

“HE IS ALL I NEED”
INTRODUCTION TO COLOSSIANS
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Moo notes that this letter to the Colossians “has had an impact on Christian theology and practice out of proportion to its size,” especially with regard to Christology, legalism, and household practices and relationships (25).

Why Study Colossians?

- 1) Because it is part of inspired Scripture (II Tim. 3:16-17)
- 2) Because it tells us how our Savior is related to our Universe and our Solar System (1:16-17, 20)
- 3) Because it tells us who is the true head of the church—organic and ruling (1:18-19, 24; 2:10, 19).
- 4) Because it shows us the finality and all-sufficiency of Christ—there is no room for blind ecumenicity that puts all religions on an equal footing, or even puts all brands of professing Christianity on an equal footing (see 1:18; 2:9-10).
- 5) Because it speaks clearly concerning Christ’s deity and His equality with God the Father and the Trinity (1:15a; 2:9).
- 6) Because Colossians shows the practical connection of belief with practice—doctrine with lifestyle (ch. 1 with 3:5-17).
- 7) Because Colossians shows that all men are on an equal footing before their Maker and Master—regardless of social class (3:18-4:1; see also Philemon for a practical application).
- 8) Because this book shows us clearly what the future holds for the believer: 1:12; 1:22, 28; 3:4.

I. AUTHOR:

“Paul” is the first word of both the Greek and English text and is also included in the last verse (4:18) as Paul’s typical self-identification with his own handwriting; nothing in the book really calls that fact into question—despite the attempts of some radical liberals such as Baur. As Robertson notes: “There is every mark of Paul’s style and power in the little Epistle and there is no evidence that anyone else took Paul’s name to palm off this striking and vigorous polemic” (470). Both the internal and the external evidence is strong.

- 1) Internal evidence—all of which is consistent with Paul as author:
 - Names himself—see above
 - His special ministry as “servant” of the gospel (1:23)
 - He represents Christ in his sufferings (1:24)
 - He is steward of the mystery revealed in the last days (1:25-26)
 - Prayer that he might continue ministry even in prison (4:3-4)
 - Timothy is his “brother” (1:1)
 - The six men he names with some detail fit his other Epistles—esp. Philemon.
- 2) External evidence—the early Christian writers. There is no evidence that the Pauline authorship of Colossians was suspect in ancient times; the external testimony is “ancient and consistent” (Vaughan, 164).
- 3) The relationship of Colossians with Philemon is a very strong argument in favor of Pauline authorship. Both are sent from Rome, to Colossae, by the same messenger, and both contain the same names: Paul, Timothy, Onesimus, Archippus, Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke.
- 4) Also, the relationship between Ephesians and Colossians favors the same author, as does the similarities between Philippians and Colossians—especially in the prayers of both books in 1:9-11.
- 5) Hendriksen concludes: **“The witness in favor of Paul’s authorship is therefore overwhelming” (37).** However, Moo gives an estimate that as much as 60% of contemporary NT scholarship does not accept Pauline authorship, but believes that some follower of Paul wrote it following his death (p, 29).

II. DESTINATION AND DATE: this epistle was sent to the church of Colossae along with that book which was directed to Philemon. Since Paul was a prisoner in Rome when he wrote this book, the date would be approximately late 62 or early 63 A.D.—some time prior to Paul’s release from his first Roman imprisonment. Paul arrived in Rome from Jerusalem sometime in A.D. 61 and was released after two years sometime before Nero’s burning of Rome—64.

Cities of the Lycus Valley

A. Colossae

Colossae is not mentioned in the book of Acts. Many believe that Colossae at the time when Paul wrote this letter had declined from the importance which it once had during the Persian and Greek empires, and was merely “an insignificant market town”. This letter to Colossae was “the least important city to which any epistle of Paul is addressed.” Today, very little if anything remains of the ruins of Colossae (H. 13). *How important it is to note that Paul wrote such a significant letter to a church in such an insignificant town—that likely had a fairly small church even in Paul’s time.* Colossae was located in the interior of the Roman province of Asia [western portion of modern day Turkey] on the south bank (i.e. its acropolis, whereas the tombs and buildings were on the N. side) of the Lycus River. Jewish Settlement in Phrygia: Antiochus the Great of Syria (223-187 B.C.) resettled about 2,000 Jewish families to Lydia and Phrygia from Mesopotamia in order to help keep peace and stability there.

