A Study of the Book of Colossians

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Colossians: The Supremacy of Christ

Introduction

Author:
The apostle Paul, joined in his salutation by Timothy (1:1), and signed by Paul himself at the end of the letter (4:18). Early sources in church history that attribute this letter to Paul include: Eusebius (300 A.D.), Origen (250 A.D.), Clement of Alexandria (200 A.D.), Tertullian (200 A.D.), Irenaeus (200 A.D.), and the Muratorian Fragment (180 A.D.).

THE CITY OF COLOSSE

The city was located about 100 miles east of Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Together with Hieropolis (4:13) and Laodicea (2:1; 4:13-16; Re 3:14-22), Colosse made up a tri-city area.
Each city had its own distinction:

- **Hierapolis**, a place for health, pleasure, and relaxation
- **Laodicea**, known for its commercial trade and politics
- **Colosse**, known simply as a small town

Colosse was mostly a pagan city, with a strong intermingling of Jews (in 62 B.C., there were 11,000 Jewish freemen in the tri-city area). This may explain the nature of some of the problems that arose among the church in Colosse (problems with both pagan and Jewish origin).

THE CHURCH AT COLOSSE

The establishment of the church is uncertain. At issue is whether Paul himself had ever been there. Some suggest that Paul may have done some work there during his third journey, on the way to Ephesus (cf. Ac 18:23; 19:1). Others point out that Paul's comments imply that he had not personally been in Colosse (cf. 2:1). One possibility is that the church was established during Paul's extended stay at Ephesus, where the effect of his work spread throughout Asia Minor (cf. Ac 19:8-10). It may not have been Paul himself, but one of his coworkers who went out to Colosse. Paul's remarks in the epistle indicate that Epaphras was the one who preached the gospel there (1:5-8) and in Hierapolis and Laodicea (4:12-13). Though he was with Paul at the time the epistle was written, Epaphras is identified as "one of you" (4:12), suggesting that he may have originally been from Colosse.

Other members of the church at Colosse included Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus, who may have been father, mother, and son. By comparing the epistle to the Colossians with that written to Philemon, it is reasonable to suppose that the church at Colosse met in their home (cf. 4:17 with Phile 1-2, and the references to Archippus). If Philemon and his family were hosts of the church at Colosse, then Onesimus (Philemon's slave) would have also been a member there upon his return (cf. 4:7-9 with Phile 8-16).
TIME AND PLACE OF WRITING

Colossians is one of Paul's four "prison epistles" (4:18; cf. Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon). The general consensus is that these epistles were written during Paul's imprisonment at Rome (cf. Ac 28:16, 30-31). If such is truly the case, then Paul wrote Colossians around 61-63 A.D. from Rome. The indication is that the epistles to the Colossians, Philemon and the Ephesians were carried to their destination by Tychicus and Onesimus (cf. 4:7-9; Phile 10-12; Ep 6:21-22).

PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE

Paul had received a report of the situation at Colosse by way of Epaphras (1:7-8). This report was for the most part favorable (2:5). But the subject matter in the epistle strongly suggests that the church was facing a twofold danger:

- The danger of relapse into paganism with its gross immorality (cf. 1:21-23; 2:6; 3:5-11)
- The danger of accepting what has been come to known as "The Colossian heresy". This heresy was a syncretism involving four elements of both pagan and Jewish origin:
  - Philosophies of men - which denied the all sufficiency and preeminence of Christ (2:8)
  - Judaistic ceremonialism - which attached special significance to the rite of circumcision, food regulations, and observance of special days (2:11,16-17)
  - Angel worship - which detracted from the uniqueness of Christ (2:18)
  - Asceticism - which called for harsh treatment of the body as the means to control its lusts (2:20-23)

To guard against these dangers, Paul writes to:

- Warn the Colossians against relapse (1:21-23)
- Warn them against the "solution" being urged upon them by those denying the all-sufficiency of Christ (2:8-23)
- Direct their attention to the "Beloved Son", the "All-Sufficient and Preeminent Savior" (1:13-18; 2:8-10)
Lesson 1
INTRODUCTION (1:1-14)

1. Salutation (1-2)
2. Thanksgiving and prayer (3-14)

Open It

1. How many cards and letters do you usually receive at Christmas?

2. When was the last time you received a letter from a stranger?

3. *When was the last time you received a letter that really cheered you up?

