

18. Colossians

A. Authorship

Paul is the author (1:1, 23; 4:18). This is another of Paul's **prison** epistles, letters written during his first imprisonment in Rome.

B. Recipients

- 1) The City – not an important city, lesser in significance than neighboring Laodicea and Hierapolis



- 2) The Church

- a. There is no mention of the start of this church in Acts, but Paul may have passed through it on his way to Ephesus on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:1).
- b. Though Paul did not start the church (1:4-7; 2:1), he did know several people from there (Philemon [one of Paul's converts, Phile 19], Apphia, Archippus, Onesimus, and Epaphras).
- c. Evidently started as a result of the ministry of **Epaphras** (cf. 1:7-8, Acts 19:10). It was probably during Paul's three-year ministry at Ephesus that the churches at Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis were founded. It is important to note that the fulfillment of the Great Commission in these areas resulted in the formation local churches (cf. Matt 28:19-20; Titus 1:5).

C. Occasion and Purpose

- 1) Occasion: False teaching threatened the Colossian church (elaborated under “characteristics”). Paul heard about this from Epaphras (1:7-8).
- 2) Purposes:
 - a. To **refute** the Colossian false teaching by demonstrating the supremacy of Jesus Christ, chapters 1-2

Jesus is...

- the very image of God, 1:15
 - the Creator, 1:16
 - the preexistent sustainer of all things, 1:17
 - the head of the church, 1:18
 - the first to be resurrected, 1:18
 - the fullness of deity in bodily form, 1:19; 2:9
 - the one who reconciles sinners to God, 1:20-22
 - the one in whom believers are made complete, 2:10
- b. To give practical **instruction** on how a Christian should live, chapters 3-4.

Note

Error *must be met with* clear teaching of the truth
and definite refutation of error.

D. Characteristics

- 1) The False Teaching Threatening the Colossian Church

Note these aspects of the false teaching—

- a. **Legalism** – strict rules about what could/could not be consumed, religious festivals and days to observe (2:16-17, 20-23)
- b. **Angel worship** (2:18)

“Probably the Colossian errorists did not *directly* attack the supremacy of Christ. Neither did those who afterwards introduced saint-worship into the Catholic Church. But in both cases the effect was to rob Christ of his rightful place in Christian devotion” (Machen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 161).

- c. **Asceticism** (2:18 “self-abasement”). One who believes he can get “closer to God” by denying himself of things like food, sleep, etc.
- d. **Devaluing Jesus Christ** – we can see this from Paul’s stress on Christ’s supremacy (1:15-20; 2:2-3, 9) and the emphasis the false teachers put on personal effort rather than relying on Christ
- e. **Secret knowledge** (2:2-3, 18)
- f. **Reliance on human wisdom and tradition** (2:4, 8)

As a result of Paul’s emphasis on the supremacy of Jesus Christ, the false teaching is shown to be mere philosophy, an “empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ” (2:8).

The false teaching the Colossians faced had three basic elements—

- (1) A **Jewish** element – legalism, ritualism, observance of holy days
- (2) A **pagan** element – asceticism, worship of angels, supremacy of knowledge
- (3) A **Christian** element – it wore the mask of Christianity, having a place for Christ but not the place of supremacy

2) Relationship to Ephesians

- a. There are many similarities between Colossians and Ephesians, both in *what* Paul says (content) and *how* he says it (the words used).
- b. There are some contrasts:

| | |
|---|---|
| <i>Colossians</i> | <i>Ephesians</i> |
| Completeness in Christ | Oneness in Christ |
| Christ in the body of the believer is a mystery | Jew and Gentile as one in the body of Christ is a mystery |
| Christ as the <i>Head</i> of the body is emphasized | The church as the <i>Body</i> of Christ is emphasized |

3) Colossians has the classic passage on the preeminence of Jesus Christ (1:14-22)

E. Keys

- 1) Theme – The **supremacy** of Christ
- 2) Word – “first place” or “preeminence”
- 3) Verse – **1:18**

F. Outline

Here's a basic outline of Colossians—

- 1) Believe in Christ, 1
- 2) Beware of Error, 2
- 3) Behave as a Christian, 3-4

Here's a more detailed outline of Colossians —

Introduction, 1:1–8

1. Believe in The Person and Work of Christ, 1:9-29

Redemption through Christ is the basis of the Christian's salvation

- 1) Prayer based on Christ, 1:9-14
- 2) Preeminence of Christ, 1:15-20
- 3) Work of Christ, 1:21-29

2. Don't be Fooled – Warning Against Error, 2:1-23

Identification with Christ is the basis for the Christian's position

- 1) Personal concern, 2:1-5
- 2) The true doctrine of Christ, 2:6-15
- 3) The false doctrines of men, 2:16-23

3. Live for Christ – Exhortations to Practical Christian Living, 3:1-4:6

Union with Christ is the basis for Christian living

- 1) The basic principle for Christian living, 3:1-4
- 2) The proper method of Christian living, 3:5-17
- 3) Christian living in human relationships, 3:18-4:1
- 4) Exhortations to prayer and conduct, 4:2-6

An important point to note – asceticism emphasizes the “negative,” but living based on union with Christ stresses both the “positive” and the “negative.”

Conclusion, 4:7-18

19. Philemon

A. Authorship

Paul is the author (vv. 1, 9, 19).

B. Recipients

- 1) Written to primarily Philemon, a believer in Colossae (v. 1)
- 2) It was also addressed to Apphia, Archippus, and “the church in your house” (v. 2). Some think Apphia was Philemon’s wife and Archippus was their son and the church’s pastor.

