

Introduction

If Ephesians can be labeled the epistle portraying the “Church of Christ,” then Colossians must surely be the “Christ of the Church.” Ephesians focuses on the Body; Colossians focuses on the Head. Like Ephesians, the little Book of Colossians divides neatly in half with the first portion doctrinal (1 and 2) and the second practical (3 and 4).

Terms:

Asceticism—the practice of strict self-denial as a measure of personal and especially spiritual discipline.

Dogma—a doctrine or body of doctrines concerning faith or morals formally stated and authoritatively proclaimed by a church.

Esoteric—designed for or understood by the specially initiated alone.

Gnosticism—the thought and practice especially of various cults of late pre-Christian and early Christian centuries distinguished by the conviction that matter is evil, and that emancipation comes through gnosis.

Gnosis—esoteric knowledge of spiritual truth held by the ancient Gnostics to be essential to salvation.

Heresy—adherence to a religious opinion contrary to church dogma.

Syncretism—the combination of different forms of belief or practice.

Overview of the Book of Colossians

Purpose: To combat errors in the church and to show that believers have everything they need in Christ.

Author: Paul

To whom written: The church at Colosse, a city in Asia Minor, and all believers everywhere.

Date written: Approximately A.D. 60, during Paul’s imprisonment in Rome. Colossians is one of the “Prison Epistles” along with Philipians, Ephesians, and Philemon.

Setting: Paul had never visited Colosse. Evidently the church had been founded by Epaphras and other converts from Paul’s missionary travels. The church, however, had been infiltrated by religious relativism (a theory that knowledge is relative to the limited nature of the mind and the conditions of knowing) with some believers attempting to combine elements of paganism and secular philosophy with Christian doctrine. Paul confronts these false teachings and affirms the sufficiency of Christ.

The problem was “syncretism,” combining ideas from other philosophies and religions (such as paganism, strains of Judaism, and Greek thought) with Christian truths. The resulting heresy later known as “Gnosticism,” emphasizing special knowledge (*gnosis* in Greek) and denying Christ as God and Savior. To combat this devious error, Paul stressed Christ’s deity—his connection with the Father—and his sacrificial death on the cross for sin. Only by being connected with Christ through faith can anyone have eternal life, and only through a continuing connection with him can anyone have power for living.

Christ is God incarnate and the only way to forgiveness and peace with God the Father. Paul also emphasized believers’ connections with each other as Christ’s body on earth. Colossians is a book of connections.

Remove the head coach, and the team flounders; break the fuel line, and the car won’t run; unplug the electrical appliance, and it has no power. Whether for leadership, power, or life, connections are vital!

Keys To Colossians

Key Word: The Preeminence of Christ—The resounding theme in Colossians is the preeminence and sufficiency of Christ in all things. The believer is complete in Him alone and lacks nothing because “in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (2:9); He has “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3). There is no need for speculation, mystical visions, or ritualistic regulations as though faith in Christ were insufficient. Paul’s predominant purpose then is to refute a threatening heresy that is devaluing Christ. Paul also writes this epistle to encourage the Colossians to “continue in the faith grounded and settled” (1:23), so that they grow and bear fruit in the knowledge of Christ (1:10).

Key Verses: Colossians 2:9, 10 and 3:1, 2

Key Chapter: Colossians 3—Chapter 3 links the three themes of Colossians together showing their cause and effect relationships. Because the believer is risen with Christ (3:1-4), he is to put off the old man and put on the new (3:5-17), which will result in holiness in all relationships (3:18-25).

The Christ Of Colossians

This singularly Christological book is centered on the cosmic (greatness of) Christ—“the head of all principality and power” (2:10), the Lord of creation (1:16, 17), and the Author of reconciliation (1:20-22; 2:13-15). He is the basis for the believer’s hope (1:5, 23, 27), the source of the believer’s power and new life (1:11, 29), the believer’s Redeemer and Reconciler (1:14, 20-22; 2:11-15), the embodiment of full deity (1:15, 19; 2:9), the Creator

and Sustainer of all things (**1:1:16, 17**), the Head of the church (**1:18**), the resurrected God-Man (**1:18; 3:1**), and the all-sufficient Savior (**1:28; 2:3,10; 3:1-4**).

The Blueprint:

1. What Christ has done (**1:1—2:23**).
2. What Christian should do (**3:1—4:18**).

In this letter Paul clearly teaches that Christ has paid for sin, that Christ has reconciled us to God, and that Christ gives us the pattern and the power to grow spiritually. Because Christ is the exact likeness of God, when we learn what He is like, we see what we need to become. Since Christ is Lord over all creation, we should crown Him Lord over our life. Since Christ is the head of the body, his church, we should nurture our vital connection to him.

Mega themes:

1. Christ Is God.
2. Christ Is Head of the Church.
3. Union with Christ.
4. Man-Made Religion.

Read Colossians as a book for an embattled church in the first century, but read it also as a book for its timeless truths. Gain a fresh appreciation for Christ as the fullness of God and the only source for living the Christian life. Know that He is your leader, head, and power source, and make sure of your connection to Him.