Explore It

4. Who wrote the letter to the Colossians? (1:1)

5. Who was with Paul when he wrote this letter? (1:1)

6. How did Paul address the Colossian Christians? (1:2)

7. How did Paul greet his audience? (1:2)

8. *Why did Paul offer prayers of thanksgiving for the Colossians? (1:3-4)

9. From what source did the believers’ faith and love spring? (1:5)

10. What did Paul stress about the gospel? (1:5-6)

11. Who taught the gospel to the Colossians? (1:7)

12. How did Paul describe Epaphras? (1:7)
13. What did Epaphras tell Paul and Timothy about the Colossians? (1:7-8)

14. *What was Paul’s primary prayer for these Christians? (1:9)

15. *What results did Paul want for the Colossians? (1:10)

16. How could the church at Colosse have spiritual strength? (1:11-12)

17. How does God enable believers to share in His inheritance? (1:12-14)

Get It

18. What do you find appealing about the way Paul started his letter to the Colossians?

19. *Why did Paul praise a group of Christians he had never met?

20. How are the results of faith, love, and hope evident in your life?

21. How is the gospel bearing fruit in your church?

22. *What can we learn about praying for others from Paul’s prayers for the Colossians?

23. If Paul were to write you a personal letter, what might he say to you?

Apply It

24. What is one way you can improve your prayer this week?

25. What missionaries can you pray for on a regular basis over the next month?

26. *To whom can you write an encouraging letter sometime during the next week?
Lesson 2
THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST (1:15-23)

A. IN CREATION (1:15-17)

1. The image of the invisible God (1:15a)
2. The first-born over all creation (1:15b-17)

B. IN REDEMPTION (1:18-23)

1. The head of the body, the church (1:18a)
2. The beginning, the first-born from the dead (1:18b)
3. That He might have preeminence in all things (1:18c)
   a. In Whom all the fullness dwells (1:19)
   b. In Whom all things are to be reconciled to God (1:20)
   c. The Colossians as a case in point (1:21-23)

1. What person comes to mind when you think of greatness?
2. Whom do you look up to? Why?
3. What qualities stand out in a person you admire?
4. What is Christ’s relationship to God? (1:15)
5. What is Christ’s relationship to Creation? (1:15-17)
6. How do "all things . . . hold together" under Christ? (1:16-17)
7. What is Christ’s relationship to the church? (1:18)
8. Why was the resurrection of Jesus significant? (1:18)
9. How did Paul explain the deity of Christ? (1:19)
10. What did God achieve through the work of His Son? (1:20)
11. How did Christ bring us to God? (1:21-22)

12. Why was reconciliation necessary? (1:21-22)

13. What is a Christian’s position before God? (1:22)

14. What is the role of faith in reconciliation with God? (1:23)

15. What kind of faith did the Colossians have? (1:23)

16. What was Paul’s confident expectation? (1:23)

17. Why did Paul take the time to describe the qualities of Christ?

18. What difference does our understanding about Christ make?

19. How would you explain reconciliation (with God) to a non-Christian friend?

20. What does the work of Christ on your behalf mean to you?

21. In what way are we all under Christ’s authority?

22. In what way are you under Christ’s authority?

23. How firm is your faith?

24. What can a person do if his or her faith is weak?

25. When can you take time this week to meditate on this powerful, compelling description of Christ?
26. What truths about Christ do you want to remember when you present the gospel to unbelieving friends?

