

# INTRODUCTION

Apostle Paul writes another letter from the prison in Rome to a church in the city of Colossae. The church was located in the Roman province of Phrygia (now part of central Turkey). Though he had never visited the church, he wrote to them because he felt responsible for their spiritual wellbeing. The church was probably founded and nurtured by his co-worker Epaphras (1:7).

Colossae was famous for its fertile land and fascination with magic and superstition. The Colossians believers were also distracted by these mystery cults that promised access to gods through consulting mediums, astrology and palmistry, among others. Paul's letter seems to be comparing Christianity with these cults. He makes it clear that faith in Christ is supreme and sufficient for right living. Paul's primary message is that "one cannot regard faith in Christ as just another element in their lives. On the contrary, Christ should take precedence over all else, where in life's other dynamics revolve around the centrality of Christ."

(Note: Colossians and Philemon are intimately related because both were evidently written at the same time, and sent to the same town by the same messenger. Colossians is a letter to a church, dealing with the larger issues of faith and conduct, while Philemon is a private note to a person in that church, dealing with a personal matter.)

# THE BIG IDEA OF COLOSSIANS

Colossians has a powerful message for our day: the centrality of the all-sufficient Christ.

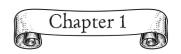
Some people in Colossae were challenging the supremacy and all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, in this letter Paul explains who Jesus Christ is and the relation of his work to God's work. He repeatedly emphasises that the fullness of God dwells in Christ (1:19; 2:9).

Paul emphasises the pre-existence of Christ and His participation in the creation of the world. Jesus is presented as the Son of God who is "the image of the invisible God". His ultimate victory on the cross is proof of what our loving God is willing to do to cleanse us of our sins. The history of Christ's death and resurrection cuts through all competing arguments and demolishes the erroneous teachings that had crept into the Colossian church.

Paul wanted the believers to know that their relationship with God is secure. He also wanted to clarify the futility of divisive philosophies and external religious rules in bringing spirituality to true Christians. Through Christ they have access to the God-head, for their lives are "hidden with Christ in God" (3:3).

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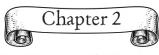
# CHAPTER SUMMARY



# Supremacy of Christ

#### Colossians 1:17-18,

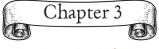
"He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.
And He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy."



#### Fullness of Christ

#### Colossians 2:9,

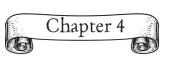
"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority."



### Living in Christ

#### Colossians 3:17,

"And whatever you do, whether in words or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."



# Relationships in Christ

#### Colossians 4:6,

"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

## Supremacy of Christ

## All sufficiency in Christ

In the Christian view of reality, Jesus is the final revelation of God and the epitome of true humanity. Good deeds, astrology, occultism and horoscopes do not show us God's ways. Only Christ does. Any "religion" that tries to equate itself with the truth using books that claim the same authority as the Bible, or which combines human effort with divine accomplishment in salvation must be avoided. Other religions cannot be combined with or added to Christianity. Christ gives us absolute standards of moral conduct.

A group called Gnostics in Colossae could not accept the full humanity of Jesus Christ because they were unable to accept the possibility that anything material, earthly, or human could be filled with divinity. (Note: The Gnostics are those who believed in a higher mystical knowledge for salvation. They believed that the present world is evil and we are trapped in this world. So, the way to escape is through acquiring this knowledge about a high God who has nothing to do with this material world. And this knowledge is available only for a few elite individuals who discover true freedom in the world of pure spirits). Paul delivers a clear warning against false teaching (2:8), calling it no more than empty philosophy which is hollow and deceptive.

It comes from human sources and is influenced by the elemental spiritual forces of this world.

Paul eloquently addresses the Colossians about the all-sufficient Christ. He uses dramatic, impelling, somewhat philosophical language to present the case for the irreplaceable centrality of the all-sufficient Christ.

Colossians 1:15–17, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."

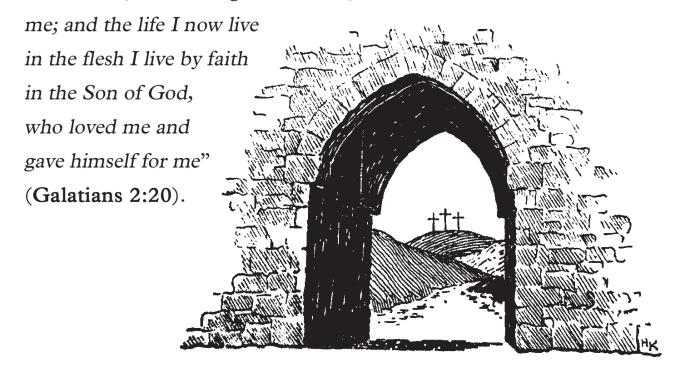
#### In this passage,

- He presents Christ as the image of God: a *window* through which we see the very nature of God; and a *mirror*, revealing our human possibility, by picturing our fallenness and the fallen state of all life against the image of our divine destiny.
- He presents Christ as the firstborn of all creation. In saying this, Paul is not implying that Christ is a created thing; rather Christ has a higher rank than any created being.
- He presents that Christ is before all things and in Christ all things were created. He is the pre-existent one. In Jesus, the complete being of God came to dwell. Nothing is left out. He is the full and final revelation of God; all sufficient for our salvation.

