

Colossians

I. Setting

The backstory for the book of Colossians is found in Acts 19.

Acts 19:10

This continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

Paul and his companions settled in Ephesus and established a church in a nearby school. The focus of the ministry seems to have been a systematic approach at teaching through the Scriptures for Paul later referred to his ministry in Ephesus:

Acts 20:27

For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

This approach of making the Word of God the focus of the church proved to be extremely effective in furthering the work of the Lord. We know of at least 8 churches in the region of Asia Minor and it seems that they all started out of the church in Ephesus.

It may have looked something like this:

- Travelers from throughout Asia Minor would congregate to Ephesus for various reasons including, business, religious pilgrimages and holidays. Some of them would be introduced to the ministry of the church in Ephesus where they came to trust in Christ. As they made their way back to their homes they brought the Gospel with them. As believers began to congregate, churches were birthed.

We know of at least 8 churches in Asia minor, 7 of which received New Testament letters

- Ephesus – Book of Ephesians
- Colossae – Book Colossians

- Smyrna – Rev 2:8-11
- Pergamum – Rev 2:12-17
- Thyatira – Rev 2:18-29
- Sardis Rev - 3:1-6
- Philadelphia - Rev 7-13
- Laodicea - Rev 14-22

It is interesting that Colossae did not receive a letter from Jesus when the other churches of Asia Minor did. This may be because of how the letter from Paul was received and acted upon. The sure way to avoid correction is to live in accordance with the Word of God.

The only church in the area of Asia minor that is both mentioned in the Bible and did not receive a letter written to it was Hierapolis. Although an open letter was sent and distributed to all the churches in the area (Col 4:13)

Colossae was a church plant that started out of a church plant.

- It is very healthy for the church to be seeking to reproduce itself. This will cause the local church to be praying for nearby communities as well as focusing upon training leaders equipped to go out.

There is no mention of the city or the church of Colossae in the Book of Acts. The reason for this is that Paul did not personally start this church. At the time that Colossians was written Paul had not been to the city, although he would play an influential part in their growth.

Colossians 2:1

For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and *for* as many as have **not seen my face in the flesh,**

Paul clearly states that he had not been to either Colossae or Laodicea

How did the Gospel get there if Paul did not bring it?

Colossians 1:5-6

Because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, **as it has also in all the world**, and is bringing forth fruit,[a] as *it is* also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth;

Paul explains that although he had not been to Colossae they had in fact heard the Gospel. He even writes that they heard it the same way it is always heard. The question we should ask ourselves is "*How is the Gospel heard or spread?*"

The answer is very simple; someone tells someone else

I think of an old poem that has recently been put to music

*One man wakes, awakens another
Second one wakes his next door brother
Three awake can rouse a town
And turn the whole place upside down
Many awake will cause such a fuss
It finally awakes all of us
One man wakes with dawn in his eyes
Surely then it multiplies
Surely then it multiplies*

The Gospel rarely spreads any other way. It is possible for a person to have a dream or even an encounter with an Angel of God, but those are the rare cases. The method God has designed for the spreading of the Gospel and the birth of new churches is when one person shares with another.

Romans 10:14

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

If the Gospel got to Colossae through someone, who was that someone?

It seems that the way the Gospel first reached Colossae was through a believer by the name of Epaphras who is mentioned three times in Scripture, twice in Colossians and once in Philemon

Colossians 1:7

As you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf,

We learn three things about Epaphras

- He was a servant
- He a faithful minister
- They learned from him, so he was a teacher

The consensus is that the Gospel was first brought to Colossae through Epaphras

Colossians 4:12

Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

Here we read that Epaphras was a Colossians.

Here's what may have happened.

