

Colossians Small Group Series

Lesson 1 – Introduction & 1:1-23

Background

Colossians is one of two letters written by Paul from prison around 60 AD in Caesarea before he was shipped to Rome. The other letter being Philemon. **Col 4:9** seems to say these two letters may have been sent at the same time from Paul in prison back to the churches in Colossae. In this letter Paul writes to people who are first generation Christians. The Christians in Colossae were pagans who were converted by the Gospel through Paul's preaching in Ephesus.

Learning to Read a New Testament Letter - Occasion

Why is it important that we understand the circumstances of Paul writing any of his letters?

- If we are going to understand what Paul is talking about in the letter we need to understand why he wrote it
- This also helps us hear the letter more like the original recipients heard it. When we understand what difficulties they were facing we understand how the letter would have been helpful to them.
- Paul doesn't usually write, "This is why I am writing this letter". You have to read the letter to see what Paul addresses in order to see why Paul wrote it.
- When you read Colossians, especially Col 2, it seems Colossians was written to combat doctrinal error that is starting to creep into the house churches of Colossae.

What error was Paul writing to address?

- The Jews believed angels were involved in giving the law (Gal 3:19 for instance). It seems false teachers had come in and said that it was necessary to please these angels, principalities and powers if God was to hear their prayers (see 2:16-23). In order to please them they were taught to follow strict dietary (2:21) and holiness guidelines as well as the observance of special days (2:16). Paul is teaching them that such teachings are false and that Christ is still supreme with full authority over everything in creation that they don't need to lean on such hollow and deceptive teachings (1:15ff, 2:8).

Colossians 1:1-23

The Work of Jesus Christ in You

Before addressing their specific concerns and needs Paul lets them know how much he cares for them.

What are four kind things Paul says about them in 1:1-1:8?

1. Heard of their **faith** (v.4)
2. Heard of their **love** for God's people (v.4)
3. They have **hope** (b)
4. The Gospel is **bearing fruit** in them (v.6)

Notice Paul's desire and prayers for them in 1:9-13. *What does Paul pray for them in these verses?*

- God to fill them with knowledge of his will, To live a life worthy of the Lord, To please the Lord in every way, To bear fruit in every good work, To grow in the knowledge of God, To be strengthened with all power, To have great endurance and patience, To give joyful thanks to God

We often get blinded by praying for people's physical needs and leave out praying for people to grow and mature spiritually and in their faith and knowledge of God.

Have you ever prayed for any of these things for another Christian? What prompted you to do that?

Keeping in mind that fact that these Christians are combating some false teaching, notice just how relevant Paul's prayer for them is. For example:

- They need knowledge of God and His will to be guided by truth rather than lies
- They need strength, patience and endurance in order to fight the good fight and withstand false teaching

What makes a prayer relevant?

How can we be lulled into prayer routine prayers that can lack relevance?

In **1:12-14** Paul talks about what God the Father has done on behalf of the Colossian Christians and all Christians – even us. *What does Paul say God the Father has done for us in 1:12-14?*

- Qualified us to share in his inheritance (**v.12**)
- Rescued us from darkness (**v.13**)
- Brought us into the kingdom of the Son (**v.13**)
- Redeemed us and forgave our sins (**v.14**)

Before Paul can talk about the untruth of false doctrine, it is important that he spends some time reminding them of the heart and soul of the real Gospel. In the remaining verses of chapter 1.

The Work of Jesus Christ in You (1:15-23):

In each of the things Paul reminds them about Christ he is showing the supremacy of Christ over everything. The reason he does this is to show them that the false teaching of pleasing angels pales in comparison to the greatness and authority of Christ.

1. Of which angel can you say they are the very image of God or that they are firstborn of all creation?
2. The angels didn't take any part in the work of creation. Christ created all things. Therefore he has authority over all things.
3. Notice again in **1:18** – Jesus Christ has supremacy over everything.

Why is it important that Jesus have supremacy over all things, even death (1:18)?

- It shows he has the power to save us from our sins.

- If someone or something had more authority than Christ then Jesus, God and their kingdom could be overthrown. But that is impossible.
- Because Christ has authority over death we believe his promise to raise us from the dead.

