

# COLOSSIANS

**Author-** Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles, and Timothy, Paul's convert and young assistant. Both are explicitly named as authors of the book (1:1). It is assumed that Timothy served as Paul's secretary and/or scribe. Paul is the author of 13 New Testament books.

**Background** – Colossae (kol-os-see) was an important city in **Phrygia** on the upper Lycus River in what is today South Central Turkey. It served as a trading center at a crossroads on the main highway from Ephesus. At the time, it was inhabited by **Phrygians, Greeks, and Jews** who had settled there in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC after the Ptolemaic wars. Therefore the religious culture would have been one of **integrated Greek Mythology, Judaism**, and some integration of the two which developed into a **cultural folklore** influenced by Jewish thought and pluralistic Greek ideas. This is particularly important because of the **polemic nature** of Colossians, wherein Paul is **arguing against** a certain form of **false doctrine** which turned the Christian's gaze away from Christ and put their trust in things lower, human philosophy and earthly thinking, worshipping **angels**, and **man-made rules** and **ascetic practices** or **rituals** as a form of self-justification. Because of its polemical (persuasive and argumentative) thrust, Colossians also takes the form of a disputation in which the apostle argues the **gospel side** of a **debate** between the **all-sufficiency of Christ** and the spurious claims of **man-made religion**.

Paul did not start the church in Colossae, it was apparently **started** by **Epaphras** (1:6-7), who was, in the words of Paul a faithful minister of Christ not only in Colossae, but also in Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:12-13). Paul wrote Colossians having heard, presumably from a visit from Epaphras, that there was some **false teaching** invading the Colossian church. Paul therefore writes both to **refute** this teaching but also as a **general instructional** and **encouraging** letter to this beloved young assembly of believers. Such is the occasion of Paul's letter to the Colossians.

**Themes present in Colossians:** The **main theme** stated in a sentence – “**The Supremacy of Christ over all things and the all-sufficiency of Christ for salvation and the Christian Life.**” Many scholars argue that Paul has written largely against the **heresy of Gnosticism**, the idea that the way of Christian salvation is through a **secret knowledge** that one possesses concerning the nature of all **physical matter being evil** and all spiritual realities being good, which leads to a very **licentious** and **morally loose** teaching about the Christian life, that is also complicated with many **other false ideas** and **practices**. But Gnosticism really

didn't develop fully until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD and it is therefore obvious that this was a much earlier kind of heresy that is more like an **integrated form of Greek pluralism and Jewish folklore**. Either way, the doctrinal instruction and refutation of false ideas in Colossians is as clear as the noonday sun. As is Paul's habit, he gets right to the issues that are plaguing the church, and casts them down with arguments that clearly point out the false ideas. In this case, the **Colossian heresy** has a few brief points that Paul addresses;

- **Ritualism** – Paul warns against strict rules about permissible food and drink (2:16-17), religious festivals (2:16-17), circumcision (2:11, 3:11), and the worship or veneration of angels (2:18).
- **Asceticism** – Paul warned against strict religious rites and practices which treat the body harshly (2:18-23) but reap no real spiritual benefit.
- **Human Philosophy and Man-made religion** – Paul warned against worldly thinking (3:1-2) and human philosophical ideas and man-made rules and principles (2:8, 2:18-23), compared to divinely revealed Christian truth.

Not only does Paul cast down these **false ideas** with **direct arguments** and **instructions**, but he uses the occasion to **magnify the person and the work of Jesus** as both the **Supreme God-man** and **all-sufficient Savior** and **Lord** of His people. As a result the letter is filled with rich teaching about several **key themes**;

- **Christ's Divinity and Supremacy over all things** – Paul presents Christ as the very image of God as a man, the pre-eminent and rightful owner of all created things being the very creator Himself. He is the pre-existent, eternal and omnipotent sustainer of all created things. He is to be honored as God.
- **Christ's all sufficiency for salvation and the Christian Life** – Christ is presented as the One who in and of Himself reconciled all things to God through His life and death on the Cross. As the God-man He is held out as the supreme treasury of all wisdom and knowledge, which also gives His people complete and sufficient resources for life and peace through their personal relationship or spiritual union with Him.
- **Union with Christ** – Christian believers are seen to be united **“in Christ”** and **“with Christ.”** Through this unique spiritual union with Christ through faith, Christians are made complete, and possess a future hope of glory and immortality, having been made-alive from the deadness of sin in regeneration (or being born again).
- **Spiritual Wisdom and Knowledge** – Paul presents spiritual wisdom and knowledge as key components of the Christian life (1:9, 2:2-3, 3:16).
- **Practical teaching for the Christian Life** – Paul includes instructions on many key elements such as the Gospel and Salvation, right and wrong thinking, the mortification of sin, Christian virtues, corporate worship, and marriage.

