

# Introduction to Colossians

---

## The Town of Colosse

Colosse was an agricultural town on the Lycus River about 110 miles east of Ephesus in what is today modern Turkey. It was not a major city. In the year 61 AD, a major earthquake rocked the city, probably destroying it. There is no record of it ever being rebuilt.

## The Church at Colosse

From 52-55 AD, Paul was a missionary in Ephesus, a city in Asia Minor (what we know as Turkey today). While there, a man named Epaphras was converted to Christianity. Epaphras matured in the faith under Paul's tutelage, and then returned to his hometown of Colosse. There, he preached the gospel, just as the Apostle Paul had done in Ephesus. Through his ministry, new churches were begun in Laodicea, Hierapolis, and in Colosse.

## Purpose of the Letter to the Colossians

It appears that the Colossian Christians were under attack for their faith. Some believe that false teachers had crept into the church and were distorting the gospel. Others say that the attack was coming from Jews living in the region who were challenging the authenticity of Christianity. Whichever the case, there was a danger that doubts about the gospel could take hold in the Colossian church. To prevent this, Paul writes this letter of instruction.

Those who were challenging the true gospel were claiming that faith in Christ alone was not enough for salvation. Their claim was that Christ was good, but by Himself, He could not give the "fullness" of salvation. If one wanted to find complete salvation, they said, one had to believe in Jesus and follow certain rules and regulations. Some of the other elements of this false teaching are as follows:

- Secret knowledge – They believed that, in addition to faith in Christ, to be saved, one needed to have a special "secret" knowledge that often came through dreams or visions. This special knowledge that they resulted in them acting as if they were superior to others.
- Jewish ceremonial law – They believed that the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament related to food and circumcision must still be observed.
- Angel worship
- Asceticism – They would deprive themselves of physical enjoyment. Usually, this involved a rigid lifestyle bound by harsh rules.

## The Theme of Colossians

Besides responding directly to the problems of the Colossian Heresy, the Apostle Paul gives the readers a fuller explanation of the person and work of Christ. It seems that the best answer to bad theology is knowing good theology. So, Paul explains who Christ is, what He has done, and why that is important to us. From this foundation of knowing who we are in Jesus Christ, Paul then shows how the gospel should have a practical impact on every area of life, including marriage, work, and relationships.

## Relevance for Today

In his commentary on Colossians, David E. Garland summarizes it well. He writes:

But the situation facing the Colossians is also similar to ours today. They faced opponents who challenged and belittled the sufficiency of Christ and their hope. Christians today live in a secular society, which regularly scoffs at Christian faith. Many Christians in the West have become increasingly uncertain of their faith and consequently hold it uncertainly. The acids of criticism can eat away at the foundations of a weak and vacillating faith. There are also fewer cultural forces to keep people in the church. When confronted with the laughter and scorn of the modern-day scoffers, nominal church members may be tempted to capitulate. They will abandon their faith or trade it in for the latest craze. In Paul's language, they return to the darkness where the rulers of this age hold sway.

When Christians do not understand their faith, they are likely to water down the gospel and accommodate it to cultural expectations. They will cut out any offending articles of faith or append specious ones more in accord with the fashion of the age. 50 Paul wrote to the Colossians to help them grasp ever more firmly who Christ is and the rich glories of all that God has done in him.

When Christians have little confidence in their faith, they will be overly tentative in their claims and easily shaken by challenges. Paul hoped to fortify the Colossians in their assurance of the hope they had in Christ. The letter affirms that God's creation has a divine purpose, which is brought to fulfillment in and through Christ. It affirms the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ as the fullness of God and as our Creator and Redeemer.

When Christians do not live with a deep sense of gratitude for what God has done for them in Christ, they will become engulfed in anxieties and will be tempted to look for security in something other than Christ. Paul repeatedly urged the Colossians to be thankful for the victory already won for them by Christ's cross and resurrection. Salvation can be found only in Christ, and Christians do not need something else or something more. The cross brings redemption, the forgiveness of sin, and triumph over all the powers that would oppress human life. Every believer is made complete when placed under the complete claim of Christ, and all the spiritual ills of our world find their only cure in him.

When Christians live no differently from those around them who do not know God or who defy God's commands, they bring discredit to their faith and cause others to think that their claims are false. The letter to the Colossians argues that

Christians must not only be solidly grounded in their faith. They must also be ethically above reproach. Discerning, confident, grateful, and ethical Christians lead lives worthy of the Lord, are pleasing to God, and will bear spiritual fruit in a spiritually blighted world. Paul intends in this letter to help form this kind of believer.<sup>1</sup>

## **Outline**

<b>I. Greeting</b>	<b>1:1-2</b>
<b>II. Thanksgiving and Praise</b>	<b>1:3-23</b>
A. Thanksgiving For Their Faith	1:3-8
B. Prayer For Their Growth	1:9-14
C. Praise for the Work of Christ	1:15-23
1. The Supremacy of Christ	1:15-18
2. The Reconciling Work of Christ	1:18-23
<b>III. The Ministry of Paul</b>	<b>1:24-2:7</b>
A. The Mystery of the Gospel	1:24-29
B. The Power of the Gospel	2:1-7
<b>IV. Warning Against False Teaching</b>	<b>2:8-3:4</b>
A. The Sufficiency of Christ	2:8-15
B. Freedom in Christ	2:16-23
C. Hope in Christ	3:1-4
<b>V. Living the Gospel</b>	<b>3:5-4:6</b>
A. Putting Off Sin	3:5-11
B. Putting On Righteousness	3:12-17
C. Christian Relationships	3:18-4:1
1. Wives and Husbands	3:18-19
2. Children and Fathers	3:20-21
3. Slaves and Masters	3:22-4:1
D. General Instructions	4:2-6
<b>VI. Final Greetings</b>	<b>4:7-18</b>

---

<sup>1</sup> Garland, David E. "What Colossians Means For Us Today" In *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Colossians and Philemon*. By David E. Garland, 32-33. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1998.