

## Posted 07-07-2020 INTRODUCTION TO COLOSSIANS

Colossians has a powerful message for our day: the centrality of the all-sufficient Christ. Like the Colossians, we have lost our focus and have been engaging in the futile effort to find meaning by blending together religious expression with ideas of philosophy.

This is an age-long phenomenon known as “syncretism,” and we have been witnessing its outcropping in expressions ranging from the secular mysticism of Transcendental Meditation to the extreme fundamentalism of “The Children of God,” and “the Moonies.”

Christianity cannot be just an element in some form of composite religion. We may press that further: we cannot take Christ as just one element of influence in our lives, rather than the centrality, the core, the dynamic around which and by which our lives move and are motivated and empowered.

When this letter was written, Colosse was in decline midway between fame and decadence. Situated in the Lycus valley, it stood along the easiest and most popular route from Greece and Italy to Syria and Mesopotamia.

Even though it was by now inferior in rank to the neighboring towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis, Colosse still retained some influence and a significant population. The fact that Paul addressed his letter to those in Colosse seems to indicate their church was the strongest of the three in number and quality.

The church was likely founded by Epaphras (Col. 1:7). The congregation seems to consist of primarily Gentile Christians. Philemon was a member. Paul kept in close touch with the people and was greatly beloved.

Epaphras went to Rome to tell Paul of the heresies that were creeping into the church. These false teachings took Christ off the throne and denied his headship of the Church. To help answer them, Paul sent this letter back by Epaphras. He writes especially on the preeminence and deity of Christ, for Christ is very God.

The logical assumption is that the gospel was carried to Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis and other interior districts of Asia Minor by friends and colleagues who had been converted during Paul's three-year stay in Ephesus (Acts 19:10). Epaphras, Paul's personal representative and a native of Colosse (Col. 4:12), was the most important of these.

He was credited with founding the church in his hometown and had pastoral care of the churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4:13). Onesimus, the slave, also belonged to the church in Colosse. Thus it may be inferred that Philemon, the master of Onesimus, was also in Colosse and had a church meeting in his home, having been converted by Paul (Philem. 2, 19).

Philemon's son Archippus held some sort of office in the church (Col. 4:17). Though not certain, it is probable that Paul was personally acquainted with Nymphas in whose house the church met in Laodicea (Col. 4:15).

There are many allusions to the heathen past of those to whom Paul writes. He reminds them that once they were estranged, with hostile minds and involved in evil deeds (1:21). They were dead in sins and in uncircumcision of the flesh (2:13), heathen who had heard the Good News through Epaphras and accepted it (1:7 f. and 4:12 f.).

They had experienced in baptism the creative power of God who raised them to new life (2:12), who forgave their sins (1:14; 2:13), and called them to conduct their lives under the dominion of Christ (1:13 f.). Until now the community has been faithful to what they have received.

Their faith in Jesus Christ and love for all the saints (1:4) is enough for Paul to say, “We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you” (1:3). Paul does not describe the teaching he is attacking, but he only makes allusions to it. His readers knew it first-hand.

Colossians and Philemon are intimately related because both were evidently written at the same time, and sent to the same town by the same messenger. Colossians is a letter to a church, dealing with large issues of faith and conduct; Philemon is a private note to a person in that church, dealing with a personal matter.

This letter was known and used by Christian writers of the early second century. The earliest evidence comes from Marcion (ca. A.D. 140), who included Colossians in his canon of Pauline letters; from Irenaeus, who cites it as a letter of Paul; and from the Muratorian Canon.

**SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:** I want to encourage you to view a 9 min. 17 sec. video from The Bible Project. It will take you in summary form through the entire book and help you to see the careful design of the epistle and how it all fits together. Here is how to see it:

In your internet address bar, type: [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com), press ENTER.

Then in the search box type: BibleProject Colossians, press ENTER.

Select the B&W video titled: Colossians Overview. Click on it to view.

I highly recommend you do this.

Tomorrow we will begin the textual study of this letter.