesn't fit the profiles of the false teachers present in other communities of faith elsewhere in the Pauline circle of churches. The circumstantial nature of Paul's letters suggests that the contents of the letter were shaped by the issues present at Colossae. What can we learn about that from the letters? The language of this letter with a strong emphasis upon the *mysterium Christi* makes the letter both rich in ideas and difficult to understand at the same time. Finally, what is the connection of Colossians to Philemon, since this Christian leader lived at Colossae and that letter was sent to Colossae as well? These are among the many questions that arise from reading and interpreting the letter.

Reading an ancient letter is like listening to one end of a telephone call. What the person is saying on the other end of the call has to be surmised from what the individual



<sup>1</sup>Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

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on this side of the call says. Paul's letter is this side of the call. What the Colossians were saying we have to surmise from what Paul has said. Sometimes this is easy, but other times it is almost impossible to determine.

### Historical Context:

In this we will explore both 'external' and 'internal' history matters. The definitions are somewhat arbitrary, but the distinction is important for the interpretive process. External history will allude to how the scripture passage for each study was hand copied over the first thousand years of Christian history. Internal history will allude to historical allusions surfacing inside each passage and reflected in time and place marker type words. Sometimes these are direct, and sometimes they are indirect. But in both instances having an historical awareness of them will contribute to better understanding of the meaning of the scripture passage being studied.

**External History.** In the process of the copying of the text of Colossians over the first eight centuries, some variations of wording in the first two verses surface in the several thousand currently existing copies of the Greek text. The major printed Greek New Testament used in the English speaking world is *The Greek New Testament*, published by the United Bible Societies and currently is in the fourth revised edition. At the bottom of each page is a Text Apparatus which lists variations of wording considered by the editors to be of enough importance to impact the translation of the Greek text into modern languages. In this edition only one variation of wording is listed.<sup>2</sup> In verse two instead of the text reading ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν (*from God our Father*), several manuscripts move the pronoun ἡμῶν and add a reference to Jesus Christ. Two basic alternative patterns surface in the manuscripts: a) ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (*from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*), and b) ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν (*from God our Father and from Jesus Christ our Lord*). One of the guidelines followed by scholars in this field of New Testament studies is to prefer the shorter reading, since the scribal tendency was much more often to add explanatory words, than it was to deliberately shorten an existing text reading. This criteria is the appropriate principle to apply here with the result that the shorter reading is understood as the original reading.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>2</sup>{A} ἡμῶν B D K L Ψ 33 81 1175 1739 1852 1881 | 156 | 170 | 617 | 751 | 883 | 1021 | 1298 | 1356 | 1365 | 1439 | 1443 | 1977 it<sup>ar</sup>, d, mon\* vg<sup>ww, st</sup> syr<sup>p, pal</sup> cop<sup>sa</sup> arm<sup>mss</sup> geo<sup>1</sup> slav Origen<sup>lat</sup> Chrysostom Theodore<sup>lat</sup>; Ambrosiaster Pelagius // ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (see Ro 1.7 etc.) κ A C F G I 075 6 104 256 263 365 424 436 459 (1241<sup>vid</sup> but ὑμῶν) 1319 1573 1912 1962 2127 2200 2464 Byz Lect it<sup>(b)</sup>, f, g, monc vg<sup>cl</sup> (cop<sup>bo</sup>) arm<sup>mss</sup> (eth) geo<sup>2</sup> // ἡμῶν καὶ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν P (0150 vg<sup>mss</sup> Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ) vg<sup>mss</sup> (syr<sup>h</sup> with \*)

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus), 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000; 2009).]

<sup>3</sup>"After ἡμῶν the Textus Receptus adds καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, with κ A C G I 88 614 Byz Lect al; the same addition is found also in other witnesses with a second ἡμῶν added to κυρίου, standing before or after Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. The words, which are absent from a variety of witnesses, some of them early (B D K L Ψ 33 81 1739 itar, d, mon vg syr, h copsa arm ethro), have no doubt been added by copyists who assimilated the text to Pauline usage; certainly no reason for deliberate omission suggests itself." [Bruce

The other major printed Greek text used in non-English speaking regions of the world is the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, now in the 27th revised edition, and also published by the United Bible Societies. The text apparatus at the bottom of each page in it is much more inclusive of all variations, significant for Bible translation or not. In verse two the N-A 27th printed text lists some more variations that are mainly attempts by later copyists to update the style of the wording of the Greek.<sup>4</sup>

What I hope to demonstrate in each study with this section is to illustrate how stable the text of Colossians has been through the initial centuries of hand copying the text. We do possess a reliable original language text of the New Testament, something which cannot be claimed in our day for the vast majority of ancient literature. Variations of wording do surface over the centuries of hand copying the text of the New Testament, but these seldom have significant impact on the meaning of any passage, and no Christian doctrinal teaching is altered by these variations at all. I do believe that Christians, both clergy and laity, need to possess a clear understanding of this process of the preserving of the text by hand copying it. Many outlandish claims will occasionally be made that we can't trust the text of the New Testament because so many different 'versions' of it surfaced through the process of copying. Such claims are nonsense, and can be easily refuted by knowing how the process took place over the centuries. This section of the study will fill in that gap of understanding so that you will be able to see how the process worked and what its impact was.

**Internal History. The City of Colossae:** The ancient city of Colossae was located in the Lycus River valley near the cities of Hierapolis (21 kilometers away) and Laodicea (19 kilometers away). It lay on one of the major roads that went from Ephesus on the western coast to the Euphrates Valley in the Middle East.<sup>5</sup> The city and its economic condition was closely linked to that of Hierapolis and Laodicea. The city stood at the head of a gorge where the Honaz Dag stream merged into the Lycos River.

The beginnings of the city reached back prior to 481 BCE when the Persian ruler Xerxes stopped there. During the Hellenistic era, the town had some business importance largely through the wool industry.<sup>6</sup> The town name Colossinus in Latin referred to a special wool of the color of the cyclamen flower, according to the Greek historian Pliny. Being located at a crossroad on the major trade route between the east and the west contributed to its prosperity. But by the beginning of the Christian era, the town was in a state of decline while the other two towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis were growing.<sup>7</sup> From the available information, it seems that

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Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 552.]

<sup>4</sup>Kolossier 1,2

\* Κολασσ— (P<sup>46</sup> A) I K P Ψ 075. 6. 33. 81. 104. 326. 614. 629. 630. 1241s. 1505. 1739. 1881 *pm* sy (bo)  
| txt κ B D F G L 365. (1175). 2464 *pm* sa

\* Ιησου A D\* F G 33. 104. 629 pc lat (syp) sa<sup>ms</sup> bo<sup>pt</sup>

\* και κυριου Ιησου Χριστου κ A C F G I (P) 075 m it vgcl (syh\*\*) bo; Hier  
| txt B D K L Ψ 33. 81. 1175. 1505. 1739. 1881 *al* ar m vg<sup>st.ww</sup> sy<sup>p</sup> sa; Ambst

In the first instance the spelling of Colossians differs from Κολοσσαῖς to Κολασσαῖς. In the second instance some mss add ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (*in Christ Jesus*) rather than ἐν Χριστῷ (*in Christ*). The third instance is the same issue as listed in the UBS 4th rev. ed.

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 523.]

<sup>5</sup>"The site of Colossae is located on the southern edge of the Lycus Valley near larger and more significant sites such as Laodicea, 8 mi. [13 km.] to the west, and Hierapolis, 13 mi. [21.5 km.] to the northwest. It is approximately 112 mi. [180 km.] due east of Ephesus." [*Holy Land Photos*]

<sup>6</sup>According to the Greek historians Herodotus (*vii.30*) and Xenophon (*Anabasis i.2.6*) the city enjoyed considerable importance prior to the beginning of the Christian era.

<sup>7</sup>"The name "Colossae," sometimes spelled Colassae, is probably not connected with Coloss (Colossus). The city was situated 125 miles east of the Aegean Sea and 90 miles north of the Mediterranean coast in the central highlands of Asia Minor, ca. 800 feet above sea level. It was exposed to grim winters, lovely springs, and hot summers. Its central section, including a theater of modest size and an acropolis of less than majestic dimensions, lay south of the river Lycus. This tributary of the Maeander rushes into and through a gorge near ancient Colossae. The Lycus Valley is dominated on its northeastern side by the mountain Salbacus, and in the southwest by the snow-capped Cadmos. Precipices, partly covered with gleaming white travertine, form walls on both sides of the valley.

