

If then you have been raised with Christ,
seek the things that are above,
where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
Set your minds on things that are above,
not on things that are on earth.

COLOSSIANS 3:1-2 (ESV)



THE BOOK OF
COLOSSIANS
COMMUNITY GROUPS 2024

AUTHOR AND RECIPIENTS

Paul the apostle wrote this, with Timothy, (1:1) to a small church in the small town of Colossae.

The church was planted by Epaphras, a native to Colossae. After believing in Paul's message taught in Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10) he traveled back to Colossae and proclaimed the gospel and a church was started.

DATE AND SETTING

Paul most likely wrote this letter, along with the letter to Philemon who was a member of the Colossian church, during his imprisonment in Rome from 60AD to 62AD. Epaphras was with Paul and probably told him about the Colossian church prompting Paul to write the letter.

PURPOSE AND THEMES

Paul's main purpose in writing is to ground the young believers in the truth about Christ and encourage them to continue to walk in Christ. This seems to be clear from 2:6, "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught..."

The next verse seems to indicate that there were false teachers: "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ" (2:8). Though Paul does not identify the false teachers or false teachings directly, by his positive counterarguments he seems to be fending off the following:

- A deeper knowledge or spiritual fullness not previously experienced
- A new spiritual freedom
- Special insights and protection against spiritual evil
- Severe abstinence and asceticism
- A sense of superiority and divisiveness toward believers who do not have the above

A major theme throughout the first half of the letter, which is the theological section, is the supremacy of Christ over all things. Christ is the fountain head of spiritual knowledge and fullness, and our source of spiritual power and freedom.

OUTLINE

1. Paul's Greeting & Thanksgiving (1:1-8)
2. Paul's Prayer (1:9-14)
3. The Preeminence of Christ (1:15-20)
4. Our Reconciliation & Continuation (1:21-23)
5. Paul's Ministry to the Churches (1:24-29)
6. Paul's Ministry to the Colossians (2:1-5)
7. What Saves Sustains (2:6-7)
8. Warning and Teaching (2:8-15)
9. Shadows vs. Substance (2:16-23)
10. Our Life is Hidden with Christ (3:1-4)
11. Putting Off the Old Self (3:5-11)
12. Put On the New Self (3:12-17)
13. Relationships at Home and Work (3:18-4:1)
14. Relating to the World (4:2-6)
15. Final Greetings (4:7-18)



REVIEW OF COLOSSIANS 2:1-5

In 1:15-23, Paul begins to lay the foundational truths of the gospel so that the Colossians will be firmly established in the faith, not persuaded by false ideas or teaching.

In 1:24-29, he explains that his ministry is one of suffering and struggle as he proclaims the word of God which is the mystery revealed, that Christ is in them and is their hope of eternal glory.

In 2:1-5, Paul goes on to explain that it's important for them to know about his ministry of suffering and proclamation so that they will be encouraged, unified, and have full assurance in Christ, and not be persuaded to believe anything contrary to Christ, but continue in their orderly and firm faith in Christ.

1. PAUL'S DESIRE (V1-3)

What does Paul desire for the believers in and around Colossae?

How and why would an awareness of Paul's suffering encourage believers?

How does unity in love relate to understanding Christ?

How does knowing Christ better relate to "full assurance"?

What does Paul mean when he writes, "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are in Christ?

How is wisdom and knowledge "hidden" in Christ?

2. PAUL'S CONCERN (V4)

What was Paul concerned about for the believers?

What did Paul say will protect them from these dangers?

What does it then mean when we are tempted to be more interested or dependent on something other than Jesus?

3. PAUL'S JOY (V5)

Paul mentions two things that he rejoices to see in the Colossians. Why is orderliness so important?

Why would Paul be concerned that the believers could be deceived if they are firm in their faith?

CONCLUSION

The way that believers grow in the faith and are protected from departing is to lovingly unite in the struggle to know and understand Christ better.



