COLOSSIANS

Colossians
Key Verse:

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Paul wrote this letter from Rome during his first imprisonment there (c. 60 AD) to the Christians of Colosse. Colosse was a city of Asia Minor (Turkey), located between Ephesus and the Aegean Sea. The church there had been pioneered by Epaphras (7). He was converted through Paul in Ephesus. When he visited Paul in Rome, he shared prayer topics for his sheep in Colosse with Paul. So Paul wrote this letter to the believers in Colosse.

Paul exalts Christ and emphasizes his complete sufficiency. This was what the Colossians needed to hear, because some false teachers had visited them and sown seeds of deceptive human philosophy based on pseudo-wisdom. Some of the believers there had become confused. These days, many Christians have been confused by the good-sounding but false teachings of psychology and secular humanism. We, too, need to be reminded of the complete sufficiency of Jesus Christ, and the inadequacy of human philosophy and wisdom. This letter may be divided as follows:

I. Introduction and prayer (1:1-14)

II. Christ is supreme (1:15-23)

III. To this end I labor (1:24-2:7)

IV. Live in Christ and be free (2:8-23)

V. Live holy lives (3:1-4:6)

VI. Final greetings (4:7-18)

BEAR FRUIT AND GROW

Colossians 1:1-14

Key Verse: 1:10

1. Greetings and thanksgiving (1-8)

Paul is in prison in Rome, but he encourages the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse. His blessing of grace and peace from God is not superficial--he thanks God because their faith is based on truth. The gospel is the word of truth. Their hope is in the heavenly kingdom, and faith in Jesus and love for the saints spring from that hope. Paul reminds them that they are a part of a

world-wide fellowship of believers. The gospel is for all people. The gospel is bearing fruit all over the world.

2. A life pleasing to the Lord (9-14)

Paul prays for them to live lives that please God. It pleases God for his people to bear fruit and grow in the knowledge of God. How can we do this? (i) We must put our hope in heaven; (ii) we must joyfully give thanks in times of trial, and so grow in inner strength, in patience and endurance; (iii) we must remember the basic grace of God who rescued us from the power of darkness, forgave our sins, and brought us into his kingdom of light.

Prayer: Lord, help me to grow and bear fruit, and live a life that pleases you. Renew my vision for the world.

One Word: Grow; bear fruit; please God

THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

Colossians 1:15-23

Key Verse: 1:19,20

1. He is God the Creator (15-18)

Who is Jesus Christ? He is the image of the invisible God. He has priority and supremacy over all creation, for he is the Creator of all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. All things were created for him; all things hold together in him. He is also the head of his body the church, because he was the first one to be raised from the dead. All who belong to him will be raised with him. Jesus Christ is supreme.

2. He is God the Reconciler (19-23)

God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Christ. And through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, he reconciles all things to himself. Once we were God's enemies because of our evil behavior and rebellious minds. But through Jesus' death, we are reconciled to God. This is the good news for every creature under heaven. This gospel is God's truth. Jesus is sufficient. He is everything to everyone. We must continue in gospel faith and hold on to this hope. We don't need anything else.

Prayer: Lord, my hope is in you alone. Come and reign supreme in my heart and life.

One Word: All God's fullness is in Christ; hold on to him.

CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY

Colossians 1:24-29

Key Verse: 1:27

1. Paul's labor for the church (24-25)

Paul rejoiced to participate in the remaining suffering of Christ. Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection was sufficient for the full salvation of all people. Now Christ's suffering was to bring a lost world to himself through the proclamation of the gospel. Paul's suffering to plant God's word was a part of this.

2. The mystery now disclosed (26-27)

The mystery that was hidden for so long has now been revealed: God is not just the God of the Jews. God wants to save all people, even the Gentiles. When Gentiles accept the gospel, then they, too, are indwelt by Christ. They have the same hope to reign with Christ in the heavenly kingdom.

3. To present everyone perfect in Christ (28-29)

This is Paul's prayer topic; this is the purpose of his hard work; it is this goal that gives meaning to his suffering. When everyone is perfect in Christ, then God's kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven.

Prayer: "Your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

One Word: Christ in me, the hope of glory

TREASURES HIDDEN IN CHRIST

Colossians 2:1-5

Key Verse: 2:2b,3

1. That they may be encouraged and united (1-3)

Paul had never visited Colosse, but he prayed for the Christians there and for those who lived in the neighboring city of Laodicea. He prayed that they might set their hearts fully on Christ and open their hearts to love one another. The mystery of God is Christ himself. In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. When he dwells in our hearts, then worldly wisdom and philosophical ideas are exposed as false and cheap. Discouragement and discord are the devil's tools. When Christ dwells in our hearts, we are encouraged in heart and united in love.