The products of the fertile land on both sides of the river included primarily figs, olives, and sheep, some of the latter raven-black in color. The processing, weaving, and dyeing of wool ('Colossian' was the trade name of a world famous purple-red) were among the sources of income for artisans and tradesmen. The city benefited from its location on the southern great trade-route that ran parallel to a northern highway, both of which led from the Euphrates and Syria through the 'inner' or 'upper' parts of Asia Minor toward the cities at the Aegean Sea. At Colossae, minor roads leading north and south over easily accessible passes crossed

a large number of Jewish people were living in Colossae during this period of time. Considered a part of the Roman province of Phrygia during the Roman era, the town was largely made up of Phrygians, Greeks, and Jews.

Sometime in AD 61/62 a major earthquake struck the Lycus valley region destroying Laodicea and Hierapolis. Whether or not Colossae was caught in this is unclear. Early twentieth century scholarship tended to use this as an argument against Colossians having come from Paul, but such reasoning has now been rejected by most scholars. No indication in ancient literature hints at Colossae suffering destruction from this earthquake. The Roman historian Tacitus mentions the earthquake, but asserts that Laodicea was quickly rebuilt without using Roman funding.

The town continued to exist until the eighth century when it was abandoned, after being overrun by the Saracens and it became “a quarry for the inhabitants of the neighboring city of Chonai (modern Honaz), three miles to the S.”<sup>8</sup> In the twelfth century, the church located there was destroyed by the Turks and the city disappeared. Although known in modern times since the 1830s,<sup>9</sup> no excavation work has been done in order to explore the city and its history. “The hollow cavity and a few stones of a large theater, fragments of columns and traces of a hall, and a necropolis with stones of a peculiar shape are still to be seen. The site is 3 m (5 km) NW of the modern Honaz, about 0.5 m (1 km) from the modern road from Denizli to Eskişehir.”<sup>10</sup> Our knowledge of the town is derived largely from the written literature mentioning it in the ancient world.

**The Origins of the Colossian Church:** The beginnings of a Christian community in Colossae are obscure. No direct information about this exists from ancient Christian writings. From inside the letter to the Colossians, it appears that Paul had not visited the area prior to the writing of this letter (cf. 2:1<sup>11</sup>). Acts makes no mention of him having evangelized the area. The closest to a possible previous Pauline link to Colossae would have come during the extended two and a half year ministry of Paul in Ephesus on the third missionary

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the main thoroughfare. To the Persian invaders, Xerxes and Cyrus the Younger in the early and late fifth century B.C.E., Colossae must have been one of the populated, prosperous, and famous cities of the kingdom of Phrygia.

The Phrygians had originally come from Thracia and spread over several parts of Asia Minor, until an invasion of Gallians (later called the Galatians) stopped them from eastward expansion. According to Homer’s *Iliad* (II 862–63, III 184–85), the ancient Phrygians were a vigorous and heroic people, who supported the Trojans. However, with the arrival of the Persians, their political independence came to an end. Eventually, a Phrygian name was considered proper for a slave.

The history of Colossae was affected by others besides Phrygians and Persians. The development of trade and travel through Phrygia resulted in a mixed population in the cities on or near the trade routes. Eventually, after the conquest of the whole of Asia Minor by Alexander the Great in 330 B.C.E., Greeks settled in the region. The defeat of the Seleucid Antiochus III by the Romans in 190 B.C.E. and the deeding of Asia Minor to the Romans through Attalus of Pergamum in 132 B.C.E. brought Romans into former Phrygia. Col 3:11 may indicate that even ‘Scythians,’ in late antiquity a threat to civilized people equivalent to the menace of the Vandals and Huns in the Middle Ages, and other ‘barbarians’ were living in Colossae. The presence of Jews who were also part of the population of the territory will be discussed in the next section. In 49 C.E., after a good deal of wavering, Rome decided definitely to join the southwestern region of Phrygia, including Colossae, to the province called “Asia,” rather than to “Galatia.”

Between Persian and New Testament times, the size and importance of Colossae declined. The city was overshadowed by two neighbors in the south-western corner of Phrygia. Ten miles from Colossae in a (north)westerly direction and six miles apart from one another stood, enthroned on plateaus, the industrial, banking, and administrative metropolis Laodicea and the health resort Hierapolis, both with several magnificent theaters and gymnasia. Hierapolis was the birthplace of the philosopher Epictetus. About 80 miles to the northeast flourished the great trading center Apamea, called *Kibōtos*, the “(treasure- or tax-?) chest.” Apamea was the cradle of the Jewish philosopher Aristoboulus. Colossae could not make comparable claims, although Col 2:8 mentions a ‘philosophy’ promoted among its inhabitants. When in the second decade of the first century after Christ Strabo wrote his *geographia*, Colossae was at best a town (*polisma*). Still, it is likely that it continued to have a share in the prosperity of its neighbors. The testimony of tombstones found in Hierapolis is confirmed by the boasting of the Christian congregation at Laodicea mentioned in Rev 3:17, “I am rich....” Business life was running smoothly<sup>2</sup>—except at times of recession, drought, epidemics, or other catastrophes. [Markus Barth, Helmut Blanke and Astrid B. Beck, *Colossians: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary in the Anchor Bible* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 7–8]

<sup>8</sup>M.J. Mellink, “Colossae,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, iPreach.

<sup>9</sup>“The location of Colossae has been known since the travels of William J. Hamilton in 1835. He identified the ruins of the city and its acropolis on the left (S) bank of the river, where he still saw many architectural fragments in marble (columns, architraves, cornices) and the cavea of the theater with several of the stone seats preserved. On the N bank lies the necropolis, with rock-cut and partly built graves.” [M.J. Mellink, “Colossae,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, iPreach.]

<sup>10</sup>Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 1, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988; 2002), 732–733. S.V. “Colossae.”

<sup>11</sup>Col. 2:1 (NRSV): “I want you to know how much I have agonized for you and for the church at Laodicea, and for many other friends who have never known me personally” (Θέλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναί ἡλίκον ἀγῶνα ἔχω ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ καὶ ὅσοι οὐχ ἔορακαν τὸ πρόσωπόν μου ἐν σαρκί).

in the mid 50s of the first Christian century. Luke makes the declaration in Acts 19:10, that Paul's ministry in Ephesus "continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord" (τοῦτο δὲ ἐγένετο ἐπὶ ἔτη δύο, ὥστε πάντας τοὺς κατοικοῦντας τὴν Ἀσίαν ἀκοῦσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου, Ἰουδαίους τε καὶ Ἑλλήνας.). It is highly unlikely that Paul traveled the 180 kilometers eastward to Colossae from Ephesus during that time.<sup>12</sup> More likely is that individuals from Colossae came to Ephesus on business and came into contact with the apostle during the time there.

Several individuals connected with Colossae surface during the ministry of Paul. Epaphras, a Colossian, visited Paul during his imprisonment to inform him about the church. Later, he was imprisoned with Paul.<sup>13</sup> Onesimus, the runaway slave, was from Colossae along with Philemon, his owner; Apphia and Archippus were Colossians.<sup>14</sup> Timothy being mentioned as one of the senders of the letter in Col. 1:1 has suggested to some that he had had prior contact with the church before the writing of the letter, and possibly as one who evangelized the region during Paul's Ephesian ministry. But no clear evidence is available to confirm this. From the way Paul mentions these individuals, one is impressed with the quality of Christian leaders that came from the church at Colossae.

Whatever the origins of the church, by the writing of this letter the church was thriving, as well as struggling a bit with dangerous influences from false teachers.

### Literary Aspects:

Understanding the nature and function of an ancient letter is critical to interpreting the text of Colossians. In this beginning pericope greater attention will be given to the general issues related to reading and comprehending ancient letters.

