

Colossians

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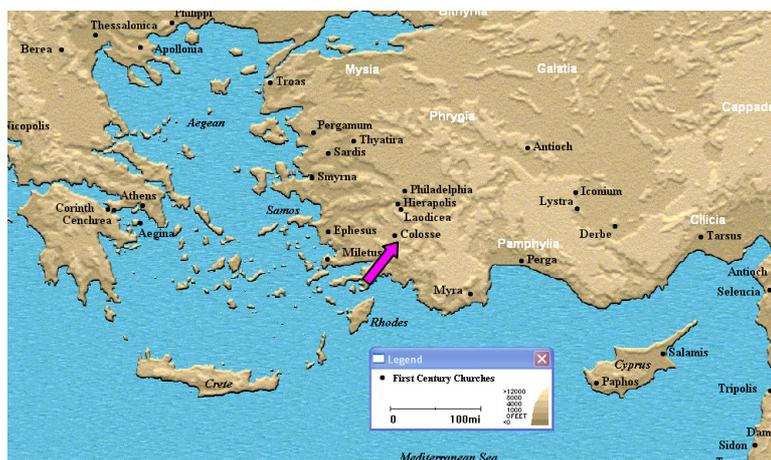
Author: Paul

Date: Written from prison in Rome about AD 57-62.
Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon were written about the same time, and form a little group in Paul's writings called the Captivity Epistles.

Purpose:

- To encourage the believers to live for Christ in a world where other philosophies eg. Gnosticism) were strongly influencing them.
- To counter the false teachings of Gnosticism that were infiltrating the Church.
- To declare the pre-eminence of Christ and contrast this with the emptiness of human philosophy.

Colosse was a town about 100km east of Ephesus in modern day Turkey. The Church in Colosse was probably established by Epaphras and Timothy 1:1, 7. Paul may not have visited Colosse in his missionary journeys, but obviously had a great love and concern for the Church there. Colosse was destroyed in the 12th Century AD.



Key verses:

"...asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way; bearing fruit in every good work; growing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience ..." Colossians 1: 9-11

"... so that in everything He (Christ) might have the supremacy". 1:18

For in Christ the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ who is the head over every power and authority. 2:9,10

The church today desperately needs the message of Colossians. We live in a day when religious toleration is interpreted to mean 'one religion is just as good as another.' Some people try to take the best from various religious systems and manufacture their own private religion. To many people, Jesus Christ is only *one* of several great religious teachers, with no more authority than they. He may be prominent, but He is definitely not pre-eminent.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*

Introduction 1:1-14

Greetings 1:1-2

Paul and Timothy greet the *holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse*. 1:2

Thanksgiving for the Colossians 1:3-8

Paul thanks God for the Colossians.

- for their **faith** in Christ Jesus
- for their **love** for all the saints based on the **hope** stored up for them in heaven
- because they heard the **truth** of the gospel.

Faith..., hope..., love..., truth.... Essentials of the Christian faith!

The Colossians are evidence of how the Gospel has been bearing fruit all over the world.

Prayer for the Colossians 1:9-14

Paul prays that God would fill them with knowledge of His will, through all spiritual wisdom and understanding and that they would:

- live a life worthy of the Lord
- please Him in every way
- bear fruit in every good work
- grow in the knowledge of God
- be strengthened with God's mighty power
- have great endurance and patience
- joyfully give thanks to God.

This is because they are qualified to *share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us in to the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.* 1:12,13

The Colossians lived in a clash between two kingdoms (just as Christians do today!):

The kingdom of God In which Jesus Christ is Lord	The kingdom of darkness In which anything other than Jesus Christ is Lord
One true God Obedience to the revealed will of God Standards of righteousness The Bible is the word of God Eternal life in Christ Hope for the future Live in fellowship with God Live to please God	god is whatever... Do whatever you like Situational standards 'Truth' is relative No life after death Hopelessness Live for self God is irrelevant
This clash between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness shows itself in many ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • news media: radio, TV, newspapers, magazines; • entertainment: music, movies, computer games, internet • business, politics, judiciary, education, academia, work, economy, environment, sexuality • church, religions, philosophies, godlessness • drugs, crime, terrorism, lack of respect, lawlessness <p><i>God has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.</i></p>	

The pre-eminence of Christ 1:15-18

Paul now shows that Jesus is supreme and above all. He is pre-eminent. There is none that can compare with Him!