Since Ephesus was a religious center containing the temple to Diana, it is reasonable to think that Epaphras traveled for a sort of religious quest or pilgrimage where he stumbled across Paul who was teaching daily in the School of Tyrannus. Having heard the Gospel and trusting Christ, he would have begun to get plugged into the church and grow in the Lord. As he continued in the word a desire would be birthed within him to carry the message of Christ back to his friends and family. When he arrived in Colossae he may have begun to do exactly what Paul was doing in Ephesus;

systematically walking through the Scriptures with anyone who would listen.

It is from this that a church started that would have an impact upon a community for decades and even centuries to come

Colossians 4:7-9

Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. **8** I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he[a] may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is *one* of you. They will make known to you all things which *are happening* here.

But the work of evangelism and church planting is never the work of just one man. Many others were involved in reaching Colossae with the Gospel

This book then is a beautiful picture of how the Gospel works as one person is impacted and reaches out to impact others

II. Situation

Colossians 1:7-8

As you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.

Philemon 1:23

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,

It seems likely that Epaphras traveled to Rome to give Paul an update regarding the church in Colossae. He spoke regarding their “Love in the Spirit” but it seems that something went wrong and Epaphras was arrested and put in prison alongside of Paul.

The news Epaphras brought was in two parts

Part one – an update on the Colossian church

Colossians 1:3-4

We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your **faith in Christ** Jesus and of your **love for all the saints**

Two things are highlighted by Epaphras

- Their faith in Christ
- Love for one another

We could have no better testimony than we trust God and love each other.

People who live like that will change the world

Part two – The threat of false teaching

Colossians 2:4

Now this I say lest anyone should **deceive** you with persuasive words.

Colossians 2:8

Beware lest anyone **cheat** you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

This false teaching seemed to emphasize at least two things

First a form of legalism where they were putting tradition above the word of God

Second they were buying in to a humanistic philosophy

Principle: our thoughts on God and Christian living must come from the Word of God and not from culture or tradition

III. Outline

The chapter naturally divides into its four chapters.

Chapter 1

- 1-8 - Introduction
- 9-13 - Prayer
- 14-23 – Jesus
- 24 – 29 – Paul

Chapter 2

- The warning chapter

Chapter 3

Living out Loud

- 1-11 – What to put off
- 12-17 – What to put on
- 18- 23 – Christ at home and work

Chapter 4

A series of Greetings, People who may not have had a prominent role in all of Scripture, but who served an important role in the local church

IV. Doctrine in Colossians

First – Christology, who is Jesus

Old Testament points to the coming Messiah in prophecies, pictures and types

Hebrews 10:7

Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—

In the volume of the book it is written of Me,

To do Your will, O God.'"

Luke 24:27

Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning

Himself.

Luke 24:44

He said to them, "These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me."

The Gospels tell the story of the life and ministry of Jesus, beginning with His birth and ending with His ascension back to glory

The book of Acts tells us His continued work on earth from heaven

Acts 1:1-2

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen

In each of the Epistles we find essential doctrine regarding who Jesus is.

Colossians 1:13-23 emphasizes the person and work of Christ

Colossians 1:13-14

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, **14** in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Paul declares that when we trust Christ we come out of darkness and into a new kingdom he calls "The Kingdom of God." This happens because on the cross a ransom was paid. The kingdom of God is not a place somewhere on the planet where Jesus has a throne and everyone there obeys Him. His kingdom is made up of every person who is under the kingship of Jesus Christ. Ultimately however, there will be a physical kingdom of Christ,

and all those who have chosen to trust their lives to Christ will occupy it.

Colossians 1:15

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Who is this one who redeemed us?

- HE is the image of the invisible God

God is invisible Christ makes Him visible

Image – an exact representation

We are in the image of God but not exact image

WE are eternal

WE are triune

- Spirit
- Soul
- Body

The great struggle of the Christian life is what we will allow to rule our lives. Will we be ruled by the drives of the flesh, by our emotions or by the Spirit of God

Jesus is the exact image of God

Hebrews 1:3 (NIV)

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

John 14:9

Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has

seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?