#### Literary Form:

**At the broad genre level**, we are dealing with *an ancient letter* in this document. In that world, the letter served as a substitute presence of the writer. The preference was to be personally present with the recipients of the letter, but circumstances made such impossible. So a letter was written and carried to the other individuals to communicate with them. This was the next best option to travelling there personally. Paul signals this several times in his letters.<sup>15</sup>

This aspect of the ancient letter prompts what is labeled in modern scholarship **the 'occasional' nature of an ancient letter**. That is, particular circumstances prompting the writing of the letter usually focused on spiritual needs in the congregation. The level of needs can range from low to high, and depends in large measure on how much information the letter sender knows about the situation in the congregation being addressed. Inside the Pauline corpus of letters, the highest level of information and need is reflected in the two letters to the Corinthian church, while the lowest level is seen in Romans. The other letters fall between these two terminal points. Even with the letters addressed to individuals rather than directly to a congregation

<sup>12</sup>One remote possibility is that Luke's statement in Acts 19:1 opens the opportunity for Paul to have passed through Colossae: "While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples" (Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ τὸν Ἀπολλῶ εἶναι ἐν Κορίνθῳ Παῦλον διελθόντα τὰ ἀνωτερικὰ μέρη ἐλθεῖν εἰς Ἐφεσον καὶ εὗρεν τινὰς μαθητάς). The nature of Luke's statement suggests that Paul and his missionary party traveled the 'northern' route that would have not taken them through Colossae.

<sup>13</sup>Col. 1:7 (NRSV): "This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf..." (καθὼς ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ συνδούλου ἡμῶν, ὃς ἐστὶν πιστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ,).

Col. 4:12-13 (NRSV): "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills. For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis." (12 ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ ἐξ ὑμῶν, δοῦλος Χριστοῦ, πάντοτε ἀγωνιζόμενος ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐν ταῖς προσευχαῖς, ἵνα σταθῆτε τέλειοι καὶ πεπληροφορημένοι ἐν παντὶ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ. 13 μαρτυρῶ γὰρ αὐτῷ ὅτι ἔχει πολλὸν πόνον ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ καὶ τῶν ἐν Ἱεραπόλει.)

Philim. 23 (NRSV): "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you." (Ἀσπάζεται σε Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ συναιχμαλώτός μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,)

<sup>14</sup>Philim. 10 (NRSV): "I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment." (παρακαλῶ σε περὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου, ὃν ἐγέννησα ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς Ὀνήσιμον,).

Col. 4:9 (NRSV): "he [Tychicus] is coming with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here." (σὺν Ὀνησίμῳ τῷ πιστῷ καὶ ἀγαπητῷ ἀδελφῷ, ὃς ἐστὶν ἐξ ὑμῶν· πάντα ὑμῖν γνωρίσουσιν τὰ ὧδε.)

Philim. 1b-2 (NRSV): "To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, 2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:" (Φιλίμονι τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν 2 καὶ Ἀπφίᾳ τῇ ἀδελφῇ καὶ Ἀρχίππῳ τῷ συστρατιωτῇ ἡμῶν καὶ τῇ κατ' οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ.)

<sup>15</sup>Cf. 1 Cor. 5:3; 16:17; 2 Cor. 10:11; 13:2; Phil. 1:27; 2:12; Col. 2:5.

-- 1, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon -- the needs of a congregation remain primarily the center piece of emphasis, with Philemon perhaps as a slight exception.

All of the letters of Paul were written with the explicit purpose of being read publicly to the assembled congregations as a part of their public worship. This could also include other congregations beyond the one designated as receiving the letter, as Col. 4:16 makes clear.<sup>16</sup> The letter sender would have anticipated spiritual needs beyond the targeted congregation, or else be convinced that what he was saying to one congregation had application beyond that particular congregation.

**The composition of ancient letters** is important to understand because of the role of the contents of the letters in assessing authorship ideas in modern scholarship. For example, it is clear that Paul did not do the actual writing of any of his letters that are found in the New Testament. This was typical in the ancient world for all correspondence, apart from private intimate letters between family members separated from one another. Paul signals this in Col. 4:18 by indicating that he had only written the final words of this letter.<sup>17</sup> The identity of the writing secretaries who composed the letters of Paul is known only in one or two isolated instances. Tertius identified himself as the writer of Romans<sup>18</sup>; Silas is identified by his Latin name Silvanus as the writer of 1 Peter.<sup>19</sup>

**Who wrote Colossians?** No direct indication of this individual surfaces in the letter. Many are convinced, with some basis, that the inclusion of Timothy as the second sender of the letter in 1:1 signals his composition of the letter. Perhaps this is correct, but it can't be conclusively established. If Timothy was involved in the composition, this would help explain Paul's mentioning of him not just here but also as a sender of the letter to Philemon who also lived in Colossae.<sup>20</sup> The available evidence points to the actual composer of the letter being the one who carried the letter to its destination and then reading it to the congregation. If accurate, this would create a better 'substitute presence' for the apostle as the primary sender of the letter. This person would be in the best position to understand the nuances of meaning present in the words of the letter and could thus better answer questions that the letter recipients might have about some aspect of what was said. Clearly Timothy had been (or, would be) involved in this sort of ministry at Corinth, Philippi, and Thessalonica.<sup>21</sup> That he would do the same with the Colossians would be very much in line with his ministry generally.

**At the narrow genre level**, Col. 1:1-2 comprises the **Praescriptio** of the letter. Ancient letters written in Greek by Greek speaking people tending to follow a set formula of introduction: *A to B; Greetings*. A is the sender(s) of the letter; B is the recipient(s) of the letter. The word of greeting intends to establish a positive bond between writer and reader. Interestingly the ancient Jewish letter, usually written in Aramaic, typically followed a slightly different formula: *To B from A: Greetings*. The letters inside the New Testament follow the Greek rather than the Jewish formula, where a **Praescriptio** is included.

The **Praescriptio** section seldom contains complete sentences in Greek because of its formula nature. The core elements are as follows:

**Superscriptio**: the designation of the sender or senders of the letter, i.e., who sends the letter. At the basic level this would be the designation of the name of the sender. All of Paul's letters contain this element designating Paul as the primary sender, and occasionally including others as co-senders. With a co-sender is listed it is almost always either Timothy and/or Silas.<sup>22</sup> Beyond the listing of names, expansion elements in the **Superscriptio** are frequently included, which are primarily designed to provide the authority identification

<sup>16</sup>Col. 4:16 (NRSV): "And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea." (καὶ ὅταν ἀναγνωσθῆ παρ' ὑμῖν ἡ ἐπιστολή, ποιήσατε ἵνα καὶ ἐν τῇ Λαοδικέων ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀναγνωσθῆ, καὶ τὴν ἐκ Λαοδικείας ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀναγνῶτε.)

<sup>17</sup>Col. 4:18a (NRSV): "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand." (Ὁ ἀσπασμὸς τῆ ἐμῆ χειρὶ Παύλου.)

<sup>18</sup>Rom. 16:22 (NRSV): "I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord." (ἀσπάζομαι ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ Τέρτιος ὁ γράψας τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἐν κυρίῳ)

<sup>19</sup>1 Pet. 5:12 (NRSV): "Through Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written this short letter to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God." (Διὰ Σιλουανοῦ ὑμῖν τοῦ πιστοῦ ἀδελφοῦ, ὡς λογιζομαι, δι' ὀλίγων ἔγραψα, παρακαλῶν καὶ ἐπιμαρτυρῶν ταύτην εἶναι ἀληθῆ χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ· εἰς ἣν στήτε.)

<sup>20</sup>Philm. 1 (NRSV): "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker..." (Παῦλος δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφὸς Φιλήμονι τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν)

<sup>21</sup>Cf. 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; Phil. 1:1; 2:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 3:2, 6; 2 Thess. 1:1.

<sup>22</sup>Paul, Timothy, and Silas - 1 & 2 Thessalonians; Paul and Sosthenes - 1 Corinthians; Paul and Timothy - 2 Corinthians, Philemon, Colossians, Philippians.

for the sender in making demands upon the readers. Most common for Paul are the terms ‘apostle’ and ‘servant of the Lord.’