2. That no one may deceive you (4-5)

Fine-sounding arguments may be very convincing, but we must never be deceived by words. Paul could not visit the Christians in Colosse, but he knew that Christ would protect them if they put his word in their hearts and loved one another.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, come and dwell in my heart. Help me to know you and know your heart for the world. Help me to love all of God's people.

One Word: Christ, our treasure and real wisdom

ROOTED AND BUILT UP IN CHRIST

Colossians 2:6-8

Key Verse: 2:6

1. Continue to live in him (6-7)

We received Christ Jesus by faith, and we must continue to live in him by faith. When we receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, we begin a new life. We must take root in Christ and grow. When we continue to grow in Christ, our faith is strengthened and our hearts overflow with thanksgiving. If there is no thanksgiving overflowing from my heart, it means I'm not growing.

2. See that no one takes you captive (8)

The hollow and deceptive philosophies which depend on the principles of the world are still around today. Many people have been captured by a psychology which rests on a materialistic view of man. They become prisoners of fatalism. Others are captured by their own sinful desires when they indulge their sinful natures and follow their natural feelings. When we take root in Christ and are grounded in him, no one can take us captive.

Prayer: Lord, help me to live by the same faith with which I received Christ.

One Word: Rooted and built up in Christ

ALIVE WITH CHRIST

Colossians 2:9-15

Key Verse: 2:13

1. Christ himself circumcised us (9-13)

Christ is all we need for salvation and life now and forever, for all the fullness of God lives in him and he dwells in us. We were dead in sin and held prisoners by Satan. God made us alive with Christ; he circumcised our hearts by cutting away our sinful nature. He did this by his death and resurrection, using the tools of repentance and faith. Water baptism is the sign of our covenant relationship with God in Christ. Real baptism is by God himself through his Holy Spirit. We are buried with Jesus in baptism when we repent, and, by faith in God who raised Jesus from the dead, we are united with him in life.

2. He disarmed our enemies (14-15)

God sets us free from the power of death by disarming our enemies. Our enemy Satan uses the law to condemn us and make us despair. God forgives our sins. Jesus made the law obsolete by his death on the cross. Christ is like a triumphant general who won a great battle and parades his captives, disarmed and helpless, through the streets.

Prayer: Lord, circumcise my heart and dwell in me today; give me victory over all enemies of the gospel.

One Word: I am alive with Christ

THE REALITY IS FOUND IN CHRIST

Colossians 2:16-19

Key Verse: 2:17b

1. Not a shadow, but reality (16-17)

Christ is the source of our life. Some people try to find God through all kinds of rituals. Festivals and rituals are shadows, but reality is found in Christ. We must come to Christ daily with humble, repentant, and thankful hearts, and not put our hope in religious activities. We must not try to satisfy people who judge us by how religious we look.

2. Don't lose connection with the Head (18-19)

Sometimes we are envious of a Christian who has impressive spiritual experiences. He talks about his dreams or about seeing angels. Paul says that such a person has an unspiritual mind, and that he is spiritually proud. Anyone who loses connection with the Head is tempted to put up a front of false spirituality. But we can only grow and bear good fruit when we maintain a strong and healthy connection with Christ the Head.

Prayer: Lord, help me not to be led astray by the opinions or religions of others, nor by my own pride. Keep me connected to Christ the Head.

One Word: Stay connected to the Head

SINCE YOU DIED WITH CHRIST

Colossians 2:20-23

Key Verse: 2:20a

1. Since you died with Christ (20)

How is dying with Christ different from becoming an ascetic? When we repent and accept God's grace of forgiveness through Jesus, we die with him to sin and to the world. We are free to love God, to obey him and to do what pleases him. An ascetic tries to be more spiritual by submitting to rules or by punishing his body. But these things belong to the world because they are based on human commands and teachings. This is not the way to become more spiritual.

2. Restraining sensual indulgence (21-23)

An ascetic life may seem to make a person more holy, but if one's inner desires are not changed he is only living a double life. He appears on the surface to be holy, but his inner life is overwhelmed by sinful desires and feelings. Union with Christ by faith in his death and resurrection brings peace and changes the inner person.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to love you with a pure heart. Wash me clean with the precious blood of Jesus, shed for my sins.