B. Laodicea

This city was founded sometime after 261 B.C. by Antiochus II (Theos) and was named after Laodice, his wife. This city began to thrive as a center of industry, e.g. fine black wool, trade, commerce, banking, etc.

C. Hierapolis:

The city was likely founded in Seleucid times under Antiochus I (281-261 B.C. It was on the north bank of the Lycus and from its terrace Laodicea could be seen. Due to the seismic activities in the region, Hierapolis had numerous vapors and hot springs that were supposed to have healing powers. Numerous resorts were established and thousands of visitors came to visit the baths and to drink the “healing” waters.

III. PAUL’S RELATION TO THE CHURCH OF COLOSSAE:

Acts gives no indication that Paul had stopped in Colossae to preach on his way to Ephesus, nor that he had visited the city while spending the 3 years plus in Ephesus. The simplest interpretation of Col. 2:1 is that Paul had not spent time there and that the people did not know him by face. As suggested previously, it is likely that Epaphras had met Paul in Ephesus and after being converted and trained, returned to his home town (Col. 4:12) to preach and establish the church in Colossae (Col. 1:7), and likely also those in Hierapolis and Laodicea. Paul calls Epaphras a “servant of Christ Jesus” (Col. 4:12), also a “fellow-prisoner” in Christ Jesus” (Philem. 23—see discussion at that place), and a hard worker in the 3 cities in the Lycus Valley who also diligently labored in prayer for the believers (Col. 4:13).

Paul also had helpers in Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus—likely Father, Wife, and Son—see discussion at Philemon 1-2—in whose home the church met. Later Onesimus, Philemon’s run-away slave, met Paul in Rome, became converted, and was sent back to his master with the letter to Philemon; he likely was well received by his master and then also became a worker in the church. Once Paul returned to Jerusalem, was captured, later taken to Rome as a prisoner, Epaphras came to Rome to assist him and brought Paul a report on the church in Colossae. Paul then writes this letter to a church that he has “grandfathered” through his ‘son,’ Epaphras” (M. 27).

IV. PLACE OF ORIGIN OF THE EPISTLE

All three epistles bear witness to the fact that Paul was a prisoner in Rome (Eph. 6:20; Col. 4:3, 10, 18; Philemon 9).

V. OCCASION:

- A. Paul notes the arrival of Epaphras from Colossae in order to minister to his needs on behalf of the Colossians (1:7-9; 4:12-13).

B. **False Teachers:** This epistle bears witness to the fact that Paul's prediction of "grievous wolves" entering into the churches in order to teach false doctrine and do damage to the ministry while leading many astray (Acts 20:29-30) had indeed taken place in Colossae. The clearest evidence of the false teaching is found in the section 2:8-23. Paul gives several key characteristics:

- 1) "A hollow and deceptive philosophy" (v. 8)
- 2) "Depends on human tradition" (v. 8); this wording cannot be restricted to Jewish tradition.
- 3) The teaching "depends on...the elemental spiritual forces of this world" (v. 8).
- 4) The teaching "does not 'depend on...Christ'" (v. 8).
- 5) Involved was the observance of certain food restrictions and some Jewish "holy days" (2:16).
- 6) The teachers practiced and encouraged forms of asceticism (vv. 18, 23).
- 7) Attention was focused on angels (v. 18). Also involved is the relationship of these angels with the "powers and authorities" (1:16, 20; 2:10, 15).
- 8) False teachers stressed their visions (2:18).
- 9) These teachers are proud (2:18).
- 10) They are losing connection with the Head—Christ (2:19). Evidently they did claim to be Christians.
- 11) The teachers promoted various rules necessary to spiritual growth that Paul considers "worldly" (2:20-23).
- 12) Also, the term "fullness" in 1:19; 2:9, 10 suggests that the false teachers claimed to offer a more complete experience than what could be found in Christ alone; it is not clear whether any Gnostic implications are found in these references.
- 13) Circumcision seemed to be advocated—cf. 2:11, 13; 3:11.
- 14) Christ seemed to be denigrated—yet all this is gathered from Paul's positive statements about Christ. Whether the attack was direct or indirect (more likely) is not clear. What is clear is that Paul's Christology has a practical application—**He is sufficient; one need not go beyond Him for all he needs—especially not to other spiritual beings.**