**Adscriptio:** the designation of the recipient(s) of the letter, i.e., who receives the letter. The specification of the readers of the letters in Paul’s writings ranges from individuals (Timothy, Titus, Philemon) to specific churches to groups of churches (Galatians). Colossians falls in the middle category. The indication of the congregation will contain a spiritual specification such as ‘saints’ and a geographical designation such as Rome. Often expansion elements will be added to this core specification of recipients. These signal topics to be discussed in the letter body.

**Salutatio:** the word of greeting from the sender to the readers. The intention was to begin on a positive note with a strong bond of friendly greeting set up between sender and reader. This was important especially when the sender had stern words of rebuke or demands to make on the readers. Additionally, it reflected the oral custom of formal verbal greeting between individuals when they met in person.<sup>23</sup> Customarily, in ancient Greek letters outside the New Testament this would be a single word, χαίρειν, or, a health wish of some sort. This reflected the customary oral greeting between individuals.<sup>24</sup> Paul’s creativity usually expands this core into several words.

One important implication that is present in the letters of Paul inside the New Testament: the expansion elements in any or all of the elements of the Praescriptio -- and also in the Proem that follows -- provide important signals of the contents of the body of the letter. Themes, specific problems etc. to be addressed by the letter are typically indicated by the apostle in the expansion elements of these first two units of the letter. Thus careful reading of these two beginning segments provides the reader a preview of the contents of the letter.

**Literary Setting:**

As the outline of Colossians to the right indicates, our passage comes at the outset of the letter and intended to introduce both senders and recipients of the letter. Its formula nature conforms to the core pattern of the *Praescriptio* in ancient letters. The contents are very much in line with the patterns that dominate the *Praescriptia* in the letters of Paul.

**Literary Structure:**

The *Praescriptio* had the usual set three elements specifying the sender, the recipients, and a word of greeting. Colossians contains these elements, which are exegeted below. Some expansion elements are embedded into the *Praescriptio*, although not as many as is often the case in the letters of Paul. This material adds more richness into the rather formulaic nature of this section.

**Exegesis of the Text:**

Because of the formula nature of this text, the exegesis will revolve around the three elements of the *Praescriptio* contained in the first two verses of Colossians.

<sup>23</sup>One glimpse into this custom can be found at 2 John 10-11 (NRSV): “10 Do not receive into the house or **welcome** anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; 11 for **to welcome** is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person.” (10 εἴ τις ἔρχεται πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ ταύτην τὴν διδασχὴν οὐ φέρει, μὴ λαμβάνετε αὐτὸν εἰς οἰκίαν καὶ **χαίρειν** αὐτῷ μὴ λέγετε· 11 ὁ λέγων γὰρ αὐτῷ **χαίρειν** κοινωνεῖ τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ τοῖς πονηροῖς.)

<sup>24</sup>Cf. 2 John 10 above where is χαίρειν used for ‘welcome.’ In the New Testament this typical single word of Greeting in a letter is found at James 1:1; Acts 15:23; and Acts 23:26.

**Outline of Colossians**

**Praescriptio**

Introduction: 1:1-2  
Superscriptio: 1:1  
Adscriptio: 1:2a  
Salutatio: 1:2b

**Proem**

Thankfulness: 1:3-8

**Body**

Intercession: 1:9-12  
Christus Hymnus: 1:13-20  
Reconciliation: 1:21-23

Paul’s Ministry 1: 1:24-29  
Paul’s Ministry 2: 2:1-5

Christian Living 1: 2:6-15  
Christian Living 2: 2:16-19

Christian Legalism: 2:20-23  
Seeking the Heavenly Things: 3:1-4  
Christian Behavior: 3:5-11  
Getting Dressed: 3:12-17

Haustafeln: 3:18-4:1  
Husband/Wife: 3:18-19  
Father/Children: 3:20-21  
Master/Slaves: 3:22-4:1

Admonitions and Requests: 4:2-6

**Conclusio**

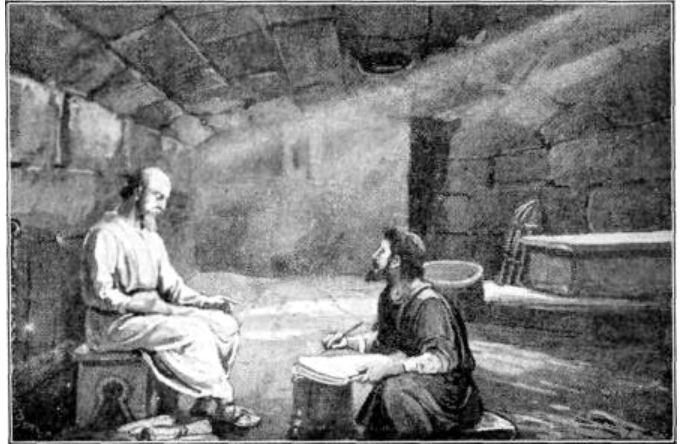
Tychicus: 4:7-9  
Greetings: 4:10-17  
Closing: 4:18  
Letter Validation: 4:18a  
Prayer Request: 4:18b  
Benedictio: 4:19c

**Superscriptio, v. 1:** “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,” (Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφός).

The two senders of the letter are identified by name and then by title.

Paul	Apostle
Timothy	Brother

**Paul.** The letter was sent to Colossae by Paul. Thus the letter internally claims to be from the apostle. For most of the interpretive history this claim has been taken at face value as being accurate. Only in the era of modern scholarship for the past three hundred years have occasional questions been raised about the accuracy of this claim.<sup>25</sup> Usually these questions are based in part upon stylistic differences of Colossians from most of the other letters of Paul. To be certain, some differences do exist, but increasingly these are



seen as reflecting the writing secretary’s style and the distinctive subject matter of the body of the letter. Given the occasional nature of Paul’s letters, one should not expect uniformity of content since the apostle was addressing specific issues largely unique to his targeted readership. The differences of perspective on the same topic as found elsewhere inside the Pauline letters pose the more legitimate areas of probing. But even here, one must guard against a ‘flat’ one dimensional view of Paul, thus expecting him to say the exact same thing on any topic from the very beginning of ministry until the conclusion of his ministry three plus decades later. He grew in his understanding of the gospel; he learned how to apply any topic to a specific situation with distinctive needs. Most of the perceived differences are a matter of tone and emphasis, rather than core content.

Paul identifies himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus.<sup>26</sup> The term apostle, ἀπόστολος, especially when used as a title in the letter *Superscriptio* specifies one directly commissioned by Jesus Christ to gospel ministry. Luke 6:13 signals the unique and exclusive role that the original Twelve would have in Jesus’ ministry.<sup>27</sup> One of the ongoing struggles throughout Paul’s ministry was his claim to be one of the apostles on equal standing with the Twelve.<sup>28</sup> Because he did not walk with Jesus in the Lord’s earthy ministry, many would not accept his claim. But as he asserts in Galatians and 2 Corinthians, the credibility of his gospel message lay in the credibility of his apostleship. Without this special commissioning of God, his message was suspect. And his encounter with the risen Christ on the road outside Damascus made the difference.

Thus Paul claims to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. That is, his commissioning has come from Jesus

<sup>25</sup>The raising of doubts about Pauline authorship reflect the adoption in modern scholarship of the questioning posture of the modern scientific method of research. This methodology has application to biblical studies, but with strict limitations and modifications because of the different nature of the research material. Methods suitable for analysis in the physical sciences don’t have full application to studying literature etc. outside the physical sciences. Increasingly contemporary scholarship reflects awareness of these limitations, and so makes the needed adjustments.

