

Jesus at the Center  
A Study in Colossians  
“Jesus at the Center of our Confession”

**Introduction:** Paul wrote 13 letters in all and Colossians is one of the shortest and yet possibly the most important letter with very pertinent modern implications.

NEXT 4 WEEKS

A. The city of Colossae

1. 100 miles east of Ephesus in Phrygia (modern Turkey) on the southern bank of the Lycus river
2. Laodicea about 10 miles west and Hierapolis about 15 miles northwest. NOTE: Hierapolis—hot springs/Colossae—cool spring/Laodicea—lukewarm
3. On main road from Ephesus and Sardis to Euphrates
4. 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century BC very wealthy—significant wool industry
5. But, by Roman times and 1st century AD—a small town
6. Jews had become part of Asia Minor culture so Colossae was a religious melting pot of Jew/pagan Gentile

B. The church at Colossae

1. Not converted through the ministry of Paul directly
2. This church community came into existence during Paul’s vigorous Ephesian ministry (52-55) in Acts 19
3. His ministry in Ephesus, however, was effective for the whole region

*And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. 9 But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. 10 And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. Acts 19:8-10 NKJV*

4. Appears that Epaphras, a native of Colossae had an effective evangelistic ministry in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis

*As you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, 8 who also declared to us your love in the Spirit. Colossians 1:7 NKJV*

*Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis. Colossians 4:12-13 NKJV*

5. Most had been pagan Gentiles (alienated and enemies in their minds by wicked works (21); gripped by power of darkness (13)
6. But now had received Christ (2:6) obedient to the Gospel for which Paul rejoiced (1:4-6); known for their love in the Spirit (1:8), and orderly and steadfast in their faith (2:5)

### C. The occasion for the letter to the Colossian church

1. Epaphras had visited Paul in Roman prison (end of Acts 28) and had reported good news of Gospel progress in the Lycus valley

*As you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, 8 who also declared to us your love in the Spirit. Colossians 1:7-8 NKJV*

*For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. Colossians 2:5 NKJV*

2. Most of report was encouraging but one disquieting issue was that an attractive, but false teaching of some sort, had been introduced to the church, and if unchecked could subvert the gospel and bring the Colossians into spiritual bondage.
3. His letter is written to respond to this urgent need of correction.

### D. The Colossian heresy (to rightly understand Colossians, this has to be identified and understood).

1. Interesting to note: At the same time he wrote Colossians, he sent a circular letter (to a group of churches in Lycus valley) later to be known as Ephesians. He felt it necessary to write a letter directly to the Colossians.
2. What exactly was this heresy or false teaching?

#### Note Paul's warning:

*Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. Colossians 2:8 NKJV*

- a. "Cheat" (εἰς-μ) NASB/NIV "take you captive, a carrying off as booty, or rob"

Concern False teaching can rob you, steal from you, hope security, assurance

3. The particular heresy? (as many as 44 suggestions)

A. Clearly Jewish in flavor

*So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. Colossians 2:16-17 NKJV*

B. Merkabah mysticism—Jewish mysteries (100 BC—1000 AD)

- Merkabah means chariot
- Focuses on visions as in Ezekiel 1—where individuals are carried or ascend into heaven/throne room of God
- Ascend into heaven to converse with heavenly beings
- Eventually merged into “Christian Gnosticism”
- Sought experience “mystical—apart from Scriptures)
- To “experience God” or “behold Him” the mystic had to undergo a total transformation induced by ascetic practice (self-denial) reciting hymns, and observing special days and Sabbaths
- On this journey angels would attempt to expel them from the heavenlies but if they knew angels names and would pay them homage, their superior journey would continue

Note the text:

*So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. 18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God. Colossians 2:16-18 NKJV*

*Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations — 21 "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," 22 which all concern things which perish with the using — according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. Colossians 2:20-23 NKJV*

- Not of divine origin but human tradition
- They are empty and provide no hope or peace
- At the heart of the Colossian heresy was NOT a denial of Jesus Christ but a lessening of His value and importance, a distorting and minimizing of the doctrine of Christ

— This was a most dangerous doctrine because it was subtly distracting from the deity of Christ while alleging to honor Him

- C. Only those with “special knowledge” or “special experience” were really saved and favored of God. SPITIRUAL ELITE

NOTE: Ran counter to Paul’s clear Christ-centric message

*To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:27 NKJV*

CHRIST IN YOU—NOT EXPERIENCE, NOT KNOWLEDGE, NOT RULE-KEEPING, NOT MYSTERIOUS, JESUS AT THE CENTER!