This teaching was syncretistic combining at least three elements. The **synchronistic** view seems best equipped to explain all the evidence. Moo states that such syncretism "arguably reflect the realities of life, in which most people do not hold a 'pure' form of any religion or philosophy, but a set of beliefs drawn from an often bewildering variety of sources" (58). Colossae was a cosmopolitan city that was exposed to a bewildering variety of influences and its people were susceptible to such:

- 1) **Jewish element**—Local folk Judaism, involving legalism and ritualism. However, it was some kind of local variety evidently native to Phrygia—not Pharisaic ritualism such as that combated in Galatians. It involved the importance of circumcision, food-regulations, observance of special days, etc. (2:11, 16-17; 3:11). All these are shadows, but Christ is the substance (2:17).
- 2) **Pagan element**—Phrygian folk belief involving some magic and ritual power—its philosophical nature and angelology, and possibly including its asceticism Colossians indicates that the majority of the church members were of pagan origin (see 1:21-22, 27; 2:11-13; 3:5-7). Many deities were worshiped in this region, including the Phrygian Cybele Sabazius, Men, Isis and Serapis, Helios and Selens, Demeter, and Artemis. Therefore, a major danger faced by these believers was that of a relapse into paganism with its gross immorality. This danger is real for several reasons: established habits of the past, the wicked environment surrounding them, inner passions not yet fully consecrated, and the temptations of Satan. It is likely that the Colossian heresy was intended to appeal to the weaknesses of the believers who were struggling with fleshly indulgences—offering them their rules and regulations and suggesting that all fullness is not found in Christ, but that they could offer more wisdom, knowledge, and rules of practice. Paul argues that such teaching was only "the appearance of wisdom...but are of no value against fleshly indulgence" (2:23).
- 3) **Christian element.** This false teaching still wore the mask of Christianity, not denying Christ outright, but rather pulling Him off His throne. Such made the erroneous teaching even more dangerous.

After an extended discussion, Moo concludes that *“sometimes we simply have to admit that we cannot know enough to be sure. This would seem to be one of those instances....The people from within the Colossian Christian community...were bragging about their ability to find ultimate spiritual ‘fulfillment’ via their own program of visions and asceticism. This program was drawn partly from Judaism, particularly in its focus on rules about eating and observing certain days. They were preoccupied with spiritual beings, probably because they viewed them as powerful figures capable of having a significant influence on their lives”* (59).

VI. PURPOSE:

- A. Refutation of the false teaching and stress upon the all Sufficiency of Christ—focus attention on Him.
- B. Warning believers not to return to the pagan vices of their pre-regenerate days (3:5ff).
- C. Expression of his love for and personal interest in the church of Colossae, and the need for them to put in high regard their faithful servant Epaphras.
- D. To emphasize the importance of forgiveness. It is likely that the Onesimus issue is still front and center even in this book addressed to the church meeting in Philemon’s home (see 3:12-14). Moreover, Paul places far more emphasis in this book to the relations of **slave and master** than he does in Ephesians—in fact more than what he says to wives and husbands and parents and children combined (H. 23).

VII. THEME:

The absolute supremacy and sole sufficiency of Jesus Christ (1:18; 2:9; 3:11). This book contains Paul’s “full-length portrait of Christ.”

Christ is:

- 1) God’s Son (1:14)
- 2) Our object of faith (1:4)
- 3) Our redeemer (1:14)
- 4) God’s image (1:15)
- 5) Lord of Creation (1:15)
- 6) Head of the church (1:18)
- 7) Reconciler of the universe (1:20)
- 8) One in Whom all the fullness of the Godhead resides (2:9)
- 9) The One to whom “every power and authority in the universe is subjected” (V. 168).
- 10) The “essence of” God’s mystery (2:3)
- 11) The One in whom is hidden “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3)
- 12) The standard of measurement of all religious teaching (2:8)
- 13) The One who has fulfilled all the shadows of the OT rituals and regulations (2:17)
- 14) The Conqueror of every cosmic power of evil (2:15)
- 15) The One enthroned at God’s right hand following His resurrection (3:1)
- 16) The One in whom our life lies hidden in God (3:3)
- 17) The One with whom we will be revealed in glory (3:4)

Vaughan sums it up with the words of Charles Wesley:

“Thou, O Christ, art all I want; more than all in Thee I find.”

CONCLUSION

Any teaching that questions the sufficiency of Christ—not only for ‘initial’ salvation but also for spiritual growth and ultimate salvation from judgment—falls under the massive Christological critique of Colossians.