<sup>26</sup>“In wider usage the term ‘apostle’ could bear the sense ‘authorized emissary’ (BAGD s.v. ἀπόστολος). This sense was familiar in the Pauline churches, as 2 Cor. 8:23 and Phil. 2:25 make clear: authorized emissary of particular churches. But as always in Paul’s claims for his own apostleship, the claim is that his commission and authorization came directly from Christ Jesus. It is as a representative of and spokesman for Christ Jesus, therefore, that Paul would lay claim to a hearing — not simply as spokesman for some agreed tradition or some church council. And for Paul that meant a commission and authorization equal in weight to that of the earliest and most prominent Christian leadership (1 Cor. 15:5–11; 2 Cor. 12:11–12; Gal. 2:7–9). In other words, the added phrase is not merely a matter of providing fuller identification, as though the name ‘Paul’ was insufficient. It is also and still more a claim to authority and respect. The earlier crisis in Galatia had called Paul’s authority in question and had evidently persuaded him of the need to assert it forcefully (Gal. 1:1), so that in his subsequent letters where a strong display of authority was necessary he made a point of introducing himself by means of his Christ authorized title ‘apostle’ (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1). Given the various parallels with Galatians (see the introduction to 2:6–4:6), however, it is noticeable that, in contrast to Galatians, there is no hint here that Paul felt his apostolic authority to be in question.” [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 44.]

<sup>27</sup>(NRSV): “And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles” (καὶ ὅτε ἐγένετο ἡμέρα, προσεφώνησεν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐκλεξάμενος ἀπ’ αὐτῶν δώδεκα, οὓς καὶ ἀποστόλους ὠνόμασεν).

<sup>28</sup>See his claim in Gal. 1:11-2:21, and a vigorous defense of it in 2 Cor. 10-13. His conversion experience outside Damascus included a calling to be an apostle as Luke suggests as well in Acts 9:1-19; 22:6-16; 26:12-18.



Christ directly, and not mediated through some individual or group of individuals, as Paul asserts in Gal. 1:1.<sup>29</sup> This apostleship was “by the will of God” (διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ). Thus both Christ and the Heavenly Father are involved in Paul’s commissioning as an apostle. Coming here in the *Superscriptio*, the expression underscores that Paul’s words express the authority of God who had commissioned him to preach and teach the gospel of Jesus.

Are there such apostles today? Absolutely not! The criteria for this level of apostleship is set forth in Acts 1:21-22<sup>30</sup> and thus limits these apostles to the first Christian century. Paul was and remains the exclusive exception to the guidelines proposed by Peter to the believers prior to the day of Pentecost. What we have available today is their witness to Jesus as preserved in the documents of the New Testament. In the process of canonization of the New Testament during the first four Christian centuries, apostolic linkage to a writing was considered essential for a document to have the inspirational ‘breath of God’ on it.

Elsewhere in the New Testament the term ἀπόστολος is used a few times in the modern sense of ‘missionary’ and doesn’t connote the exclusive role of the Twelve in the formation of Christianity. This is the only continuing aspect of the term into our day.

**Timothy.** Timothy was an associate of Paul who joined the missionary team during the second missionary journey at Lystra.<sup>31</sup> From the early 50s, Timothy accompanied the apostle in ministry until Paul’s death in the middle 60s. He served God in a variety of roles through missionary service. As suggested in the above discussion, his inclusion here probably suggests him as the writer of this letter and as one who carried the letter to its destination in Colossae.

He is labeled ‘brother’ (ὁ ἀδελφός) by Paul here. Paul treated Timothy with respect and not as a second class co-worker. By using this term in the *Superscriptio* Timothy is affirmed to the Colossians as a genuine Christian brother.

**Adscriptio, v. 2a:** “To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae:” (τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαῖς ἀγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ).

The wording of the Greek expression contains both the standard spiritual label and the geographical indication, ‘in Colossae.’ The geographical questions have been discussed above and thus will not be repeated here. The spiritual labels pose some slight uncertainty. Two separate translation patterns of the Greek text will surface in English translations: ‘to the saints and to the faithful brothers in Christ’ or ‘to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ.’<sup>32</sup> Most likely the latter is to be preferred, although the difference conceptually is not great.

The believers in Colossae are identified in two ways: from their relationship to God -- ‘saints’ / ‘holy’ (τοῖς...

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<sup>29</sup>Gal. 1:1 (NRSV): “Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—” (Παῦλος ἀπόστολος, οὐκ ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι’ ἀνθρώπου ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν.) See Gal. 1:10-2:21 for the elaboration of this claim.

<sup>30</sup>Acts 1:21-22 (NRSV): “21 So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.” (21 δεῖ οὖν τῶν συνεληθόντων ἡμῖν ἀνδρῶν ἐν παντὶ χρόνῳ ᾧ εἰσηλθεν καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς ὁ κύριος Ἰησοῦς, 22 ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τοῦ βαπτίσματος Ἰωάννου ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας ἧς ἀνελήμφθη ἀφ’ ἡμῶν, μάρτυρα τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ σὺν ἡμῖν γενέσθαι ἓνα τούτων.)

<sup>31</sup>“Honouring God, a young disciple who was Paul’s companion in many of his journeyings. His mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, are mentioned as eminent for their piety ( 2 Timothy 1:5 ). We know nothing of his father but that he was a Greek ( Acts 16:1 ). He is first brought into notice at the time of Paul’s second visit to Lystra ( 16:2 ), where he probably resided, and where it seems he was converted during Paul’s first visit to that place ( 1 Timothy 1:2 ; 2 Tim 3:11 ). The apostle having formed a high opinion of his ‘own son in the faith,’ arranged that he should become his companion ( Acts 16:3 ), and took and circumcised him, so that he might conciliate the Jews. He was designated to the office of an evangelist ( 1 Timothy 4:14 ), and went with Paul in his journey through Phrygia, Galatia, and Mysia; also to Troas and Philippi and Berea ( Acts 17:14 ). Thence he followed Paul to Athens, and was sent by him with Silas on a mission to Thessalonica ( 17:15 ; 1 Thessalonians 3:2 ). We next find him at Corinth ( 1 Thessalonians 1:1 ; 2 th 1:1 ) with Paul. He passes now out of sight for a few years, and is again noticed as with the apostle at Ephesus ( Acts 19:22 ), whence he is sent on a mission into Macedonia. He accompanied Paul afterwards into Asia ( 20:4 ), where he was with him for some time. When the apostle was a prisoner at Rome, Timothy joined him ( Phil 1:1 ), where it appears he also suffered imprisonment ( Hebrews 13:23 ). During the apostle’s second imprisonment he wrote to Timothy, asking him to rejoin him as soon as possible, and to bring with him certain things which he had left at Troas, his cloak and parchments ( 2 Timothy 4:13 ). According to tradition, after the apostle’s death he settled in Ephesus as his sphere of labour, and there found a martyr’s grave.” [“Timothy,” *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* online]

<sup>32</sup>This is based on two possible ways of taking the Greek words:

- 1) article - subst. adjective - and - adjective - noun: to the saints and the faithful brothers.
- 2) article - adjective - and - adjective - noun: to the holy and faithful brothers.

ἀγίοις) -- and then in relationship to one another -- faithful brothers (πιστοῖς ἀδελφοῖς). By God's grace they were cleansed of their sin and made pure before God: τοῖς...ἀγίοις. And they are then dedicated to God as His own people. From this emerges the responsibility to live in holiness as does God their Heavenly Father.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> **ἅγιος, ἴα, ον** orig. a cultic concept, of the quality possessed by things and persons that could approach a divinity (so among the Trag. poets only Thespis, Fgm. 4 p. 833 Nauck2 βωμῶν ἀγίων, but found since V B.C. as a cultic term in Ion. and Att., e.g. ἰρόν Hdt. 2, 41; 44; Pla., Critias 116c, τόπος Leg. 904e; τελεταί Aristoph., Nub. 304 and Demosth. 25, 11 [ἀγιώταται τ.]; above all in the mysteries [GWobbermin, Rel. gesch. Studien 1896, 59ff, cp. OGI 721, 1 τῶν ἀγιωτάτων, Ἐλευσῖνι μυστηρίων]; LXX [HGehman, Vetust 4, '54, 337–48]; LXX, pseudepigr., Philo, Joseph., apolog.)

