

Love Letters

Lesson 15: Colossians 1

The book of Colossians is a modern-day reminder that the foundational issues, which fashioned the early church, are still relevant to the twenty-first century church. Paul stresses to believers that truth must be taught and fought for by each succeeding generation of God's family. He writes to an audience that views Christianity from a variety of philosophical perspectives blending various ideas of worship with more than one god. He is concerned that the believers in Colossae might be deceived by the lies of false teachers. Some were accepting of the idea that works (circumcision) must be added to their faith in order to be saved. Others thought that people had to attain a higher degree of knowledge to be like God (Gnosticism). Still others were following the astrological charts of the stars to direct their Christian walk. Paul's underlying purpose is to help these believers protect themselves from those who would undermine the simplicity and sufficiency of their faith in Christ. It is a recurring topic we see often repeated in Paul's other letters.

Fast facts ~

- Paul writes from a prison cell around the year AD 60.
- The theme of the letter is the supremacy and preeminence of Christ.
- The city was located approximately 100 miles east of Ephesus in Asia Minor. At one time it was a city thriving with commerce, but by the time of Paul's writing its importance was on the decline.
- Paul's purpose in writing was to encourage believers who were growing spiritually and being confronted with teaching that undermined the supremacy of Christ.
- He wanted everyone to know that the answer to all false teaching is the mystery of "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:27).

The chapter you are about to read must be regarded as one of the most profound in the context of scripture. Before you begin, pray and ask the Lord to open your eyes to see Him and your ears to hear Him speak to you on a personal level. You are on hallowed ground, digging for priceless treasure!

Read Colossians 1:1–29.

Day One: The Supremacy of Christ

1. What close companion of Paul's is acknowledged? How does Paul identify his audience and with what form of familiar greeting (verses 1–2)?

Rather than immediately dealing with the problem of false teachers in Colossae, Paul repeats a pattern familiar to some of his other epistles, giving thanks for the believers and mentioning his effort to remember them in prayer.

Notice in verses 4–8, Paul forms his prayer for these believers based on their need as a body.

2. What does he acknowledge about them?
 - a. Verse 3
 - b. Verse 4
 - c. Verse 5
 - d. What does Paul recognize as the source of the fruit evident in the believers' lives (verses 5–6)?

It is apparent that Paul did not evangelize the city of Colossae, but rather that Epaphras had. He was most likely won to Christ during Paul's three-year stay in Ephesus; and from there it seems that Epaphras took the gospel message out to areas such as Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea.

3. What does Paul note in particular about Epaphras in verse 7?

Selah ~

It is worth noting that God uses some of His children to plant the seeds of faith, and some to water, but who is responsible for giving the increase and supplying growth? See 1 Corinthians 3:5–8. How do you see God using you in this process of faith?

Memory verse: Colossians 1:28 NKJV

Write the verse out below; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

Day Two: What Christ Has Made Possible for Me

Reread Colossians 1:9–14.

The opening words of Paul's letter began with an acknowledgement of prayer. He now returns to that theme in verses 9–14, as we see the focus of his prayer shifting from thankfulness to intercession.

1. For what does Paul pray in the following? (As you write your answer think about the depth of meaning behind his words.)
 - a. Verse 9
 - b. Verse 10
 - c. Verse 11

The apostle is writing about more than mere head knowledge or intelligence. "Wisdom" in verse 9 refers to the *full comprehension* of truth, while "understanding" refers to the *full application* of truth. To be controlled by God's will means to grasp scriptural principles and put them into practice.

2. What has the Lord done for us that merits our thanks and praise?
 - a. Verse 12
 - b. Verse 13
 - c. Verse 14

Selah ~

Pause and ponder for a moment the key words in the above verses: *filled with knowledge; fully pleasing Him; fruitful in every good work; increasing in knowledge; strengthened with all might; partakers of the inheritance; delivered from the power of darkness; conveyed into His kingdom; redeemed through His blood; forgiveness of sins.*

Paul wanted his readers to know the full truth about God, so that we would not be misled by anyone who tells a good tale to try and move us away from a loving heavenly Father. Now go back and reread the key words above, but this time insert your name before each one and put it in the active tense: *Mary is filled with knowledge*, etc. Does this change the intensity for you? Does it bring a freshness to what God is performing in your life? Would you take a moment now and thank Him? You may want to record your thoughts.

Day Three:

The Truth About Jesus

Reread Colossians 1:15–23.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians, he was addressing a subtle but growing movement that put Jesus on an equal basis with a various assortment of other gods. It was not a blatant attempt to negate Him altogether; rather He was relegated to one of many choices. Paul makes it very clear that Jesus is not a prominent figure—He is preeminent because He is God!