27. How can you strengthen your faith in Christ this week?
Lesson 3
THE APOSTLE OF CHRIST (1:24-2:5)

A. PAUL'S SERVICE (1:24-29)

1. His joy in suffering for them (1:24)
2. His ministry (1:25-29)
   a. A stewardship to proclaim the mystery of God now revealed (1:25-27)
   b. A labor to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus (1:28-29)

B. PAUL'S SOLICITUDE (2:1-5)

1. His great concern for them (2:1-3)
2. Reasons for this concern (2:4-5)

   1. When was the last time you had a good physical workout?
   2. How do you feel after strenuous physical exercise?
   3. Why did Paul rejoice? (1:24)
   4. What did Paul do for the sake of the church? (1:24)
   5. What commission did God give Paul? (1:25)
   6. To what mystery did Paul refer? (1:26)
   7. To whom had God chosen to make known a mystery? (1:27)
   8. How did Paul help believers become spiritually mature? (1:28-29)
   9. What kind of effort did Paul expend in preaching and teaching? (1:29)
  10. What did Paul want his audience to know? (2:1)
  11. What was Paul’s stated purpose? (2:2-3)
12. What is hidden in Christ? (2:3)

13. How would a commitment to the full knowledge of Christ protect the Colossians? (2:4)

14. How was Paul unified with the church at Colosse? (2:4)

15. What delighted Paul? (2:5)

16. Paul had never met the Colossian Christians; how could he have suffered for them?

17. How is suffering an essential part of the Christian life?

18. Why did Paul work so hard for the Colossians?

19. What results did Paul expect from his work for the sake of the gospel?

20. What can you do for the church of Christ?

21. When have you become tired because of your work for the kingdom of God?

22. What makes a church encouraged and united?

23. What "fine-sounding arguments" draw some Christians away from the faith?

24. What can we do to grow in our understanding of Christ?

25. What can you do to grow in your understanding of Christ?

26. What kind of "spiritual workout" would increase your stamina for the Christian journey ahead this week?

26. How can you learn more about Christ this week?
Lesson 4
WARNINGS AGAINST "THE COLOSSIAN HERESY" (2:6-15)

1. Exhortations to be firmly established in Christ (2:6-7)

A. WARNING AGAINST PHILOSOPHY (2:8-10)

1. Beware of being cheated by philosophy and empty deceit (2:8)
2. In Christ dwells the fullness of God, and you are complete in Him (2:9-10)

B. WARNING AGAINST JUDAISTIC CEREMONIALISM (2:11-15)

1. In Christ you have a circumcision made without hands (2:11-12)
2. You are made alive in Christ, and the handwriting of requirements that was against us has been taken away at the cross (2:13-15)

1. What good advice have you never forgotten?

2. In what ways would you characterize yourself as permissive, and in what ways would you characterize yourself as strict?

3. How did Paul tell the Colossians to continue in Christ? (2:6-7)

4. How were the Colossians to walk in Christ?

5. What false teaching was Paul concerned about? (2:8)

6. What three things might be used to "cheat" us?


8. What is said about Jesus in relation to the Godhead?

9. What is our condition in Christ?

10. What did God give the Colossian believers? (2:10)

11. Why do Gentile Christians have no need to conform to Jewish rules and regulations?
12. (2:11-12)

13. What sort of "circumcision" have we had in Christ?
14. How did the Cross cancel the written code? (2:13-14)

15. What takes place in baptism? Who is the one at work in baptism?

16. What did Christ take out of the way, having nailed it to the cross?
Lesson 5
WARNINGS AGAINST "THE COLOSSIAN HERESY" Continued (2:16-23)

1. Therefore don't let anyone judge you in regards to food, festivals, or Sabbath days (2:16-17)

   C. WARNING AGAINST ANGEL WORSHIP (2:18-19)

   1. Don't let anyone defraud you of your reward by appealing to angel worship and imagined visions of a fleshly mind (2:18)
   2. Such people do not hold fast to Christ as the Head, and from whom true divine nourishment comes (2:19)

   D. WARNING AGAINST ASCETICISM (2:20-23)

   1. Having died with Christ to the world, there is no need to submit to human ordinances (2:20-22)
   2. While having appearances of wisdom, such practices have no value in controlling the indulgences of the flesh (2:23)