① **as adj. pert. to being dedicated or consecrated to the service of God**

a. in the cultic sense *dedicated to God, holy, sacred*, i.e. reserved for God and God's service:

α. of things ἅ. πόλις of Jerusalem (Appian, Syr. 50, §250: Jerus. is called the ἀγιωτάτη πόλις of the Jews; also Mithrid. 106 §498; Is 48:2; 52:1; 66:20; 2 Esdr 21:1; Da 3:28; 1 Macc 2:7 al.; B-D-F §474, 1) **Mt 4:5; 27:53; Rv 11:2**; of the heavenly Jerusalem **21:2, 10; 22:19**; τόπος ἅ. of the temple (2 Macc 2:18; 8:17; 3 Macc 2:14) **Mt 24:15; Ac 6:13; 21:28**, but of the next life 1 Cl 5:7, like ὁ ἅ. αἰῶν the holy age = αἰῶν μέλλων (cp. in the addition to the Lat. transl. of Sir 17:27 'aevum sanctum') B 10:11; γῆ ἅ. (2 Macc 1:7; TestJob 33:5) **Ac 7:33** (Ex 3:5); ὄρος ἅ. (Wsd 9:8; Ps 14:1; 42:3 al.—Appian, Bell. Civ. 1, 1 §2 τὸ ὄρος τὸ ἀπὸ τοῦδε [i.e. something extremely significant occurred] κληζόμενον ἱερόν) of the mountain of Transfiguration **2 Pt 1:18**; σκευή (1 Esdr 8:57; 1 Macc 4:49) OX 840, 14; 21; 29 (ASyn. 150, 112; 114; 116); σκηνή **Hb 9:2** (JSwetnam, CBQ 32, '70, 205–21, defends the Vulgate transl.). διαθήκη (Da 11:28ff Theod.; 1 Macc 1:15) Lk 1:72; γραφαί **Ro 1:2** (cp. 1 Macc 12:9; Philo, Rer. Div. Her. 159); εὐαγγέλιον AcPlCor 2:36. λόγος 1 Cl 13:3; 56:3; Dg 7:2 (cp. Herm. Wr. 1:18 ὁ θεὸς εἶπεν ἀγίῳ λόγῳ). Since Christians are called 'holy ones' (s. 2dβ), their κλήσις is also ἅ. **2 Ti 1:9**; so also of the ἐντολή given them **2 Pt 2:21**. Their community forms an ἐκκλησία ἅ. ITr ins; Hv 1, 1, 6; 1, 3, 4; cp. 4, 1, 3, as well as a ἱεράτευμα ἅ. **1 Pt 2:5** and an ἔθνος ἅ. (Wsd 17:2) **vs. 9**. For φίλημα ἅ. s. φίλημα.—πίστις is ἀγιωτάτη most holy **Jd 20** (for the superl. cp. Pla., Leg. 729e; Diod S 3, 44, 2 ἱερόν ἀγιώτατον=an exceptionally holy temple; SIG 339, 14; 768, 16 [31 B.C.]; Jos., Ant. 16, 115; ἀγιώτατος θεός; OGI 755, 1; 756, 3; cp. PGM 4, 668. Of the synagogue CIJ 754; 781; 867).

β. of humans and transcendent beings

κ. of human beings *consecrated to God, holy, pure, reverent* (CB I/2, 386 no. 232, 8 [early III A.D.] of a gentile: Γάιος, ὡς ἅγιος, ὡς ἀγαθός) prophets (Wsd 11:1; cp. ἅ. Αβράμ Did., Gen. 228, 23) **Lk 1:70; Ac 3:21; 2 Pt 3:2**. John the Baptist (w. δίκαιος) **Mk 6:20**; apostles **Eph 3:5**; of Polycarp, in EpilMosq 1; 3; 5; αἱ ἅ. γυναῖκες **1 Pt 3:5**. Israel a λαὸς ἅ. (Is 62:12; Sir 49:12 v.l.; Da 7:27; PsSol PsSol:17) 1 Cl 8:3; cp. B 14:6; πᾶν ἄρσεν τῷ κυρίῳ **Lk 2:23**.—The Christians (Orig., C. Cels 3, 60, 16) ἅ. ἔσσεσθε **1 Pt 1:16a** (Lev 19:2). Charismatics (?; so EKäsemann, Beiträge zur Hist. Theol. 9, '33, 146, n. 5) **Col 1:26**. ἀδελφοὶ ἅ. **Hb 3:1**; their children **1 Cor 7:14** (GDelling, Studien zum NT, '70, 270–80, 281–87=Festschrift Fascher, 84–93; JBlinzler in Festschrift Schmid, '63, 23–41; KAland, Die Stellung d. Kinder in d. frühen christl. Gemeinden u. ihre Taufe, '67, 13–17). Presbyters IMg 3:1. W. ἄμμωμος Eph 1:4; 5:27; Col 1:22; ἅ. ἐν ἀναστροφῇ **1 Pt 1:15**, cp. D 10:6.

ι. of angels *holy* (Job 5:1; Tob 11:14; 12:15; cp. Bousset, Rel.3 321; Cat. Cod. Astr. VIII/2 p. 176, 19; cp. PGM 4, 668; Ascls 3, 16) **Mk 8:38; Lk 9:26; Ac 10:22; Rv 14:10**; 1 Cl 39:7; Hv 2, 2, 7; 3, 4, 1f; ἐν ἅ. μυριάσιον αὐτοῦ w. *his holy myriads* **Jd 14** (w. ἄγγελος P72; cp. En 1:9).

λ. of Christ *holy* τὸν ἅγιον παῖδά σου **Ac 4:27, 30**; τὸ γεννώμενον ἅ. κληθήσεται Lk 1:35; GJs 11:3 (ἅ. belongs to the pred.).

τ. of God (Aristoph., Av. 522; Pla., Soph. 249a; OGI 262, 25; 378, 1 [19 A.D.] θεῶ ἀγίῳ ὑψίστῳ; 590, 1; 620, 2 [98 A.D.]; UPZ 79, 22 [159 B.C.] of Isis; likewise POxy 1380, 34; 36; 89; IDefixWünsch 4, 10 τὸν ἅ. Ἐρμῆν; Herm. Wr. 1, 31; PGM 1, 198; 3, 312; 4, 851; 2093. Further exx. in Wobbermin 70; Cumont3 266.—LXX; Philo, Sac. Abel. 101; SibOr 3, 478) *holy* **J 17:11; 1 Pt 1:16b** (Lev 19:2); **Rv 4:8** (Is 6:3; TestAbr A 3, p. 79, 19 [Stone p. 6]; ParJer 9:3.—The threefold ἅγιος serves to emphasize the idea, as the twofold καλὸν καλόν=indescribably beautiful Theocr. 8, 73); 6:10. Of God's name (LXX; PGM 4, 1190; 13, 638) **Lk 1:49**; 1 Cl 64.

π. of spirit τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον or τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα or πν. ἅ., s. πνεῦμα 5c.

β. shading over into the sense *holy = pure, perfect, worthy of God* (Stephan. Byz. s.v. Παλική: ὄρκος ἅγιος) θυσία **Ro 12:1**. ἀναστροφαί **2 Pt 3:11**. Of the divine law **Ro 7:12**; ἀπαρχή (cp. Ezk 48:9ff) **11:16a**; ναός (Ps 10:4; 17:7 al.; Jos., Bell. 7, 379; cp. ἱερόν ἅ.: Hdt. 2, 41; Diod S 5, 72, 3; 15, 14, 3; Paus., 10, 32, 13) **1 Cor 3:17; Eph 2:21**.

② used as a pure subst. *the holy* (thing, pers.)

a. **ἅγιον, ου, τό that which is holy**

α. concrete *sacrificial meat* (Lev 22:14.—Also concr. θύειν τὸ ἱερόν: 67th letter of Apollon. of Ty. [Philostrat. I 363, 30 K.]) μὴ δῶτε τὸ ἅ. τοῖς κυσίῳ **Mt 7:6**; cp. D 9:5. Cp. 1QS 9:17.

β. *sanctuary* (OGI 56, 59 [239 B.C.]; UPZ 119, 12 [156 B.C.]; Num 3:38; Ezk 45:18; 1 Esdr 1:5 v.l.; 1 Macc 10:42; Philo, Leg. All. 3, 125; Jos., Ant. 3, 125) τὸ ἅ. κοσμητικόν **Hb 9:1**.

