

## Colossians

### Background

- 1:1 From Paul while in the company of Timothy while in prison (4:3, 4:18). Timothy was in the group with Paul that spent time in Macedonia (Acts 20:1 – 6), passing through twice, on the way to Corinth and on the way back. Others who were present were:
- Fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision
    - Tychicus (4:7), a travelling companion of Paul (Acts 20:4) perhaps carried this letter (4:8). Assuming that Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus was written about the same time, perhaps he carried both letters (Ephesians 6:21). Years later, Paul sent him to Ephesus again (2 Timothy 4:12). Paul planned to send either Tychicus or Artemas to meet with Titus on Crete (Titus 3:12) so Titus could meet Paul in Nicopolis.
    - Onesimus (4:9) was from Colossae, who prompted the letter to Philemon (Philemon 10)
    - Aristarchus, a Macedonian who had travelled extensively with Paul (Acts 19:29, 20:4, 27:2), is now a fellow prisoner (also in Philemon 24).
    - Mark (Acts 12:12, 12:25, 15:37, 15:39, 2 Timothy 4:11)
    - Jesus called Justus
  - Paul's Gentile companions at the time of this writing
    - Epaphras was the primary person who brought the gospel to that area (1:7, 4:12) and is a fellow prisoner (Philemon 23).
    - Luke (4:14)
    - Demas (4:14, Philemon 24) later abandoned the gospel (2 Timothy 4:10).
- 1:2 To the Christians in Colossae, in southwestern Turkey, about 100 miles east of Ephesus.
- 2:1 Colossae is very close to Laodicea (4:13 – 16, Revelation 1:11, 3:14 – 22) and Hierapolis (4:13).
- 2:1 Many if not all of the Christians in Colossae had never met Paul in person.
- 4:16 This letter was to be read in Laodicea, also. The letter to Laodicea was to be read in Colossae.

### A Reminder of Their Present Condition (1:1 – 23)

- (1:2) "Grace and peace" This common opening (in every letter except Hebrews, James, 1 John, and 3 John) is not a standard greeting but sets the tone for that which follows. The letter should be viewed as an outgrowth of the grace of God and should result in peace for the reader. Overlooking the source and result leads to the distortions referenced in the various letters.
- (1:3 – 1:8) A reminder of their present condition as a result of the grace of God.
  - Your faith and love have been successful, prompting thanksgiving by others.
  - Your attitude (hope) has produced and continues to produce results.
  - You are just like the other success stories of the gospel.
  - Your love is God's version of love, in the Spirit (Romans 5:5).
- (1:9 – 12) The report of their faith prompted prayers from Paul and company that they may:
  - Be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding
    - All the facets of the will of God had not yet been revealed
    - Not only do we pray for our own wisdom, but for that of others.
    - True understanding is from the perspective of faithful spirits, not faithful mortals.
  - That you may walk worthy ... fully pleasing ... fruitful ... increasing in knowledge ... strengthened