Jesus is:	Implications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the image of the invisible God 	<p>God is invisible. John 1:18. If you want to know what God is like look at Jesus. John 14:9</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the firstborn over all creation the creator of all things in heaven and earth; visible and invisible; thrones; powers; rulers; authorities etc. All things were created by Him and for Him). 	<p>God's purpose in creation was to have a people who would love Him, and with whom He could have fellowship. Revelation 4:11.</p> <p>Everything in the universe was created by Jesus and for Jesus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The issue of <i>how</i> this happened (creation/ evolution/Big Bang/etc.) is much less important than <i>why</i> it happened! Our perspectives on people, society, authorities, environment, meaning and purpose of life, possessions, human rights etc. will be radically changed when we realise that everything was created for, and is supposed to exist for Jesus, not for us!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> before all things and in Him all things hold together 	<p>Jesus is above everything, and holds everything together. The key words here are 'in Him'.</p> <p>God's purposes are always completed "in Christ". We were included "in Christ" at the Cross when Jesus became sin and took the full penalty of sin (death) on our behalf. On the basis of this God declares us to be righteous "in Christ" and we are able to fellowship with Him. This is called justification. See 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Romans 1:17; 3:21-26; 5:18,19; 8:1-4; Ephesians 1:3-14 etc.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the head of the Body of Christ, the Church 	<p>Jesus is the Head of the Church, not the Pope, pastors, or church leaders. With Jesus as Head the Church is His body, carrying out His will in the earth. Ultimately, <i>God's good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment is to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ.</i> Ephesians 1:9,10</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the beginning and firstborn from the dead 	<p>Jesus is the first one raised from the dead. All of those who are "in Christ" were also raised from death to life with Him, and have been 'born again'. As a result all in Christ have eternal life. John 3:1-15. Romans 5:17-19; 6:1-10.</p>

so that in everything He might have the supremacy. 1:18

Never forget that Jesus is always to be pre-eminent.

Only He is *King of kings and Lord of lords.* Revelation 19:16

The reconciling work of Christ 1:19-2:7

For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood shed on the cross. 1:19,20

- Once we were enemies of God and alienated from Him (due to our evil behaviour).
- In Christ we have been reconciled back to God and are at peace with Him. No longer are we His enemies; now we are His friends.
- Jesus has brought about this reconciliation through the shedding of His blood at the Cross. *God made Him who had no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21*
- As a result (in Christ) we are *holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation. 1:22* and are thus able to freely have fellowship with God.
- We must continue in this relationship, *established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. 1:23*

Paul has been commissioned as a servant of God in proclaiming the gospel, the Word of God, and has done so faithfully. The message of the gospel is a *mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 1:25-27*

So as a result of the gospel Christ is in us, and we are “in Christ”! How glorious!

Paul then states his purpose in proclaiming the gospel:

We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. 1:28 The word ‘perfect’ here is *teleios*: mature, fully formed, complete, finished, perfect. Every Christian fully complete and mature in Christ! That’s the goal.

Paul labours for this so that they might:

- be encouraged in heart
- united in love
- have full understanding of the mystery of God ie. *Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 2:3*
- not be deceived by fine sounding arguments
- be strong in their faith.

Paul laboured so that the Colossians, and other early Christians might be saved and included “in Christ”, and then might come to maturity in Him. Ultimately, our service for the Lord is just the same as Paul’s.

So, then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. 2:6,7

Freedom from human regulations 2:8-23

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world, rather than on Christ. 2:8

The early Christians either came from a Jewish background or from a pagan background. When they became Christians they naturally brought their existing ideas and cultural practices into their Christianity. This is why much of the New Testament is aimed at establishing the foundational truths of the Christian faith and correcting false teaching.

For the Colossians (who mostly came from a pagan background) the main issue was that they were being seduced away from Christ by ‘hollow and deceptive philosophies’ that were bringing them into bondage rather than into the freedom that exists in Christ. These philosophies were built around human traditions and worldly principles, rather than on Christ.

Some of these 'hollow and deceptive' philosophies were:

- legalism. eg. requiring of circumcision 2:11-13, 3:11; compliance with the law and its regulations for what can be eaten or drunk; observation of religious festivals and Sabbath days. 2:14-17
- false humility and worship of angels 2:18-19
- secret knowledge (gnosis) 2:18
- reliance on human wisdom (Sophia) and traditions 2:20
- asceticism 2:21-23
- undermining of the Lordship of Christ 1:15-20; 2:2-9

These philosophies are strongly contrasted with the freedom that there is in Christ.

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In Him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your human nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code with its regulations, that was against us and stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. 2:9-15

The main philosophy that Paul (and other early Christian leaders) had to counter was **Gnosticism**. This 'deceptive philosophy' was becoming a significant problem in many of the developing Churches, not just in the Church at Colosse. (John's Gospel, 1 John, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, 2 Peter and possibly 1 Corinthians include sections written to counter Gnosticism in the Church).