β. **ἅγια, ων, τά sanctuary** (Jdth 4:12; 16:20; 1 Macc 3:43, 59 al.; Philo, Fuga 93 οἷς [sc. ἡ Λευιτικὴ φύλη] ἡ τῶν ἁγίων ἀνάκειται λειτουργία; Jos., Bell. 2, 341) **Hb 8:2; 9:24f; 13:11**. Also the front, or outer part of the temple, the holy place (3 Km 8:8; Philo, Rer. Div. Her. 226) **Hb 9:2**. τὰ ἅ. of the heavenly sanctuary (SibOr 3, 308) **vs. 12; 10:19**.—(τὰ) ἅγια (τῶν) ἁγίων the holy of holies (3 Km 8:6; 2 Ch 4:22; 5:7; GrBar ins 2; Philo, Leg. All. 2, 56. Cp. Polyb. 16, 12, 7 τὸ τοῦ Διὸς ἄβατον.—Formed like κακὰ κακῶν Soph., Oed. C. 1238, ἄρρητ' ἄρρητων Oed. R. 465; ἔσχατα ἐσχάτων Ael. Aristid. 46 p. 260 D.; B-D-F §141, 8; 245, 2) **Hb 9:3**; IPHd 9:1; GJs 8:3; 13:2; 15:3. Of Christians 1 Cl 29:3 (cp. 2 Ch 31:14; Ezk 48:12).

c. **ἅγιος, ου, ὁ the holy one**

α. of God (En 14:1; 97:6; 98:6; 104:9) **1J 2:20** (β is also prob. [s. OPiper, JBL 66, '47, 437–51]).

β. of Christ ὁ ἅ. **Rv 3:7**; 1 Cl 23:5; Dg 9:2; ὁ ἅ. καὶ δίκαιος **Ac 3:14**. ὁ ἅ. τοῦ θεοῦ **Mk 1:24; Lk 4:34; J 6:69** (cp. Ps 105:16 ὁ ἅ. κυρίου of Aaron).

γ. of the martyr Polycarp EpilMosq 2 (of psalmists Did., Gen. 60, 18).

Out of this comes a spiritual relationship with other believers as spiritual brothers together in the family of God: πιστοῖς ἀδελφοῖς.<sup>34</sup> Added to this is the adjective ‘faithful’ suggesting consistency and dependability in serving Christ in the community of believers.<sup>35</sup> The Greek construction τοῖς...ἀγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς ἀδελφοῖς

**d. ἄγιοι, ὧν, οἱ the holy ones**

α. of angels (Zech 14:5; Ps 88:6; En 1:9; PsSol 17:43; PGM 1, 198; 4, 1345; 1347). For **1 Th 3:13; 2 Th 1:10; D 16, 7; Col 1:12** (cp. 1QS 11:7f), β is also prob.

β. *believers, loyal followers, saints of Christians* as consecrated to God (cp. Is 4:3; Tob 8:15; Ps 33:10; Da 7:18, 21) **Ac 9:13, 32; Ro 8:27; 12:13; 15:25** (Ltzm., exc. ad loc. on the early community in Jerusalem); **1 Cor 6:1f; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 2:19; 3:8; Phil 4:22; Col 1:4; 1 Ti 5:10; Hb 6:10; Rv 22:21 v.l.** (s. RBorger, TRU 52, '87, 56f); D 16:7 perh.; 1 Cl 46:2; Hv 1, 1, 9 al.; κλητοὶ ἄ. **Ro 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2;** οἱ ἄ. αὐτοῦ **Col 1:26; cp. Ac 9:13;** Hv 3, 8, 8; οἱ ἄ. καὶ πιστοὶ αὐτοῦ ISm 1:2.

γ. of other people esp. close to God (Dionys. Soph., Ep. 70 σωφροσύνη ... προσήγαγέ σε θεῶ ... τοῖς ἀγίοις παρέστησεν) **Mt 27:52; cp. Rv 18:20, 24; Eph 2:19.**—FJDölger, IXΘΥΣ 1910, 180–83; WLink, De vocis ‘sanctus’ usu pagano, diss. Königsb. 1910; AFridrichsen, Hagios-Qadoš 1916; EWilliger, Hagios 1922; JDillersberger, Das Heilige im NT 1926; HDelehay, Sanctus 19272; '33; RAsting, D. Heiligkeit im Urchristentum 1930; UBunzel, D. Begriff der Heiligkeit im AT, diss. Breslau 1914; JHänel, D. Religion d. Heiligkeit '31; PChantraine/OMasson, Debrunner Festschr., '54, 85–107; FNötscher, Vom Alten zum NT, '62, 126–74 (Qumran). SWoodward, JETS 24, '81, 107–16 (Qumran displays transition from association of the term for ‘saints’ with celestial beings to human beings, s. 1QS 5:6f; 8:5 and 8).—B. 1475. EDNT. DDD 1359–64. New Docs 4, 111. DELG s.v. ἄζομαι. M-M. TW. Sv.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 10-11.]

<sup>34</sup>“The phrase ‘faithful brothers’ might be rendered ‘believing brothers,’ but if the adjective meant ‘believing,’ it would add nothing to the sense, whereas it clearly bears the fuller meaning ‘faithful’ when qualifying ‘brother’ or a similar noun in Col. 1:7; 4:7, 9.” [F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 39.]

<sup>35</sup>“πιστός, ἢ, ὄν (πείθω; Hom.+).

① **pertaining to being worthy of belief or trust, trustworthy, faithful, dependable, inspiring trust/faith**, pass. aspect of πιστεύω (Hom.+).

a. of pers.

α. of human beings (and Christ) δοῦλος (1 Km 22:14; 2 Macc 1:2; OdeSol 11:22; Jos., Ant. 6, 256; SIG 910 A, 5 [Christian]; PLond II, 251, 14 p. 317 [IV A.D.] δούλους πιστούς καὶ ἀδράστους): δοῦλε ἀγαθὲ καὶ πιστέ **Mt 25:21a, 23a; cp. 24:45;** Hs 5, 2, 2 πιστότατος (v.l. πιστός). οἰκονόμος **Lk 12:42; 1 Cor 4:2.** μάρτυς (Pind., P. 1, 88; 12, 27; Pr 14:5, 25; Ps 88:38; Jer 49:5; Philo, Sacr. Abel. 17) ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου **Rv 2:13** (μάρτυς 3); in this ‘book of martyrs’ Christ is ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός (καὶ ὁ ἀληθινός) **1:5; 3:14; cp. 19:11** (the combination of ἀληθινός and πιστός in the last two passages is like 3 Macc 2:11). Cp. **Rv 17:14.** πιστός ἀρχιερέυς *a faithful or reliable high priest* **Hb 2:17** (of Christ); cp. **3:2** (ἀρχιερέα ... πιστὸν ὄντα τῷ ποιήσαντι αὐτόν). σύμβουλοι πιστοὶ B 21:4. πιστοὶ ἄνθρωποι *reliable persons* **2 Ti 2:2** (cp. Is 8:2; sing. Tob 5:3 S; 10:6 S; ArcEsdr 2:2). Paul honors his co-workers w. π. as a designation: Timothy **1 Cor 4:17.** Tychicus **Eph 6:21; Col 4:7** (both πιστός διάκονος ἐν κυρίῳ). Onesimus **Col 4:9.** Eraphras **1:7** (πιστός ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ). Cp. **1 Pt 5:12** (διὰ Σιλουανοῦ τ. πιστοῦ ἀδελφοῦ).—Moses was πιστός ἐν ὄλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ **Hb 3:5** (Num 12:7). πιστὸν τινα ἠγεῖσθαι *consider someone trustworthy* (Aristoph., Plut. 27) **1 Ti 1:12** (cp. **Hb 11:11;** s. β below); s. PtK 3 p. 15, 18. γίνου πιστός (γίνομαι 7 and cp. Jos., Vi. 110, Ant. 19, 317) **Rv 2:10.**—πιστός ἐν τινι *faithful, reliable, trustworthy* in someth. (TestJos 9:2 π. ἐν σωφροσύνη) ἐν τῷ ἀδίκῳ μαμωνᾷ *in matters relating to unrighteous wealth* **Lk 16:11.** ἐν τῷ ἄλλοτρίῳ *in connection with what belongs to someone else* vs. **12.** ὁ π. ἐν ἐλαχίστῳ καὶ ἐν πολλῷ π. ἐστὶν *one who is trustworthy in a very small matter is also trustworthy in a large one* vs. **10;** 2 Cl 8:5; cp. **Lk 19:17.** π. ἐν πᾶσιν *trustworthy in every respect* **1 Ti 3:11.** Also ἐπί τι *in (connection w.) someth.* **Mt 25:21b, 23b.**—When Paul explains in **1 Cor 7:25** that the Lord graciously granted him the privilege of being πιστός, and uses this as a basis for his claim to be heard w. respect, πιστός can hardly mean ‘believing’ (s. 2 below); the apostle rather feels that in a special sense he has been called and commissioned because of the confidence God has in him (πιστός is almost like a title=‘trusted man, commissioner’, oft. in ins of distinguished pers.: ISyriaW 2022a; 2029; 2034; 2045f; 2127f; 2130; 2219; 2238–40; 2243; 2394; cp. SEG XLII, 1484, 1599.—Corresp. πίστις=‘position of trust’: Achilles Tat. 8, 15, 1 οἱ ἄρχοντες οἱ ταύτην ἔχοντες τὴν πίστιν).

