



COLOSSIANS

Centered on Christ

Mike Taylor

<https://www.taylornotes.info>



LESSON 1: INTRODUCTION



What does a Christ-centered life look like? What does a Christ-centered church look like?

A. BACKGROUND

Why Was Colossians Written?

This letter was written for two reasons.

First, to combat extremely dangerous and threatening heresies that were creeping into the Colossian church. False teachers were distorting who Jesus is.

- They attacked Jesus' supremacy and his deity.
- They attacked Jesus' creative power and supreme role in creation.
- They attacked Jesus' humanity.
- They attacked Jesus' redemptive power.

Second, the letter was written to emphasize the importance of making Jesus Christ the center of the believer's life and the center of the church. Christ (Gr. Christos) means "anointed one," symbolizing appointment to a task, or Messiah. An anointed one is someone designated as a king and is the primary emphasis in this letter to the Christians in Colossae.

Who Wrote Colossians?

The Epistle to the Colossians is the twelfth book of the New Testament. It was written, according to the text, by Paul the Apostle and Timothy, and addressed to the church in Colossae, a small Phrygian city near Laodicea and approximately 100 miles (160 km) from Ephesus in Asia Minor.

When Was Colossians Written?

Uncertain, but probably between AD 60-63. Galatians was probably written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome. But this too is disputed by some. Some hold that the letter was written from Caesarea (AD 58-60) or Ephesus (AD 55-56).

To Whom was Colossians Written?

Though Paul never visited Colossae on his missionary journeys (2:1), his connection to them was strong. It is likely that a man named Epaphras was the founder of the Colossian church (1:7) which consisted mainly of Gentiles, but also had Jewish Christians.

B. FOUR THREATS THAT FACED THE COLOSSIAN CHURCH

Heresies that plagued this church contained elements of both Jewish legalism and Pagan mysticism. Despite these heresies, the Colossian Christians remained faithful to God. They held to faith in Christ Jesus and showed love to all saints (1:4). They were bearing evangelistic fruit reaching many people for Christ (1:6) and were steadfast in their faith (2:5).

These four threats were:

The threat of Gnosticism (2:8): The “deceptive philosophy” that distorted who Jesus is. Gnostics insisted that they possessed a “secret knowledge” which was given by Jesus to his disciples but was not recorded. They insisted that this secret knowledge was passed down verbally. They also developed a concept of emanations from a perfect Supreme God, which became progressively more evil resulting in one that created the evil world. This was a “religious” view that was greatly influenced by Greek dualism.

The threat of Jewish legalism (2:11, 16, 22). Special foods and drinks, days and festivals, traditions and man-made rules were insisted upon. Much of this was based on man-made laws (“fence laws”).

The threat angel worship (2:18): Colossae, in Paul’s day, had a strong angel cult believing angels could forgive sins. The town was known for its fusion of religious influences (syncretism), which included Jewish, Gnostic, and pagan influences that, in the first century AD, were described as an angel-cult. This unorthodox cult venerated the archangel Michael, who is said to have caused a curative spring to gush from a fissure in the earth.¹ Also early Jewish teaching stated that angels were participants in the issuance of the Mosaic Law and were to be revered.

The threat of asceticism (2:20-23). The belief that the normal appetites of the physical body, including emotions, had to be suppressed since they were viewed as being evil. This view was also based on Greek dualism.

C. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What threats to Christian churches do you see today?

2. Legalism, a term Christians use to describe a doctrinal position emphasizing a system of rules and regulations for achieving both salvation and spiritual growth, was prominent in the Colossian church. What forms of legalism might creep into Christian churches today?
3. Why is Jesus often the main target of false teachers? What is it about Jesus that causes people to avoid talking about him?

D. SUMMARY OF COLOSSIANS

The Book of Colossians is a letter written by the apostle Paul to the Christian community in Colossae, a city in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). The letter addresses various theological and practical issues facing the Colossian church. It can be summarized as follows:

Introduction and Thanksgiving (Colossians 1:1-14): Paul begins by expressing his thanks for the faith and love of the Colossian Christians. He offers prayers for their continued spiritual growth and gives thanks for their reception of the gospel.

The Supremacy of Christ (Colossians 1:15-23): Paul emphasizes the preeminence of Jesus Christ, describing Him as the image of the invisible God and the one through whom all things were created. He highlights Christ's role in reconciliation, both cosmic and personal, and his ultimate authority over all creation.

Paul's Ministry and Suffering (Colossians 1:24-2:5): Paul speaks about his own ministry and suffering, emphasizing his role as a servant of the gospel, entrusted with proclaiming the mystery of Christ to the Gentiles.

Warnings Against False Teaching (Colossians 2:6-23): Paul warns the Colossians against being deceived by false philosophies and teachings that diminish the supremacy of Christ. He encourages them to remain rooted in Christ, not being led astray by human traditions or worldly philosophies.

Living in Christ (Colossians 3:1-4:6): Paul offers practical instructions for Christian living. He urges the Colossians to set their minds on heavenly things, to put to death earthly desires, and to clothe themselves with virtues such as compassion, kindness, humility, and forgiveness. He also addresses various relationships within the Christian community, including those between spouses, parents and children, and masters and slaves.

Final Greetings and Instructions (Colossians 4:7-18): Paul concludes the letter with personal greetings and instructions. He mentions several individuals who are with him and sends greetings from various members of the churches. He also encourages the Colossians to exchange letters with the nearby church in Laodicea and instructs them to read his letter to the Laodiceans.

Overall, Colossians emphasizes the supremacy of Christ, the dangers of false teaching, and the importance of living out one's faith in practical ways within the Christian community.

Sources used in this series

Barclay, William. *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*, rev. ed. Louisville: Westminster Press, 1975.

BibleWorks, Version 5.0. *Thayer's Greek Lexicon. 1992-2002 BibleWorks*, L.L.C. Norfolk, 1992-2002.

ESV Crossway Bibles. *ESV English Standard Version*. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2008.

Houdmann, S. Michael. *Got Questions Ministries*. Colorado Springs, n.d.
<<http://www.gotquestions.org/>>.

Leadership Ministries Worldwide. *The Teacher's Outline and Study Bible*. Chattanooga: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 1994.

MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2005.

Mounce, William D. *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006.

New International Version. *Life Application Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House and Tyndale House Publishers, 1991.

New Living Translation. *Holy Bible*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1997.

OpenAI. *ChatGPT*. Ed. ChatGPT is an AI-powered conversational agent. 2023. OpenAI.
<<https://chat.openai.com/>>.

End Notes

¹ Wikipedia, < <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colossae> >