So, everything that is required for our life was presented freely by Christ's death and resurrection. His selfless act of love on the cross reconciled his people with himself and translated us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. We belong to Christ; His is the kingdom, the power and the glory. We have been qualified to be "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light." (1:12-14)

# Christ in you, the hope of glory

Paul's great definition of a Christian was "a person in Christ." He used that depiction over and over again. The phrase "in Christ" or its equivalent is used at least 172 times in Paul's epistles. His most vivid description of his own life in Christ was written to the Galatians: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live; but Christ who lives in



Here then is the secret, the revelation of the mystery that has been hidden for ages and generations, is now dwelling in us "Christ in you, the hope of glory – the indwelling Christ! (1:27) –

### • We are the recipients – Christ dwells in us.

The core of the gospel is that Christ - who has primacy over all things, in whom all things hold together, who is the head of the church, who will stand at the end of time and be the final judge and triumphant Lord - lives in us by the Holy Spirit. A wholesome life is one in which we are intentional about living our life in response to the presence and awareness of the indwelling Christ in us.

#### • We are the communicators of this truth.

We are not only the recipients of this truth but proclaimers too. We have a calling to share this truth to others. Colossians 1:28, "He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ."

### • The power of the indwelling Christ is at work.

We are not reliant on our own energy, but that of Christ whose Presence works mightily within us. Colossians 1:29, "To this end I strenuously toil with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me."

### Fullness of Christ

### Christ is the fullness to fill our emptiness

Paul is not anti-intellectual, nor against philosophy. He is one of the great minds of the ages. He simply knew that as important as it is, knowledge is not the answer to finding meaning in life.

Paul was warning against the subtle mixing of Christian thought with false philosophy, and the effort to syncretize the Christian message with the vogue philosophy of the day. He was also warning the Colossians against subjecting themselves to the regulations and practices of religion, with the false notion that life's meaning can be discovered through these rituals.

In verse 9, Pauls says, "You are complete in Christ". By possessing Him, or being possessed by Him, you are fulfilled. In having Him you have all you need. This is the supreme reality:

- The complete being of God is revealed in Jesus Christ
- In Him the completeness to which we are called is an accomplished fact
- We appropriate that fullness for ourselves by yielding ourselves to the indwelling Christ

# We become channels of the indwelling Christ for others

We, Christians, are the channel through which the reality—the presence and power of the indwelling Christ—flows into the life of others and to the world. This happens in two ways.

### Our Prayer

Prayer is the vital vocation of Christians. God has given us the privilege of sharing in His work in the world. testifies Scripture history confirms that the Lord has ordered His kingdom so that blessings and power for us are to a marked degree dependent upon the prayers of others. What does that say about our praying? If the blessings and power of God for others are dependent upon us, who is being deprived?



#### Our Presence

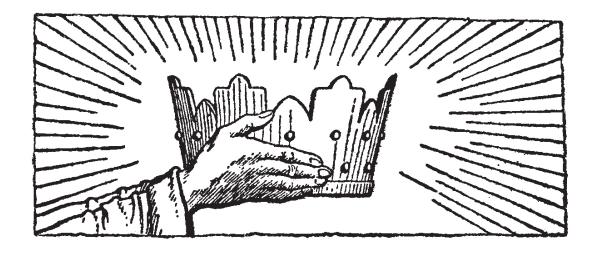
Not only are our prayers a channel through which the presence and power of God flows into the life of others and the world, our personal *presence* is likewise a channel. Because this is so, Paul urges the Colossians, "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (v. 6).

Through our prayers and presence, the transformative power of the indwelling Christ is communicated.

### Alive in Christ

### Your life is hidden in Christ

Colossians 3:1-4, "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."



To be a Christian is to change, to become new. It is not simply a matter of choosing a new life style, because the change is not external. It is an internal transformation which results in renewed person. The new person does not emerge full-blown. In *position*, in our relation to God in Jesus Christ, we are new persons. Our *condition*, the actual life that we live, must be brought into harmony with our new position.

Paul uses a striking word to describe our new life in Christ. "For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (3:3). A number of sentences in Colossians 2 and 3 combine to create a powerful impact of this image. You have "died" with Christ and have been "buried" with Him in baptism (2:12). You were also "raised" with Him through faith in the working of God (2:12). God "has made you alive together with Him" (2:13); you have been "raised with Christ" (3:1).