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- They had grace, love, peace, faith, and hope. From that foundation, Paul prayed for applications.
- Having the ability to apply the concepts came “according to His glorious power,” not by trying harder.
- Declaring that these applications are unimportant rejects the power of God. Declaring that we must achieve a certain level of these applications in order to be acceptable to God also rejects the power of God.
- The point is that our faith, love, hope, and peace give us the platform from which to trust the promises of God for ourselves and for others and expect that these applications will happen.
- The Father...has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance. Our response is patience, longsuffering, joy, and thankfulness.
- (1:13 – 23) A reminder of how we got where we are
  - The paragraph begins and ends with reconciliation (1:13, 1:21 – 22). The focus of our memories of the past is joy and thankfulness for deliverance, not sorrow and guilt for the way we were.
  - This description of Jesus emphasize the magnitude of that deliverance
    - Image of the invisible God: God became a human so we could see a practical demonstration of His character.
    - Firstborn over all creation...in Him all things were created...head of the body
      - The creation was prompted by the Son facet of God, not the Father or the Spirit facet. Spirits who were assigned physical bodies were created to be siblings, God being the eldest (having responsibility for the younger children).
      - “He is before all things and in Him all things consist.” The character of God, specifically the Son application, required the physical creation so that facet could be fully expressed.
      - Spirits that have not been assigned physical bodies (angels) are included as equals in the process. Note: Hebrews 1:14 characterizes angels as servants. But, Jesus characterized Himself the same way, so being servants of “those who will inherit salvation” is not a lowly position, but their job description.
      - The Son facet is not a subset of God but a full representation (all the fullness should dwell).
      - The eldest Son position made it Jesus’ responsibility to rescue His siblings, both on earth and in heaven.
  - The reconciliation of the Christians in Colossae had already occurred (1:21), yet in the future, Paul prayed, they would walk worthy and be fully pleasing (1:10).
  - “If indeed you continue in the faith...”
    - The emphasis is on grounded and steadfast faith, not walking worthy and being fully pleasing. The point is to accept reconciliation and trust God for the power to become transformed into His image.
    - A faithful person retains the ability to reject faith. Various people in the New Testament did so (Luke 8:13, Romans 11:20 – 23, 1 Corinthians 10:12, 2 Corinthians 6:1, Galatians 5:4, 1 Timothy 4:1 – 2, Hebrews 3:12, 6:4 – 6, 10:26 – 29, 2 Peter 1:10 – 11, 2:20, Revelation 3:5)

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### The objective: the hope of glory (1:24 – 2:3)

- (1:24 – 25) Paul's attitude toward his own difficulties
  - Rejoice in suffering
    - 1 Thessalonians 1:6
    - 2 Corinthians 7:4
    - James 1:2
    - Acts 5:41
    - The context of each references difficulties experienced in the progress of the gospel, not to general bad times (Philippians 2:25 – 30)
    - Do we suffer for the progress of the gospel?
  - Fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ
    - Afflictions, not suffering. Suffering was used as an equivalent to death.
    - Jesus was afflicted (persecuted) at more times than at the end of His earthly life as He brought good news to the nation of Israel (“to the Jew first”).
    - Those who carried the message after Jesus went to the whole world, expanding the scope of persecution.
    - 1 Peter 2:21 – 24
    - Will the afflictions of Christ ever be filled up?
  - For the sake of His body, the church
    - Matthew 24:31, Mark 13:27 He will gather His elect from the four winds
    - Ephesians 5:25 – 27
    - Do we endure afflictions for the sake of the body in this way? 2 Corinthians 4:10, 4:9 – 10, 6:4 – 10
  - A stewardship
    - 1 Corinthians 4:1 – 2, 9:16 – 17
    - Do we have a stewardship? 2 Corinthians 4:5, 5:18, 5:20, 6:1
  - To fill to overflowing the Word
    - Not revealed before Jesus
    - Now revealed to the saints
    - What is meant by “to fulfill the Word of God”?
- (1:26 – 28) The specific objectives of the plan of God
  - The hope of glory
    - “Christ in you” is equivalent to “the parade of Jesus’ character traits being in you”
    - 2 Corinthians 3:18
  - Consistent inside Jesus while we are still on earth
    - Matthew 5:48 Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect
    - Hebrews 12:23 The church is populated by “the spirits of righteous men made perfect.”
    - 1 Corinthians 2:6 “Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are perfect.” Verses 10 – 16 describe these perfect people as those who have “the mind of Christ,” referring to believers living on earth.
    - Ephesians 4:13 Miraculously appointed leaders were provided “until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Perfection is the objective. If this perfection does not occur until Judgment Day, then Jesus’ prayer in John 17:20 – 23 failed.

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- John 17:20 – 23 Jesus prayed that His future followers “be perfected in unity.” He stated that He had given future believers His glory. These were to be an evidence that Jesus was from the Father.
- May we expect to obtain the character of Jesus and consistency while on earth?