REVIEW OF COLOSSIANS 2:6-7

In 1:12-14 Paul begins to lay the foundational truths of the gospel starting with the fact that God the Father is the one who qualified us for heaven, delivering us from sin and death and making us full citizens of his kingdom through his Son who forgave and redeemed us. He then unpacks this in 1:15-23, starting with the reality of Christ's preeminence over creation and the new creation by reason of being fully divine yet taking on flesh and dying to reconcile us.

In 1:24-2:5 he explains that his ministry is one of suffering and struggle as he proclaims the word of God which was a mystery that has been revealed. The revealed mystery is that Christ has come to live in them and is their hope of eternal glory. As we move into chapter 2, Paul explains that he is telling them about his ministry of suffering and proclamation so that they will be encouraged, unified and understand this mystery and continue in their orderly and firm faith in Christ.

And finally in 2:6-7, Paul explicitly gives his purpose for writing his letter and reiterates these foundational truths of the gospel. It is so that this gospel he has laid out and that they have fully received, will characterize how they live, direct what they are growing into, and be the source of their increasing understanding and thanksgiving.

1. AS YOU RECEIVED CHRIST...WALK IN HIM

Paul uses a unique combination of names for Christ in order to give emphasis to each part. What does he draw our attention to in each part of the title: Christ, Jesus, the Lord?

Walking is a word picture for the way we live our daily lives. How had the Colossians "received" Christ and how does this inform how they are to "walk" in him?

2. AS YOU WERE ROOTED IN HIM... BE BUILT UP IN HIM

What does the metaphor "rooted in Christ" illustrate?

How does this idea of having been rooted in Christ inform how we are to be built up in him?

3. AS YOU WERE TAUGHT ABOUT THE FAITH...BE MORE AND MORE ESTABLISHED IN THE FAITH

In 1:3-8 how does Paul refer to what the Colossians heard and were taught by Epaphras?

How do the things Epaphras originally taught that led the Colossians to believe, serve to further establish them in their faith more and more?

Why does revisiting these foundational truths of the gospel make our thankfulness 'abound'?

CONCLUSION

The path to Christian maturity is to continue in Christ just as we initially received him, pursuing to have Christ and the gospel characterize how we live, direct what we are growing into, and as the source of our increasing understanding and thanksgiving.



REVIEW OF COLOSSIANS 2:8-15

In 1:24-2:5, Paul explained that his ministry is all about making known “the word of God,” the revealed mystery. This mystery is Christ, and Paul tells us that he proclaims him by warning and teaching everyone.

In 2:6-7, Paul explicitly tells the Colossians that his purpose for writing to them was to reiterate the gospel foundations of their faith and teach them that these foundations are what should characterize how they live, direct what they are growing into, and be the source of their increasing understanding and thanksgiving.

In 2:8-15, he warns them about teachings that are not according to Christ and then spotlights the essential truths of the gospel that he teaches.

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COLOSSIANS 2:8-15 | LESSON THREE

1. WARNING

Paul now reveals what he warns against in his proclamation ministry (1:28). What warning does he give us here and what is his list generally characterized by?

2. TEACHING

Paul now puts a spotlight on the essential truths of the gospel that he teaches. He starts with the fully divine nature of Christ in verse 9. What are the implications for us who are in Christ (v10)?

What does Paul metaphorically refer to as the "circumcision made without hands" and the "circumcision of Christ"?

What does Paul say is signified in a believer's baptism?

Paul's statement, "putting off the body of the flesh" refers to being buried with Christ, symbolized in baptism. Why was this necessary?

What has God done to raise us to new life with Christ? (v13-14)

What else did God accomplish through Christ's death on the cross? (v15)

What would you say are the essentials that Paul teaches to make the gospel fully known and understood?

CONCLUSION

Be careful that nothing leads you astray from Christ and his gospel, by remembering his sufficiency to save fully.



REVIEW OF COLOSSIANS 2:16-23

In 2:8-15 Paul warns them against being enslaved by the traditions of humanity and the world and then spotlights the essential truths of the gospel that he teaches.