The language used in the verses before us is so bold that it cannot be attributed to any mere human being. It describes someone whose origin and essence begin and end with God. Jesus Christ is declared as the *visible* representation of the *invisible* God. He does not merely resemble God; rather He manifests God's full glory and power in His being.

In today's exercise, look up the corresponding cross-references that underscore Paul's points in answer to the question: *Who is Jesus?* Note your findings.

1. *He is the visible expression of the invisible God* (verse 15). Did you know that all you desire or need to know of God you see in the Son who is His exact reflection? (Record your thoughts.)
 - John 14:9; Hebrews 1:3
2. *He is the firstborn over all creation* (verse 15). Think about why it would be necessary for you to focus on the deity of Christ so as not to fall prey to false teaching.
 - Psalm 89:24–27; Revelation 1:17b
3. *He is the Creator of all things* (verse 16). Recognize that He created *you* for His own pleasure. Think about some of the ways *you* delight His heart.
 - John 1:3; Hebrews 1:2
4. *He holds all things together* (verse 17). Whatever *you* need mended—brought back into place—He can provide cohesion to His creation where chaos now exists.
 - Acts 17:28a
5. *He is the head of the church* (verse 18). The church is not an organization but a living vital organism consisting of the body of believers and Christ, who is the head. Think about the place *you* occupy in the body of Christ. Where has He put *you* to use your gifts?
 - Ephesians 2:21–22

6. *He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead* (verse 18). He was the first (both in time and rank) to die and be brought back to life through the power of God. He has preeminence. Have you made Him first in every area of your life: marriage, family, profession, friends, free time?
 - Romans 1:4; 1 Corinthians 15:20–23

7. *He is the fullness of God* (verse 19). All of God’s attributes, character, and power reside in the Son. When you have Christ’s abiding presence, you have all of God. His nature is your nature; His character is your character; His power is your power. What does this say about *your* potential?
 - Colossians 2:9–10

8. *He is the reconciler* (verse 20). His death provided the way for you to be put into a right relationship with God—putting away the old and making all things new. What kind of difference has this made in your life?
 - Romans 5:10–11; 2 Corinthians 5:18–19

Selah ~

The word *if* in verse 23 could best be translated “since” to avoid misunderstanding the context of Paul’s words. He is not saying that believers will be presented holy and blameless if they remain faithful, since salvation does not depend upon performance or works. He is confident, rather, that the believers he is writing to will avoid false teaching and will remain faithful to the message of the gospel that reconciled them to God in the first place. What “safeguards” are you building into your Christian walk that will assist you in recognizing and avoiding false teaching and enable you to remain faithful to Christ? Please explain.

Day Four:

Service for Christ

Reread Colossians 1:24–29.

Paul was made a minister of the gospel with the mission to reach the Gentiles. Along with that came the responsibility to help bring every believer to maturity in Christ. Paul knew well that suffering was part of the growth to maturity. Writing from prison, he rejoiced in his suffering on behalf of Christ because it meant identifying with Christ in His suffering (Philippians 3:10).

1. When maturity is the aim of ministry, the result is some hard work. Jesus wasn't around anymore to persecute, but His followers were, and that meant enduring the same suffering and rejection. What did Jesus promise about this in John 15:18–21?

2. How does Paul speak about the message he was given to share (verse 26)? To whom has it now been revealed? Do you realize this includes *you*?
 - a. What is this message (verse 27)? (Look back at Ephesians 3:1–6.)

3. Bottom line: Who is this message about? Look at verses 28–29 in different translations. In your own words, describe the kind of effort it takes to do the work of the ministry.
 - a. What is the end goal of ministry's labor and object of suffering for the Lord?

 - b. Who is at work in us that makes it possible?

Selah ~

Paul must have taken a look back many times at who he once was and the man he became. Look again at verses 21–23 and consider . . .

- Before Christ, what was your state of being (verse 21)?
- Because you are reconciled to God, what is your current standing (verse 22)?
- How, again, did Jesus Christ accomplish this wonderful miracle (see 2 Corinthians 5:21)?
Briefly recap this gospel message in your own words.

If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved" (Romans 10:9 NASB).

Day Five:

In Touch with Jesus ~

This section of the lesson is intended to be a review of what you have learned and what God has spoken to you this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark those places and points that stand out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share with your discussion group.

1. *LISTEN*: In what way did the Lord Jesus meet *you* in His Word this week? Be specific.

2. *LEARN*: How can you apply this understanding to your daily Christian walk?

3. *LIVE*: What step of obedience will you purpose to take in your walk of faith this week?

Prayer Requests ~