One Word: I died to the world with Christ

SET YOUR MINDS ON THINGS ABOVE

Colossians 3:1-10

Key Verse: 3:1

1. Set your hearts on Christ (1-4)

How can we live as children of God in a world polluted by every kind of moral impurity? We must set our hearts on Christ, and our minds on things above. This is possible when we remember that we have died with Christ. Our lives are hidden with Christ in God. Our hope is in him, for he will return to reign in glory, and we will be with him forever.

2. Put on the new self (5-10)

The Christian life is not automatic. We have to get rid of old habits that are displeasing to God. God's wrath will be poured out because of sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed (idolatry). We must put these things to death--along with anger, malice, slander, lying and all kinds of filthy language. As God's children, we have taken off the old self and put on the new, and God continues to work in us to mold us into Jesus' image.

Prayer: Lord, my heart is so easily polluted by the world and by my own desires. Help me to set my mind and heart on Jesus. Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

One Word: Hidden with Christ in God

LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU RICHLY

Colossians 3:11-17

Key Verse: 3:16

1. Above all, put on love (11-14)

God's people are chosen from every race, sex, nationality and human condition. We have one thing in common--Christ is in us all. So we must love one another; we must bear with one another and forgive each other as Christ has forgiven us. We must be clothed in the compassion, kindness, humility and patience of Jesus.

2. Let the peace of Christ rule your hearts (15-16)

We are members of one body, called to peace. When God's word is in our hearts, then we can encourage one another without criticism, sing songs of praise to God, and be joyful, happy Christians.

3. Be thankful (17)

Gratitude to God and thankfulness are mentioned three times in these few verses. God wants us to be thankful--with no complaints about anything.

Prayer: Lord, let your word dwell richly in my heart. Give me your peace, and help me to grow in Jesus' image. Thank you for Christian brothers and sisters.

One Word: Let God's word dwell in you

KEEPING SPIRITUAL ORDER

Colossians 3:18-4:1

Key Verse: 3:20

1. "...for this pleases the Lord" (18-21)

Any society, including a family, needs spiritual order. Ordinarily, wives should submit to their husbands, and a husband has an obligation before God to love his wife; he must not treat her harshly. Children should obey their parents, and parents should not discourage their children, or embitter them by making unreasonable demands. Wives' submission and children's obedience should be tested by only one standard: Is it pleasing to the Lord?

2. Work with all your heart (3:22-4:1)

Rules for slaves and masters can be applied to employers and employees. When we make up our minds to work for God, we are freed from being "eye-watchers." Joseph in the Old Testament understood this principle. He was a slave, but he became Pharaoh's shepherd and father because

he worked for God with all his heart. Employers must be just; for God is just. We have a Master in heaven.

Prayer: Lord, help me to keep spiritual order so that I may please you.

One Word: Try to please God

PROCLAIM THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

Colossians 4:2-6

Key Verse 4:3

1. In chains for the gospel (2-4)

For Paul and for us, too, the most important task is that of proclaiming the gospel to the people of a sinsick and dying world. For this, we must devote ourselves to prayer. We must be alert to God's answers and be thankful. We must pray for open doors for the gospel; we must pray for ourselves and our fellow Christians to have courage and faith to proclaim the gospel message clearly, as we ought.

2. Make the most of every opportunity (5-6)

When God hears prayers and opens doors, we must have the faith to go in and make the most of the opportunities God gives. We need God's wisdom to act wisely toward unbelievers. We need God's help moment by moment so that our conversation may be full of grace and seasoned with salt--what we say should encourage and build up others.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for hearing our prayers and opening the door in Russia and in Africa. Bless the sacrificial lives of missionaries who are there to preach the mystery of Christ clearly.

One Word: Pray and work

PAUL'S CO-WORKERS

Colossians 4:7-18

Key Verse: 4:12

1. The messengers (7-9)

Tychicus and Onesimus would deliver Paul's letter. Tychicus had been Paul's representative on several occasions (Eph 6:21). Onesimus had been a useless runaway slave, but through Paul he had met Jesus in Rome, and now he was returning to Philemon in Colosse as a dear brother (Phm 16).

2. Fellow workers (10-18)

Aristarchus had been with Paul in difficult times (Ac 19:29; 20:4; 27:2), and now he was with him in prison. Mark, who had run away and was helped by Barnabas and Peter, had come back and grown into a useful servant of God (Ac 15:36-39). Epaphras, the pioneer of the church in Colosse, was continuing to wrestle in prayer for his sheep in Colosse and in nearby cities. Luke the historian and evangelist was Paul's personal physician; Demas later ran away (2Ti 4:10). Paul's letter writing ministry should encourage us to write letters.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be a faithful co-worker in the gospel.

One Word: Write a letter