## Encouragements and Prayers for a Young Church Colossians 1:1-14

1. As we get into today's text, chapter 1:1-14, Paul is here greeting the church (1:1-2), encouraging them about the \_\_\_\_\_ they believed (1:3-8), praying for them that the Gospel would \_\_\_\_\_ in their lives (1:9-12), and proclaiming the Gospel of the \_\_\_\_\_ in (1:13-14).
2. In these verses the Holy Spirit will highlight three aspects of the Gospel of Jesus Christ;
  - **The Gospel takes \_\_\_\_\_ – 1:3-8**
  - **The Gospel \_\_\_\_\_ fruit – 1:9-11**
  - **The Gospel brings a new \_\_\_\_\_ – 1:12-14**
3. He didn't make himself an apostle, but \_\_\_\_\_ did. God was the One that sent him, and Christ was the one that gave him the authority as an apostle by \_\_\_\_\_ **appointment** (Acts 9:15-16).

### The Gospel takes root

4. But also here, immediately names \_\_\_\_\_ as the **Son of God**. Paul makes it clear from the outset of his letter to the Colossians that **Jesus** is the \_\_\_\_\_ **Son of God!**
5. **faith in Christ Jesus** – When God \_\_\_\_\_ us He gives us the gift of faith. And that faith \_\_\_\_\_ and **comprehends** that we are fallen into sin and alienated from God. But more than this it energizes us to **repent** of our \_\_\_\_\_, to **recognize** our **desperate** condition, and it gives us **light** to see **Jesus**, the Savior, the only one who can \_\_\_\_\_ **us** from such a desperate and lost condition. And so our faith is "**in Christ.**"
6. And so we long to \_\_\_\_\_ these dear saints, and **help** them, and **care** for them. And we realize they are longing for the same thing as they have sought to **embrace** us, and \_\_\_\_\_ **receive** us, **sinful as we are**, yet they love us, and pray for us, and care for us, and show a great \_\_\_\_\_ for us and our well-being, even as Christ loves us.
7. In the Gospel God has promised to us that Christ's work is so powerful that it brings us **eternal life** and \_\_\_\_\_ beyond the **grave**. God has promised

to make us **immortal** at that time when He gives us a \_\_\_\_\_ body when Christ returns.

8. They begin to bear the fruit of godliness, of faith, hope and love, and every other \_\_\_\_\_ because the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in the heart and mind and **transformed us** from the inside out.
9. Here Paul tells us that it **wasn't him** who preached the Gospel to the Colossians but \_\_\_\_\_, who is also a "**beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf.**" It is assumed that Epaphras \_\_\_\_\_ the Gospel from Paul and was saved in Ephesus, and later became an evangelist and pastor, preaching in Colossae, Laodecia, and Hierapolis (4:12-16).

### The Gospel bears fruit

10. So we desperately need "**spiritual \_\_\_\_\_ and understanding**" to comprehend what the Christian life is, and how we are to live it. For Christians to properly \_\_\_\_\_ in the Christian life their intellectual powers must be awakened, the ability to **think \_\_\_\_\_ and practically** about **God** and **His purposes** for His people.
11. Having the knowledge of God, \_\_\_\_\_ **Him and loving Him**, energizes our life to \_\_\_\_\_ **Him**. This is the way we worship God, with our lives, seeking to obey Him and \_\_\_\_\_ Him in every way by living out a worthy life of goodness and virtue, loving God and our neighbor as ourselves.
12. It takes **endurance**, it takes a \_\_\_\_\_ **perseverance** to live the Christian life. It takes **patience** to endure **the trials of life** with **thanksgiving** and \_\_\_\_\_.

### The Gospel brings a new Rule

13. What God did in **small scale** with Israel's deliverance from **slavery** in \_\_\_\_\_, **foreshadowed** what He has now done **in Christ** on a \_\_\_\_\_ scale, **setting free** an **innumerable host** of people from **sin** and \_\_\_\_\_ from every tribe, language, nation and people.
14. He brought us under the glorious \_\_\_\_\_ and rule of Jesus, **His true King** and **beloved Son** who's rule and authority is \_\_\_\_\_ all earthly and heavenly powers. Sin no longer rules us, now Christ is our ruler, our King! Yes indeed, Jesus is \_\_\_\_\_!