

# Colossians Overview

*“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness” (Col 2:6-7)*

## Sermon series

1. 1:1-14	4. 1:24 – 2:5	7. 3:1-17
2. 1:15-20	5. 2:6-15	8. 3:18 – 4:1
3. 1:21-23	6. 2:16-23	9. 4:2-18 (focus on 4:2-6)

- Studies will follow the sermon series and will focus more on the application of the passages to our lives rather than on the exegesis of passages themselves.

## Introducing Colossae and the Colossians

- In the 1<sup>st</sup> century Colossae was a relatively small town in the south west of Asia Minor (Turkey). Less important than its neighbours Hierapolis and Laodicea.
- Its population & culture was predominantly Gentile (Greek). Like many cities it had a Jewish population and this influence is seen in Paul’s letter.
- Colossae was a cosmopolitan and culturally diverse city with an array of religious beliefs and practices.
- The Christians in Colossae were a small part of this community.
- The church was founded in the early to mid 50s AD (Acts 19).
- Not founded by Paul nor had he been there (1:3&4; 2:1).
- Established by Epaphras (1:7), a native of Colossae. Epaphras was with Paul at time of writing (4:12).



## The letter and its purpose

- Where was Paul writing from? See Ch 4:3, 10, 18. Most likely from Rome circa. 60-61AD.
- Paul was concerned about false teaching and its effects and seeks to provide assurance and encouragement to the Colossians to continue in Christ-centred faith.

## A Colossian 'heresy'? and Paul's response

- It is unclear whether the church was already in the grip of false teachers or if Paul's warning was pre-emptive.
- What was the nature of the so-called heresy or false teaching? We can only garner clues from the text (mirror-reading). See for example: 2:4, 8, 16-23. Jewish characteristics with Greek tendencies!
- Whatever the exact nature of the 'heresy', Paul's concern is that it will lead the Colossians believers to doubt the sufficiency of Christ such that some might believe that they were incomplete Christians, somehow lacking in something.
- Paul's response is to assure the Colossians that they lack nothing whatsoever in Christ. In Christ they are complete, already seated with Christ in heaven, sharing in the blessings of heaven. Such things as true knowledge, spiritual wisdom & understanding, and power.
- Paul's answer to the Colossian 'heresy' is simply to urge the Colossians to stand firm on the foundation of Christ (1:23; 2:5, 6-7; 4:12) which, after all, is the gospel they first received via Epaphras.

## Application

- We should never be tempted to think that our walk with Christ is inferior or sub-standard lacking compared with other Christians.
- We have great assurance that if we are in Christ, we have been rescued by him and share in the kingdom of the Creator and Ruler of the universe. As result we have come to a full & complete knowledge of truth, wisdom, understanding, power.
- As to experience there is no greater reality than being seated with Christ in heaven.
- This understanding of the nature of our Christian walk should equip us to confidently continue in our faith in a world that offers a vast array of alternative (but ultimately false) philosophies and religions with their alternative wisdom, knowledge, truth, powers etc. These are manifestations of the kingdom of 'darkness' from which we have been rescued (1:13).

## Passage summaries

- 1:1-14 In what is an extended introduction we find Paul thankful for the Colossians' faith in Christ and eager to assure them of his prayers for them (vv 3-4). The *content* of his prayer is that 'they be filled with the knowledge of God's will' (v 9). The *purpose* of his prayer is that 'they live lives worthy of the Lord' (v 10a), the results of which are spelled out in vv 10b-12a.
- 1:15-20 These verses begin the main 'theological' section of the letter. We find in them a remarkable declaration of the nature and extent of Christ's lordship over the cosmos. Christ is described as supreme over all things and central to the existence of all things. But why did Paul begin his assault on the false teaching which threatened the Colossian church with a description of Christ's lordship? Perhaps because the only way of convincing the Colossians of the *sufficiency* of Christ (something they were tempted to doubt) was to remind them of the *supremacy* of Christ. Christ is not a 'springboard' to a deeper experience of God. His is, rather, the one in whom and through whom God may be experienced in all his fullness.
- 1:21-23 In this wonderfully compact statement of the gospel Paul spells out the flipside to his assertion in v 20 that through Christ 'all things were reconciled to God'. Reconciliation with God implies a prior state of alienation from God. Paul attributes that alienation from God to the enmity which existed in people's minds and behaviour (v 21). Yet through Christ's death,

reconciliation with God was made possible (v 22). The condition ('if') at the beginning of v 23 sounds a sober warning to all those at Colossae who might be tempted to pursue a form of spirituality which relegated the gospel of Christ's reconciling death to the background of Christian faith and experience.

1:24-2:5 As Paul's appeal to the Colossians continues to take shape, he now turns to his own apostolic ministry. Perhaps because he was not known personally by the Colossians, Paul felt it necessary to lay out his apostolic credentials and, more importantly, the content of his apostolic ministry. In this short biography Paul describes himself as a 'servant' of the church (and the Colossians in particular) with a commission from God himself to present His word (vv 24-25). But more importantly for Paul is the content of that 'word'. It is, as Paul reveals in vv 26 – 28, Christ.

A note about words. Notice the repetition of certain words in this passage such as 'mystery', 'full/fullness', 'wisdom'. See also the connections with 1:1-14 in terms of Paul's use of 'knowledge', 'understanding', 'power'. This is deliberate and is part of Paul's strategy to diffuse whatever 'heresy' threatens the Colossian church.

2:6-7