Main beliefs of Gnosticism

- In the beginning just two things existed: God and matter.
- God is pure spirit and is entirely good. Matter is entirely evil.
- God can't have anything to do with matter because it is evil.
- To create the universe God put out emanations (Aeons), further and further from Himself.
- The creator God (Demiurge) came from one of the emanations and is equated with Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament. The Creator God is evil and hostile to the true God.
- Sophia, the mother of the Demiurge, was once a virginal goddess, but fell from her original purity causing the world to be evil and flawed. People (Adam) in this evil world are separated from God and enslaved by moral laws and the laws of nature. They have a divine spark within them but are ignorant of this.
- The divine spark can be awakened through knowledge (gnosis). This salvation comes through spiritual revelations given by Messengers of Light (mainly Seth, Jesus, Mani and Sophia). Salvation comes by increasing knowledge, not by faith, obedience or good works.
- Growth in gnosis can only occur while we are alive. Death releases the divine spark but it gets re-incarnated for further cycles and continued evolution.
- Ethics, morality and rules serve the Demiurge. The inner spark brings about personal morality rather than rules, so matters of conduct are left to individual choice. "Since the effort is to restore the wholeness and unity of the Godhead, active rebellion against the moral law of the Old Testament is enjoined upon every man".
- Growth in gnosis is a cosmic event. The ultimate end of all gnosis is *metanoia*, or repentance, the undoing of the sin of material existence when Christ and Sophia welcome the spiritual person into Pleroma (fullness or Paradise).
- In time every spiritual being will achieve gnosis, be re-united with their angelic twin – their higher self, and enter Pleroma.

From this some Christians had come to believe Jesus was just one of the emanations, and so was not divine. Others (the Docetists) said Jesus had no body: He was like a phantom and only seemed to be a man. That's why Paul says:

He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 1:15-18

For God was pleased to have all His fullness (pleroma) dwell in Him... 1:19

We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom (sophia), so that we may present everyone perfect (teleios) in Christ. 1:28

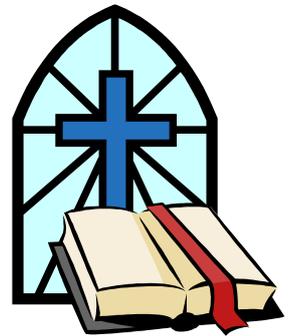
My purpose is so that they ... may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom (sophia) and knowledge (gnosis). 2:2,3

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form....2:9

The reality.... is found in Christ. 2:17

And John says in the introduction to His Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word (logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; and without Him nothing was made that has been made. The Word became flesh (sarx) and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:1-3, 14



By the Second and Third Centuries Gnosticism had become even stronger and its philosophies more developed. It was intricately linked with magic and astrology; had created a vast body of literature (including various texts that are in the Apocrypha, and some that have been highlighted in the Da Vinci Code); had its own rituals including baptism, confirmation, and communion; and significantly influenced the development of the Roman Church. Justin Martyr and Tertullian were two early writers who tried to expose the evils of Gnosticism in the Church.

Gnosticism is still a widely held philosophy, underpinning many of the anti-Christian and 'politically correct' world views current in some 21st Century Churches and in society in general.

We need to understand the way people think and recognise where it is coming from, then communicate the Gospel to them based on an understanding of the philosophical base on which they have built their lives. Also, we need to recognise that we are being influenced every day to think and act in ways that have Gnostic under-pinnings, especially by Government decisions and priorities.

The message of Paul to the Colossians regarding Gnosticism is vitally relevant for Christians today! Be aware!

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch! These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. 2:20-23

Practical Christian living 3:1- 4:6

At the Cross Christians died with Christ and were raised with Him into newness of life. As a result we are now “in Christ” and *we are holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation*. 1:22. Our behaviour and actions, however, may be quite different to our position “in Christ”!

Paul now gives many practical instructions for how we are to live out our Christianity in the world. We are to live in a way that reflects our position in Christ (ie. holy, without blemish, and blameless in God’s sight). As we obey these practical instructions our state in the world becomes more and more like our position in Christ and we are gradually transformed into the likeness of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). We can’t do this in our own strength, though! The Holy Spirit works in our lives in a process of sanctification to do this and make us like Jesus. (Romans Chapters 6-8 describe in detail how this can take place).

