

Introduction (1:1-14)

Greeting (1:1-2)

Author

Paul. When Colossians was written, Paul was in prison, most likely in Rome.

Audience

The letter is addressed to the church in Colosse. The city of Colosse was located in the province of Asia about 100 miles east of Ephesus on the south bank of the Lyous River. The city had been on the main road heading east out of Ephesus. However it had diminished in importance after the road had been moved to Laodicea¹, which was 10 miles to the northwest of the town.



Paul probably had not visited Colosse (2:1), but the church was probably founded as a result of the tremendous influence Paul had on the region during his two year stay in Ephesus (Acts 19:10). The church itself was most likely founded by Epaphras (1:7).

Paul asked that when the Colossians had finished with his letter, that it be passed on to the church in Laodicea (4:16), and likewise that a letter he had written to the Laodiceans would be circulated to them.

Occasion for the Writing (1:3-8)

Paul begins his epistles thanking God that the Colossians had learned of and responded to the gospel as presented to them from Epaphras. However, Epaphras was now with Paul (4:12), perhaps having come to visit him while in prison in Rome. Either through Epaphras or through some other means, Paul had learned of heretical teaching taking place in Colosse. This epistle is written to directly refute this teaching. The nature of this heresy is unknown. We can surmise from the epistle itself the following:

- The false teaching was based on human philosophy and traditions (2:8).
- It taught that there were mysteries beyond the gospel of Christ which the Colossians needed special knowledge and wisdom to understand (2:2)
- The false teachers emphasized holy days, festivals and keeping the Sabbath (2:16).
- It involved asceticism and the keeping of human rules (2:18, 21-23).
- It involved circumcision (2:11)
- It involved the worship of angels and visions (2:18).

Unfortunately scholars have not been able to find any ancient religions or teachings from the time of Paul which corresponds to all these characteristics. Nonetheless some scholars believe it to be the same Jewish believers whom Paul refutes in Galatians and Romans. Others see the heresy as a Greek mystery cult.

¹ Hughes, R. B., Laney, J. C., & Hughes, R. B. *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*. (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 608.

Theme of the Book

The book of Colossians emphasizes the preeminence and the sufficiency of Christ. The Colossians need not seek additional wisdom or knowledge, for Christ is the fullness of all wisdom. The Colossians need not keep additional laws or customs, for Christ's work on the cross is sufficient.

For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority (Colossians 2:9-10)

Structure of the Book (1:9-14)

After his prayer of thanksgiving, Paul then prays that the Colossians would be 1) filled with knowledge (1:9) and 2) walk in a manner worthy of the Lord (1:10). This provides the basic structure of the book. Chapters 1 and 2 emphasize the fact that Christ is the fullness of wisdom, while chapters 3 and 4 detail what it means to walk in a worthy manner.

Christ, the Fullness of Wisdom				Walking in Worthy Manner					
Introduction		The Preeminence of Christ		Admonition to Resist False Teaching		Living in Unity		Concluding Comments	
1:1	1:14	1:15	1:29	2:1	2:23	3:1	4:6	4:7	4:18

The Preeminence of Christ (1:15-29)

The Authority of Christ (1:15-18)

After his initial prayer that the Colossians would be filled with knowledge, Paul begins with a detailed listing of the preeminence of Christ. Christ is:

- ...the image of the invisible God.
- ...the firstborn of all creation.
- ...the creator of all things, both spiritual and natural.
- ...before all.
- ...the one who holds all things together.
- ...the Beginning.
- ... the firstborn from the dead.
- ...first place over everything.

Paul is showing that Christ is so great and powerful, that the Colossians do not need to look for any other knowledge or wisdom. Their knowledge of Christ is all that they need.

The Accomplishments of Christ (1:19-23)

But Christ did not merely create all and hold all things together, but when creation fell and rebelled against Him, He intervened. For it was the Father's good pleasure to send Christ into creation so that through the blood of the cross, Christ might reconcile all things to Himself (1:20).

Paul makes this act of Christ's reconciliation personal, addressing to his readers. Previously they had been alienated (1:21a), but now they were reconciled to God (1:22a). Previously they had been involved in evil deeds (1:21b), but now they were holy and blameless and beyond reproach (1:22b).

The Adequacy of Christ (1:24-29)

The mystery of the adequacy of Christ is such a privilege for Paul to reveal that he would rather have this ministry even if it means imprisonment. For Christ alone is all we need. He is our full sufficiency.

In a passage reminiscent of the other prison epistles, Paul takes joy in his incarceration (1:24). He has been put in jail for the sake of the Colossians and because He had dared to share the mysteries of God with the Gentiles. Paul had been appointed as a steward of the mystery of God and was called to share that mystery with the Gentiles (1:25). What was this mystery? “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (1:27). The mystery is that Christ comes to dwell in us and gives us the hope that we someday will share in the glory of Christ. Having this knowledge is all we need. There is no additional wisdom or knowledge. There are no additional mysteries that need to be revealed. Instead, this is all that is necessary so that every one may be complete in Christ (1:28).