1. From what did Christ deliver us? How? (2:15-17)
2. How did Paul encourage the Colossians to practice their freedom in Christ? (2:16)
4. Whom did Paul accuse of trying to rob believers of their spiritual rewards? (2:18)
5. What were the characteristics of the false teachers? (2:18-19)
6. How did Paul challenge the legalism that had infected the church? (2:20-21)
7. What are the failings of human commands and teachings? (2:20-23)
8. What "additions" to faith in Christ have you encountered from teachers in your Christian community?
9. How are you affected by popular religious rules floating around today?
10. What does "fullness in Christ" mean to you?
11. Paul's advice kept the Colossians growing in their faith; what Christian leaders have helped you stay on track spiritually?
12. How deep are the roots of your faith?
13. This week, how can you best exercise the freedom you have in Christ?

14. How can you help a Christian friend get rid of his or her false ideas about Christ?
Lesson 6
THE CHRISTIAN SOLUTION (3:1-3:17)

A. SET YOUR MIND ON THINGS ABOVE (3:1-4)

1. Since you were raised with Christ, seek those things above (3:1-2)
2. For you have died and your life is now hidden in Christ, to be revealed when He appears (3:3-4)

B. PUT OFF THE OLD MAN (3:5-9)

1. Put to death your members here on the earth, for the wrath of God is coming on the sons of disobedience (3:5-7)
2. Put off the old man with his deeds (3:8-9)

C. PUT ON THE NEW MAN (3:10-17)

1. Put on the new man, renewed in the image of our Creator (3:10-11)
2. As God's elect, put on Christ-like qualities (3:12-14)
3. Let God's peace rule in your hearts, and be thankful (3:15)
4. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another with song and singing with grace in your hearts (3:16)
5. Do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, with thanksgiving (3:17)

1. What’s the nicest suit or outfit you have ever worn?
2. When you’re finished with your old clothes, what do you often do with them?
3. Where did Paul tell the Colossians to turn their attention? (3:1)
4. Where did Paul tell the believers to focus their concern? (3:2)
5. What was the Colossians’ security? (3:3)
6. Why should believers look forward to Christ’s return? (3:4)
7. What must die? (3:5)
8. What evil activities does God seek to eliminate from our lives? (3:5)
9. Why is God’s wrath coming? (3:5-6)
10. What had the Colossians taken off? (3:7-9)
11. What had the Colossians put on? (3:10)
12. What distinctions are removed in Christ? (3:11)

13. What virtues does God seek to plant in us? (3:12, 14)

14. How were the Colossian believers called to clothe themselves? (3:12-17)

15. Why did Paul call on the believers to be peaceful and thankful? (3:15-16)


17. What is one principle that ought to guide everything we do? (3:17)

18. If you consistently set your sights on Christ and heaven, how would your life be different?

19. What old, "earthly" clothing do you need to get rid of?

20. How does wearing "Christ’s clothing" affect the way you live your daily life?

21. What Christian virtues are you lacking?

22. What spiritual process is involved in "putting off" and "putting on"?

23. What is involved in replacing old habits with new ones?

24. How should life in Christ affect the way you treat others?

25. How are all your relationships to be built around Christ?

26. Why do we need to be loving toward others?

27. Why is a thankful spirit an important part of holy living?

28. Which of God’s goals for holy living do you need to apply to your life this week?

29. How can you be more thankful and loving to those who are close to you?
Lesson 7
THE CHRISTIAN SOLUTION continued (3:18-4:1)

D. FAMILIAL RESPONSIBILITIES (3:18-4:1)

1. Wives toward their husbands (3:18)
2. Husbands toward their wives (3:19)
3. Children toward their parents (3:20)
4. Fathers toward their children (3:21)
5. Servants toward their masters (3:22-25)
6. Masters toward their servants (4:1)

