

## Colossians

Colossae is in the region of the seven churches of [Revelation 1-3](#). In [Colossians 4:13](#) there is mention of local brethren in Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. Colosse was approximately 12 miles from Laodicea and 14 miles from Hierapolis. Members of the congregation at Colosse had incorporated pagan elements into their practice, including worship of elemental spirits. The false teachers were not giving the person and work of Christ proper interpretation or emphasis.

The basic problem was a Judaic-Gnostic heresy that sought to mix Greek philosophy with Christian theology. Gnostic philosophy taught that matter was evil. In order to avoid having their pure god create evil, they had created a system of lesser deities that overflowed from their god. These lesser gods were far enough removed from the pure god that they were able to create the universe (which was composed of evil matter). They named this lesser deity the Jehovah God of the Hebrews.

### Author and Title

Because of the greetings in 1:2, Colossians became known as *Pros Kolossaeis*, "To the Colossians." That Colossians is a genuine letter of Paul is not usually disputed. In the early church, all who speak on the subject of authorship ascribe it to Paul.

### Date: A.D. 61

Paul wrote all four prison epistles during his first Roman imprisonment. This means he wrote it in A.D. 60-61 (see the discussion on the date of Ephesians and Philipians).

### Theme and Purpose

The Epistle to the Colossians declares Christ's supremacy over the entire created universe and exhorts Christians to lead godly lives. The letter consists of two parts: first a doctrinal section, then a second regarding conduct. In both sections, false teachers who have been spreading error in the congregation are opposed. Colossians demonstrates that because of all that Jesus Christ is in His person and has accomplished in His work, He, as the object of the believer's faith, is all we need for in Him we are complete (2:10). In scope, Colossians presents the all supremacy, all sufficiency, uniqueness, and the fullness of the person and work of Jesus Christ as the God-man Savior, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and the total solution for man's needs both for time and eternity. It presents the cosmic Christ: the **Creator/Sustainer** and **Redeemer/Reconciler** of man and the entire universe.

### Summary

In chapters 1-2, Paul sends words of thanks to the faithful believers "*who are at Colosse*". Paul did not establish the Colossian Church and had never visited there. He teaches one of the most powerful passages attributing the divinity of Jesus Christ who is

God in flesh. It is apparent that false teachers were spreading heresy by rejecting the deity of Jesus Christ, probably teaching that He was just a “unique man”. Paul warns not to allow anyone to lead them astray with Philosophy, trickery, or by traditions of men. Paul then assured the church that Jesus is God, *“in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form”* (2:9), and that He, *“reconciled all things unto Himself”* (1:20), and He did it by, *“having nailed it to the cross”* (2:14) referring to our sins. Because Jesus Christ is God, He was able to pay the penalty of sin in order to rescue mankind.

In chapters 3-4, Paul encourages the church to focus on God, and keep their eyes on the goal, *“set your mind on the things above”* (3:2). He teaches believers how to live at home, how to manage family matters, and how to get along with other believers in Christ. His approach is for believers to put aside the petty situations that become obstacles in our lives, ultimately slow us down, and prevent the spread of the Gospel. Paul then explains what it means to forgive, *“just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you”* (3:13). Paul declares, *“Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts”* (3:14-15)

#### Key Words:

Key words in this book are “supremacy” and “sufficiency.”

#### Key Verses

- **1:15-20.** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, 1:16 for all things in heaven and on earth were created by him—all things, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions, whether principalities or powers—all things were created through him and for him. 1:17 He himself is before all things and all things are held together in him. 1:18 He is the head of the body, the church, as well as the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead so that he himself may become first in all things. 1:19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him 1:20 and through him to reconcile all things to himself by making peace through the blood of his cross—whether things on the earth or things in heaven.
- **2:8-10.** Be careful not to allow anyone to captivate you through an empty, deceitful philosophy that is according to human traditions and the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. 2:9 For in him all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form 2:10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head over every ruler and authority.
- **3:1-3.** Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 3:2 Keep thinking about things above, not things on the earth, 3:3 for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

#### Key Chapters

**Chapter 2** is key in that it demonstrates why and how the believer is complete in Christ and needs nothing added to the saving person and work of Christ. **Chapter 3** then builds on this as root to fruit or cause and effect. Because believers are complete in Christ (2:10) and are thereby risen with Him, they now have all they need for Christ-like transformation in all the relationships of life (3:1f.).

### Some Thoughts

The whole message of this epistle finds expression in 2:9-10a: "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete." The two declarations in this sentence are the great revelations of the Colossian letter. The central doctrine in Colossians is Christology.

