



Introduction to Colossians

As we begin our new expository devotional series in the epistle of Colossians, it's good practice to spend a few minutes learning about the audience, culture, history and setting of the church, and the author's purpose in writing the letter.

Colossae was a city located in what is modern day Turkey and was about 100 miles east of the city of Ephesus. Colossae was part of the Roman empire and considered an important trade center in the area, so the church members likely consisted of a range of individuals from wealthy merchants to slaves. Founded around 1100 BC, Colossae had been a major trading city for centuries, until about 100 BC when neighboring city Laodicea, just a few miles away, become a tough competitor which caused wealth in the city to steadily decline. History tells us the city of Colossae suffered a devastating earthquake in 60 AD, around the time this letter was written, however the event is not mentioned in New Testament texts.

The apostle Paul is well-established as the author of the letter to the Colossians, while his friend and fellow gospel worker, Epaphras, is generally credited with founding the church in Colossae (cf: Col 1:7). Paul wrote this letter, as well as those to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon, while he was imprisoned in Rome during the rule of Nero. These four letters are often referred to as Paul's "prison epistles". The letter to Philemon was also addressed to several members of a church in Colossae (see Strong's G5371, G0751 and G0682) and may have been delivered at the same time as this one.

Paul's letter to the Colossians is one of great encouragement, but also addresses several important doctrinal issues that the church was struggling with. Early in the 1st century AD, the worship of angels had begun as a cult practice in the region, and the church had significant social influence from Jewish, Gnostic, and pagan cultures. This caused confusion in the young church which affected their ability to clearly understand who Jesus really is and apply gospel principals to their lives.

For example, a heresy had taken root that embraced doctrines of works-based salvation, as well as Gnosticism, which says that God is good, but anything created (matter) is bad, that Jesus was not really human but just an 'emanation' from God, that radical self-denial (aka: asceticism) and a secret, higher knowledge, outside of existing scriptures and apostolic teachings, was needed in order to be saved. The situation had apparently grown so bad that Epaphras made the very long journey to visit Paul and seek counsel and help from the apostle (cf: Col. 4:12-13).

In this letter, Paul goes into painstaking detail explaining who Christ is and the true gospel, as he aimed to correct the false teachings and beliefs affecting the Colossian church. Paul's



teaching is some of the most potent and profound we find on the dual deity and humanity of Christ, as well as the proper way to understand our grace-by-faith salvation.

Even with all the doctrinal difficulties Paul was addressing, he remained encouraging, gentle, and pastoral. Perhaps this is because it is unlikely that Paul ever personally visited the church in Colossae; he had only *heard* of their faith, love, and works (cf: Col 1:4). He was likely trying to avoid harsher rebukes like those found in his letters to the Galatians and Corinthians, because he was not personally known to these believers. Instead, Paul provided them sound teaching they could use to have a true understanding of the Christian faith.

Some of the key themes we find in the letter to the Colossians are:

- Christ is both human and deity (the Son of God)
- Christ was personally involved in the act of creation with the Father
- God the Father's spirit dwells in Christ
- Christ is the head of the Church
- The sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice to cover our sins
- The importance for unity among believers
- The importance of living in a way that reflects our faith
- Our standing as citizens of heaven
- The dangers of false teaching and bad doctrine
- The importance of prayer and forgiveness

I hope and pray that you will be encouraged, challenged, and blessed by this series, and that your faith in and understanding of God our Father and Christ our Lord is strengthened as we unpack Colossians verse by verse.

~Associate Pastor Jeremy Preece

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