1. If you were to make up a slogan that describes your family, what would it be?
2. Generally speaking, how do you get along with others?
3. What should wives do? (3:18)
4. What should husbands do? (3:19)
5. How should children respond to parents? (3:20)
6. Why does obedience to parents please the Lord? (3:20)
7. Of what do fathers need to be careful? (3:21)
8. How can children become discouraged? (3:21)
10. How were slaves called on to serve Christ? (3:23-24)
11. How would God mete out full justice in the master-slave relationship? (3:25)
12. What instructions did Paul give masters? (4:1)
13. What insight did Paul give masters? (4:1)
14. How do God’s instructions to families help family members become mature Christians?
15. Why should wives submit to their husbands?
16. Why does God tell husbands not to be harsh with their wives?
17. Why should Christian parents rear their children in an atmosphere of encouragement?
18. How can Christian parents rear their children in an atmosphere of encouragement?

19. How can God’s instructions to slaves apply today to Christian employees?
20. Which of God’s principles for Christian households challenge you to change?

21. What is one way you can improve the way you treat each member of your family?

22. How can you have an attitude of service toward others in your work?
Lesson 8
EXHORTATIONS TO PRAYER AND PROPER CONDUCT (4:2-6)

A. Devote yourselves to prayer (4:2-4)

B. Walk in wisdom and let your speech be with grace (4:5-6)

1. What’s your favorite salty snack?

2. If you had to eat all food without salt for a day or two, how would this affect your eating habits?

3. What are the main points of this chapter?

4. What did Paul prescribe for all believers? (4:2)

5. In calling them to earnest prayer, what four things does Paul ask of them?

6. What request did Paul make of his readers? (4:3-4)

7. What did Paul say about the Christian’s public life? (4:5-6)

8. How should believers speak to others? (4:6)

9. How were they to walk?

10. How were they to speak?

11. How can God open a door for a message?

12. How do we conduct ourselves with wisdom toward outsiders?

13. How can we make the most of our opportunities?

14. Why is our speech to be “gracious, seasoned with salt?”
Lesson 9
PAUL'S COMPANIONS (4:7-14)
CONCLUSION (4:15-18)

A. COMMENDATIONS OF HIS MESSENGERS (4:7-9)

1. Tychicus, a faithful servant who will inform them of Paul's circumstances (4:7-8)
2. Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother (4:9)

B. GREETINGS FROM HIS FRIENDS (4:10-14)

1. Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus, fellow workers for the kingdom of God (4:10-11)
2. Epaphras, one of them, and a servant of Christ (4:12-13)
3. Luke the beloved physician, and Demas (4:14)

C. CONCLUSION (4:15-18)

1. Greetings to those in Laodicea, and to Nymphas and the church in his house (4:15)
2. A command to read and exchange the epistles from Paul (4:16)
3. A personal exhortation to Archippus (4:17)
4. A personal signoff from the hand of Paul,

   1. Who was Tychicus? (4:7)
   2. Why did Paul send Tychicus to Colosse? (4:7-8)
   3. Who was Onesimus? (4:9)
   4. Whose greetings to the Colossians did Paul include in his letter? (4:10-14)
   5. Which of Paul’s partners in ministry were Jews? (4:10-11)
   6. What did Epaphras do on behalf of his church at Colosse? (4:12-13)
   7. What relationship did Luke and Demas have to Paul? (4:14)
   8. To whom did Paul send greetings? (4:15) Where did Paul want his letter read? (4:16)
11. Why is prayer important?
12. How much time do you devote to prayer each day?
13. How did Paul set an example for mature interpersonal relationships?

14. In what ways is your conversation "seasoned with salt"?

15. How well do you relate to unbelievers?

16. Paul demonstrated the value of teamwork in ministry; how well do you work with other Christians for the kingdom of God?

17. Paul spoke highly of his Christian friends; what can you praise about your Christian friends?

18. How can you season your speech with God’s grace among non-Christians?

19. How can you remember to speak well of family members and Christian friends this week?

20. What personal relationship can you improve during the next few days? How?