1:20 – *What does the word reconciliation mean?*

- When you reconcile your checkbook or account you balance it out. All debts must be paid and everything accounted for.
- *How is sin a debt and how did Jesus pay for that debt for us (1:20)?*
 - **See Rom 6:23**
 - When we sin we deserve the death sentence but through the blood of Christ the price was paid for our forgiveness (**1:20**).

So Jesus is not only supreme in his being, who he is. He is also supreme in what he accomplished in his time on earth. He not only taught the truth and healed the sick. He shed his blood to bring forgiveness and reconciliation to the whole world.

In the last three verses (**1:21-23**) of the section we are studying Paul tells us more about how the reconciliation he mentioned in 1:19 really works.

First, there is our situation. *How Does Paul describe the Colossian Christians before they became Christians? Have you ever been in that boat?*

- Alienated, enemies and evil people
- *What does Paul say caused their alienation from God?*
 - Their evil behavior and acting as enemies to God
- *Do we really view non-Christians as alienated from God even if they still seem like “nice people”? How do these verses inform us on how we see those who don’t believe in Jesus as Lord?*

Next, he talks about what Christ has done for us while we were in that situation of being lost. *What does he say Christ did for us?*

But he says, this reconciliation takes place not just because Christ did that but only if we continue in our faith (**1:23**)

In other words, our reconciliation is done by the work of Christ but is only available through continuing in our faith.

Application:

When do you find your faith growing the most? Is that always an enjoyable experience?

How can appreciation of where God has brought us from (alienation and enemies) to where we are now (reconciled as God’s children) help strengthen our faith moving forward?

How does knowing Christ is superior and has more authority than any and every power in all creation give you courage to live a godly life regardless of the obstacles the world throws at you?

Lesson 2 – Colossians 1:24-2:5

Paul's Mission in Colossae

Read 1:24-2:5

Notice back in **1:23**, *What did Paul call himself?*

Would you consider yourself a servant of the Gospel?

How do we serve the Gospel?

In the verses we are studying today we learn more about what Paul believed that meant and how he lived that out for the benefit of the Colossian Christians.

First, servants are known to suffer at times:

Servants suffer because servants do what they are told to do. They don't call the shots. They listen and obey. That sounds harsh but we have to remember all that Paul just taught us about Christ in the first chapter. *What did we learn about Christ last week that makes him easy to follow and serve?*

- He has all power and authority (**1:15-18**)
- He contains the fullness of God (**1:19**)
- He brought reconciliation and life to lifeless sinners, that's us (**1:20-22**)
- We are now free from accusation (**1:22**)

Jesus Christ has two qualities that we don't often see side-by-side in our world. He has all power and he is merciful. *Why is it difficult for mankind to see those two qualities together? Who does Paul believe he is suffering for? (**1:24**)*

We hear people talk about suffering for Christ but rarely do we hear people talk about suffering for the church. Paul is physically in chains because he was trying to advance the Gospel and reach the lost. *How do you think people suffer for the church today?*

Notice that Paul's suffering brings him great joy (**1:24**). Compare this to **James 1:2-4**. Paul gives us another spin off of suffering producing joy. Here, Paul's suffering not only makes **him** more mature in his faith but he is suffering to make **them** more mature in their faith (**1:28**).

What things are you willing to suffer for?

When have you suffered for something? Did it help you mature in some way?

Second, Paul understands that servants have responsibilities:

What did Paul say God commissioned him to do?

How seriously did Paul take his commission from God (**see 1:29-2:1**)?

- God had him share the Gospel with the Gentiles. Paul did so even to the point of his own suffering and imprisonment.

- *What makes some Christians “strenuously contend” to do what God asks and others don’t seem to want to be bothered with responsibility?*

Before we think it all depends on us who is Paul leaning on to make this happen (1:29)?

Third, Paul realizes just what his master has entrusted him with:

It is important for servants to realize what their master values. In **1:25** Paul tells us what God entrusted him with. *What is that?*

- “the word of God” = Gospel

What did God ask him to do with it?