### Keep it simple (2:4 – 23)

- Tools of deception. How can we differentiate between these and good teaching?
  - Persuasive words (2:4) (*c.f.*, Jude 16)
  - Philosophy (2:8)
  - Practices (2:16, 21, 23)
  - False humility (2:18, 23)
  - Worship of angels (2:18)
  - Visions (2:18)
  - Asceticism (2:23)
- Good teaching. How can we differentiate between these and deception?
  - Abounding with thanksgiving (2:7)
  - In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (2:9)
  - You are complete “in” Him (2:10)
  - Putting off the body of the flesh (2:11) (*c.f.*, 2 Corinthians 5:16 – 17)
  - Through faith in the working of God (2:12)
  - Alive together with Him (2:13)
  - Nailed it to the cross (2:14)
  - The body...grows with the increase that is from God (2:19)

### The Perspective of a Christian in Contrast to Common Beliefs (3:1 – 4:1)

- Summary of the Christian perspective (3:1 – 4)
  - Raised
    - In this letter(2:12 – 14), forgiveness
    - Other references: Ephesians 2:6, Romans 6:4, 8:11
    - In each case, being forgiven should elicit a response.
    - In direct contrast to “self-imposed religion” (2:23)
  - Seek things above
    - In this letter
      - Hope of heaven (1:5)
      - Knowledge of His will (1:9, 2:2)
      - Fully pleasing (1:10)
      - Strengthened (1:11, 2:19)
      - Perfect (1:28)
    - Reasons
      - Where Christ is (3:1)
      - The past is hidden (3:3)
      - The future victory parade (3:4)
- Put to death previous behavior (3:5 – 17)
  - Written as if both possible and expected

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- History reveals a very low expectation of success
- Therefore, something about “seeking things above” enables achievement
- Focus determines outcome
- In this letter, concerning common truisms that divert us from “seeking things above”
  - Continue in faith (1:21 – 23)
  - Deception and persuasion (2:4)
  - Deception and philosophy (2:8)
  - Regulations (2:16 – 17, 20 – 23)
  - Complex doctrine (2:18)
- Put off these common behaviors (3:5 – 9)
  - Paul’s implication was that these behaviors were being excused as an incurable part of the human condition, subject to regulation but not cure.
  - The cure is simply stated (3:10)
    - “Have put on” is past tense. The cure was already “on” them
    - “Is renewed” is present tense. Despite failing to use the “new,” we are still able to succeed in the present and future.
    - “Knowledge” has been noted as a gift or promise (1:9 – 10, 27, 2:2 – 3)
- Special mention: racism or ethnocentrism (3:11 – 15)
  - The underlying assumption that my culture is superior has become so embedded in our ethics that we no longer see it as poor-but-incurable behavior.
  - The early church was not immune to this problem
    - Jewish Christians had difficulty accepting Gentiles as potentially faithful
    - Greek Christians had difficulty accepting barbarians as potentially faithful
    - Throughout history, the gospel has been transmitted with a significant cultural content and bias.
  - The cure
    - Christ, “all and in all” (3:11). Most translations insert “is,” which is not in the text. Rather, Paul’s point is that we no longer see racial, cultural, or economic classes, but Christ (2 Corinthians 5:16). Each faithful person’s spirit is being re-manufactured into the image of Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 8:29). Christ lives “in” them (1:27).
    - Positive traits on which to focus (3:12): mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, bearing with one another
    - How much? (*viz.*, “How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”): As Christ forgave you.
    - Love, the bond of perfection
    - Peace:
      - ▶ Through being forgiven (1:20, Philippians 4:7, Romans 5:1))
      - ▶ Opposite of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33)
      - ▶ Between Christians (Romans 14:17, 1 Corinthians 7:15, Ephesians 4:3, James 3:18).
    - One body
      - ▶ “And be thankful,” not just enduring
      - ▶ Knit together (2:19)
      - ▶ Repeated image (Romans 12:4 – 5, 1 Corinthians 10:16 – 17, 12:12 – 27, Ephesians 4:4 – 16, 5:23 – 32)

