

Colossians Overview

Introduction: The year is about A.D. 55 and Paul the Apostle is carrying on a ministry in Ephesus. He's been teaching in a place called the School of Tyrannus, possibly renting it or using the space when Tyrannus was taking his breaks. The book of Acts tells us that:

Acts 19:10 NKJV ... this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

One of the converts Paul made in Ephesus at that time was a man named Epaphras. He was from the city of Colossae, about 100 miles away. Epaphras went back to Colossae, started sharing his faith, and a church was planted as a result.

Now it's about 10 years later and a lot has happened. Paul is in confinement in the city of Rome and Epaphras is with him. He may have come to visit Paul, or may even be in custody with him. Archippus, the son of Philemon now has the primary ministry responsibilities and this church may be using the home of Philemon as its main meeting place. (See letter to Philemon for more on this family.)

While the church in Colossae is doing well in many ways, there is one problem that probably has both Epaphras and Paul concerned. There is some twisted teaching taking root in the church. It seems to contain an element of Jewish legalism along with some odd superstitions probably rooted in the folk religion of that region. We might call it a form of syncretism – the mixing of the Christian faith with something else. Paul's main purpose in writing this letter is to provide some solid Christ-centered doctrine. Right teaching is the way to stop false teaching from gaining any more ground. The letter is delivered by Paul's coworker Tychicus and Philemon, a runaway slave who is now returning to Philemon his master.

Before we start the letter, there is one major theme we want to take note of. We might even use this as an alternate title to the whole letter to the Colossians:

The Supremacy of Christ

If there was one major problem with the false teaching that was infiltrating the Colossian church, it was that it was drawing attention away from Jesus Christ. Unlike some religions which can be reduced to a code of ethics, a system of traditions or a philosophy of life, the Christian faith is all about Jesus Christ. He is our Creator, Redeemer and Lord. We don't simply believe things about Him or listen to His teaching; we worship Him and entrust Him with our eternal souls. His death and resurrection form the core of our beliefs. He gave His life for us and we now live for Him. If Jesus is pushed aside or minimized, this does more than modify our Christianity; it corrupts it to the point that it truly no longer is Christianity at all.

A blended faith is not pure Christianity. Christianity requires unmixed devotion to Jesus.

Throughout this letter Paul will point us to Jesus. If we listen to him, this Christ-focused way of doing Christianity will correct any error and bring any imbalance in our faith back into perfect equilibrium. Anything that attempts to shove Jesus to the side in order to stand alongside Him needs to be shoved out of the way itself so that Jesus can have His rightful place in our lives.

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Outline:

Major Divisions:

Chapters 1-2 The Supremacy of Christ in Our Doctrinal Beliefs
Chapters 3-4 The Supremacy of Christ in Our Day-to-Day Life

Divisions for the purpose of walking through the letter:

- 1 Overview
- 2 1:01-14 Learning to Pray with Paul
- 3 1:15-23 We are reconciled to God through the blood of Christ Who Reigns Supreme
- 4 1:24 – 2:05 The Severe Privilege of Making Known the Mystery of Christ
- 5 2:06-15 The Sufficiency of Christ and His Cross
- 6 2:16-23 The Insufficiency of a Religion that is Based on Rules and Rituals
- 7 3:01-17 Learning to Live the New Life
- 8 3:18 – 4:01 Learning to Have God-Centered Relationships
- 9 4:02-18 Closing Remarks and Instructions

Highlights:

Prayers: 1:3-14 4:2-4 4:12-13

Key verses: 1:15-18 2:9-10 3:1-2 3:23-24

Major Theme: The Supremacy of Christ

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Application:

In what ways might we be practicing a contemporary, American form of syncretism?

Cultural assumptions can take the place of unmixed faith in Jesus Christ.

Cultural values can replace obedience to Jesus Christ.

Personal preferences can make us unwilling to submit ourselves fully to Jesus Christ.

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