C. Occasion and Purpose

- 1) Occasion
 - a. Onesimus, one of Philemon’s slaves, had run away and stolen from him (vv. 15-16, 18). Under Roman law, runaway slaves could face the death penalty.
 - b. Onesimus (meaning “profitable,” note v. 11), fled to Rome, where he came in contact with Paul and then trusted Christ (v. 10)
 - c. Though Onesimus had repented of his sin, he had not made restitution
 - d. So Onesimus now returned to Philemon, his earthly master, and Paul appealed to Philemon to accept Onesimus as a brother in Christ (v. 16)
- 2) Purpose – to urge Philemon to **forgive** and **receive** Onesimus back as a brother in Christ

D. Characteristics

- 1) Philemon is an excellent example and illustration of **forgiveness**.

As God has forgiven us, we must forgive one another (Eph 4:32). Philemon should forgive Onesimus, even though he didn’t deserve such, just like God forgave Philemon, even though he didn’t deserve such.

- 2) Philemon is an excellent example and illustration of **imputation**. Note verses 17-18.

Just as Paul took on the debt Onesimus owed to Philemon, so Christ took on the debt sinners owed to God. In Philemon’s ledger book, what Onesimus owed was transferred to Paul’s account. In like manner, in God’s ledger book, what we owed was transferred to Christ’s account.

Once this “transaction” was completed, Onesimus should be received as if it were Paul himself (v. 17). Likewise, the believer is received by God as if it were Christ Himself, as He took our sin and gave us His righteousness (cf. 2 Cor 5:21).

3) The Role of the Church

Ultimately, Philemon has the final decision concerning this matter. However, note the greeting that this letter begins with in verse 2 “...and to the church in your house” and the closing words in verse 25 “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your (plural) spirit.” Philemon’s decision is done as a member of the church, who also cares about the outcome. **Your decisions are not made in isolation!**

4) Christianity and **Slavery**

Nowhere does the Bible attack the institution of slavery, but it does give principles by which Christian slaves and masters should guide and conduct themselves (Eph 6:5-9; Col 3:22-4:1; 1 Tim 6:1-2; 1 Pet 2:18-25). The principles, however, when consistently and thoroughly applied would eventually result in the end of slavery.

E. Keys

- 1) Theme – Christian **Love**
- 2) Phrase – “**beloved** brother”
- 3) Verse – **16**

F. Outline

1. Greeting, vv. 1-3
2. Thanksgiving and Prayer, vv. 4-7
3. Plea for Onesimus, vv. 8-21
4. Closing, vv. 22-25

20. 2 Timothy

A. Authorship

Paul is the author (1:1).

B. Recipient

- 1) Timothy, see discussion under 1 Timothy (p. 95).
- 2) Though written primarily to Timothy, it closes with a plural “you” (4:22), so that what he says is important for the **church** as well.

C. Occasion and Purpose

1) Occasion

- a. Paul is again in prison under Nero’s persecution of Christians, except this time he is chained like a criminal in a cold dungeon (1:16; 2:9; 4:13) instead of under house-arrest, as he was in his first Roman imprisonment.

A great fire ravaged Rome (rumored to have been ordered by Nero). To remove suspicion, Nero blamed Christians, resulting in a terrible persecution. Paul, as the champion of the spread of Christianity among the non-Jewish nations, became public enemy number one.

- b. Paul does not expect to be released but instead expects to **die** (4:6-8).
- c. He is **lonely**, having been abandoned by Phygelus, Hermogenes (1:15) and Demas (4:10), and his other co-workers were away (4:10-12). Only Luke was with him (4:11).
- d. Timothy needed encouragement to stay faithful to God and His Word, despite the fact that Paul was suffering for these very things.

2) Purpose

Paul urges Timothy to...

- a. Be ready to suffer, 1:8; 2:3
- b. Guard the faith, 1:14
- c. Persevere in the faith, 3:14
- d. Keep on preaching the Word, 4:2

D. Characteristics

- 1) This is Paul's **last** letter, and a very personal one at that.
- 2) It is interesting to note that Paul's "last words" exhorting faithfulness to God and His Word necessarily involves **proclaiming** God's Word and **refuting** error.
- 3) Prophecies (3:1-6; 4:3-4)
- 4) Important passages
 - a. 2:2 – the necessity of passing on the faith to others
 - b. 2:15 – the admonition to handle God's Word accurately
 - c. 2:19 – the firm foundation of God with its two-fold seal
 - d. 3:2-4 – the reference to different "lovers"
 - e. 1:5; 3:14-15 – Timothy's godly upbringing
 - f. 3:16-17 – the character, function, and purpose of Scripture
 - g. 4:1-5 – the command to preach the Word regardless of circumstances

E. Keys

- 1) Theme – Faithfulness to **God** and His **Word**
- 2) Phrase – "preach the word"
- 3) Verse – **3:16-17**

F. Outline

Here's a basic outline of 2 Timothy—

- 1) Be Faithful to God, 1-2
- 2) Be Faithful to God's Word, 3-4

Here's a more detailed outline of 2 Timothy—

Greeting, 1:1-2

1. Be Faithful to God, 1-2

- 1) Faithfulness in Opposition and Suffering, 1:3-18

“Do not be ashamed...” (1:8)

- 2) Faithfulness in Personal Life and Ministry, 2:1-26

“Be strong...” (2:1)

2. Be Faithful to God's Word, 3-4

- 1) Challenges to a Faithful Ministry, 3:1-9

“Avoid such men as these” (3:5)

- 2) Components of a Faithful Ministry, 3:10-4:8

“Continue in the things you have learned...preach the Word...fulfill your ministry” (3:14; 4:2, 5)

- a. Follow Godly Examples, 3:1-13
- b. Continue in God's Word, 3:14-17
- c. Preach God's Word, 4:1-4
- d. Persevere Until the End, 4:5-8

Conclusion, 4:9-22