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world 2:20

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 3:1-4

Since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. 3:9-11

<input type="checkbox"/> Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, idolatry.	<input type="checkbox"/> Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
<input type="checkbox"/> Rid yourself of actions from your old way of life: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language.	<input type="checkbox"/> Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.
<input type="checkbox"/> Do not lie to each other.	<input type="checkbox"/> Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.
<input type="checkbox"/> Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.	<input type="checkbox"/> Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.
<input type="checkbox"/> Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.	<input type="checkbox"/> Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.
<input type="checkbox"/> Put on love, which binds them all other virtues together in perfect unity.	<input type="checkbox"/> Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men for it is the Lord Christ you are serving.
<input type="checkbox"/> Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart.	<input type="checkbox"/> Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.
<input type="checkbox"/> Be thankful.	<input type="checkbox"/> Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.
<input type="checkbox"/> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.	<input type="checkbox"/> Pray that God may open a door for the message of the gospel and that it may be proclaimed clearly.
<input type="checkbox"/> Sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.	<input type="checkbox"/> Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.
<input type="checkbox"/> Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.	<input type="checkbox"/> Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Conclusion 4:2-18

Paul finishes his letter with a final message to the Colossians (and to us!), and by sending greetings to individuals within the Church.

Paul's final message to the Colossians 4:2-6

Cherish your relationship with God v 2

- *devote yourselves to prayer*
- *be watchful* (because it's easy to get drawn away from your relationship with God)
- *be thankful* (because He has done so much for you).

Focus on sharing the good news of Jesus v 3, 4

Pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should.

- Persecution (which Paul was experiencing in his imprisonment) makes you focus on what is important!
- The easy life leads to easy-going Christianity.
- If all we have learned about the supremacy of Christ and living for Him is true, we have a strong responsibility to share it with others.

Be wise in the way you live out your Christianity v 5, 6

We live in a similar world to the Colossians with many philosophies attacking Christianity. How important it is that we live out the truth wisely. Otherwise the Gospel gets mis-represented, and we are seen as intolerant bigots, hypocrites and fakes. The message gets thrown out with the messengers.

- *Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders.*
- *Make the most of every opportunity.*
- *Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt.* (As Christians the way we speak should strongly differentiate us from others. eg. In the way we participate in discussions, the graciousness we show when speaking with others, and by not swearing).
- *so that you may know how to answer everyone.*
Those outside of Christ do have questions! If they see the answers being worked out in us they will ask their questions and this gives us our best window of opportunity to share how wonderful living for Jesus really is.

Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphant procession in Christ, and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him. 2 Corinthians 2: 14

Final greetings 4:7-18

- Tychicus was bringing the letter from Rome to the Colossians. (He probably helped Paul with writing it down in the first place). *Tychicus is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.* 4:7-9
- Onesimus was the runaway slave that Paul had written to Philemon about in Philemon 1:8-21. Obviously Philemon had listened to Paul's advice and now Onesimus was a great helper for Paul and Tychicus.

Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus Justus, Epaphras, Luke, and Demas send their greetings.

- Aristarchus was with Paul in Ephesus and Greece Acts 19:29; 20:4. He accompanied Paul on the journey to Rome. Acts 27:2.
- John Mark was the writer of the second Gospel. He had caused a relationship breakdown between Paul and Barnabas when he deserted them during the First missionary journey. Acts 13:13; 15:36-41. It's good to see that now Paul valued Mark because *he is helpful to me in my ministry*. 2 Timothy 4:11 and recommended that the Colossians welcome him. 4:10.
- There were only a few converted Jews in Rome and *they have proved a comfort* for Paul. 4:11
- Epaphras had originally brought the Gospel to Colosse. *He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. He is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.* 4:12,13
- Luke (a doctor) was the writer of the third Gospel, and had traveled with Paul on some of his missionary journeys.
- Demas later deserted Paul *because he loved this world*. 2 Timothy 4:10

Paul sends his greetings to *the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house*. 4:15

- Paul obviously wrote other letters. *After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.* 4:16

Archippus is told: *See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord.* 4:17

The letter finishes with:

Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. 4:18.

Discussion questions

Why did Paul write Colossians? Is the message of Colossians relevant today? How?

.... so that in everything He might have the supremacy. Colossians 1:18. What are the implications of this for the Church today? What are the implications for your life?

A key theme of Colossians is reconciliation. What is reconciliation? How has God reconciled us to Himself? How does this work out in reconciliation between people?

Outline the main beliefs of Gnosticism. Explain how Paul and other New Testament writers countered these beliefs. Give examples of how Gnostic philosophies are influencing society today. What can Christians do to counter these philosophies and present the truth of the Gospel clearly?

In Colossians 3:1-4:6 Paul lists many practical ways that Christians can live out their faith. Are these goals we should try to attain, or are we expected to live up to these high standards? What should we do if we are not meeting the standards?

In Colossians 4:2-6 Paul writes his final message to the Colossians and states things that are very dear to his heart. Write your own "final message". Include everything that you would like future generations to know as they go through the journey of life.

What have you learnt from your study of Colossians? How will you apply this in your life?