

Colossians

The Colossian heresy taught that the fullness of God could only be appreciated by mystical experiences for which ascetic preparation was necessary. Paul says fullness is found in Christ.

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy . . . For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.” - 2:8, 9

Theme: Christ is the fullness of deity and the only adequate source and reason of life.

Purpose: Defeat worldly philosophies sweeping through Colossae that demeaned Jesus

Basic Outline:

1:1-2:3, Doctrinal – the person and work of Jesus Christ

2:4-23, The Colossae Heresy – emptiness of worldly philosophies and completeness of Christ

3:1-4:6, Practical Application – the lifestyle and character of a believer in Jesus

Christ in Colossians

- Christ is the creator (1:16-17)
- Christ sustains all things (1:16-17)
- Christ is the fullness of Deity (1:15,19; 2:9)
- Christ is the head of all principality and power (2:10)
- Christ is the redeemer (1:14)
- Christ has reconciled us to God (1:20-22; 2:11-15)
- Christ is the resurrected One (1:18; 3:1)
- Christ is the head of the church (1:18)
- Christ is our life (3:4)
- Christ is the source of our strength to live the new life (1:11)
- Christ is our returning Lord (3:4)

In **chapter one** Paul thanks God for the Colossians' faith and prays for their growth. He then describes the glorious person of Christ and richness of his work in redemption. Paul goes on to describe his ministry which includes presenting the fullness of God's word or revelation to believers.

1. 1:9a – Know what God's will is
2. 1:9b – Wisdom and understanding increases
3. 1:10a – Results in living a life worthy of the Lord
4. 1:10b – Produces fruit in every good work
5. 1:10c – Knowledge of God increases

In **chapter two** Paul goes on the attack to expose some competitive philosophies or heresies that are undermining true Christianity in Colossae. We do not know the specific names or all the details of any of these heretical philosophies, but it appears that errant world views Paul was attacking had these characteristics that included both Pagan and Jewish elements:

1. Traditionalism which honors man-made customs and rituals of the past with a less than satisfactory understanding of why things are done (2:4, 8)
2. Ceremonialism from some pagan religion (much like that in Judaism) that dictated acceptable food and drink, honored holy days and religious festivals, and practiced circumcision (2:11-17)
3. Asceticism, which is a lifestyle dominated by abstinence from natural activities, foods, or customs in the pursuit of gaining a spiritual or religious goal (2:21)
4. Early Gnosticism and other forms of religion based on secret knowledge (2:18)
5. Angel worship (2:18)
6. **Merkabah Mysticism**- “Merkabah” means “heavenly chariot.” This included a process of legal observances, ascetic practices, mystical experiences and the uses of “angels” (stoichea) to pass through the heavenlies and see vision of God as Ezekiel.

Philosophy and man's wisdom outside of God (2:8)

Chapter Two breakdown: Salvation is from Christ:

1. 2:1-5 Christ is the focus of our Faith
2. 2:6-7 Christ is the Source of Strength to continue
3. 2:8-23 Avoid these substitutes or imitations
 - a. Empty philosophies (2:8-15)
 - b. Legalism (2:16-17)
 - c. Angel worship (2:18-19)
 - d. Asceticism (2:20-23)

In **chapter three** Paul establishes some expectations for those who are in Christ and have access to the wisdom and power of Christ. The Christian's life should manifest the Christian's spiritual position in Christ. The Christian life is described 3:1-4:6

1. Source of power (3:1-2, you are raised with Christ, now set your mind on his Word of Truth)
2. Motivation for service (3:3-4, Christ will appear in glory with you.)
3. Process for growth or Steps towards production
 - a. Abandon old sins (3:5-11)
 - b. Embrace new virtues (3:12-17)
 - c. Strengthen relationships (3:18-4:1)
 - d. Pray and share Truth (4:2-6)

In **chapter four** Paul refers to nine people who are either with him or who are being greeted by him.

Chapter 1

1:1-2 Greeting

1:3-8 Thanksgiving for what the Gospel had done in Colossae. Not what people had done or ministry or application or counseling or programs or etc. (Exodus 18:15-23, 18:17 and 20, "What you are doing is not good...Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform.")

1:6 – The truth is producing fruit and it is growing...stick with the Truth of the Gospel!

1:9-14 Prayer for fruitfulness in the Kingdom of light they have been delivered into

1:15-20 Attention is drawn to Christ and his spiritual and temporal reality

1:15 – "Image" is εἰκόν and means "manifestation"

1:16-17 – ἐν, διὰ, εἰς or "in Christ" and "through Christ" and "for Christ"

1:21-23 Contrast to their past spiritual and temporal condition with the potential of their new position in Christ's kingdom if they will continue in it.

1:22 – note specific reference to "Christ's physical body" and how his "death" presents you "holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation"...that is, "IF YOU CONTINUE IN YOUR FAITH not moved from the hope" by some new philosophy or religious system.

1:24-2:5 Paul's ministry and purpose

Greek Words

- πρωτοτοκος – *prototokos* – first in time, first in place, it means chief or preeminent, it emphasizes the uniqueness of his being and his superiority over creation, 1:15.
- πρωτεω – *proteuo* – to be first, to be pre-eminent, supremacy, 1:18.
- ανταναπληρω – *antanapleroo* – fill up, to fill up in turn or to fill up on one's part, 1:24.
- φιλοσοφισ – *philosophia* – the love or pursuit of wisdom (*philo* – "love"; *sophia* – "wisdom"), philosophy, 2:8
- θεοτης – *theotes* – godhead, deity, divine nature 2:9