- **HE is the firstborn over creation**

This does not mean that Jesus is a created being. The idea of being firstborn speaks to position of authority. This is made clear in the following verse.

Colossians 1:16

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

All created things come from the one who has authority over all creation.

His authority over creation is seen during his earthy life when he spoke to creation and it obeyed him; food multiplied, sickness fled and the natural elements responded to his commands

Colossians 1:17

And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

In Him all things consist speaks to the fact that not only is he the one who created all things but also is the one holding it all together. Peter speaks of the universe, as we know it being replaced with a new heaven and earth. This will be done when He lets go of holding it together.

Colossians 1:18

And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

- **Jesus is also the head of the church.**

It is not the job of the pastor to build the church or to develop vision for the church, but to simply seek the one who is head of the church.

- Jesus is the firstborn from the dead.

Although the Scripture records at least 8 people having been raised from the dead, Jesus is the only one raised in a resurrected body never to die again. He is the proof that there is life after death for all who trust in Him

Those risen from the dead include:

- **Widow of Zarephath's son**
(I Ki 17:17-24) raised by Elijah
 - **Shunamite's son**
(II Ki 4:20-37) raised by Elisha
 - **Man tossed into Elisha's tomb**
(II Ki 13:21) raised by God's Spirit
 - **Widow of Nain's son**
(Lk 7:11-16) raised by Jesus
 - **Synagogue ruler Jairus' 12-year-old daughter**
(Mk 5:35-43) raised by Jesus
 - **Lazarus**
(Jn 11:1-44) raised by Jesus
 - **Tabitha also known as Dorcas**
(Acts 9:36-41) raised by Peter
 - **Eutychus**
(Acts 20:7-12) raised by Paul
 - **There is also some evidence that Paul was raised**
(Acts 14:19-20) raised by Paul
- Jesus is to have the preeminence

Preeminence speaks of having first place. Because of who He is, He should have first place in life, family, and the church

Colossians 2:9-10 also emphasizes the person and work of Christ

Colossians 2:9-15

For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; **10** and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

He is the fullness and we are complete in Him

This is where our identity must be found

Colossians 3:4 also emphasizes the person and work of Christ

Colossians 3:4

When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Christ is our life and Christ will return

The doctrine of the second coming is mentioned in almost every NT Epistle

Second – The doctrine of Christian living

This is the main focus of chapter 3

Colossians 3:1

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things, which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

We have been raised with Christ and as a result we should live differently.

This chapter will explain how to do that:

Colossians 3:8

But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.

Now that you are a follower of Jesus there are behaviors that are not to be a part of our lives any longer

Colossians 3:12

Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;

Now that you are a follower of Jesus there are behaviors that must be part of our lives. Christianity must never be reduced to what we don't do

Colossians 3:18-21

18 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.

20 Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.

21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

Paul tells us that we must take our Christianity home with us. Husband and wife as well as parents and children are addressed.

Colossians 3:22-4:1 New King James Version (NKJV)

22 Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. **23** And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, **24** knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for[a] you serve the Lord Christ. **25** But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

4 Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Paul also addresses the fact that Christianity must show itself in the workplace

Third – The doctrine of Christian service

We saw previously the life and ministry of Epaphras

We also get a glimpse into the personal life of the apostle Paul

Col 1:24-29

Verse 24 is particularly interesting:

Colossians 1:24

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,

Paul is not suggesting that the cross was less than sufficient to provide for the salvation of humanity, but in addition to the suffering Christ endured on the cross, Paul also suffered to bring Christ to Colossae.

The difficulty we endure to bring Christ to others fills up what was lacking in the affliction of Christ. When we endure mockery, discomfort, personal financial loss or risk a relationship to bring Jesus to others we are following the example of Paul

V. Precious Promises

Colossians 2:3

In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge

Colossians 2:14

Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Colossians 2:23

These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

Colossians 3:15

Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