The fullness of the Godhead is in Christ. This is an eternal fact that is always true. Divinity is an attribute of God, but deity is the essence of God. It is not enough to say that Jesus Christ was divine. In a sense, every person is divine in that we possess some attributes that God also possesses. Only He possesses them perfectly. Jesus Christ was deity. He alone possesses the unique nature of God. In Him, the fullness of essential deity dwells in bodily manifestation (form or expression).

The Apostle Paul expounded Christ's fullness in three respects in this epistle. In relation to creation, He is the Originator and Sustainer of all things (1:16-17). This includes all life. In relation to redemption, He is the first-born from the dead (1:18). Resurrection presupposes death. Death is due to sin. Between creation and resurrection, there was sin and death. In resurrection, Christ was victor over sin, death, and the grave. He is Death's Master. In relation to reconciliation, Christ is the maker of peace (1:19-20). The result of Christ's victory over death is peace. He is the reconciler of all things that sin has separated. His reconciliation affects both people and the created world. In Christ, we see all the fullness of deity: creating, rising triumphantly out of death, and reconciling to the farthest reaches of the universe. That is the Christ of Christianity!

The second major declaration of Colossians is that in Christ God makes us complete (2:10a). Not only is the fullness of the Godhead in Christ, but the filling of the saints is in Christ too. Paul explained what this means. First, it means that God restores us to "our true place in creation" in Christ. We can regain the scepter and the crown as kings of the earth under God's authority (Gen. 2:15). God has sent us out into all the cosmos to make Christ known (Matt. 28:19-20). Unfortunately, we do not always realize our position. We choose instead to grovel among the world's garbage heaps. Nevertheless, in this sense God makes us full in Christ: We come into a new relationship to all creation through Christ. God restores us to our divinely intended position in creation in Him. Second, God restores us to "our true relation to Himself" through Christ's resurrection. God communicates His very life to us so that we take our rightful place as God's subjects. God does not break our will. He captures our will by the indwelling grace of Christ's life. God makes us full in this sense too. We are His instruments. Third, God restores us to "true fellowship with Himself" in Christ. We not only receive from

God, but we can also give to God in service. Thus our fellowship is reciprocal. We are His partners. We experience fullness in Christ, for in Him: God restores us to our true place in creation, to our true relation to Himself, and to our true fellowship with Himself. This restoration enables us to cooperate with God in His purposes. We become, not only trophies of His grace, but His instruments—and even His partners—in our generation.

In view of this revelation, Paul made a threefold appeal: The first appeal is a warning against a false philosophy (2:8). Paul described this false philosophy in two ways. It is the tradition of men, which is essentially speculation. In this context, Paul meant human guessing that leaves God out of His universe. For example the theory of organic evolution. This philosophy is rudimentary because it tries to explain everything within the limits of the material. The material part of life is rudimentary. We correct this false philosophy by recognizing that Jesus Christ is the solution to the problem of the universe. When we realize that Jesus Christ is the first-born (first in rank and sovereignty), then we gain a true view of the universe. He is the Creator and the great cohesive agent in the universe.

Paul's second warning is against false mediation (2:16-18). He pointed out that ceremonies such as observing certain kinds of foods and festivals are only "shadows." We should not think that observing these ceremonies will improve our relationship to God. We have Jesus Christ, who is the substance to which these ceremonies pointed (e.g., the Jewish feasts). Another type of false mediation involves the worship of spirits that grant us access to Christ. "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

Paul's third warning is against false confidences (2:20-23). Our spiritual enemy may tempt us to have confidence in the opinions of others. When false teachers say, "Do not touch this or taste that or handle something," we may think that those statements are authoritative. But this is legalism. Paul urges us not to follow such opinions—but to get our direction from the Lord Jesus. Our enemy may tempt us to put confidence in ascetic practices of abstention and self-affliction. Paul tells us to forget these things and to set our thinking on the things of Christ rather than on ourselves. Asceticism breeds morbid introspection and selfishness. When we have a true view of Jesus Christ, He will be the focus of our thinking. That view will deliver us from the domination of the flesh. We need to base our confidence on God's Word, rather than on human traditions that do not reflect scriptural revelation accurately.

The matter of supreme importance to the church is her doctrine of Christ. Our Christian life and service will flow out of our doctrine of Christ. We are what we think. "As a man thinks in his heart so is he" (Prov. 23:7). Not only must Christ occupy the eternal place in our lives, but our understanding of Christ must be accurate. We can avoid all the errors that Paul warned against in this epistle by keeping a proper view of Christ.