Admonition to Resist False Teaching (2:1-23)

Stand Firm in Your Faith (2:1-8)

Paul has worked hard for the Colossians and Laodiceans so that they might stand firm in their understanding of the knowledge of Christ (1:28-2:1). He wants them to be encouraged and united together in their understanding of Christ (2:2). He wants them to be assured that they have all the knowledge and wisdom they need in Christ (2:2). For in Christ is all wisdom and knowledge (2:3).

Some were trying to persuade Paul's readers that Christ is not preeminent and that there was additional knowledge or wisdom to be gained (2:4). But Paul wants them to know that even though he is not their physically he is with them spiritually in their stance against such false teaching (2:5), and he calls on them to stand firm in their faith with him (2:5b-7).

The Elementary Teachings of Christ (2:9-15)

Paul warns them not to give in to these human philosophies and traditions, but to hold on to the elementary teaching of Christ (2:9). He then reminds them of what these teachings are.

- Christ is the fullness of deity (2:9).
- Christ is our completion (2:10a).
- Christ is the head, the ruler, and the authority over all things (2:11b).

Therefore, because Christ is complete, their baptism in Christ is all they need. They don't need to be circumcised, for baptism accomplishes more than circumcision (2:11). For baptism demonstrates the sufficiency of Christ's death and resurrection and is our means of publicly identifying with the death and resurrection of Christ (2:12).

Through the death and resurrection our sins are forgiven (2:13), our debt to God is cancelled (2:14), and all ruler and authorities have been defeated (2:15)

Reject Anything that Adds to Christ (2:16-23)

Because of all that Christ's death has accomplished, Paul reminds the Colossians that they don't need any other works or effort to complete their spirituality. They need not keep dietary laws, Jewish festivals or Sabbath days (2:16), for these are just shadows while Christ is substance (2:17). They don't need to be involved in self-abasement, the worship of angels or visions (2:18), for Christ will provide them with all they need for spiritual growth (2:19).

Because Christ is sufficient for us, we do not need to seek righteousness through any fleshly efforts. Therefore why would we want to follow rules that tell us what to taste and touch (2:21)? These things may sound spiritual (2:23), but it is self-made religion and has no value in helping us curb our sinfulness (2:23).

Admonition to Live in Unity (3:1-4:6)

Put on the New Self (3:1-11)

So, if we can't achieve righteousness through these man made rules, how do we find holiness? Paul begins by reminding us that we have already been made holy and that we will realize the fullness of this when Christ returns (3:4). If we set our minds on our future glorification (3:2), then we will have the power to overcome our sinful flesh. The appetites and desires of our flesh will pale in comparison to the glory we will share with Christ, who is seated at the right hand of the father (3:1). Therefore, we are to put aside our old lifestyle (3:5-8), and put on our new self, which is renewed in our knowledge of Christ (3:10).

Be Unified (3:11-17)

We should especially put aside anger, malice, slander and lies to one another (3:8-9), for this brings about disunity in the body. We must remember that all those old issues of ethnicity no longer divide us in Christ (3:11). Instead, we should be compassionate, kind, humble, loving and forbearing with our fellow saints (3:12-13). Paul, then calls on the Colossians to do two things which will create unity: 1) let the peace of Christ rule, for this is He is the foundation of our unity (3:15); 2) let the word of Christ dwell in us, and then share with one another this word through our teaching and singing (3:16). Paul then summarizes this section reminding his readers to do whatever they do in the name of Jesus.

Submit (3:18-4:1)

For unity to be evident in the church, it must first be evident in the home. So Paul calls for submission in our domestic relationships:

- Wives are to submit to their husbands, while husbands are to love their wives (3:18-19).
- Children are to obey their parents, while fathers are to not exasperate their children (3:20-21).
- Slaves are to work as unto the Lord, while masters are to be just and fair to their slaves (3:22-4:1)

Promote the Gospel (4:2-6)

Finally, Paul gives one final exhortation for the Colossians to be united in their purpose; namely, the promotion of the gospel. He calls on them first to pray, with a heart of thanksgiving (4:2), that God might open the doors so Paul might be able to share the gospel (4:3) and that he might be clear in his communication of this message (4:4).

Secondly, he calls on them to conduct themselves in a manner that opens up doors with non-believers (4:5a). He tells them to watch for opportunities to spread the gospel (4:5b). He reminds them that as we share the gospel, our speech must be seasoned with the salt of grace (4:6a), and that we must be prepared to respond appropriately to each person we encounter (4:6b).

Final Comments (4:7-18)

Paul concludes his epistles with personal greetings (4:10-15) and then instructions to pass the epistle to the neighboring church in Laodicea (4:16). He then concludes in his own handwriting, asking them to remember him his imprisonment while he wishes them grace (4:18)