- Share it with the Gentiles

What did Paul call the Gospel in 1:26, 27?

- A mystery
- Glorious riches

Mystery (1:26-27)- Paul has been entrusted by God with something very special. First it was a mystery. It could only be revealed by God. We couldn’t figure it out on our own. Even the disciples who were with Christ 24/7 were confused at times and Christ had to reveal God’s plan to them and make known the Gospel. Today, the Gospel doesn’t feel like a mystery because many of us are 10th generation Christians who grew up in Sunday school. *How might the Gospel have at first seemed more like a mystery to those in Colossae than to many of us today?*

- They were first generation Christians. This was news to them. They had never heard of Jesus until Paul preached to them about the death, burial, and resurrection and how God was reconciling the world to himself (**1:20**)

Glorious riches (1:27, 2:2-3) – This was not some small mundane mystery. Look back at **Col 1:12**. *What word related to riches do you find there?*

How is the benefit and blessing of receiving the Gospel and becoming a Christian “glorious riches”?

There is nothing more valuable in the world than Jesus Christ and what he purchased with his own blood was a bunch of people dead in sin. Paul is reminding them of this so that they will recognize that what the false teachers have to offer pales in comparison to the glorious riches found in Christ (**see 2:4-5**)

If you are a Christian you are very wealthy in the most important ways imaginable.

Application:

What do you think God wants you to strenuously contend for?

What would it take for you to start doing that?

How do we still depend on God for strength today? Or do we?

How can we give our God-given mission our best effort while fully depending on God to make it happen?

Lesson 3 – Colossians 2:6-3:17

Life in Christ

Read 2:6-2:15

In 2:4 and 2:8 Paul refers to the possible danger of them being deceived by false teaching. In this section Paul is going to set them straight on the truth about Christ and in doing so, combat the false teachings they were facing.

Since we aren't dealing with the same false teaching today this lesson will focus on why false teaching is dangerous and what we can learn from Paul's teaching about the sufficiency of Christ from this passage.

The Danger of False Teaching:

There are false teachings today that are just as dangerous as what they faced in the first century. Paul teaches us several things that help us know what is true and what is false teaching:

1. False teachings can take you captive (2:8)

- a. Paul literally warns them not to let the false teachings "kidnap" them
- b. Things like the "health and wealth gospel" makes claims they can't deliver on.
- c. *How is someone "taken captive" by these types of teaching?*
 - i. They claim to have benefit, draw you closer to God, or have a special spiritual meaning but often distract us from the importance of Christ.

2. The sufficiency of Christ (2:9-10)

- a. Paul's answer to false teaching is the sufficiency of Christ. The Gospel doesn't need anything added to it or taken away from it. Jesus Christ and his death, burial, and resurrection is enough.
- b. *What does Paul say about Christ in 2:9-10?*
 - i. 2:9 - Christ is complete and fully divine
 - ii. 2:10 – He is head over every power and authority

3. What Christ has Done for us

- a. *What does Paul say Christ has done for us in 2:11-15?*
 - i. Circumcised out our sinful nature/fleshly desires (2:11)
 - ii. Raised us to walk a new life through baptism (2:12)
 - iii. Made us alive (2:13)
 - iv. Cancelled all that stood against us (2:14)
 - v. Disarmed all powers and authorities and gained victory over the powers that opposed us (2:15)
- b. Why is this important? – Paul is telling us to enjoy the blessing we have found in Christ and that what he has already done is enough.

In **2:16-23** Paul talks about some specifics of the false teaching they were facing. We don't face the same false teaching today but there is still something to learn from these verses. See especially **2:20**.

- As Christians we have also died to the world and sin in order to belong to Christ.
- *What struggles do Christians face today to be like the world...worse, act like we still belong to the world?*
- *What blessing comes from belonging to the world?* - None. In fact, Paul says that way of life is “destined to perish” (2:22)

Colossians 3:1-17

Chapter three starts Paul’s “Application section” of the letter. Since all he has said to this point is true, here is how we are to live in light of these teachings.