#### D. The Colossian application

1. Misguided (or diminished) Christianity is a huge problem in the church today!
2. Multiple expressions
  - a. Works Gospel (vs. grace) when my works, not Christ’s grace saves me
  - b. Preoccupation with mystical/supernatural (angel dust, feathers, visions, dream interpretations)
  - c. Boasts of spiritual knowledge and superiority “The Lord told me!” (personal prophecy)
  - d. Exaltation of experience over faith

NOTE: Even in Pentecostal/charismatic world we have judged a person’s spiritual status based on experience

- e. Pluralism, syncretism, embracing, embracing of all truth claims

NOTE: All of this diminishes and denigrates the doctrine of Christ as the sole means of our salvation.

*FF. Bruce—“A firm grounding in Christology, then and in its practical implications for the daily life of believers was (is) the best defense against the illusory attractiveness of Colossian heresy (or modern versions).*

*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. Colossians 2:9-10 NKJV*

— 2 main problems

- Doctrine of Christ (who He is/what He’s done)
- How this affects Christian living

## CHRIST IS PREEMINENT

Jesus is AT THE CENTER!

First...of our confession

NOTE: Our confession is what Christ has done for us

Paul's prayer gives us foundation...

*For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; 10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:9-14 NKJV*

Three-fold confession

### I. In Christ alone we meet the Father's qualifications to become heirs of an eternal inheritance.

*Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. Colossians 1:12 NKJV*

- A. Romans 8 speaks of righteous requirement of law (Romans 3—all have sinned and come short of God's glory).
- B. Our wealth, experience, knowledge, or exploits could never qualify us as righteous
- C. Jesus met the requirement for us—perfection. Righteous standard—we are now accepted

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. Ephesians 1:3-6 NKJV*

### D. Now heirs/and co-heirs

*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. Romans 8:16-17 NKJV*

(ILL) Just as the people of God of old had inheritance of Canaan—we have been qualified IN CHRIST for eternal inheritance!

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you. 1 Peter 1:3-4 NKJV*

## **II. In Christ alone our spiritual citizenship was changed.**

*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Colossians 1:13 NKJV*

NOTE: Delivered—“methistemi” (Ancient world victor kingdom transferred its captives to own kingdom)-Assyria/Babylon

NOTE: This transference is 4-fold

- A. From darkness to light—(groping, stumbling, unable to find way)
- B. From slavery to freedom
- C. From condemnation to forgiveness (Romans 8:1)
- D. From power of Satan to power of God

## **III. In Christ alone our redemption was secured.**

*In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:14 NKJV*

- A. Only in Christ is this experienced
- B. Redemption (apolutrosis) to purchase in the marketplace—to buy back something once in your possession. To release with a ransom

(ILL) Hosea/Gomer—Jesus for us

- C. Price was His blood (NOTE: “through His blood” not in Alexandrian or Masoretic texts)

BUT—

*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. Ephesians 1:7 NKJV*

*Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed. Romans 3:24-25 NKJV*

- D. It came no other way but through His blood

*Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. 1 Peter 1:18-19 NKJV*

**Conclusion:** Paul is calling Colossians to push Jesus to the center of their confession

- A. Today—bombarded with new theologies—new revelation
- B. Pluralism, many ways, far out experiences, legalism
- C. Jesus is the CENTER OF OUR CONFESSION!
  - 1. In Christ alone I meet the Father’s qualifications
  - 2. In Christ alone my spiritual citizenship has been changed
  - 3. In Christ alone my redemption is secured

*Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. Colossians 3:16 New Living Translation*

IMPLICATIONS:

- ✓ My experience or knowledge should not puff me up.
- ✓ My lack of experience or knowledge should not discourage me.