

COLOSSIANS – AN INTRODUCTION

WHO

The **Apostle Paul** wrote this letter from a Roman prison along with Ephesians, Philippians and Philemon. The Letter begins with grace, “**Grace** and peace to you from God our Father” (1:2). and ends with grace, “**Grace** be with you” (4:18).

WHERE

“To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at **Colosse**” (1:2). About 100 miles east of Ephesus, **Colosse** was in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) on the east – west trade route from Phrygia to Ephesus. It was once a thriving city, but by the time Paul wrote his letter, it was a second-rate town. [An earthquake destroyed it in 61 a.d. and it was never rebuilt.] More prominent were the nearby cities of **Hierapolis** and **Laodicea**. While Paul was in Ephesus for three years, **Epaphras**, a native of Colosse (4:12), was converted and he took the gospel to Colosse (1:7–8, Acts 19:10) and thus a Christian church was established there.

WHEN

Colossians was probably written in **60 a.d.** during Paul’s period of house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:16 – 31).

WHAT

What is Scripture? The Bible is God’s special revelation to us. It is an account of God’s divine activity and God’s divine word.

What is Scripture’s view of Scripture?

“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1: 20–21)

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16 – 17).

What is Jesus’ view of Scripture: “The scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35) and,

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matthew 5:17 – 18).

The value of Scripture for us today, “The holy scriptures ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).

From the **Shorter Catechism**:

Q. 3. **What do the Scriptures principally teach?**

A. The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to **believe** concerning God, and what **duty** God requires of man.

WHY

There were problems in Colosse that Paul addressed. **The Colossian Heresy** was a form of **Gnosticism** [Greek **gnosis** = knowledge] by which some claimed special knowledge about God. Colossians 2:8 – 23 describes a combination of **philosophy, legalism, mysticism** and **asceticism**. As with all heresies, Christians were tempted to take their focus off Jesus Christ. Paul’s pastoral concern prompted him to write to set them straight.

HOW

Introduction: 1:1-14, Greetings, Thanksgiving and Prayer

- ❖ **Supremacy** Of Christ, 1:15 – 2:5
- ❖ **Freedom** through Christ, 2:6 - 23
- ❖ **Living** for Christ, 3:1- 4:1

Conclusion: 4:2 – 18, Prayer and final greetings

TWO KEY THEMES: KNOWLEDGE AND LIFESTYLE

In his opening prayer (1:3-14), Paul highlights two themes which he later amplifies:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and **asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will** through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. (1:9)

And we pray this in order that you may **live a life worthy of the Lord** and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God... (1:10)

KEY VERSES

Rescued and redeemed by Christ

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (1:13–14)

Pre-eminence (or supremacy) of Christ

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. (1:18)

Reconciled by Christ

But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. (1:22)

Lordship of Christ

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (2:6–7)

Freedom through Christ

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. (2:8)

Fullness of Christ/Fullness in Christ

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. (2:10-11)

Died With Christ

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules

Raised with Christ

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (3:1 – 2)

Ruled by Christ

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. (3:15)

BOB AKROYD, BUCCLEUCH & GREYFRIARS FREE CHURCH, OCTOBER 2004