What does it mean to set your heart and your mind on things above? (3:1-2)

- We make our priorities line up with God’s
- We realize that this world is wasting away but through Christ we have true life

How would setting our heart in this position change our priorities?

Paul tells them how to set their hearts right in 3:5-17. **Name some of the 10 things he tells them to do or not to do in these verses (3:5-17):**

- Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, etc (3:5)
- Rid yourself of all such things as these: anger, rage, etc (3:8)
- Do not lie to each other (3:9)
- Take off the old & put on the new (3:9-10)
- Clothe yourself with: compassion, kindness, humility, etc (3:12)
- Bear with each other and forgive (3:13)
- Put on love (3:14)
- Let Christ’s peace rule your heart (3:15) – *What does that mean?*
- Let Christ’s word dwell in you (3:16)
- Do everything in the name of the Lord (3:17)

Application:

So Paul gives them a “to do” list and a “things not to do” list. It is important we know both what God expects of us as well as what he does not want us to do.

How would your life be different this week if you took this list seriously?

Would you be happier or more at peace if you did?

How can our sinful desires keep our from engaging in these things Paul encourages them to do?

Lesson 4 – Colossians 3:18-4:18

Practical Encouragements

Read 3:18-4:1

The “Household Code” is a name given to this part of a letter where the author would give specific instructions to members of his household or people under his authority. Paul uses this in Colossians, Ephesians, and Titus. You also see this in 1 Peter.

Two things jump out in his rules for Christian households:

1. In pagan letters you would often find rules for slaves, children, and wives. Paul gives rules for the men as well as both fathers and husbands.
2. Paul is not just interested in how they treat each other “at church” (assembled) but also at home, behind closed doors.

Wives/husbands:

Wives are told to submit to their husbands and husbands are told to love their wives.

- *How do these things go hand in hand?*
- *What happens if only one of them cares to do their part?*
- *Have you ever found your role challenging?*
- *Why does it make it easier if the other person does their part?*

Children/parents:

Children are told to be obedient and parents are told to not embitter their children.

- *What does it mean to embitter a child?*
- *How do these two things work together to make a healthy parent-child relationship?*

Slaves/masters:

If you think back to Philemon and what slavery was like in their day this is far easier to understand and eliminates some of our objections to the thought of Christians owning slaves and Paul accepting it among Christians.

- *If you were a slave, wouldn't it be easy to rationalize slacking since your situation might not be ideal?*
- *What does Paul remind them of so that they will work hard and do right?*
- *What does this have to teach us about the work we do today?*
- *Do you think what Paul says to the slaves' masters would be applicable to Christians who manage people and are over a large number of employees today?*

Read 4:2-18

What additional instructions does Paul give in 4:2-6?

- Generally - Devoted prayer, watchful and thankful
- Specifically – pray that God may open the door for their message (the Gospel) and that Paul proclaims it very clearly
- Act wisely toward the world – this sounds like an evangelistic lifestyle.
- *How can our speech help or hinder what the world thinks about Christians?*
- *Do you pray more for specific things or are your prayers more general? We should find room for both.*

In the last verses of Colossians we learn several things:

- That Paul is surrounded by Christians, even in jail, who are there to encourage him and promote the Gospel including many we know from other places in scripture:
 - Onesimus who is from Colossae (4:9)
 - John Mark – author of the Gospel of Mark
 - Luke – author of the Gospel of Luke
 - Barnabas from Acts
- Epaphras is a prayer warrior who prays for the church in Colossae regularly and with great fervor.
- *Have you ever prayed for a church hundreds or even thousands of miles from where you live? Have you kept our church in Germany in the Carrolls in your prayers on a consistent basis?*
- We see that this letter is “encyclical”, which means it was meant to be read at several churches.
- We also learn that Paul wrote a letter to the church at Laodicea (4:16) that is no longer in existence.

Application:

How well have you fulfilled your role in your household as determined by Paul’s household code here in Colossians?

What are you or could you be a prayer warrior for?

What does the world think about God and Christ based on what you have shown them by your example?

This is the final lesson on Colossians. *What has impacted you studying Colossians that will affect your faith, actions, or attitude?*