In 2:16-23 he warns them again about the traditions of humanity and the world listing out specific things to be on guard against.

He writes to say that they should allow no one to judge or disqualify us because of dietary or sabbath restrictions or because they are not extreme enough in their spiritual disciplines or experiences. He then tells us why these teachings are completely useless to us.

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COLOSSIANS 2:16-23 | LESSON FOUR

Reflecting on Colossians 2:8-15, can you think of a time when you have thought someone might be immature? What standard did you use to measure maturity? Would you still hold that same standard?

1. LEGALISM AND MYSTICISM

Paul refers to the dietary and sabbath restrictions as a “shadow” of Christ. What dietary and sabbath restrictions is he referring to?

Asceticism, angel worship, and visions are examples of mysticism, or extreme spiritual disciplines or experiences. How do these things have a tendency to “puff up” and lose connection to Christ the Head?

Why is connection to Christ, the Head, essential for godly growth?

2. WORDLY AND POWERLESS (V20-23)

How do verses 2:11-12 inform our understanding of what Paul means when he writes that we have died to the world?

Why do human precepts and teachings not apply to us?

Although some human teachings seem wise and helpful, why are they of no value?

CONCLUSION

We must renounce any and all standards of Christian maturity which are not rooted in Christ our head and are not reliant upon divine power.

APPLICATION

It's fairly natural for us to think we must work our way toward God in one way or another. We also tend to think that maturity comes with advancement in knowledge and experiences.

How might we finish the following statements naturally, or in a worldly way?

God will forgive me if I ...

I will be a more faithful and devoted Christian if I ...

Maturity as a Christian is when I ...

In light of what we've learned from Colossians 2:16-23 how might we finish these statements?

God will forgive me if I ...

I will be a more faithful and devoted Christian if I ...

Maturity as a Christian is when I ...



REVIEW OF COLOSSIANS 3:1-4

In 2:6-7, Paul explicitly tells the Colossians that his purpose for writing to them was to reiterate the gospel foundations of their faith and teach them that these foundations are what should characterize how they live, direct how they grow, and be the source of their increasing understanding, leading to thanksgiving.

In 2:8-23, he warns them against being enslaved by the traditions of humanity and the world. Specifically, he writes to say that they should feel no judgment with regards to dietary and sabbath restrictions nor feel disqualified because they are not extreme enough in their spiritual disciplines or experiences. Therefore, in 3:1-4 he exhorts the Colossians to look to heaven instead of this earth to know how to live.

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COLOSSIANS 3:1-4 | LESSON FIVE

1. PAST

What does Paul mention about the Colossians past?

In what way have believers died?

When Paul says we have been raised with Christ he is referring to the ultimate reality for all who believe in the gospel that he has explained in his letter so far. He is not writing figuratively or emblematically. What is he trying to drive home for us?

2. PRESENT

What does it mean to 'seek' and 'set your minds on' something?

In what ways is our life "hidden with Christ in God"?

2. FUTURE

How does the phrase "Christ who is your life" summarize what Paul is saying in these 4 verses?

Why is it so important for the Colossians to understand and remember their future?

CONCLUSION

Because we have died to the influence and power of this world and have been raised to a new life as citizens of heaven by what Christ has done, we can and should focus our life on heavenly values and priorities.

APPLICATION

In his quote above, John Woodhouse says "What we seek is what dominates and shapes our lives." What dominates and shapes your life most? Are you motivated most by comfort, pleasure, security, approval, or power?

What steps can you take to love heavenly values and priorities more than the earthly values and priorities that often motivate you?

How can the difficult things and even the good things in this life help us set our hope on heaven? This week try to capture your thoughts when something difficult happens and when something good happens, and remind yourself that this is not your home and that the best is yet to come.

Share your thoughts with the person in the group that you've been connecting with, or your spouse or a close friend.

COMMUNITY GROUP CONTACT INFO

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