This means at least two things.

- Death has no power over us. The risen and exalted Lord conquered death. We do not wait for eternal life; it is ours now. Risen with Christ, the glorious privilege of a life with Christ, which will continue eternally, is ours.
- Sharing Christ's risen life means the power which raised Jesus from the dead is also our power. We do not have to be the victims of sin. The hampering limitations of the present order need not overcome us.

### Put the Old to death

Colossians 3:5-9, "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, rage, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds."

Paul is calling for a radical surgery. He is saying that we are to put to death every part of our being which is against God, and which prevents us from doing God's will. The truth is that we can't perform this surgery ourselves. This is where the power of Christ comes into play.

Christianity is no DIY (do-it-yourself), make-yourself-right, lift-yourself-by-your-own-bootstraps kind of religion. It is a religion of the heart in which all that we are is yielded to the

transforming, healing power of Christ.

Paul is driving home the point that the old life is dead; we must let it die.

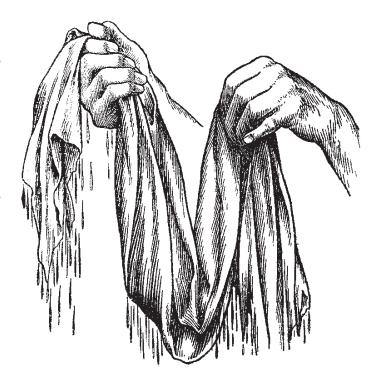


The list of vices mentioned here does not claim to cover all possible sins. It focuses on five sins associated with the old self: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed (3:5). These sins may have been common in the region of Colossae. He lists five more sins that affects relationships within a community – anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language. When these are not dealt with, they can poison the life of the local church.

### Put on the New

Colossians 3:12–14, "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection."

Putting on has to do with a deep and transforming inner experience which reflects itself outwardly. Again, it is not simply a matter of having a new lifestyle; it is about being a new person. What we do flows out of who we are. Being and doing cannot be separated.



Earlier, Paul listed five vices believers are to avoid (3:5); now he lists five virtues they are to possess: tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness and long suffering (3:12). Anger, rage and slander are to be replaced with forgiveness (3:13). They are to "take off" the habit of lying that characterized them in the past (3:9) and instead put on love (3:14). Above all, believers are to let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts. They must remain thankful and let the message of Christ dwell in them (3:15-16).

### Relationships in Christ

### A Christian style of relationships

Paul turns from a practical description of the new life in Christ to talk very plainly and practically about a Christian style of relationship. He spells out the relational gospel for marriage, family, vocation, and our everyday life.

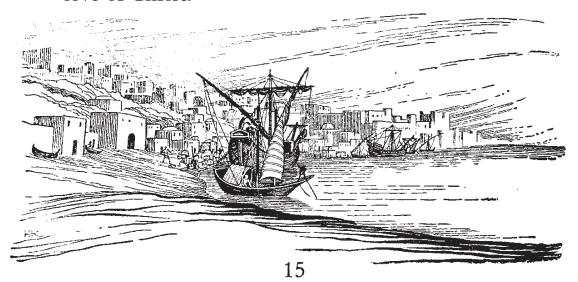
The instructions given in Colossians 3:18-22 is similar to Ephesians 5:22-33. Wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters, all are directed to mutually respect each other. At the heart of the Christian style of relationships is submission to one another, a submission that is modelled on the submission of all believers to the lordship of Jesus.

- 3:18 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
- **3:19** Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.
- **3:20** Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.
- **3:21** Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.
- 3:22 Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.
- **4:1** Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

## Speak words of Grace

Paul's final word to guide us in our relationships is this: "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (4:6). How we speak and what we say can bless or curse, create or destroy. The Epistle of James puts it graphically: "The tongue is a little member and boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire" (James 3:5–6).

- "Let your speech always be with grace." How you speak is vitally important. A loving spirit is essential. Because we are called to use gracious words, we can count on God's grace to guide our speaking, even to put the right words on our lips when we need them.
- "Let your speech be seasoned with salt." This metaphor was often used for sparkling conversations. They seek to bring out the speciality of a person, as salt brings out the special flavour of food. It also requires us to give the person our full attention. Their agenda is more important than ours—if we really want to love that person with the love of Christ.



# CONCLUSION

Colossians is Paul's strongest declaration of the uniqueness and sufficiency of Christ. The life of a Christian is a life of submission to the Lord Jesus who is Lord over all. Our faith in Jesus Christ should transform the relationships we have in every area of our lives—in our homes, our churches, and our world. Your view of Jesus Christ will impact every area of your life. We must be on guard against any deviation that will diminish the centrality of Christ as our Lord and Saviour.