

Introduction to the Book of Colossians

Tonight I want to begin a study of the book of Colossians. This was a letter, written by Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, to the church at Colossae. He penned this letter, along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon during his first imprisonment in Rome.

It is believed that the church at Colossae was founded during Paul's third missionary journey. It was a church Paul had never visited personally. [Col.2:1 – For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;](#) However according to [Acts 19: 9-10](#), Paul spent two years teaching the Word of God at Ephesus. Colossae was located about 90 miles east of Ephesus, and many suggest that Epaphras, the pastor of Colossae, sat under the teaching of Paul and influenced the believers in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. [Col.1:7 – As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;](#) [Col.4:12-13 – Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.](#) ^[13] [For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.](#) Laodicea was only twelve miles from Colossae and it is possible that Epaphras started both these churches.

Colossae was a small market town in Asia Minor (Turkey). It was located on the south bank of the Lycus River in the fertile Lycus Valley. Laodicea and Hierapolis were located in the same valley, but they were more prominent cities than Colossae. The main road from Ephesus to the Euphrates ran through Colossae, so there must've been many travelers through the city.

➤ So, what is the significance for us concerning the book of Colossians? First of all, it is the Word of God. [2 Tim.3:16 – All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:](#) I have been called to preach the whole counsel of God. If I am to do that, then I must preach the Bible. There is no better way to preach the whole counsel of God than to take the books of the Bible and deal with them book by book, chapter by chapter, paragraph by paragraph, and verse by verse.

➤ Secondly, Colossians is regarded by many as the most Christological book in the Bible. [Col.1:15-19](#) is among the greatest passages in Scripture. This passage reveals and confirms the pre-existent, omnipotent, exalted, and eternal Son of God. The **key verses** in Colossians are:

[Col.2:9-10 – For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.](#) ^[10] [And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:](#)

[Col.3:1-2 – If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.](#) ^[2] [Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.](#)

The theme of Colossians could be summed up that “we are complete in Christ.” In Him we find the fullness of our salvation. Ephesians focuses on the body of Christ, while Colossians focuses on the Head. Dr. H.L. Willmington described our “completeness in Christ” as being four-fold:

1. Building Downward – “Grounded and settled and...not moved away from the hope of the gospel” (1:23). This is the deeper life.

2. Building Upward – “Built up in him, and stablished in the faith” (2:7). This is the higher life.

3. Building Inward – “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (3:3). This is the inner life.

4. Building Outward – “Walk with wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time” (4:5). This is the outer life.

All who are born again need to better understand and embrace the completeness, the fullness that we have in Christ. Each of us needs to build our lives upon Him.

➤ Thirdly, Colossians is a book that is relevant to our day. Some believe the Bible is an archaic book that has long been outdated, but nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible is more relevant and up to date for our lives than any modern publication in print today.

The church at Colossae is far removed from us in time and location. They faced vastly different social, political, and cultural differences, and yet their lives are strikingly similar to the lives people live today. The church there faced many problems that continue to plague our society and churches as well. If we are to overcome adversity and be complete in Christ, we must seek His Word and apply it to our lives. The book of Colossians has great application for the modern church.

Quickly let's consider some of the issues that the church at Colossae faced. This was the heart of Paul as he wrote to the Colossians. He wanted to confront the heresy that had invaded the church and strengthen the faith of the believers there. (Keep in mind that Laodicea was only a few miles away. We are all familiar with where that church stood spiritually when John wrote the Revelation. They were neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm. Because of their lukewarmness, they were chastised of the Lord. It appears the doctrine that plagued Laodicea had already begun to permeate the Lycus Valley and the church at Colossae.)

1. Intellectualism – This is the belief that salvation is only obtained through advanced knowledge. The heretics at Colossae were teaching that only the intellectually superior had any hope of salvation.

- Where does that leave the child-like faith our Lord spoke of? [Mark 10:15](#) – *Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.* We are still seeing that doctrine in our day. I don't know of anyone who possesses enough knowledge to fully understand salvation.

2. Legalism – Their heresy attacked the simplicity of the Gospel. These supposed intellects sought to add to the Gospel and develop strict guidelines and works like the Pharisees did. [Col.2:8](#) – *Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.*

3. Ritualism – Great importance was placed upon special drinks, foods, festivals, and traditions. [Col.2:16, 20-22](#) – *Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:* ^[20] *Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,* ^[21] *(Touch not; taste not; handle not;* ^[22] *Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?* Traditions are fine as long as they don't contradict Scripture. Many Baptist hold tradition in higher esteem than they do the Bible.

4. An improper view of the body and life itself was also taught by these heretics. They considered the body to be evil, literally a prison that enslaved the soul. This led to devastating schools of thought.

A. Asceticism – That is a difficult word, but it simply refers to self-denial. This doctrine taught the only way to release the soul or care for it properly was to deny the body any pleasure. Paul addressed this in [2:20-22](#). These believed to save the soul, life must be void of any joy or pleasure. (I have met some folks whom I am convinced believe that!) Christ came that we might be set free from bondage and that we might have life and have it more abundantly.

B. Epicureanism – This is another big word that simply refers to self-indulgence. It took false doctrine to the other extreme. These taught if the body had no bearing on the eternal destiny of the soul, and merely held it until its departure, then why not live as you please. "Eat, drink, and be

merry, for tomorrow you may die.” This line of doctrine led to all sorts of indulgence and immorality. Paul addressed this as well. Col.3:5-9 – Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: ^[6] For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: ^[7] In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. ^[8] But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. ^[9] Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

- The modern church has contributed to this heresy. The “easy-believism” of our day has taught folks they can live as they please once they are saved. Apparently they have never read the Bible or understood that God expects us to live holy, sanctified, and separated lives.

Conclusion: I hope this introduction will help us as we move through this powerful book. I felt it was important to lay some groundwork before we started in Colossians. Hopefully we better understand the climate of that day and can readily see the similarities of our day. It is a rich book that has much to say to us.

I pray we will be reminded of the deity of Christ and His preeminence in our lives. Col.2:9-10 – For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. ^[10] And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: I trust you know Christ as your Lord and Savior. If not, seek Him while there is time and opportunity. The world has much to offer in regard to philosophy and indulgence, but only Jesus can cleanse from sin, reconcile to God, and offer eternal life.