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- Summation in terms of earthly behavior to achieve a spiritual result (3:16 – 17)
  - “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly”
    - The body of thought concerning Jesus (not the printed Bible)
    - John 1:1 – 14, Revelation 19:11 – 16, 1 John 1:1, 2 Peter 3:7
    - 1 John 1:10, 2:14, James 1:21, Hebrews 4:12, 5:13, 6:5, 1 Peter 2:2, Revelation 6:9
    - 2 Peter 3:5
    - 1 Corinthians 12:8
  - The concepts about Jesus are simple enough to be reduced to songs, not thick commentaries.
  - The motive behind the teaching is grace, both received and given.
  - The teaching is to “one another” but, at the same time, “to the Lord.”
  - “In the name of the Lord”: “In” the essential quality of Jesus (What would Jesus do?)
  - “Giving thanks”: all we do or say should be an outgrowth of our own thankfulness
- Examples to groups within the church (3:18 – 4:1)
  - Wives (3:18)
    - Submit
      - Middle voice, including the idea of following voluntarily
      - Ephesians 5:22 – 33 A fuller explanation
      - 1 Corinthians 7:12 – 16 Make the best of existing relationships
      - 1 Peter 3:1 – 6 Objective is maintaining or expanding the Kingdom
    - Fitting
      - Ephesians 5:3 Behavior that sheds the light of Jesus on outsiders
      - Philemon 8 That which is fitting is a natural response of love
  - Husbands (3:19)
    - The Colossian Christians were predominantly Gentile, so many cultures would be represented, but with an overlay of Hellenism. Wives had the option of being independent of and equal to husbands.
    - “Bitter” is a figure of speech using the word for a bitter flavor.
    - Love: see Ephesians 5:25 – 27
  - Children obey parents (3:20)
    - Literally, “readiness to attend,” as Rhoda attended to the gate (Acts 12:13).
    - In every usage (36 places), individuals are called upon to make a choice concerning whom to heed.
    - The Old English word “hearken” is a better translation: a recommendation to listen to good advice (or avoid bad advice).
  - Fathers (3:21)
    - Stir up, only here and 2 Corinthians 9:2. This context is negative.
    - Discouraged (only places this word is used): spiritless, dismayed.
  - Slaves (3:22 – 25)
    - Obey: the same word as in 3:20. The idea is to give heed to masters as an outgrowth of service to Jesus, not mindlessly. The selection of this word gives a different attitude for slaves than was common in that society.
    - (25) Being a Christian slave did not allow the option of refusing service based on religious beliefs.
  - Masters (4:1)

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- Emancipation is not listed.
- Treat slaves as God treats you.

### Everything Points toward Spreading the Good News (4:2 – 6)

- Prayer has a major impact on the success of evangelism (4:2 – 4)
  - Vigilant
    - Acts 20:31 Be vigilant to recognize “savage wolves.” (1 Thessalonians 5:6, Revelation 3:2 – 3, 16:15, Luke 12:37, 39)
    - But not a fearful vigilance but full of thanksgiving
  - Prayers by the “rank-and-file” were solicited by an apostle
    - How do we know if God opened a door?
    - Note that Paul does not pray for release, but for opportunity. Requests need to leave room for God to operate.
    - Paul asks the Colossians Christians to pray for Paul’s clarity.
- Evangelism is the responsibility of everyone, not just “special” people (4:5 – 6)
  - “Walk in wisdom” is directly related to prayer (James 1:5), in this case the wisdom to speak in such a way so as to communicate effectively with outsiders.
  - Redeeming the time (Ephesians 5:16): buying back time that would otherwise be wasted or enslaved to unwise purposes.
  - In addition to praying for wisdom, our speech must be
    - With grace
      - Matthew 6:14 – 15 Forgive as you have been forgiven
      - Not condemning but as a gift
    - Seasoned with salt: interesting, witty, leaving a good taste.
    - Suited to the individual (not “one size fits all”)

### Greetings Designed to Encourage (4:7 – 18)

- See Background (1:1) for details about the named individuals
- Encouragements
  - That you may know our circumstances and comfort your hearts
  - They have proved to be a comfort to me
  - Laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God
  - He has great zeal for you
  - Share information with other congregations
  - Archippus: get back to work
  - How can we encourage those at great distances?