β. of God as the One in whom we can have full confidence (Pind., N. 10, 54; Dt 7:9; 32:4; Is 49:7; PsSol 14:1; 7:10; Philo, Rer. Div. Her. 93, Sacr. Abel. 93, Leg. All. 3, 204) **1 Cor 1:9; 10:13; 2 Cor 1:18; 1 Th 5:24; Hb 10:23; 11:11; 1 Pt 4:19; 1 J 1:9;** 1 Cl 60:1; iTr 13:3. π. ἐν ταῖς ἐπαγγελίαις 1 Cl 27:1 (cp. Ps 144:13a πιστὸς κύριος ἐν τοῖς λόγοις αὐτοῦ). πιστός ἐστὶν ὁ ἐπαγγελάμενος (*God*) *is trustworthy, who has promised* 2 Cl 11:6.—Also of the ‘Lord’ (Christ), who is spoken of in the same way as God **2 Th 3:3; 2 Ti 2:13.**

β. of things, esp. of words (Hdt. 8, 83; Pla., Tim. 49b; Aristot., Rhet. 2, 1, 1377b, 23; Polyb. 3, 9, 4; 15, 7, 1; Plut., Mor. 160e; Cass. Dio 37, 35; Jos., Ant. 19, 132; Just., D. 11, 2 διαθήκη; Ath., R. 17 p. 69, 16 τὸ πιστόν; Aberciusins. 6 γράμματα πιστά [of a divine teacher]) πιστός ὁ λόγος (Dionys. Hal. 3, 23, 17; Dio Chrys. 28 [45], 3) *it is a trustworthy saying* **1 Ti 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Ti 2:11; Tit 3:8; cp. 1:9** (JBover, Biblica 19, '38, 74–79). οἱ λόγοι πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοὶ **Rv 21:5; 22:6.** Opp. ψευδής Hm 3:5ab. Ὁν τὰ ὄσια, Δαυὶδ τὰ πιστά **Ac 13:34** s. ὄσιος 3.—Of water *dependable* (i.e. not likely to dry up suddenly; cp. Dt 28:59 νόσοι πισταί), *unfailing, plentiful* B 11:5 (Is 33:16). πιστὸν ποιεῖν τι act loyally **3 J 5.**

② **pert. to being trusting, trusting, cherishing faith/trust** act. aspect of πιστεύω (Aeschyl., Pers. 55, Prom. 916; Soph., Oed. Col. 1031; Pla., Leg. 7, 824; Cass. Dio 37, 12, 1; Just., A I, 53, 10 al.), also *believing, full of faith, faithful* (cp. POxy 1380, 152 ὁρῶσι σε [=Isis] οἱ κατὰ τὸ πιστὸν ἐπικαλούμενοι [on this s. AFestugière, RB 41, '32, 257–61]; Sextus 1; 8; Wsd 3:9; Sir 1:14, 24 v.l.; Ps 100:6; SibOr 3, 69; 724) of OT worthies: Abraham (who is oft. called πιστός; cp. Philo, Post. Cai. 173 Ἄβρ. ὁ πιστός ἐπώνυμος; 2

(article + adjective and + adjective noun) ties these two concepts of holy and faithful closely together. Thus the spiritual experience is the traditional Jewish and Christian vertical/horizontal experience where relationship with God and with others are linked together in an inseparable manner.

**Salutatio, v. 2b:** “Grace to you and peace from God our Father” (χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν).

Here Paul uses his standard ‘Christianized’ howdy. Instead of the single word greeting, χαίρειν, the apostle built off the foundation of with both a Greek greeting and a typical Hebrew greeting (‘peace’ from shalom, שלום) blended into a distinctly Christian expression. Grace, χάρις, comes from the same root form as does χαίρειν. Affirmed clearly is the source of both grace and peace: “from God our Father” (ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν). This was important to a mixed Jewish / Gentile audience to understand that this God who gives grace and peace is “our Father,” not the Jew’s God exclusively.

With the oral reading of this letter to the Colossians and others, they would feel affirmed and at the same time sense the importance of the subsequent words as coming from an apostle commissioned by God through Christ to speak His words to them.

## 2. What does the text mean to you today?

- 1) How do you read letters today?
- 2) Who is Paul in your understanding?
- 3) Who is Timothy?
- 4) Who were the Colossians?
- 5) What have you experienced of God’s grace and peace?

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Macc 1:2; 1 Macc 2:52; Sir 44:20) **Gal 3:9**; 1 Cl 10:1; Νῶε πιστὸς εὐρεθεῖς 9:4; Moses 17:5; 43:1 (both Num 12:7) and s. 1aα above (Hb 3:5). Of believers in contrast to doubters Hm 11:1ab. Of belief in the resurrection of Jesus μὴ γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός J 20:27. Of one who confesses the Christian faith *believing or a believer in the Lord, in Christ, in God* π. τῷ κυρίῳ Ac 16:15. Also π. ἐν κυρίῳ Hm 4, 1, 4. π. ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ **Eph 1:1**. πιστοὶ ἀδελφοὶ ἐν Χρ. **Col 1:2**. δι’ αὐτοῦ (=Χριστοῦ) πιστοὶ (πιστεύοντες v.l.) εἰς θεόν **1 Pt 1:21**.—The abs. πιστός also means *believing (in Christ), a (Christian) believer* and is used both as adj. (Just., D. 110, 4) and as subst. **Ac 16:1**; **2 Cor 6:15**; **1 Ti 4:10**; **5:16**; **6:2ab**; **Tit 1:6**; 1 Cl 48:5; 62:3; 63:3; Hm 9:9; Hs 8, 7, 4; 8, 9, 1; 8, 10, 1; 9, 22, 1. οἱ πιστοὶ the believers = the Christians **Ac 12:3 D**; **1 Ti 4:3, 12**; IEph 21:2; IMg 5:2 (opp. οἱ ἄπιστοι); MPol 12:3; 13:2; AcPl Ha 7, 7 (cp. Just., D. 47, 2 τοῖς Χριστιανοῖς καὶ πιστοῖς). οἱ ἅγιοι καὶ πιστοὶ αὐτοῦ ISm 1:2. οἱ ἐκ περιτομῆς πιστοὶ=the Israelite (s. **Ac 10:36**) believers/Christians **Ac 10:45**. Without the art. (Orig., C. Cels., prol. 6, 5) Dg 11:2, 5. νέοι ἐν τῇ πίστει καὶ πιστοὶ young in the faith, but nevertheless believers Hv 3, 5, 4.—πιστὸς εἶναι be a believer IRo 3:2. ἐὰν ᾗ τις πιστότατος ἀνὴρ even though a man is a firm believer Hm 6, 2, 7.—LFoley, CBQ 1 ’39, 163–65.—B. 1167. New Docs 2, 94, w. reff. to Christian ins. DELG s.v. πείθομαι. M-M. ENDT. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 820-21.]