

## Introduction

- Folk believe the strangest things!!
  - there was a **parents room** (waiting room) in the **nursery in Motherwell** where our boys went, where you could wait while your child was settling in, etc - **so could be there for a while!!**
  - magazines... **like waiting rooms anywhere** serious articles about **Astrology**; "forced" to read this stuff; stuck in my mind because the same day there was a semi-serious discussion on Astrology on Radio 4, of all places!!
  - from magazines or conversations we could probably say similar things about **reincarnation**, about **UFOs**, etc!
- And then they manage to mix it all up!
- From "**Unconditional**" by Nigel Pollock:
  - the story is told of Cambridge College where on registration you had to state your religious affiliation. If you put "Christian", as the majority did for mostly cultural rather than spiritual reasons, you were expected to be at compulsory chapel at 8am. One new student, not fancying the prospect, entered "**sun worshipper**" as his religion. Congratulating himself on his cleverness and looking forward to a lie-in he was shocked to discover the Master of the College knocking on his door at 5am, saying "**The sun will be rising in 10 minutes and I expect you to be up to welcome it into a new day.**" At that moment the student started to think, "**I have to get a new religion!!**" His choice was based on ease, not on convictions about the truth. Others choices may be based on interest, personal preference, attractiveness...
  - but, **truth is never true just because you want it to be**
- Despite this, most people around us mix together what they believe:
  - a little bit of **being good/decent/upright/nice...**
  - a little bit of **checking your horoscope or whatever other superstition takes your fancy...**
  - a little bit of **New Age spirituality, meditation for stress, yoga...**
  - a little bit of **trust in modern medicine (or alternative therapies?)** for when I've got something wrong...
- But then, as the saying goes, "**There's nowt as strange as folk!!**"
- That's our world - **but it was also the world to which Paul wrote!!**
- *and this letter, to a particular church in an insignificant place a long time ago, carries too a fundamental truth that we need to learn, again and again and again:*
- **Put Christ first!**
- We'll see that coming out throughout our studies between now and late February.
  - but for tonight, lets take a few moments to introduce our main characters...

## Paul and Timothy

### Paul

- We are perhaps reasonably familiar with him... but, worth remembering:
  - he was an **Apostle** - he claims that status as he writes
  - consequently these are not merely the opinions of an admittedly brilliant man!
- Rather, he was a man turned round from **hatred and contempt** for Christ and his followers to **love and service**.
  - he was someone who had **met the risen Christ**
  - he was someone **touched, transformed by grace!**
  - and he was someone **sent by the Lord** to proclaim the gospel among the Gentiles as well as among the Jews
- As such - and particularly as an apostle - he spoke and still speaks with **authority**

Timothy

- Brother in Christ to Paul; close affinity in ministry:
  - rather than coming from a hatred of Christ and all things Christian, he was from a Christian home, with lots of **background** in the faith
  - also someone **touched by grace!**
- For both, the emphasis here is that they are **"in Christ"**:
  - for ultimately, nothing else matters!
  - a priority we need to hear as we relate to one another;
  - are we **"in Christ"** ourselves...?
  - Do we relate to each other as **"in Christ"**, **brothers and sisters?**
  - riches, poverty, ability, attractiveness, age, gender, none of these comes close compared to being **"in Christ"!**

**The Colossians**

- Small provincial town; overshadowed by Laodecia nearby.
  - **see map**
  - insignificant folk, from an insignificant town...
  - but **how does Paul address them?**

Saints

- Holy... **hagios...**: reflects their status, not their behaviour
- In relationship with Christ, we are made holy:
  - his holiness cloaks us
- So despite the fact that Paul was about to challenge them and some of their doctrine and behaviour, they were still **holy, saints**:
  - a God given status, **not an earned one, not something they could polish by attendance at services!**

Faithful

- **pistoi**
- This term probably does refer to something of their behaviour:
  - they'd stuck with Jesus, the Christian way, even if imperfectly
- **Challenge to us** - if Paul was writing to us, what word would he pick out to describe us?
  - **holy** - yes, because it is our God given status!
  - **faithful...?** or ....?
- OK, **we've got whose writing, we've got who they are writing to**
  - **but what do they actually say to them in these two opening verses of greeting?**

**Grace and Peace**

- Two words expressing what Paul & Timothy would love to see these Colossian believers receive from God the Father in heaven:
  - **Charis**
  - God's favour!!
    - supremely in Christ's death for us;
    - extending to every aspect of his goodness and love for us...
  - Both Paul and Timothy are those touched & transformed by grace, by **charis**
    - their desire is that the Colossians too would know that grace at work in their lives!
  - **Eirene / Shalom**
  - Healthy condition of life experienced by the person who enjoys God's favour:
    - person at peace with themselves and their situation, because they are at peace with God!

## Conclusion

- All that is good here is God's gift to us in Christ!
  - so, **focus our attention on him!**
  - give him the **priority and central place** he is due!
- God's stamp on their lives "allowed" Paul and Timothy to write this letter...
  - his stamp on the Colossians lives prompted Paul to write to them...
    - *let his stamp become increasingly evident in our lives!*